

ARTICLE

Interruptions and Discontinuity: Constructing a Segregated Intercultural Musical Space in Tan Dun's *Concerto for String Quartet and Pipa*

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Abstract

By eliminating spoken words and more novel musical and staging effects used in the original *Ghost Opera*, Tan Dun's *Concerto for String Quartet and Pipa* offers an analytical opportunity to show how he uses more conventional musical techniques to depict an intercultural and personal ritual. Yet, studying Tan's usage of borrowed musical elements illuminates the commonalities and irreconcilable differences between Eastern and Western sounds. The construction of such an intercultural sound-scape nonetheless requires a distinction between Chinese and Western musical practices. The Chinese sounds used in this work are also mediated by the Chinese state or Tan himself from rural communities through modernist and Orientalist means, while Tan's compositional approach remains centred on Western-based musical means. This shows Tan's agency to both place Chinese peasant culture at the periphery and elevate such elements to high art for Western audiences.

What it means to inherit Chinese *guoyue* must transform *guoyue* into global wisdom and global language, and enter the global educational institutions, and that is what I do.¹

In the epigraph above, Tan Dun expresses his desire to resituate *guoyue* – a broad and indeterminate range of Chinese music across its whole territory – more at the centre of global

¹ Daozheng Zhang, 'Tan Dun: Zai Shijie Wutai Jiang Zhongguo Gushi', *China Today*, 28 February 2017. www.china-today.com.cn/chinese/culture/mrl/201702/t20170228_800088646.html (accessed 6 September 2021). Translation mine. *Guoyue* means, transliterally from Mandarin, national music. It is relatively common to see *guoyue* being used to represent music performed using Chinese instruments, but in the context of Zhang's article, Tan's definition of *guoyue* is likely to be much broader than that, encompassing an ambiguous range of Chinese music regardless of origins and performance methods.

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music life.² Indeed, Tan has put his aspirational words into practice in multiple ways, including his conducting, performance, and as dean of the Bard Conservatory. But his main way of engaging with the world – composition – exemplifies his ambition to connect local cultures to the global audience. One such example is the well-known *Ghost Opera* (1994), which claims to be inspired by the Hunanese ritual of the ghost opera. The piece is framed primarily by the dialogue between two pre-existing musical icons – ‘Xiao baicai’ (‘Little Cabbage’), a government-mediated ‘folk song’ tune, originating from Shaanxi province, is quoted and weaved into the intercultural fabric with quotations from J. S. Bach’s Prelude in C# minor from the *Well-Tempered Clavier* Book I. In addition, some of the main melodic motives are rewritten from Tan’s earlier composition for a post-socialist theatre piece. When *Ghost Opera* was rewritten as *Concerto for String Quartet and Pipa* (1999), the use of counterpoint and the presence of sounds from natural elements (such as stones and water) in the musical discourse were significantly reduced in the concert version while the rest of the piece remained mostly unchanged.³ With such contextual transformations, how do we comprehend the concerto? What aspects of the original cultures do these sounds portray, and how are they perceived to be global musical elements?

The process of ‘blending [of] East and West’ in contemporary Chinese compositions that lack obvious Chinese markers is then often attributed to the aesthetic, cultural, and even spiritual realms, as guided by the composer’s transcendental narratives.⁴ Tan and other Chinese American migrant composers’ relationship with Chinese music and culture changed in the migration process, in tandem with their distance from the motherland.⁵ Tan often cites Chinese influences in his musical works (in spirit rather than musical techniques) and biographical narratives to prove his deep connection with the motherland while principally using Western musical techniques to show his fluency in the Euro-American music tradition.⁶ Using either hybridity or dialectics, Chinese composers in America are characterized as composing in a cultural ‘Third Space’ or ‘transcendence’ from both cultures, with the Eastern culture represented by ancient, rural, and primitive tropes to be elevated to be on par with the modernist, Western aesthetics.⁷

Recent analytical works have begun to view these tropes more critically, with approaches that nuance a binary view of cultural boundaries and the dramatic nature of Tan’s art. For example, Joseph N. Straus has shown that Tan’s dramatic contrast is constructed through

² As argued by Vincent Mu-Chien Chen, *guoyue* is a modern, vaguely defined concept that does not precisely translate to music practised by Chinese at-large. See Vincent Mu-Chien Chen, ‘From “Chinese Music” to “Guoyue”: Shanghai Musicians and Translated Traditionality, 1919–1937’, *Music and Letters* 103/3 (2022).

³ Tan also adapted *Ghost Opera* into *Concerto for String Orchestra and Pipa* (1999/2012/2013) with more significant revision in terms of engaging the soloist at the beginning of the piece with a semiquaver A drone and practical directions for the conductor on the score available from the G. Schirmer website. Yet, performances available commercially and online show that directors and soloists inconsistently adopt the changes. Therefore, I hereby focus on the adaptation process from the staged work to the chamber concerto as the most important contextual change as it better illustrates Tan’s original intents.

⁴ Joshua Barone, ‘Asian Composers Reflect on Careers in Western Classical Music’, *New York Times*, 23 July 2021, www.nytimes.com/2021/07/23/arts/music/asian-composers-classical-music.html; Ken Smith, ‘A Cultural Revolutionary: Chinese-Born Composer Tan Dun’s First String Quartet Shocked His Conservative Campus. Ever Since, He’s Fearlessly Blended Elements of East and West’, *Los Angeles Times*, 15 December 1996, Sec. G, 6.

⁵ Philippa Gates, *Criminalization/Assimilation: Chinese/Americans and Chinatowns in Classical Hollywood Film* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2019), 13; Su Zheng, *Claiming Diaspora: Music, Transnationalism, and Cultural Politics in Asian/Chinese America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 5–8.

⁶ Zhang, ‘Tan Dun’; ‘Lament for China’s Past’, *Newsweek International*, 17 May 1999, www.newsweek.com/lament-chinas-past-166988.

⁷ Tong Cheng Blackburn, ‘In Search of Third Space: Composing the Transcultural Experience in the Operas of Bright Sheng, Tan Dun, and Zhou Long’ (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2015), 295–97; Edward Green, ‘China and the West – The Birth of a New Music’, *Contemporary Music Review* 26/5–6 (2007), 493–4; Leta E. Miller and J. Michele Edwards, *Chen Yi* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2020), 161.

the alternation between silence and musical gestures, musical affects, and a pitch-class-based dramatic, instead of cultural, dichotomy in *Intercourse of Fire and Water*.⁸ Similarly, in her study of Tan's *The First Emperor*, Nancy Rao illustrates that Tan's use of stereotypical 'Chinese opera' trope established in white America's exotic and racial gaze is an 'ahistorical, formulaic, and generic' portrayal (aka Puccini's style) of 'the real Chinese, their theatres, or even the real world'.⁹ To negotiate the demands of conforming to the European operatic tradition, such as satisfying or breaking away from the 'Chinese opera' trope, inserting genuine 'Chinese' expressions, and employing an experimental, modernist approach to composition, Tan sought to 'affect musical alignments across national borders and to transfer the genre of European opera into a cosmopolitan musical form'.¹⁰ Similarly, Jia Guoping observed the renaming of *On Taoism* (1985) from a more abstract and absolute title, which 'triggers the audiences' imagination on ancient rituals ... [and] reflects the composer's contemplation on the culturality expressed in the composition, enabling the audiences to more closely comprehend the inner meaning of the piece *from a specific regional cultural perspective*'.¹¹

These readings stop at the door of dissecting the mechanisms of intercultural dialogues, as the Chineseness of these pieces is often discussed in observable, audible, and describable processes. Furthermore, they allude to an internally contradictory but coexisting property of music that attempts to break down ethnic cultural differences – these works concurrently dissolve cultural boundaries by creating new sound-spaces that enable the coexistence of different musical traditions, while favouring certain representations of their ethnicity in marked ways. Therefore, claiming objects as simply 'Chinese' reveals a lack of critical observation of modern Chinese identity formation, and fails to reflect on the elite, urban, Han Chinese's claim to ownership over rural, and in other cases, minority, cultures.¹² The less powerful social groups can be exoticized as carriers of 'fossilized' traditions that may be performed and even appropriated. These idyllic sights and sounds, in turn, play a significant role in constructing a new ethnic and cultural identity in post-socialist China, even though they are socioeconomically alienated, creating new social boundaries in the process.¹³ Therefore, it is crucial to engage with how modern Chinese musical developments and their sociohistorical contexts are embedded in the ethnic Chinese image Tan creates

⁸ Joseph N. Straus, *The Art of Post-Tonal Analysis: Thirty-Three Graphic Music Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 126–31. His analysis of the piece, including the pitch-class dichotomy, formal processes, and timbre, is echoed in Jia's reading of *On Taoism* ('FreeDream – Analysis of Tan Dun's *On Taoism*', *The Art of Music: Journal of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music* 2 (2016), 14–18).

⁹ Nancy Yunhwa Rao, 'From Chinatown Opera to *The First Emperor*: Racial Imagination, the Trope of "Chinese Opera, and New Hybridity"', in *Opera in a Multicultural World*, ed. Mary Ingraham, Joseph So, and Roy Moodley (New York: Routledge, 2016), 56.

¹⁰ Rao, 'From Chinatown Opera to *The First Emperor*', 64.

¹¹ Jia, 'FreeDream', 13. Translation and emphasis mine. In the treatment of the phrase 'teshu di diyu wenhua jiaodu' (特殊的地域文化角度), I translated 'teshu' as 'specific', rather than 'special', which is a more transliterally accurate term, because it better matches with the original context, which states the piece triggers a specific cultural aura inspired from 'humanistic' mysticism. I also seek to de-emphasize the sense of exoticism or exceptionalism that may be implied in the term.

¹² Frederick Lau, 'When a Great Nation Emerges: Chinese Music in the World', in *China and the West: Music, Representation, and Reception*, ed. Hon-Lun Yang and Michael Saffle (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 270–2; Hon-Lun Yang, 'Music, China, and the West: A Musical-Theoretical Introduction', in *China and the West: Music, Representation, and Reception*, ed. Hon-Lun Yang and Michael Saffle (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 9.

¹³ Kevin Carrico, *The Great Han: Race, Nationalism, and Tradition in China Today* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 44–5, 56; Dru C. Gladney, *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 306–12.

through his use of musical symbols and narratives. It is equally important to interrogate *why* and *for whom* such a subset of Chinese symbols is used and what effects they are displaying.

Using Chen Kuan-Hsing's insight from the non-West perspective, we also have to consider Western influences as 'bits and fragments that intervene in local social formations in a systematic, but never totalizing, way'.¹⁴ This implies that the coexistence of East-West cultures in contemporary societies does not necessarily signify the dissolution of cultural borders. In developing a localized mode of modernity, from the Eastern perspective, micro-level power dynamics nonetheless exist, and Asian cultures and societies continue to negotiate with Western dominance.¹⁵ Samson Young convincingly argued that the exotic Chinese markers used in Tan's music may be assimilated or subsumed into Western musical idioms.¹⁶ Seeing this as 'apparent expressions of neocoloniality', Shzr Ee Tan reminds us that these strategies are 'part of the decolonial process itself, while acknowledging that racisms around the world ... are, in turn, undercut by intersectional hierarchies of class, further subdivision of race, shadism, and intergenerational politics'.¹⁷

Reading Tan Dun's narratives and musical depiction of interculturality through a trans-Asian perspective, which critically engages with the 'transnational circulation of capital, people, and culture and uneven connections it engenders', can also be a fruitful pursuit.¹⁸ As a composer with a global career, Tan acts both as an elite Han majority in the Chinese context, who has the privilege to determine potentially appealing elements in Chinese culture for his benefit, and as an ethnic 'minority' in a Western art music industry, who embraces neoliberal values and often displays his ethnic differences. His sensitivity in appealing to audience's interests while being conscious of his cultural differences from mainstream Western art music leads him to practise what Aihwa Ong calls a flexible citizenship: the highly qualified person from the East can 'negotiate, circumvent, or take advantage of Orientalist images that inform citizenship requirements and transnational capitalism'.¹⁹ By embracing universalist narratives and aural experiences that appeal to spirituality, borrowing from Andrea Moore's argument, Tan's musical dissolution of national boundaries can also be understood as an appeal to the consumer culture that governs our contemporary, individualist society.²⁰

In the first part of this article, I discuss the history of nationalizing and homogenizing rural folk tunes for political propaganda beginning in early twentieth-century leftist China. Parallel to this nation-building agenda, another project was 'advancing' Chinese musical culture into modernity by assimilating Western musical and aesthetic ideals. These two strategies for promoting new sociocultural construction, particularly in urban areas, have informed each other and institutionalized Chinese musical training while alienating the broad swathes of the rural Chinese population through political and cultural means. Tan, as an urbanite with some childhood and teenage exposure to rural village life, participates

¹⁴ Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 223.

¹⁵ Chen, *Asia as Method*, 177; Yuko Kawai, *A Transnational Critique of Japaneseness: Cultural Nationalism, Racism, and Multiculturalism in Japan* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), 26–7. Chen also highlights the importance of studying the racial dominance of Han in the Chinese context; such a dimension will not be discussed in this article, for the Chinese population of interest is within the Han majority.

¹⁶ Samson Young, 'Reconsidering Cultural Politics in the Analysis of Contemporary Chinese Music: The Case of *Ghost Opera*', *Contemporary Music Review* 26/5/6 (2007), 605–10, 613–15.

¹⁷ Shzr Ee Tan, 'Whose Decolonisation? Checking for Intersectionality, Lane-Policing and Academic Privilege from a Transnational (Chinese) Vantage Point', *Ethnomusicology Forum* 30/1 (2021), 145.

¹⁸ Koichi Iwabuchi, 'Trans-Asia as Method: A Collaborative and Dialogic Project in a Globalized World', in *Trans-Asia as Method: Theory and Practices*, ed. Jeroen De Kloet, Yiu Fai Chow, and Gladys Pak Lei Chong (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), 27.

¹⁹ Aihwa Ong, 'On the Edge of Empires: Flexible Citizenship among Chinese in Diaspora', *Positions: Asia Critique* 1/3 (1993), 746–7.

²⁰ Andrea Moore, 'Art-Religion for a Global New Age', *Twentieth-Century Music* 16/3 (2019), 389.

in this dynamic through his work and commentary by adopting internally Orientalist and exoticist perspectives in discussing the musical culture of peasants from Hunan, his home province.

Based on this historical background, I consider how Tan stages a musical dialogue with idioms more rooted in conventional techniques found in Western concert music. In the second part of the article, I offer a reading of Tan's juxtaposition of the state-mediated folk song 'Xiao baicai' with the Bach prelude and illustrate how the folk tune is subordinated and the challenges in creating intercultural sounds, while Western musical idiom serves as an unmarked medium for cultural exchange. Furthermore, primitivism is illustrated not just by Stravinskian approaches but also by the quotation of his original melodies from another early work of his, *Xibei Zuqu* No. 1 (Northwestern Suite No. 1, 1986), with a ritualistic and barbaric aura.²¹

Finally, I will discuss some contradictions within Tan's endeavour for musical transcendence. On the one hand, it seeks to celebrate a universal sense of humanity and redress the loss of cultural 'roots' to modernity across cultures through multiple ritualistic references. While all cultural references have undergone some form of negotiation and partial presentation, his portrayal of Chinese culture in marked, politicized, and/or primitive forms is nonetheless influenced by nationalist and (self-)Orientalist processes. Such a strategy has not meaningfully challenged the feudal stereotypes of non-Western culture. Rather, it creates further separation between Tan, a transnational elite, and the rural Chinese population he claimed to represent.

The multiplicities of Chinese music in the modernizing nation-state

To understand Tan's musical and cultural becoming, it is necessary to revisit the close relationship between music and political movements in twentieth-century China, how this connection is reflected in music education, compositional styles, and the dissemination of folk songs, and how post-socialist musicians' work fits into this historical context. In the process of referencing different facets of Western or modern musical institutions, we see multiple forms of nationalist Chinese music emerge in this period, all with different strategies in response to distinguishing Chinese identities from others. The survey shows the lineage of musical discourses Tan has inherited, and enables us to critically engage with his understanding of Chinese music.

From the fall of imperial China in 1912 to the early days of the People's Republic of China (PRC) beginning in 1949, modernization discourse with social evolutionist perspectives dominated intellectual circles, utilizing Western music as a technology to facilitate the growth of national and military strength.²² In addition to introducing Western classical music to the (primarily urban) Chinese and adopting Western music education curricula, Chinese musicians and scholars who studied in Europe, the United States, and Japan professionalized and institutionalized Western musical practice and 'precise' technologies to foster modernization in the first half of the twentieth century. The sophistication of classical music and Western compositional ideals, such as harmonic syntax and form, is fundamental to Chinese conservatory training.²³ However, the status of Chinese folk music was contested. While it remained popular for daily entertainment, the sing-song girl style

²¹ In the following prose, the suite's title will be abbreviated as *Xibei Zuqu*. Tan has only created one suite from the dance piece. It is also known as *Huangtudi Zuqu* (Yellow Earth Suite), whose theatrical origins will be elaborated in footnote 75.

²² Miriam Lang, 'Traditional Chinese Music in 1989: The ART Cup', in *Modernization of the Chinese Past*, ed. Mabel Lee and A. D. Syrokmla-Stefanowska (Broadway, Australia: Wild Peony, 1993), 107–8.

²³ Richard Curt Kraus, *Pianos and Politics in China: Middle-Class Ambitions and the Struggle over Western Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 3, 31–4, 42–3; Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban*

xiaodiao was well distributed through sound recordings. Chinese scholars and musicians of the time denounced such music for its moral corruption. Nonetheless, Andrew F. Jones argues that the evolution of Chinese popular music in this period was as cosmopolitan as and up to date with Western trends.²⁴ In contrast, the more 'serious' musicians sought to develop new Chinese musical idioms from Western traditions. Interactions with visitors from the Western music sphere, such as Alexander Tcherepnin, who visited China and Japan in 1934–7, played an important role in promoting Chinese and other East Asian composers' works for Western instruments. Tcherepnin also advocated making use of folk elements for new compositions.²⁵ Nonetheless, the educated Chinese composers who wrote in Western classical music styles focused more on patriotic and military songs inspired by Japan or on new 'folk songs' intended for mass singing, using primarily pentatonic melodies accompanied by tertian harmonies, all with a nationalist agenda.²⁶

Chinese composers also adopted Western musical techniques and technologies in Chinese instrumental compositions, intending to elevate Chinese music to an international status.²⁷ Indigenous Chinese musical cultures and technologies were also interpreted as backward and inferior in modern Chinese society.²⁸ Spearheaded by Liu Tianhua in the 1930s, some of the best-known Chinese instruments nowadays, such as *erhu* and *pipa*, were redesigned and 'improved' in terms of their acoustics, timbre, and volume – a display of Chinese music's modern evolution beyond feudalism. Compositions by Liu also show the adoption of certain Western formal elements, such as ternary form and modal modulations. These efforts demonstrated the pervasiveness of the desire to modernize or 'catch up' with Western aesthetic standards. All these hybridization processes illustrate how deeply Western influences can be found in modern Chinese sounds.²⁹

Such discourse on music remained active after the Communists took over the regime in 1949, and musical activities continued to burgeon during the reformation periods of the PRC in the 1950s. Western music, while representing the high culture of the Western social elites, was seen as a form of technology that drove modernization and could be recontextualized for political uses in the new communist state.³⁰ As Arnold Perris argues, the content of art creations, including music composition, was obliged to 'affirm the state ideology and the theory and practice of a sociopolitical program', rather than reflect artists' free will or audiences' tastes.³¹ The call for artworks to convey political narratives was clear, but there

Culture in China, 1930–1945 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 44–50; Ching-Chih Liu, *A Critical History of New Music in China*, trans. Caroline Mason (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2010), 79–81, 91–9.

²⁴ Andrew F. Jones, *Yellow Music: Media Culture and Colonial Modernity in the Chinese Jazz Age* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 114–19. Furthermore, recontextualizing the role of sing-song girls as an agent for leftist movements was evident in Chinese films from the late 1930s (134–5). While Jones (134) considers it as 'traditional urban folk song forms', *Xiaodiao*, transliterated 'small tune', is a loosely defined term used by Chinese musicians for various kinds of Chinese (primarily Han) folk songs with daily-life themes unrelated to labor or national histories. See Wenhua bu wenxue yishu yanjiu yuan yinyue jianjiusuo, *Minzu yinyue gailun* (Beijing: People's Music Publishing, 1980), 41–8.

²⁵ Kraus, *Pianos and Politics in China*, 5–6; Barbara Mittler, *Dangerous Tunes: The Politics of Chinese Music in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the People's Republic of China since 1949* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1997), 28.

²⁶ Kraus, *Pianos and Politics in China*, 5–8; Liu, *A Critical History of New Music in China*, 104–12, 128–36, 185; Mittler, *Dangerous Tunes*, 33.

²⁷ Kraus, *Pianos and Politics in China*, 68.

²⁸ Liu, *A Critical History of New Music in China*, 101, 166–8.

²⁹ Iwabuchi, 'Trans-Asia as Method', 28, 31.

³⁰ Zedong Mao, 'Chairman Mao's Talk to Music Workers', Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung, Marxist Internet Archive, 24 August 1956, www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-7/mswv7_469.htm; Arnold Perris, 'Music as Propaganda: Art at the Command of Doctrine in the People's Republic of China', *Ethnomusicology* 27/1 (1983), 2, 9–11; Mittler, *Dangerous Tunes*, 270–1, 313–14.

³¹ Perris, 'Music as Propaganda', 1–2.

were ever-changing aesthetic and narrative directions in both the Soviet Union and the PRC to which artists had to adapt based on political currents.³² Early PRC compositions were still diverse in musical style, ranging from tonal pieces rich in nineteenth-century harmony to experiments with post-tonality and twelve-tone serialism, all while exploring how these techniques can be used in tandem with Chinese musical characters.³³

Adopting *minjian yinyue*, roughly translated as folk music and symbolized as the sounds of the 'ordinary people', also became a convenient musical source for the PRC to effectively adapt and deliver political messages. Led by Lü Ji (1909–2002), a 'systematic' study of Chinese folk music started with the founding of the Folk Song Research Association under the Lu Xun Academy of Art in Yan'an in the 1930s and became a nationwide project in the early PRC days. This was not necessarily a process of preserving Chinese folk cultures; instead, it collected raw materials for musicians to create propaganda works.³⁴ Songs collected were 'edited' to give them a less distinct regional flavour so that they were 'musically pleasant that would satisfy the aesthetic needs of the masses ... [and] were closely related to the political struggle in reality'.³⁵ Given that these musical texts were primarily used as carriers for constructing a new socialist culture and ethnic unity, in Sabine Trebinjac's words, these songs went 'from folklore to state traditionalism' and were used as a display of state and racial unity for many decades to come.³⁶

Tan's generation inherited all these streams of influence while becoming disillusioned by the socialist revolutionary model. Some intellectuals believed that a significant part of their culture had been 'lost' due to the political upheavals in the first half of the twentieth century and the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), but national traditions are 'robust, manly, and firmly rooted in the land' that can withstand manmade adversaries.³⁷ 'Finding roots' in rural regions and minority nationalities, therefore, became an important intellectual movement in constructing the post-Cultural Revolution Chinese identity in the 1980s. By critically examining the country's 'nature', sometimes in a highly romanticized manner, intellectuals sought "'new" cultural concepts and ideals of character' that were previously neglected and would help strengthen the country.³⁸ Yet, the concept of 'restoring' cultures was nonetheless subject to the state's intervention. In July 1979, the Ministry of Culture and the Chinese Musicians Association called for a 'total, systematic collection and organization' of Chinese *minzu minjian yinyue* (national folk music) within modern China's geographical boundaries, continuing the 'partial' work done before the Cultural Revolution. The goal of this project

³² Lorenz Bichler, 'Coming to Terms with a Term: Notes on the History of the Use of Socialist Realism in China', in *In the Party Spirit: Socialist Realism and Literary Practice in the Soviet Union, East Germany and China*, ed. Hilary Chung et al (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 1996); Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 3.

³³ Liu, *A Critical History of New Music in China*, 291–92.

³⁴ Zhongyang yinyue xueyuan yanjiubu, *Zhongguo minge xuan*, vol. 1 (Shanghai: Wanye Shudian, 1952), 33; David Holm, *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1991), 44–5, 132–6.

³⁵ Jiafang Dai, 'Generation Introduction to Chinese Music in the Early 1960s', *Hundred School in Arts* 115/04 (2010), 59. Translation mine.

³⁶ Sabine Trebinjac, 'The Invention and Re-Invention of Musical Tradition in China', *History & Anthropology* 15/3 (2004), 220–2. This claim is also supported in Lan, 'Zhongguo yinxie zhaokai minzu yinyue gongzuo zuotanhui', *Yinyue yanjiu* 3 (1959); Sue Tuohy, 'The Social Life of Genre: The Dynamics of Folksong in China', *Asian Music* 30/2 (1999), 57, 60–2.

³⁷ Brian C. Thompson, 'Zhao Jiping and the Sound of Resistance in *Red Sorghum*', *Studia Musicologica* 56/4 (2015), 365.

³⁸ Edward Friedman, 'Reconstructing China's National Identity: A Southern Alternative to Mao-Era Anti-Imperialist Nationalism', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 53/1 (1994), 69; Merle Goldman, Perry Link, and Su Wei, 'China's Intellectuals in the Deng Era: Loss of Identity with the State', in *China's Quest for National Identity*, ed. Lowell Dittmer and Samuel S. Kim (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 143; Thompson, 'Zhao Jiping and the Sound of Resistance in *Red Sorghum*', 365; Tuohy, 'The Social Life of Genre', 46.

was then claimed to be a 'rescuing, collecting, and organizing' process so as to prevent these diverse folk music traditions from becoming extinct.³⁹

The collection and use of folk music materials in modernist musical contexts, as discussed by Julie Brown, are built on the dichotomies between rural and urban and between intellectuals and peasants.⁴⁰ In communist China, peasant music was promoted as an authentic source of ethnic culture by the elites, as opposed to popular music in cities, while being permanently othered by sociopolitical structures.⁴¹ Moving into the post-socialist era, Chinese 'male urban sophisticates' relation with the 'exotic' rural cultures can be understood as 'internal orientalism' in Louisa Schein's terms, which is 'a relation between imaging and cultural/political domination that takes place interethnically within China'.⁴² While Schein's focus has been on the gendered and stereotyped performances of the ethnic differences between minority nationalities and the Han majority, I emphasize that rural Han members can also be culturally subjugated, in addition to their sociopolitical segregation, through the *hukou* system.⁴³ The urban elites are not only consumers of such rural cultures, but also claim to be protectors of the indigenous Chinese culture in the global context. Tan has advocated for showcasing rural Chinese cultures in the West. In his own words:

I just spent 10 days in a Hunan village that is almost unchanged from 100 years ago. I plan to bring 30 farmers to London's Barbican arts festival [in September 2000] to present their rituals – weddings, funerals and ghost operas, to show how they fall in love, how they sing songs, make shoes, textiles and rice cakes.⁴⁴

These Hunan farmers were persistently subjugated, alienated culturally and sociopolitically, and treated as 'domestic others'. Meanwhile, enabling rural culture to be experienced in learned spaces elevates Tan and like-minded intellectuals as cultural ambassadors who bridge the East and West, which enhances their social privileges.⁴⁵

Furthermore, such 'preservation' or performance of folk culture is itself a dynamic social process. Dorothy E. Smith argues that this is a representation of actuality presented in an 'interpretive schema', which 'may be named, analysed, and assembled and organized into a form in which it may be told again', retaining a certain 'sameness' within a particular social context.⁴⁶ Therefore, the idea of the rural members carrying the 'roots' of Chinese culture is a social construction made by educated urbanites who seek legitimacy in their cultural and national identity as urban China modernizes, and minority and peasant cultures are

³⁹ Goldman et al., 'China's Intellectuals in the Deng Era', 131–2; Tuohy, 'The Sonic Dimensions of Nationalism in Modern China: Musical Representation and Transformation', *Ethnomusicology* 45/1 (2001), 111; Wencheng, "'Zhongguo minjian gequ jicheng' deng sibu jicheng bianji gongzuo quanbu wancheng', *China Folklore Network*, 19 July 2009, www.chinafolklore.org/web/index.php?NewsID=5248. The source materials of the post-Cultural Revolution folk song collections, however, have been inherited from the earlier projects, which means some state-mediated tunes are still present in the new editions. See Stephen Jones, 'Reading between the Lines: Reflections on the Massive *Anthology of Folk Music of the Chinese Peoples*', *Ethnomusicology* 47/3 (2003).

⁴⁰ Julie Brown, 'Bartók, the Gypsies, and Hybridity in Music', in *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music*, ed. Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 119–21.

⁴¹ Friedman, 'Reconstructing China's National Identity', 76; Sulamith Heins Potter, 'The Position of Peasants in Modern China's Social Order', *Modern China* 9/4 (1983), 465–9; Wanning Sun, *Maid in China: Media, Morality, and the Cultural Politics of Boundaries*. London: Routledge, 2009, 3–4.

⁴² Louisa Schein, 'Gender and Internal Orientalism in China', *Modern China* 23/1 (1997), 70, 73.

⁴³ Potter, 'The Position of Peasants in Modern China's Social Order', 465–8.

⁴⁴ 'Lament For China's Past'.

⁴⁵ Carrico, *The Great Han*, 30; Schein, 'Gender and Internal Orientalism in China', 73.

⁴⁶ Dorothy E. Smith, 'The Social Construction of Documentary Reality', *Sociological Inquiry* 44/4 (1974), 257–9.

objectified and malleable to the urban Han and Westerners' gazes.⁴⁷ The cultural agency remains in the hands of elites who can 'elevate' such folk traditions to a high cultural status.

In global and intercultural spaces, Tan's achievements in providing a more 'down-to-earth' depiction of Chinese culture should be celebrated, for such an effort breaks the Orientalist and Far East stereotypes constructed from the Western gaze that have long existed in musical discourse. But this process draws new boundaries between the East and West. Tan claims that his music bears the 'spirit' of folk music as a 'special positive aura of the natural [*sic*] that can be transferred from peasant music to art music by a genius'.⁴⁸ Such an essentialist narrative may be read, following de Kloet and Chow's arguments, as Tan, an Asian male, 'internaliz[ing a] certain Western-centric frame of mind'.⁴⁹ Instead of colonizing Eastern land and natural resources, Tan seems to respond to the call for 'spiritual input as to enable a resetting of modernity in the Anthropocene'.⁵⁰ The 'indigenous' Chinese elements embedded in Tan's music are a modern construct mediated by forces including state ideology, intellectual discourse, and social hierarchy in post-socialist China. In this process, we are nonetheless viewing Chinese ethnic performance as represented by a transnational elite, who segregated and objectified the rural dwellers from the East, creating new social boundaries to legitimize Tan's cultural distinction, sophistication, and privilege.

Tan Dun in New York: challenges and acceptances

Tan's musical journey from Beijing to New York in the 1980s was not easy and at times tumultuous. Despite the early recognition and achievements, his music was once censored for 'Spiritual Pollution' in 1983 and 'liberated' in 1985 with a composer's concert in Beijing.⁵¹ His music, along with his contemporaries, including Chen Yi and Qu Xiaosung, was heard in China and beyond through the increasing cultural exchange between the PRC and Western spaces. Opportunities including the First Chinese Composer's Festival held in Hong Kong in 1985 and the Central Philharmonic Orchestra tour in the United States in 1987 enabled Tan's *On Taoism* (1985) to be heard internationally, which set the stage for Tan's rapid rise in fame in his early days in New York City while being a doctoral student at Columbia University.⁵² In the American classical music scene between the late 1980s and 1990s, critics showed a changing attitude towards the unconventional sounds and performance practices heard in Tan's music, partially reflected by the concert reviews in the *New York Times*. In one of the earliest reviews of Tan's music on *Nine Songs* in 1989, Bernard Holland claimed:

Universality is a desired art in our global village, but perhaps it cannot be manufactured on the spot by individuals, 'Nine Songs' [*sic*] seemed to be telling us, unintentionally, that we might temper our creative presumptions a little, show patience and

⁴⁷ Carrico, *The Great Han*, 44–5; Dru C. Gladney, 'Representing Nationality in China: Refiguring Majority/Minority Identities', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 53/1 (1994), 110; Potter, 'The Position of Peasants in Modern China's Social Order', 475–6, 481–2. There are considerable differences and overlaps in the treatment of minority nationalities and rural-dwelling peasants in Chinese sociocultural structures, which deserves its own discourse. Here I draw the similarities in terms of their perceived cultural differences, remoteness, and 'primitivity' from the urban-dwelling Han majority.

⁴⁸ Brown, 'Bartók, the Gypsies, and Hybridity in Music', 121, 134.

⁴⁹ Jeroen De Kloet and Yiu Fai Chow, 'What Is the "Trans" in Trans-Asia?', in *Trans-Asia as Method: Theory and Practices*, ed. Jeroen De Kloet, Yiu Fai Chow, and Gladys Pak Lei Chong (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), 53n3.

⁵⁰ De Kloet and Chow, 'What Is the "Trans" in Trans-Asia?', 44–5.

⁵¹ Frank Kouwenhoven, 'Composer Tan Dun: The Ritual Fire Dancer of Mainland China's New Music', *China Information* 6/3 (1991), 9–12, 16; Sheila Melvin and Jindong Cai, *Rhapsody in Red: How Western Classical Music Became Chinese* (New York: Algora, 2004), 324–9; Mittler, *Dangerous Tunes*, 120–1.

⁵² Frank Kouwenhoven, 'Meaning and Structure: The Case of Chinese qin (zither) Music', *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 10/1 (2001), 13–15.

leave East and West to grow slowly together on their own. Two cultures in tandem remain two cultures.⁵³

Less than ten years later, Anthony Tommasini acknowledged Tan as ‘one of the most sought-after composers in the United States’ but criticized Tan’s piece *Red Forest* as ‘banal and pretentious’, and that Tan was ‘squandering his success’.⁵⁴

Despite such negative reviews from some of the most well-known critics, Tan has garnered support from his fellow artists and cultural institutions for his creativity and musicianship. Concurrently in the 1990s, Allan Kozinn observed that institutions such as Carnegie Hall sought diversity in their musical programming, with a renewed interest in contemporary works.⁵⁵ While Tan mostly found his resonance and muse in the ‘downtown’ style, which is experimental through innovative compositional and performance practices, rather than the ‘uptown’, serious compositional rigour taught at Columbia University, his work appeals to both institutional and experimental spaces by positioning his music as ritualistic performances that appeal to the concert-going Western middle class.⁵⁶ This also resonates with Marianna Ritchey’s observations on the neoliberal stance on music creation in the twenty-first century, where the ‘ambivalence towards specialisation and expertise manifests not only in criticisms of the academy but also in the embrace of stylistic eclecticism’.⁵⁷

Furthermore, the young talents from China also received significant support from a tight-knit network of Chinese American artists who have established institutional reputations, which provided a robust social network and various opportunities for their works to be performed. Chou Wen-Chung, beyond being the composer’s mentor at Columbia University, established a long-term collaboration with dancer Chiang Ching, which also provided early composition opportunities for Tan (and other students from Asia, including Chinariy Ung) to gain exposure in the greater New York art circle. As early as December 1986, a few months after Tan moved to the United States, his music was already heard at Chiang’s solo dance concert at the Asia Society, which was founded by John D. Rockefeller III and is a major benefactor for promoting Asia primarily in New York City and the surrounding area.⁵⁸ Tan formed further connections to major figures in American art through the patronage of Mary Scherbatskoy.⁵⁹ With the support of such a close-knit social connection with influential artists and patrons, Tan established a reputation for his experiments in constructing ritualistic performances that were often supported by innovative spectacles, collage-like musical processes, and the sensorial experiences of the unusual. Embedding his music in a

⁵³ Bernard Holland, ‘When East and West Meet without Mingling’, *New York Times*, 15 May 1989, Sec. C, 14.

⁵⁴ Anthony Carl Tommasini, ‘Composer Conducts Composers Orchestra’, *New York Times*, 28 May 1998, Sec. E, 5.

⁵⁵ Allan Kozinn, ‘Diversity, Again, in Carnegie’s New Lineup’, *New York Times*, 8 January 1997, Sec. C, 14.

⁵⁶ Serena Yiai Wang, ‘New Chinese Music in New York City: From Revival to Musical Transnationalism’ (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2021), 156–8.

⁵⁷ Marianna Ritchey, *Composing Capital: Classical Music in the Neoliberal Era*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019, 68.

⁵⁸ Anna Kisselgoff, ‘Dance: Chiang Ching in Solo Concert of Diverse Styles’, *New York Times*, 14 December 1986, Sec. 1, 109; Hon Ki Cheung, ‘Listening to Each Other? – Opportunities and Challenges in Music Exchanges between the United States and the People’s Republic of China in the Late Twentieth Century’, *Rockefeller Archive Center Research Reports*, 4 March 2024, 4–6, <https://rockarch.issuelab.org/resource/listening-to-each-other-opportunities-and-challenges-in-music-exchanges-between-the-united-states-and-the-people-s-republic-of-china-in-the-late-twentieth-century.html>. One of Chiang’s solo works is based on Tan Dun’s *R* (1982) and is archived at the New York Public Library Jerome Robbins Dance Division.

⁵⁹ Kouwenhoven, ‘Composer Tan Dun’, 18.

postmodern framework, he sought to create a persona and a musical understanding that transcended cultural boundaries.⁶⁰

Exoticist and Orientalist blindspots in understanding Tan's interculturality

Concerto for String Quartet and Pipa is written for the same five players (string quartet and pipa) as in *Ghost Opera*, but the staging directives, spoken words (including singing the lyrics of 'Xiao baicai' and a quote from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*), and sounds of percussion instruments, water, metals, stones, and paper are stripped away from the original work. Looking at the 'cast' of *Ghost Opera*, Tan stated that the three 'actors' are 'Now', 'Past', and 'Forever', respectively. 'Now' is the sound created by the string quartet and the pipa. 'Past' refers to traditions, including Bach, folksong, monks, and Shakespeare. 'Forever' uses water, stones, metal, and paper.⁶¹ Without these verbal clues, the concerto carries a more abstract context that nonetheless involves a sense of loss and temporality. The absence of the natural, 'permanent' elements diminishes a sense of ecological awareness, but its quality of reflecting on the past, living in the present, and projecting towards 'forever' remains prominent through its diverse soundscape. The more traditional concert setting of concerto provides an excellent opportunity to engage with conventional musicking processes, the use of the pipa in contrast to the bowed strings, and the (inter)cultural meanings the sounds may convey.

On the 'Explore' page of Tan's now-defunct website, it reads, 'Tan Dun utilizes extended techniques[–]shouting, improvisation, harmonics, bent notes, rolls and slides[–]to embody the ethereal grace of *Ghost Opera*'.⁶² Yet, it fails to acknowledge a new narrativity presented in the concerto in its new formal structure, and these changes significantly impact the performance practice, musical structure, and our perception of continuity. The original five-movement *Ghost Opera* is revised and partially rewritten to create a four-movement, 20-minute structure, as illustrated in Table 1. The formal boundaries in *Ghost Opera* are meant to be blurry, created by intentionally presenting new materials or tie-overs at the end of the first and third movements and using *attaca* in the rest. With the reorganization of movement endings, each movement of the *Concerto* is intended to be a complete musical utterance. Therefore, the recomposition process seems to both assert Moore's argument of Tan's interest in creating abstraction in his music, resulting in a less definite narrative that becomes 'more multivalent for listeners' and denies her observation of his outward attempts to break cultural boundaries by adopting a more traditional formal design of a concerto.⁶³

What is equally missing from the promotional materials is the reference to the borrowing from either the Western classical music canon or Chinese-style sounds that signify the 'universality' of music. In fact, Tan's quotations of the Bach prelude and 'Xiao baicai' are well highlighted in the interpretations and reviews of *Ghost Opera* as the symbol of intercultural dialogue within the same time-space.⁶⁴ Bach's Prelude in C# minor frames the

⁶⁰ Kouwenhoven, 'Composer Tan Dun', 24; Yanling Liu, 'My Views on the Romantic Composer Tan Dun from the Perspective of Modernism and Post-Modernism', *People's Music* 3 (2021), 21.

⁶¹ Tan Dun, *Ghost Opera* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1995), 3.

⁶² 'Tan Dun | Concerto for String Orchestra and Pipa', *Tan Dun*, tandun.com/explore/concerto-for-pipa-and-string-orchestra/.

⁶³ Moore, 'Art-Religion for a Global New Age', 377–8, 385.

⁶⁴ Joe Banno, 'What True Crossover Sounds Like, East-Meets-West Edition: The Shanghai Quartet and Pipa Player Wu Man Perform Works by Western-Influenced Chinese Composers', *The Washington Post*, 27 April 2016, www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/music/what-true-crossover-sounds-like-east-meets-west-edition/2016/04/27/923e8244-0c8d-11e6-bfa1-4efa856caf2a_story.html; Young, 'Reconsidering Cultural Politics'. In Young, however, this is seen more from a critical lens, stating the Western-leaning 'blend' that has happened.

Table 1. Adaptations made in *Concerto for String Quartet* from *Ghost Opera*

<i>Concerto for String Quartet and Pipa</i>	Adaptation from <i>Ghost Opera</i>
First movement	First movement, anacrusis to rehearsal marks E–I: • without the spoken <i>yao</i> and fingering gong
Second movement	First movement rehearsal mark J–second movement rehearsal mark A–Q, second bar of rehearsal mark S to end: • without the Bach prelude starting the second movement • breaths in rehearsal mark R trimmed
Third movement	Third movement–first six bars from the fourth movement: • rehearsal C changed from M.M. = 70 to 75 • repeat in rehearsal D (involving Bartók pizz.) removed • <i>pipa</i> with the last line of ‘Xiao baicai’ added to the cello solo at the beginning of the 4th movement
Fourth movement	Fourth movement rehearsal mark J–end: • repeat added to rehearsal mark M; rebarring from 10/4 to 2/4 • <i>Tutti</i> unison at rehearsal V instead of having <i>pipa</i> moving to singing and percussion • Rehearsal W: <i>pipa</i> plays the theme from the first movement rather than singing and playing percussion

piece alongside the sound of water drops at the beginning of *Ghost Opera*, and is followed by the sung ‘Xiao baicai’ and a quote from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* in *Sprechstimme*. All quotations represent the past, accompanied by the sound of water drops, a natural sound projecting eternity.⁶⁵ However, the ‘Xiao baicai’–Bach dialogue in the concerto is confined within the third movement. Lacking such a framing, the concerto appears to be set more in the present, in which the instrumentalists are all playing Tan’s musical ideas from the outset. This also turns the piece into a cyclic work, rather than resembling an arch form, with the fourth movement recapitulating many of the musical ideas from the previous movements.

Because of these alterations, I will focus on three aspects in my reading of *Concerto for String Quartet and Pipa*. First, in response to the discussion on quotation and Orientalism in *Ghost Opera* initiated by Samson Young, I further investigate how the ‘Xiao baicai’–Bach prelude dialogue is constructed with a sense of incompleteness. This shows the negotiations and nuances required to facilitate intercultural dialogue as the Chinese elements are compromised more than their Western counterparts. I will then shift the focus to Tan’s construction of the universal ritual through (self-)quotation. The melodic ideas cited in the work come from his *Xibei Zuqu* and carry key characteristics of Tan’s interpretation of the Chinese folk musical styles that do not perfectly fit the pentatonic stereotype. This can be understood as displaying and renewing the ‘lost’ Chinese tradition by using his personal utterances. Stravinskian rhythm and post-tonal approaches may also be read as indexing a premodern ritual from the Western perspective, albeit through postmodern means.

I conclude my analysis by examining the change of musical framing in the concerto that utilizes the less constrained, nearly barbaric sounds instead of the dialogues and borrowed materials in *Ghost Opera*. This significant change draws attention to a more personal ritual less conditioned by cultural boundaries while still interpreting the Eastern sounds more as the past and the West as the dominant voice of the present.

⁶⁵ Tan Dun, programme notes for *Ghost Opera* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1995).

The intercultural struggle, compromise, and hierarchy

While the dialogue between 'Xiao baicai' and the Bach prelude plays a relatively small role in the concerto by being confined to the third movement, it also undergoes the least amount of rewriting from *Ghost Opera*. The two musical borrowings are connected by the theme of grief, which facilitates a musical display of basic human emotions regardless of cultural background and modes of expression. Young's analysis already showed that 'Xiao baicai' is the musical symbol 'signifying the sparse and introspective, the nostalgic, the distanced, the rhythmic and the primal', while Bach's prelude symbolizes the mastery of compositional and contrapuntal craft.⁶⁶ In the context of *Ghost Opera*, 'Xiao baicai' is sung and played in multiple keys, but the tonal centre of the Bach prelude, despite some surface-level harmonic changes, remains largely intact. Therefore:

Xiaobaicai's [sic] syntax is shaped to operate within the frames of the quoting agent so that it may never threaten the buffers between the two sound worlds and destabilize the cent[re]. ... *Ghost Opera* seems to yield to the code of model minority and to the policy of cultural assimilation.⁶⁷

I concur that the Chinese elements have limited agency in their ability to drive the musical narrative in both *Ghost Opera* and the concerto, but Young's argument could be nuanced by studying the changes to the two quotations and the role of instruments in the concerto. I seek to show that the dominant culture, represented by Western musical instruments and passages, also needs to give way to let the non-Western culture have a voice through an incomplete quotation. It requires, however, more compromising of one's non-Western cultural identity for the sake of modernity and universalism than letting go of the symbolically learned Western cultures and outlooks.

Bach's Prelude in C# minor is considered one of the more complex pieces in *The Well-Tempered Clavier* for its intricate texture in an advanced key. The slow siciliano dance rhythm, juxtaposed with its minor tonality and melancholic melodic qualities, creates a highly expressive and technically challenging work for keyboard players.⁶⁸ Referencing Bach's devotion to his Lutheran faith, Cecil Gray, in 1938, offered a colourful reading of the prelude that provokes an image of a religious ritual. Gray wrote, 'We have Bach the priest, in ceremonial robes, intoning a chant in which we catch an echo of the very incantation that preceded Creation itself.'⁶⁹ Such a visual interpretation of the prelude illustrates a sense of solemnity and sombreness that is shared by the Chinese tune 'Xiao baicai' in [Example 1](#). 'Xiao baicai' is one of the earlier tunes collected and edited by the communist cultural workers. It first appeared in Volume 1 of *Zhongguo ming xuan* (1953), published by the Folk Music Research Institute of the Central Conservatory of Music. This tune is often interpreted as a simple lament of the loss of a young child's mother.⁷⁰ Musically speaking, both 'Xiao baicai'

⁶⁶ Young, 'Reconsidering Cultural Politics', 611.

⁶⁷ Young, 'Reconsidering Cultural Politics', 613–14.

⁶⁸ Marjorie Wornell Engels, *Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier: An Exploration of the 48 Preludes and Fugues* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2006), 29–30; David Ledbetter, *Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier: The 48 Preludes and Fugues* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 64, 159; David Schulenberg, *The Keyboard Music of J.S. Bach*, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2006), 213–14.

⁶⁹ Cecil Gray, *The Forty-Eight Preludes and Fugues of J. S. Bach* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), 24. This passage is also referenced in Engels, *Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier*, 29–30. In a less religious manner, Schulenberg pointed out the sense of spaciousness and grandeur in his discussion of the prelude. See Schulenberg, *The Keyboard Music of J.S. Bach*, 214. It is worth noting that in this textbook the protagonist is referred to as a 'she' using the pronoun 她. Such a gendered interpretation of the crying child is also seen in Bright Sheng's program notes for *Three Songs for Violoncello and Pipa* (1999, 2008).

⁷⁰ Wenhua bu wenxue yishu yanjiu yuan yinyue jianjiusuo, *Minzu Yinyue Gailun*, 17–18.

小白菜

Little Cabbage

(小調) [*Xiaodiao*]

河北 中部 [Central Hebei]

漢族 [Han]

慢 淒涼地 [*slow, desolately*]

小 白 菜 (呀) 地 裡 — 黃 — (呀) ; 三 兩 歲 上
Xiao bai cai (ya) di li — huang (ya); San liang sui shang

沒 了 娘 — (呀) 。 親 娘 — 呀 , 親 — 娘 — 呀 !
mei le niang (ya). Qin niang ya, qin — niang ya!

安波、章枚記錄

[recorded by An Bo and Zhang Mei]

Example 1 'Xiao baicai', in *Zhongguo mingxue xuan*, Vol. 4, ed. Wenhua bu wenxue yishu yanjiuyuan yinyue yanjiusuo (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1985), 66. Translation and engraving from *jianpu* by the author.

and the prelude exhibit a sense of simplicity and grief with descending melodic lines. The use of both musical passages, therefore, suggests sentiments and even some sense of loss, be it the mother or, more broadly, the cultural roots of the motherland Tan often discussed and suggested in the context of *Ghost Opera*.

Young notices that in *Ghost Opera*, 'Xiao baicai' and the Bach prelude are heard in the same temporal space in the first movement, but the quotation of the folk tune is 'strangely alienated' due to the dissonant key relationships between F major pentatonic and C# minor, respectively.⁷¹ Such alienation is much better hidden in the concerto as the two themes have not been individually presented and are better fused, perhaps unnaturally, into one musical unit in the concerto, while each element's incompleteness is more visible.

Our first aural experience of the two musical motives sounding together begins in bar 4, as if melodies from Bach's prelude create a quasi-heterophonic texture with 'Xiao baicai', potentially suggesting the same emotional roots of the Bach melody as that of the folk tune. In this movement, the first violin plays the tune 'Xiao baicai' using an E major pentatonic collection when the beginning theme played by the *pipa*, which comes from the first movement, slowly fades out on pitch class B, the modal centre and final note of the tune. As the first violin plays the second phrase of the tune in bar 4 (Example 2), the other three bowed strings play the beginning of Bach's prelude using a three-voice, rather than the original four-voice, texture. The two melodies also share a majority of pitch classes despite being in different modal centres and using slightly different pitch collections, fusing the pentatonic nature of 'Xiao baicai' almost seamlessly into Bach's contrapuntal fabric. Yet, the first cadence of the prelude lands on bar 14 in G# minor, but Tan only quotes the piece up to the first half of bar 10, as illustrated in Example 3. By then, in bar 13, he had already changed the modality of the prelude from minor to something Aeolian-like. Therefore, even though the Bachian counterpoint dominates the texture, its incomplete quotation and changes in

⁷¹ Young, 'Reconsidering Cultural Politics', 610–13.

Example 2 shows the string quartet parts for measures 4-8 of Tan Dun's Concerto for Strings Quartet and Pipa, III. The score is in G# minor, 3/4 time. The top staff (Violin I) is labeled "Xiao baicai" melody. The bottom three staves (Violin II, Viola, Cello) are labeled "Bach prelude in three-voice texture". The score includes dynamic markings (p, mp, mf, pp, ppp) and performance instructions (con sord., hold (freezing)).

Example 2 Tan Dun, *Concerto for Strings Quartet and Pipa*, III, string quartet parts, bb. 4–8. Copyright © 1995 by G. Schirmer, Inc. International Copyright Secured. All Rights Reserved. Used by permission.

Example 3 shows the piano part for measures 1-14 of Johann Sebastian Bach's *The Well-Tempered Clavier* Book I, Prelude No. 4 in C# minor. The score is in C# minor, 4/4 time. The score includes dynamic markings (p, mp, mf, pp, ppp) and performance instructions (con sord., hold (freezing)).

Example 3 Johann Sebastian Bach, *The Well-Tempered Clavier* Book I, Prelude No. 4 in C# minor, bb. 1–14. Ed. Alfred Dürr (Kassel: Bärenreiter Verlag, 1989), 18.

harmonic processes suggest that accommodation from the dominant Western culture is required to embrace the non-West.

However, it does not imply that 'Xiao baicai' needs no alteration to participate in the dialogue – arguably, it has been changed more substantially with marked distinction through timbre, texture, and temporal presence. 'Xiao baicai' requires more regularization to fit the metre of the Bach prelude (a regular compound duple metre instead of using the transcribed 4/4 and 5/4 metres), as well as its tonal framework. Without completing its phrase on pitch class B, the tune is cut short on C# as the Bach prelude continues and lands on a dominant seventh chord for C# minor in bars 5–6. In contrast, the lower three strings are instructed to 'hold (freezing)' when the first violin continues with the third phrase of 'Xiao baicai'. The folk song fails to reach the ending B and is interrupted on C# again in bar 8, and the lower strings 'unfreeze' and move on with the prelude. The first violin then plays 'Xiao baicai' without interruption for the first time in bar 10. Tan's Bach quotation gradually shifts to his contrapuntal writing to better accompany the folk tune and transition to the light-hearted middle section. 'Xiao baicai', however, still fails to reach its concluding note B in bar 16, and it is also transformed into a four-bar melody played by the first violin in a simple quadruple time. Tan adds a D between the first two notes' descent from A to F#,

Example 4 Tan Dun, *Concerto for String Quartet and Pipa*, III, string quartet parts, bb. 23–6. Copyright © 1995 by G. Schirmer, Inc. International Copyright Secured. All Rights Reserved. Used by permission.

creating a D major melody out of the lament tune, and the lower bowed strings also play a Bach prelude-inspired accompaniment in the major mode in [Example 4](#).

The different treatments of the two incomplete phrases suggest that the counterpoints drawn from Bach, despite giving way to the Chinese melody, are merely suspended instead of being interrupted (and silenced), as in the case of ‘Xiao baicai’. At the end of the movement at bar 31, the *pipa* returns with ‘Xiao baicai’ in the 6/4 metre, with the lower three strings joining with the Bach prelude one by one. Even so, the folk tune fails to reach its final note and is interrupted in bars 34–35 when the second violin and viola fade out. The last phrase in [Example 5](#) is supported solely by a heavy C $\sharp_1$ in the cello. Furthermore, the ending of the second phrase of the folk tune in bar 34 is changed to a scalar descent to D $\sharp$ from E, rather than a minor third leap, and moves to B, suggesting a sense of half cadence that requires a resolution to C $\sharp$ minor instead. This almost erases the importance of B as the modal centre, leaving ‘Xiao baicai’ no space to properly conclude. Despite having similar aural effects, the score shows the power hierarchy between the two musical borrowings – ‘Xiao baicai’ is woven piecewise with the intricate Western counterpoint rather than being seen as an equal. Instrumentation also illustrates similar intercultural dynamics. The *pipa* is silent throughout the interplay between ‘Xiao baicai’ and Bach’s prelude, mostly performing alone or independently from the rest of the ensemble in this movement.

Tracing the juxtaposition of ‘Xiao baicai’ and the Bach prelude based on modalities, melodic characteristics, and performance techniques requires careful, culturally informed listening. The almost seamless juxtaposition at the beginning can be read as how different sounds and musical cultures originate from the same musical seed, making the blending of Chinese and Western cultural artefacts in this movement fit organically into Tan’s ‘inclination towards a more “global” idiom’.⁷² Such a blending, however, is an artificial construction and requires negotiations and trade-offs, as symbolized by the imperfect quotations. Therefore, the lament of the loss of cultural ‘roots’, or a pillar of one’s life, is a shared human experience regardless of sociocultural and religious backgrounds. To musically experience such a loss, the display requires the manipulation of preserved historical ‘artefacts’. Furthermore, the Chinese musical elements, namely ‘Xiao baicai’ and *pipa*, in this movement are prone to more subjugation and distinction than the Western ones.

Self-quotation and transformation of musical meaning

Tan’s reuse of his earlier works also helps buttress a ritualistic meaning in the concerto. Resonating with Moore’s observation of how Tan uses canonic musical works as a ‘stand[-]in

⁷² Kouwenhoven, ‘Composer Tan Dun’, 24.

The musical score for Example 5 consists of five staves. The first staff is for the Pipa, starting at measure 33 with a melody marked *ppp*. The second staff is for the Violin (Vn.), which is mostly silent with a *mf* marking and a 'put down the bow' instruction. The third staff is for the Viola (Va.), also mostly silent with a *mf* marking and a 'put down the bow' instruction. The fourth staff is for the Violoncello (Vc.), starting at measure 33 with a *ppp* marking, followed by a crescendo to *fff* and then *fff* again. The fifth staff continues the Vc. part, starting at measure 37 with a *fff* marking, including 'sul pont.' and 'ord.' markings, and ending at measure 41 with a *ppp* marking and a 'put down the bow' instruction.

Example 5 Tan Dun, *Concerto for String Quartet and Pipa*, III, bb. 33–41. Copyright © 1995 by G. Schirmer, Inc. International Copyright Secured. All Rights Reserved. Used by permission.

for now-obsolescent liturgical music',⁷³ I interpret the different ritual markers from the East and West referenced in the piece as an attempt to reframe local ceremonies into a globalist, universalist ritual. The concerto's second movement is adapted from the second movement of *Ghost Opera* with some changes in formal boundaries, creating a playful movement with a loose, rounded binary structure. The original movement in *Ghost Opera* starts by juxtaposing the second violin and *pipa* glides with the start of the Bach prelude, but only the glides remain in the concerto. The second violin then adds one beat to the ostinato, emphasizing D–A–C# starting in bar 13, creating metrical dissonance with the now two-beat pattern on the *pipa*. The repetitive nature of the music and the use of rhythmic multiple stops are reminiscent of the rigour we hear at the beginning of 'Les Augures printaniers' from Igor Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du printemps*. Echoing Richard Taruskin's argument that the spectacle of ancient religion in Stravinsky's depiction of a primitive sacrifice, including rituals and myths, was part of a greater movement to 'heal' and 'reconcile' the sense of 'cultural inauthenticity' between the modern, materialistic, and artificial culture and the primal, elemental earth.⁷⁴

Starting in bar 39 in Example 6, the first violin plays a modal melody centred on A in bars 39–48, which is paraphrased from an original theme of the second movement, 'Nao

⁷³ Moore, 'Art-Religion for a Global New Age', 380.

⁷⁴ Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works through Mavra*, vol. 1 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), 850–66.

Example 6 Tan Dun, *Concerto for String Quartet and Pipa*, II, first violin, bb. 39–60. Copyright © 1995 by G. Schirmer, Inc. International Copyright Secured. All Rights Reserved. Used by permission.

dongfang’ (‘Wedding Night’), of Tan’s *Xibei Zuqu*, in [Example 7](#).⁷⁵ The paraphrased tune in the concerto, compared with ‘Nao Dongfang’, starts and ends in almost the same way as the original tune at a fifth above. The original tune is played on the outer string of an *erhu* tuned in a⁷⁶. By transposing the tune up a fifth, a violinist can play the melody using similar fingering on the E string instead. Furthermore, the contrasting lyrical theme played by the cello in bars 108–116, as shown in [Example 8](#), is also identical to the second theme from ‘Nao dongfang’ in [Example 9](#), despite being transposed down a twelfth. The gliding figure we encountered in the three-beat ostinato can also be attributed to the bars 17–18 of ‘Nao dongfang’, which is further reiterated as transition materials in the original piece.

While recycling materials from earlier works is a common practice in twentieth-century music, what is remarkable in this movement is how Tan rewrites his *own* works – everything but the main melody is newly composed. This echoes Lou Harrison’s revision practice, which exhibits a postmodernist, transethnic aesthetic.⁷⁷ The narrative facilitated by such recomposition, while it resonates with Straus’s notion of ‘establishing a link to the tradition’ that is prevalent in modern music, seems to assert Tan himself more as both the creator and the inheritor of the Chinese rural soundscape.⁷⁸

Nao Dongfang refers to the ritualistic activities on Chinese wedding nights, in which the newlyweds are teased, most likely sexually, by the groom’s family members before

⁷⁵ China Nationalities Orchestra Society, ‘Xibei zuqu’, *Yue Tan*, 6 January 2013, 80. It is worth noting that the suite was adapted from his dance theatre piece, *The Yellow Soil*, commissioned by the Hong Kong Dance Company in 1985, while the staged work is, in turn, inspired by Chen Kaige’s film *Yellow Earth* (1984), set in the rural region of Shaanbei province in the 1930s. The second scene of the film depicts a rural wedding ritual filled with Chinese fife and drum music performed by peasants, which is based on repeated melodic and drum patterns, as well as unaccompanied solo singing that accompanied the new couple to the room they would spend the night in (*dongfang*).

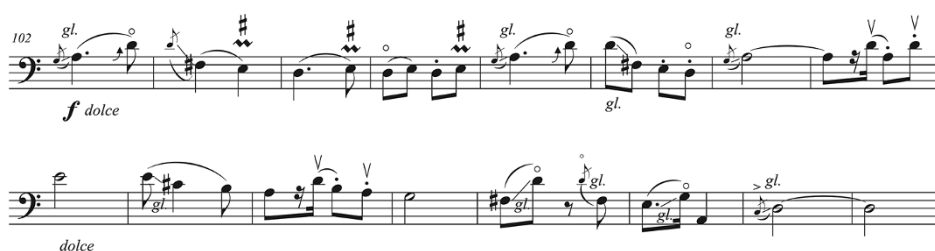
⁷⁶ Daozheng Zhang, ‘Tan Dun: Zai Shijie Wutai Jiang Zhongguo Gushi’, *China Today*, 28 February 2017. www.china-today.com.cn/chinese/culture/mrl/201702/t20170228_800088646.html (accessed 6 September 2021). Translation mine. *Guoyue* means, transliterally from Mandarin, national music. It is relatively common to see *guoyue* being used to represent music performed using Chinese instruments, but in the context of Zhang’s article, Tan’s definition of *guoyue* is likely to be much broader than that, encompassing an ambiguous range of Chinese music regardless of origins and performance methods.

⁷⁷ Leta E. Miller, ‘Lou Harrison and the Aesthetics of Revision, Alteration, and Self-Borrowing’, *Twentieth-Century Music* 2/1 (2005), 106.

⁷⁸ Joseph N. Straus, *Remaking the Past: Musical Modernism and the Influence of the Tonal Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 44–5, 73.



Example 7 Tan Dun, *Xibei Zuqu*, II, 'Nao dongfang', erhu, bb. 13–21.



Example 8 Tan Dun, *Concerto for String Quartet and Pipa*, II, cello, bb. 102–117. Copyright © 1995 by G. Schirmer, Inc. International Copyright Secured. All Rights Reserved. Used by permission.



Example 9 Tan Dun, *Xibei zuqu*, II, erhu, bb. 45–52.

their first night as a married couple.⁷⁹ Such light-heartedness and playfulness are depicted in the movement written for Chinese orchestra by using a treble-heavy timbre and fast-moving accompaniment so that the portrayal of the playful and the primitive goes beyond its programmatic contexts but also in terms of the musical character. In contrast, the second movement in the concerto is driven by the rhythmic ostinati that use multiple stops in a wide, open-strings-supported range on bowed strings, while the pitch bends and *sao* (quickly pluck all four strings) on the *pipa*, creating a raw burst of emotions. This assists the melody's meaning in being detached from its original location-specific context. Not only is the rural-suggesting melody now heard in a new musical space, but Tan also illustrates that such a sense of innocence and desire is part of a shared primal humanity not conditioned by modernity and cultural boundaries. It further suggests another perspective of primitive,

⁷⁹ Xiying Guan, 'Cultural Connotation of Joking the Bridal Chamber and its Function', *Journal of South-Central University for Nationalities (Humanities and Social Science)* 21/4 (2001), 53–54.

pancultural ritual – it can provoke a non-religious, light-hearted, and simple sense of happiness indexed by the ‘traditional’ rural celebrations. Through Tan, this unorthodox aspect of rituals is rediscovered and reinstated in postmodernity, appealing to the liberal pluralist ideology and capitalizing on that as a ‘flexible, adaptable, and high-status worker that late capitalism so values’.⁸⁰

(Self-)Primitivism as panculturality

If melodic quotations primarily drive the inner movements of the concerto, the outer movements display outbursts of primal human expressions symbolized by the many breakdowns and repetitions of fragmented musical materials, all of which seem to index a sense of primitivity and the breakdown of cultural boundaries by returning to human instincts. The first movement of the concerto starts from rehearsal mark E of the first movement of *Ghost Opera*, meaning most of the pitch-centre dissonances and repeated musical motives presented in the first movement of *Ghost Opera*, including the Bach quotation and Chinese folk tune ‘Xiao baicai’, are stripped. Instead, it spotlights the contrast between primitive human ritualistic depiction and a more learned musical style. The first section of the concerto presents us with a noisy and confusing soundscape despite the carefully constructed pitch collection and rhythmic patterns that use highly economical and modular methods. Starting with a stomp by all string quartet members, the first section in bars 1–18 (Example 10) uses double stops in bowed strings and ostinato to create a march-like soundscape. The regularity is quickly challenged by the viola in bar 3, in which the ‘stomp’ consistently enters a semiquaver off the beat. As the second violin joins the march with an A–E dyad on the downbeat of bar 5, the cello begins varying the march by playing a two-bar virtuosic double-stop passage with complex rhythms in bars 5–10, alternating between the dyadic movement and gliding gestures emphasizing fifths and ninths, concluding with a set of gestures in the form of minor seconds, major sevenths, and augmented octaves. Despite the heavy use of surface-level dissonances, the C major-pentatonic collection in quintal voicing serves as the harmonic anchor.

The breakdown continues in bar 11 when the stable two-bar glides and the openness in harmony are replaced by more rapid rhythmic activity, drastic glides, and dissonances. The four bowed strings create a wedge-like gesture in semiquavers in bars 11–12 while emphasizing the dissonances until bars 18–19. Rather than putting chaos into order, the opening deconstructs the rhythm it briefly establishes, foregrounding the innate, primitive expressions to follow. The *pipa* contributes to the chaos by offering counterpoints to the string quartet activities in its own time-space in bar 14 by playing a six-note pattern that creates metrical dissonance with the string quartet (Example 11). In addition, unlike the string quartet where the double stops are generally played on stopped strings, the *pipa* plays a pattern using both open strings and guitar-like chucking.⁸¹ It then switches to noisy gestures using open strings, crossed strings, and *zhai*, which roughly translates to Bartók pizzicato, in bar 18. The dissonances and less-than-perfect rhythmic unity also suggest the amateurish nature of the music performed in a folk ritual.

This mechanical and exciting atmosphere is contrasted in the second section (bb. 19–38). Utilizing a slower tempo and softer dynamics, the *pipa*, violins, and cello play a two-bar pattern using a quintal chord comprising the pitch classes A, D (in bowed strings and *pipa* in harmonics), and E (in *pipa* in harmonics), alternating with finger-style chops. The open

⁸⁰ Moore, ‘Art-Religion for a Global New Age’, 386–91.

⁸¹ The tuning of the *pipa* is conventionally A–d–e–a. The only notes that are stopped are e¹ and a¹ at the beginning of each six-note pattern.

The image shows a musical score for the string quartet parts of Tan Dun's Concerto for String Quartet and Pipa, I, measures 1 through 7. The tempo is marked 'Andante molto' with a quarter note equal to 72 beats per minute. The parts are for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. A blue box highlights a section in the Viola part labeled 'Off-beat "stomps"', showing a series of off-beat eighth notes. A green box highlights a section in the Cello part labeled 'Repeating motive', showing a continuous eighth-note pattern with various ornaments.

Example 10 Tan Dun, *Concerto for String Quartet and Pipa*, I, string quartet parts, bb. 1–7. Copyright © 1995 by G. Schirmer, Inc. International Copyright Secured. All Rights Reserved. Used by permission.

sonority accompanies a five-bar melody played by the viola starting in bar 23, with a four-bar introduction reiterating the note D, the modal centre of the melody based on scale step 2 in a C major scale.

The motivic design juxtaposes pentatonicism in pitch spaces and stylized gestures, both suggesting Oriental folk music practices prescribed by the composer. The basic idea of the viola melody in bars 23–27, which originates from rehearsal G of the first movement of *Ghost Opera*, is based on a single pitch class D at different registers with embellishments from above and below, featuring the large-interval glides Tan often uses to illustrate Chinese-style singing.⁸² Yet the continuation of this idea is a tuneful, light-hearted pentatonic melody, which also fits with the folk music stereotype. The D-major pentatonic melody played by the *pipa* in bar 41 is tuneful with heavy use of pitch bending, *lun zhi* (wheel finger, playing with all five fingers in quick succession), harmonics, and arpeggiation, suggesting sounds from the more melodious and tender *wenqu* (literati music) playing style. After the brief duet, the pitched and controlled glide by the second violin dissolves rhythmically in bar 47, and the other bowed strings join with similar glides using notes from a B minor triad. The *pipa* also switches to playing natural harmonics and a sustained D, reiterating its status as the pitch centre before the ensemble gradually returns to silence. As a result, this brief movement establishes a more abstract unity of the whole piece using intervallic, rhythmic, and instrumental means rather than melodic and lyrical motives such as *Ghost Opera*. Unlike the conventional design of Western cyclic works, in which melodic motives unify the movements, our aural memories in the concerto are more often triggered by unorthodox and unpitched sounds instead.⁸³

While the chaotic beginning and the reference to a Chinese learned musical style, suggested by the solo passages by *pipa*, provide the concerto with a more global and perhaps

⁸² Eline Flipse, dir., *Broken Silence* (Paris: Idéaleaudience, 2008), 24:01–24:10.

⁸³ Hugh MacDonald, 'Cyclic Form', *Grove Music Online*, www.oxfordmusiconline.com; Christine Dahl, 'Tan Dun | Concerto for String Orchestra and Pipa', *Tan Dun*, tandun.com/composition/concerto-for-string-orchestra-and-pipa/.

The image displays a musical score for Tan Dun's *Concerto for String Quartet and Pipa*, measures 12-17. The score is written for Pipa, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. Two specific areas are highlighted with colored boxes:

- A green box labeled "Major seventh glides" is positioned over the Violin I and II parts, showing a series of notes with glissando markings.
- A blue box labeled "Db-Ab vs D-A" is positioned over the Viola and Cello parts, showing a similar series of notes with glissando markings.

The bottom system of the score provides detailed string glissando markings for each instrument:

- Violin I: "gliss.", "on A and E strings", "gliss."
- Violin II: "gliss.", "on E and D strings", "gliss."
- Viola: "gliss.", "on D and G strings", "gliss."
- Cello: "on C and G strings", "gliss."

The score also includes dynamic markings such as *ppp*, *sfz*, and *ppp*, and performance instructions like "head from slow to fast" and "gliss. between A and F#, from slow to fast".

Example 11 Tan Dun, *Concerto for String Quartet and Pipa*, I, bb. 12–17. Copyright © 1995 by G. Schirmer, Inc. International Copyright Secured. All Rights Reserved. Used by permission.

novel vision of the music-making process, the fourth movement of the concerto movement is a tour de force displaying a whirlwind of images and emotions, with most of the materials adapted from previous movements with small but significant changes. The explosion starts right from the first twenty bars of this movement, as all five players utilize all four strings in *tutti* with intense harmonies in [Example 12](#), which is imported directly from the sixth movement of Tan's *Eight Colors for String Quartet* (1986–8), 'Drum and Gong'. The original work was intended to create 'a kind of ritual performance structure', with Tan experimenting with his musical language 'between folk materials and the concentrated, lyrical language of atonality'.⁸⁴

In the concerto, all but the second violin part contains a single tritone, already suggesting the dissonant nature of the music. The combined sound is even more dissonant and powerful as half steps saturate these clusters, resulting in an almost complete chromatic collection with a missing B. The bowed string players then play rapid fragments pointillistically in semiquavers, while the *pipa* part features crossed strings with a fixed short-short-long rhythmic pattern, creating a cymbal-like effect. While there is no clear melodic direction, the pitch collection used in the melody, similar to the cluster, is an eleven-note collection with a missing E, a perfect fifth away from the B that was missing in the earlier chromatic cluster. The vertical emphasis of wide, open, and dissonant intervals is now balanced by the perfect interval in the negative space. The fragmentary structure and

⁸⁴ Tan Dun, programme notes for *Eight Colors for String Quartet* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1994).

Example 12 Tan Dun, *Concerto for String Quartet and Pipa*, IV, bb. 1–6. Copyright © 1995 by G. Schirmer, Inc. International Copyright Secured. All Rights Reserved. Used by permission.

Example 13 Tan Dun, *Concerto for String Quartet and Pipa*, IV, string quartet parts, bb. 54–60. Copyright © 1995 by G. Schirmer, Inc. International Copyright Secured. All Rights Reserved. Used by permission.

constant changes in musical texture are also balanced by the repetition of musical ideas, which is often two bars long. These elements point to a sense of depth and unity that Tan seeks to create while navigating the different cultures and aesthetics.

Materials in the second movement are recalled in the violins and viola in bars 46–87. While the materials for the upper three parts are preserved, the regular one-bar rhythm pattern of the cello is irregularized.⁸⁵ The viola is also assigned a new role as the instrumental equivalent to the shouting of ‘Yao’ from the second movement between bars 54 and 59, as illustrated in Example 13. Instead of playing the pitch bends as it had, the *pipa* plays new material involving a Bartók pizzicato on the lowest A string and a melodic idea deriving from bar 34 of this movement with more vigour using *sao*. This is another passage demonstrating Tan’s skill in recontextualization. The sounds and colours of Peking Opera and Buddhist chanting that first inspired *Eight Colors* are highlighted and meshed into the intercultural fabric, highlighting the self-identity he seeks to express through music.

Our grounding in the piece comes in bar 89 after the most chaotic mixture of instrumental sounds and human voice. Everyone plays the *pipa* melody in unison as if everyone has been cast under a spell and is moving their bodies in the same way as in Stravinsky’s

⁸⁵ This passage is also seen in bars 40–75 of the last movement of *Eight Colors for String Quartet*, ‘Red Sona’. In the parallel passage in *Eight Colors*, the viola is tacet.

ballet. In prior movements, the *pipa* has often served as an outsider or subjugated character, playing melodies or gestures mostly independent from the string quartet. But here, the *pipa* leads the strings into unison, showing its ability to blend and collaborate with Western musical cultures. Similarly, the inner strings, which tend to fill in harmonies in Western harmonic practice, announce musical gestures that the first violin and cello eventually follow. Tan finally gives the outsider, or the lesser-valued group members, a voice in this finale, upsetting the well-established dynamic imbalance from previous movements. Their leadership eventually drives the music to a wild state of mind through a recapitulation of the ritualistic musical elements, including quadruple stops, accompaniments from 'Nao Dongfang', and the indeterminate shouts and *glissandi*. After the last exhale, the recapitulation of the *pipa* melody, which we first heard at the end of the first movement, is now accompanied by such a lush, seven-voice D major add-sixth chord, rather than the solo accompaniment on an embellished D note in the second violin.⁸⁶

If we interpret the texture in the first movement as an introduction to a sense of searching calmness that is not fully realized alongside the unfolding actions driven by primitive human desires and euphoria in various forms, then this conclusion is the final transcendence that unifies human experience in this pancultural ritual – a sense of peace that is now enjoyed and shared by both Eastern and Western constituents. This final, sustained harmony is a result of a modernized, multicultural expression that nonetheless maintains a reverence for the ancient Eastern culture. The unchanged *pipa* passage continues to display elegance and subtlety in the literati tradition. Even with a *sforzando*, the first harmonic on *pipa* has a much faster decay to null than the bowed *pianississimo* chord, meaning its sounds are enhanced and framed by Western timbre and harmony. As much as we wish to seek a power balance between the *pipa* and string quartet, and the fourth movement has indeed spotlighted the inner voices and *pipa* as leaders in earlier moments, the string quartet, nonetheless, plays a more dominant role in demonstrating dynamics, progress, and capacity of change more than *pipa*. The Chinese instrument, until the last moment of the piece, is taking on two roles that signify otherness – the primitive dancer driven by ecstasy and the oriental *literati* reverberating a lyrical past.

Conclusion: ever-changing boundaries

Tan's *Concerto for String Quartet and Pipa* is a colourful kaleidoscope of cultures and ritualistic performances with a modernist aesthetic: many traditional cultural elements are manipulated and transformed through modern techniques, but the 'essence' of these traditions might still be experienced in the modern context through the trance-like experiences. There are also moments where we can interpret Tan's ambition in achieving a sound space that enables a harmonious presence of various cultures that is only possible in the present. However, it is important to return and revisit the sociocultural issues that Moore, Ong, and Young have raised and how the concerto, while opening new musical possibilities for intercultural dialogues, reinforces Tan's flexible citizenship through othering and recontextualizing Chinese rural culture and musical constructs.

First, as the piece is called *Concerto for String Quartet and Pipa*, it is curious that Tan decided to place 'string quartet' before '*pipa*' in the title of the piece, which is unconventional as the solo instrument is typically placed before the ensemble. This decision intentionally treats the *pipa* player not as the soloist through semiotics, despite its distinct aural status due to its unique timbre and often different musical gestures from the bowed strings. Throughout the concerto, the *pipa* rarely performs the main melodic ideas but articulates formal boundaries

⁸⁶ While all members of the string quartet are playing double stops, the second violinist and violist double on pitch b.

and performs non-pitched materials or static passages with limited interaction with the string quartet. The tradition-hinting melody was used as the conclusion in both the first and the last movements, with a short, faster variation that happens in bars 133–8 in the second movement as well as a truncated version that starts the third movement. The only other melodic element used in the whole piece was in bars 31–6 of the third movement. But even there, the *pipa* merely plays the 'Xiao baicai' tune like the first violin did in bars 4–5, with a note altered from C# to D# to fit the Bachian harmonic framework, and is silenced when the string quartet plays important melodic ideas. As early as in bar 4 of the fourth movement, the *pipa* is assigned to be the non-melodic instrument making unpitched sounds when the string quartet plays an atonal, pointillistic melody. After a brief unison in bars 9–12, it is silenced as the atonal melody continues until bar 22, where it introduces the other string instruments to a new musical idea before being placed aside again. Though it introduces the main melody in 33–4, the string quartet never fully gets on board with what the *pipa* is playing until bar 89.

Furthermore, despite asserting a more significant role in the fourth movement, *pipa* has limited influence on other instruments, suggesting its peripheral position and role of enriching the string quartet in a Western-centric musical space (and, by extension, a modernized society). This is even more apparent in a staged performance of *Ghost Opera*, where the *pipa* player is placed in positions 2, 3, and 5 in Figure 1, in contrast to the string quartet in the centre, showing its peripheral position. Referring to Tan's words, 'I began to find a way to mingle old materials from my culture with the new, to contribute something to the [W]estern idea of atonality, and to refresh it.'⁸⁷ Here, the role of the *pipa* is to 'refresh' a Western idea (atonality) and ensemble (string quartet), which is the primary, pancultural mode of Tan's musical expression. Or, from another perspective, it provides the Orientalizing elements that make his music sound intercultural and distinctive.

Second, compared with *Ghost Opera*, I found the reference to 'Nao dongfang' equally, if not more, important in guiding my interpretation of the meanings of musical gestures and Tan's motives. The concerto shows some curious similarities with *Xibei zuqu* regarding the compositional process and musical context. All three pieces seek to create ritual performances through repeated musical gestures, bodily means of musical creation such as stomping and shouting, and references to canonical works and ritualistic music in both Western and Chinese cultures.⁸⁸ Yet, in addition to the shared melodic motives, both the concerto and *Xibei zuqu* are adapted from theatrical works, with the rhythmic and non-pitched elements functioning as the framing of the outer movements. Tan once described the structure of *Xibei zuqu* as, 'the depiction of one's growth. ... If we can transfer one's personality and humanity to a national and ethnic commonality, we can create resonance'.⁸⁹ Given that both *Xibei zuqu* and *Ghost Opera* are claimed to be inspired by folk elements and rituals, in Wang Jin's words, these compositions are Tan's 'perfect imagination of the folk life'.⁹⁰ These similarities invite us to reflect on the need to understand the original contexts of musical quotations, specifically elements depicting Chinese traditions, in our understanding of the concerto and Tan's music at large, as well as how his musical voice is shaped by the racialized, capitalist market.

In Yu Siu Wah's critical reading of Tan's *Symphony 1997: Heaven, Earth, Man*, he points out that Tan failed to fully negotiate the symbolic (and in the case of *Di Nü Hua*, the literal)

⁸⁷ Tan Dun, programme notes for *8 Colors*, Naxos Music Library, www.naxosmusiclibrary.com/work/320988.

⁸⁸ The similarities of the musical characters between the *Concerto* and *Xibei Zuqu* go beyond the shared melodic motives and four-movement design. To my ears, the tempi, gestures, and musical affects also seem to mirror each other. This warrants further exploration.

⁸⁹ China Nationalities Orchestra Society, 'Xibei zuqu', 77–8. Translation and emphasis mine.

⁹⁰ Jin Wang, 'Tan Dun *Xibei zuqu* chuanguotong yinyue sucai yunyong fenxi', blog, *Zhongguo lunwen wang*. <https://m.xzbu.com/1/view-6688125.htm>. Translation mine.

With the more rapid flow of information and advancement of technologies in the twentieth century, we see composers sourcing sound materials from diverse origins, genres, and even eras. To treat the original materials merely as sounds with no cultural implications, and as objects that can be assigned new meanings freely, however, is dismissive of the perspectives of intertextuality and cultural hierarchy. This transformation of meaning does not erase the symbols' past.⁹³ In Lawrence Kramer's words, 'what matters is how the terms, tropes, narratives, and maxims elicited by a textual question take shape and move through an intertextual array'.⁹⁴ In Yu's reading, he thoroughly uses his expertise in Chinese music to deconstruct the symbols in Tan's 'ritual paraphernalia' and concludes that Tan's use of Chinese cultural symbols is insensitive and inappropriate.⁹⁵ What Yu has done is, from Klein's perspective, to understand the topics and commonplaces that 'have social/historical (con)texts that must be read to understand the very permutation and neutralization happening within the imaginary boundaries of a musical text'.⁹⁶ To understand how Tan constructs new meanings in his music that seeks to break away from cultural boundaries, we have to 'uncover' the conventions and evolutions that have defined the musical tropes and cultural boundaries that come before this composition.⁹⁷

Furthermore, as early as 1989, Richard Kurt Kraus argued, 'if music were indeed so international, Americans should be able to hear Chinese opera as easily as the people of Shanghai can now hear Beethoven'.⁹⁸ This requires us to understand how composers navigate the racialized power dynamics of the American musical sphere. Chinese American composers' prominence in the American musical field as a cohort attracts attention from many journalists and scholars, some of whom persistently view them through an exotic lens, which influences these composers' display of their ethnicity in interviews and writings.⁹⁹ Tan once wrote, 'If my name is not a brand of Chinese culture in the avant-garde, Peter Gelb is not going to be behind me at the Metropolitan Opera'.¹⁰⁰ This succinctly echoes Marianna Ritchey's insight on the capitalist nature of musicking in the contemporary music scene, which has a powerful impact on composers' presentation of self and musical expression. The coexistence of Chinese and Western musical markers within the same sonic space has not erased the East-West cultural hierarchy because the dialogue is built on established cultural values and stereotypes. Rather, utilizing Eastern elements by composers can be understood as a globalizing process that exhibits hierarchical status and social distinction. This process becomes a new institutionalized paradigm for minority composers to appeal to the adventure-seeking Western classical music audiences.¹⁰¹ Celebrating intercultural sounds without paying attention to how social forces influence the composers' musical

⁹³ Timothy Brennan, *Wars of Position: The Cultural Politics of Left and Right* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 45–6.

⁹⁴ Lawrence Kramer, 'What Is (Is There) Musical Intertextuality?', in *Intertextuality in Music: Dialogic Composition*, ed. Violetta Kostka, Paulo F. de Castro, and William A. Everett (London: Routledge, 2021), 15.

⁹⁵ Siu Wah Yu, 'The Cultural Negotiation in the Rituals of the 1997 Hong Kong Reunion with China', *Journal of Ritual Studies* 19/1 (2005), 47; Yu, 'Two Practice Confused in One Composition', 70–1.

⁹⁶ Michael L. Klein, 'Intertextuality and a New Subjectivity', in *Intertextuality in Music: Dialogic Composition*, ed. Violetta Kostka, Paulo F. de Castro, and William A. Everett (London: Routledge, 2021), 55–7.

⁹⁷ Klein, 'Intertextuality and a New Subjectivity', 63–4.

⁹⁸ Kraus, *Pianos and Politics in China*, ix–x.

⁹⁹ Nancy Foner and George M. Fredrickson, 'Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity in the United States: Social Constructions and Social Relations in Historical and Contemporary Perspective', in *Not Just Black and White: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity in the United States*, ed. Nancy Foner and George M. Fredrickson (New York: Russell Sage Foundation), 2005, 13.

¹⁰⁰ Tan Dun, 'Words', *21st Century Music* 15/7 (2008).

¹⁰¹ John Corbett, 'Experimental Oriental: New Music and Other Others', in *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music*, ed. Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press), 2000, 166–7.

expression and identities, therefore, fails to break down racial boundaries in meaningful and structural ways.¹⁰²

Finally, the concerto illuminates the many intricacies we need to consider while interpreting works with multiple cultural borrowings. Studying the piece as a work written primarily for concertgoers, we see Tan conforms formally to a conventional concerto design while using visually and aurally marked ways to display his Chineseness. His mastery of the art music genres and the established tropes within the genres, therefore, influences how musical objects can be interpreted differently depending on the compositional context.¹⁰³ The reduced importance of the Bach–‘Xiao baicai’ dialogue from *Ghost Opera* to the concerto, for example, changes the narrativity of the piece and highlights Tan’s musical voice. Meanwhile, the new formal design, which is more akin to *Xibei zuqu*, can be read as a transcendent journey from a personal level to universality. Looking specifically at the visually and aurally marked Chinese elements, however, requires us to acknowledge the century-long process of modernizing and ‘improving’ Chinese musical expression as exhibited by how Tan and his post-socialist contemporaries have accepted a Westernized way of theorizing and representing their non-Western culture as an indigenous process. Note that the *pipa* that requires chromatic frets to perform the piece, the stabilized form of ‘Xiao baicai’ is disseminated through Chinese folk song anthologies, and Tan’s ‘Nao dongfang’ references are all created in the twentieth century with Western musical influences. These modern elements, nonetheless, remain visually and aurally marked as symbols of Eastern traditions, and in ways that support the alienation of the rural population as savagery. Therefore, it remains questionable as to what degree such an ethnic display has upset the structural and hierarchical East–West divide and a nationalist, ahistorical understanding of Chinese culture.

Negotiating cultural boundaries between the self and the other is a constant process with persisting differences.¹⁰⁴ In this article, I seek to make a case for a more nuanced, multi-layered approach regarding the unequal use of cultural markers in Tan’s concerto because the impact of globalization and modernism on contemporary Chinese music is multifaceted and dynamic. In the concerto, we observe the different degrees of mediation between Tan’s Chinese cultural utterances and his use of hegemonic Western musical processes. Using Markus Arnold’s paradigm, the concerto illustrates a ‘postcolonial’ innovation and stylistic transgression – Tan’s music is intercultural, for the musical dialogues between cultures are based on mutual understanding and compromise, with an intention to break down the macrocultural boundaries between East and West. But his conception of an audible Chineseness is shaped by a stable, ‘postcolonial’, romanticized Chinese identity, facilitated by modernized, nationalist tropes and at the expense of marginalized rural populations, that is, the micro-sociocultural segregation and influences of modernism and the West that might be overlooked under the umbrella term ‘Chinese culture’.¹⁰⁵ A historically and culturally informed listening allows us to identify the transformations and recontextualizations in Tan’s use of Chinese-marking elements and reject an essentialized understanding of Chinese nationalism. While we may lament the omnipresence of boundaries and inequities in any intercultural processes, it may be more productive to accept that any form of cultural negotiation is a dynamic, ever-changing intersectional process along multiple axes

¹⁰² Ritchey, *Composing Capital*, 10.

¹⁰³ Rao, ‘From Chinatown Opera to *The First Emperor*’, 62.

¹⁰⁴ Ien Ang, ‘Transcending Trans-Asia? Lessons from Trans-Europe’, in *Trans-Asia as Method: Theory and Practices*, eds. Jeroen De Kloet, Yiu Fai Chow, and Gladys Pak Lei Chong (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), 64–5; Kawai, *A Transnational Critique of Japaneseness*, xiv–xvii.

¹⁰⁵ Markus Arnold, ‘Between “Post-Colonial” and “Postcolonial”: Mauritian Fiction as a Paradigm for Literary Postcoloniality in “Different Degrees”’, in *Postcoloniality, Globalization, and Diaspora: What’s Next*, ed. Ashmita Khasnabish (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020), 63–6.

of power, including, for example, geopolitics, class, and gender.¹⁰⁶ Within this framework, we can acknowledge the constant negotiation between the multiple identities of each composer, or even each composition, while better understanding the trends and variations in constructing different musical forms of global modernisms and postcolonialisms.¹⁰⁷

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¹⁰⁶ De Kloet and Chow, 'What Is the "Trans" in Trans-Asia?', 48.

¹⁰⁷ Arnold, 'Between "Post-Colonial" and "Postcolonial"', 63–4; Chen, *Asia as Method*, 267–8; De Kloet and Chow, 'What Is the "Trans" in Trans-Asia?', 47–8; Kawai, *A Transnational Critique of Japaneseness*, xiv–xvii, 21–2.

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