
**THE UNDERLYING FOLK MUSIC IN
WANG LISAN'S MUSIC**

**A Monograph
Submitted to the
Temple University Graduate Board**

**In partial fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR IN MUSICAL ARTS**

by

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December, 2014

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ABSTRACT

A prominent yet under-researched composer, Wang Lisan contributed many significant works to the Chinese piano music repertoire. The monograph is a subjective analysis of Wang's selective works (*Lanhuahua, the Beautiful Girl*, three pieces from *Other Mountains* and *Fantasy-Sonata "Black Soil"*, *Memories of the Er-Ren-Zhuan*) and their origins based on the author's own understanding. From the gradual extinction of those origins, the author predicts, and laments the future of Wang's music. Through those unique approaches, this document will be a useful resource for future researches, and delineate Wang's profound music, thoughts and experience.

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PRELUDE: WHY RESEARCH WANG LISAN'S MUSIC

It was in the autumn of 2012 that I decided to research Wang Lisan and his music. Before the decision was made, I had spent plenty of time and effort to look for Chinese piano music with research potential, and would give me the confidence to convey its spirit to the audience. It was not an easy job. Some of the music, such as that of Zuxin Jiang (蒋祖馨), was excellent, but I simply did not know how to make it sound convincing on stage. There are other composers, such as Sicong Ma (马思聪), Jianer Zhu (朱践耳) and Jihao Quan (权吉浩) who have written piano music of good quality, but not of good quantity. In the end, I chose Wang Lisan because his life was both typical and unique in different ways, his piano music is of good quality and quantity, and he exhibited a consistency in style and technique for over fifty years.

I did not realize how many treasures there were in his musical output on day one. First, I played the very famous suite *Impressions of Paintings by Higashiyama Kaiti* (1979), only the last movement of which usually receives attention from players and scholars. After having played the suite a couple of times, I turned to another suite named *Other Mountains* (1980). From the first glance, I knew it was a fine piece. However, after trying it out for a couple of days, I found that some passages were technically unplayable. Maybe that is why most pianists, again, have only played the fourth piece of the suite, and currently there is no published recording of the complete suite.¹ It was not until later that I understood the necessity of performing the suite as a whole, and I eventually figured out how to deal with the difficult passages and demonstrate their brilliance on

¹ Pianist Huan Qi (齐欢) and I are working on publishing our recordings of the complete suite now.

stage. After studying these two pieces, I learned that the Shanghai Music Publisher was about to publish the complete piano works by Wang. The publisher kindly sent me the *Fantasy-sonata, "Black Soil—Memories of Er-Ren-Zhuan,"* which for long time had been a piece existing only in name. I discovered that this big piece was even more difficult to play than *Other Mountains*. However, I kept working on it until I overcame all the difficulties, and realized how great this piece was. Wang worked on this piece from 1981 to 2007, and there are three versions of it (1981, 2002 and 2007).

After studying these three pieces, I became confident about playing Wang Lisan's music. I realized that no matter how discouraged I felt at the beginning when working on a new piece by him, there was always a way to solve the technical difficulties and reveal the music's brilliance. With these thoughts in mind, I managed to meet with the composer's daughter Wang Duowen (汪多文) by arrangement of the Shanghai Music Publisher in December 2012. I was surprised to find out that Wang Duowen had already been aware of me and my research through my online blog. In December 2012, Wang Lisan and I met twice. By this time, he had been suffering from a cerebral infarction for years. His memory and ability to speak were so severely damaged that I could not communicate with him about his music at all. The first time we went to Suzhou and Wuxi for a one-day trip, and the second time I stayed in his home until 2 a.m. to proofread the soon-to-be-published score, consulting his manuscript. The proofreading was necessary because, due to the composer's sickness in his late years, there were great unclarities and minor mistakes in his handwriting. My proofreading did not end after his scores were published because many problems could not be solved in such a short period of time. I

kept making corrections to his music, and even published an article on this topic in the journal *Piano Art* in 2013.

In March 2013, my formal study and promotion of Wang Lisan's music drew the attention of the Shanghai Television Station, and they decided to make a documentary film entitled "Searching for Wang Lisan." As a result, in June the crew followed me to Wang Lisan's home in Shanghai. They also went to Beijing, Harbin and Jiamusi with me while I was doing my research. On July 6, 2013, Wang Lisan passed away. The crew followed me to his funeral in Shanghai. In February and March 2014, they followed me to Harbin and Shanghai again, as well as to Changchun and Nanjing. The film is an ongoing project, and they are waiting for the story to continue.

Before I did my research, not much scholarly work had been done on Wang Lisan, and most of what had been done concentrated on a limited number of pieces written in two narrow time periods: two pieces from the 1950s and works written between 1979 and 1981. This "standard repertoire" of Wang includes *Lanhuahua, the beautiful girl* (1953), *Sonatina* (1957), *Brother and Sister Cultivate the Wild Land* (1977), *Impressions of Paintings by Higashiyama Kaii* (1979), *Other Mountains* (1980) and *A Dream of Heaven* (1980). Misleadingly, most of the authors talked about individual movements or pieces from the suites instead of entire works. Even now, performances of Wang's music still overwhelmingly feature individual movements or pieces instead of whole suites.

There have only been two previous doctoral dissertations about Wang's music, written by Rongjie Xu and Pang Jane Cheung. The former focuses on *Other Mountains* (1980) and the latter focuses on "Calligraphy and Chinese Lyre" from *Other Mountains*,

“The Sound of the Waves” from *Impressions of Paintings by Higashiyama Kaiti* (1979) and “A Dream of Heaven” (1980). There is one Master’s thesis written in 2001 by Wenjun Wang: “A Research on Wang Lisan’s Piano Music.” However, this thesis only studies Wang’s music before 1981. Specifically, Wenjun Wang spends twenty-nine pages giving a survey of all Wang’s piano music from 1953 to 1981, not including the two pieces still unpublished in 2001. Then he spends another twelve pages on how to play and teach Wang’s *Lanhuahua, the Beautiful Girl* (1953), “Under the Sunshine” from *Sonatina* (1957), *Brother and Sister Cultivate the Wild Land* (1977) and “The Sound of the Waves” from *Impressions of Paintings by Higashiyama Kaiti* (1979). Other Master’s theses either talk about individual pieces or compare two pieces. Not surprisingly, all these pieces are from the “standard repertoire.”

Some famous musicologists or scholars in China, including Fang Pu, Tingge Wei, Yuhe Wang and Chuan Qin, have published articles about Wang and his music (see the bibliography). However, with one exception, those articles are generally short and share the same shortcomings that I have discussed, i.e., focusing on the “standard repertoire” and talking about individual movements or pieces as opposed to whole suites. The exception is Fang Pu’s article “Talking of Wang Lisan’s Piano Writing.” This eight-page article is based on Pu’s Master thesis, which now even Fang Pu herself cannot find. Although the supervisor of the thesis was Pu’s father, Yuhe Wang, it was Wang Lisan who actually went to Pu’s home every day and guided her. Consequently, this article should be treated as a primary source. However, it is difficult to determine which portions of the article exhibit Wang’s ideas.

The majority of Chinese musicologists, scholars, pianists and composers do appreciate the uniqueness of Wang's music and his life. For example, composers Xiaosheng Zhao (赵晓生), Hongjin Ni (倪洪进), Weijie Gao (高为杰), Qimin Xi (奚其明) and Shunzhong Ge (葛顺中), along with musicologist Penghai Dai (戴鹏海) speak highly of him, but research on his music is still extremely weak. There is no scholarly work covering all Wang's music, nor even a complete works list for the composer. In fact, Jinwen Wang thought of making a piano works list of Wang, but

After I mentioned it to him several times, he suggested that I should not do so. . . . Wang told me that some of the works were still being revised and were not published. That was why he did not want to make the work list. (Wenjun Wang, 55)

If Wenjun Wang had made a piano works list in 2001, my job would have been much easier. However, I still managed to make a works list of Wang (see "A Complete Works List of Wang Lisan" in the Appendix).

It is not difficult to understand why the majority of Wang's music, except for the standard repertoire, is ignored by both researchers and performers. Most Chinese musicians and scholars are more interested in Western music. Also, most Chinese composers do not have a complete works list. However, there are other reasons as well. When Wang was active in Harbin, almost all the major musicologists and scholars were concentrated in central cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Guangzhou and Wuhan, and almost all of them were busy doing other things. In addition, Wang did not promote his pieces well. Arguably, without the government's plan of publishing his "selected piano works" (actually all the existing works), Wang probably would not have "cleaned up" his piano music in such a short period of time (2003-2007), and we would have

missed a big part of his compositional output. “My father is addicted to procrastination,” explained Wang Duowen.

However, there is one musicologist in Harbin named Zhuquan Zhou who does fully recognize the significance of Wang’s music. He wrote a biographical article “Morning Flower Blossoming out in the Evening, the Legendary Composer Wang Lisan” after having interviewed Wang..

Primary and secondary sources on Wang Lisan and his music may be divided between those produced after the Cultural Revolution and those produced before it. In the first category, we have Wang’s articles and manuscripts, as well as articles by Shutong Liao, Lanshen Su, Yizhi Zeng, Fang Pu, Yin Kang and Zhuquan Zhou. We also have a book by Yin Kang, as well as half of an interview by Zhuquan Zhou preserved on an audio cassette. (See the Bibliography) Regarding this category, I made a commentary of Wang’s published music that corrects mistakes, and discovered four unpublished articles by Wang in his home. I published two of these articles in 2013 after the composer’s death. In addition, due to the persistence of Hongbo Zhou (周洪波), the director of the documentary film “Searching for Wang Lisan,” Ya-bing Tao discovered the cassette mentioned above.

As for the second category, except for the composer’s manuscripts, there are articles on the issue of Xinghai Xian’s symphonic works. It was not easy to get some of these articles. For example, the website of Wuxi,² which contains a lot of academic articles, blocks all issues of *People’s Music* from 1957; another website named

² <http://wuxizazhi.cnki.net/default.aspx>, accessed--September 16, 2014.

“Zhongguo Zhiwang”(中国知网)³ blocks part of the 1957’s *People’s Music*. It was my friend Hao Li (李皓) who helped me get some of these articles from Fudan University’s library. In China, research on the rightists in 1957 is not entirely on the right track because of the government’s attitude. Chongdao Yang’s book, *An Unofficial Document of a Disaster from an Overt Trick: A List of the Central Units’ Rightists that were sent to the Great Wilderness of the North*, could not be published publicly. I got this book by contacting the author, and he mailed me the book without charging me any fee.

Since the Cultural Revolution, the only scholar who has discussed these articles focusing on the year of 1957 is Weiping Chen (陈伟平). In his article “Review and Thoughts about the Discussions of Wang Lisan about Xinghai Xian’s Symphonic Works” (2003), he summarized these articles and offered his own opinions. However, this article was published in the *Zhuzhou Advanced Technology College Journal*, which is a minor journal outside the field of music. The online edition of this article is available on two websites, but one of them blocks some of the content.⁴ In fact, some of the musicians and musicologists that I have contacted tried to stop me from getting involved in such political issues. But I did it anyway because I believe that Wang’s life during the 1950s influenced his music enormously.

Also, other non-musical issues that are closely related to Wang’s life and music remain unclear for different reasons. These issues include the rightists in Northeast China, the situation of the Great Wilderness of the North in the 1950s and early 1960s, the Hejiang Agricultural Bureau Art Troupe, and the action of Harbin to “fish out” the

³ <http://www.cnki.net/> accessed--September 16, 2014.

⁴ Journalist Tong Zhang also wrote two thousand words about this issue in his book *Ten Musicians in the Process of the Chinese New Music*. However, he plagiarized Weiping Chen’s article.

rightists from the Great Wilderness of the North, to name a few. None of the previous research on Wang Lisan talks about any of these issues, but they are all related to his music. Consequently, I spent a long time collecting related information.

Last but not least, Wang's music involves many different types of Chinese folk songs, regional dramas and even ritual music. Most of these disappearing or fast-evolving folk-song types and dramas have not been researched enough, or have been poorly researched, due to the frequently changing political climate and the country's modernization. Again, previous research on Wang Lisan mostly avoided these topics. I engage with them throughout this monograph.

My method of researching Wang Lisan and his music had to be unique due to the challenges I have mentioned. I realized from day one that the library system would not be enough. My own investigation could be generalized as a combination of "field research" and "human search engine" (a newly invented word by the Chinese netizens). I got the idea of conducting "field research" from treatises written by the sociologist Xiaotong Fei (费孝通), and I realized that the more he was personally involved in a research topic, the better his results were. For example, his most famous and brilliant book, *Peasant Life in China: A Field Study of Country Life in the Yangtze Valley* (1939), would not have been so successful if he was not raised in the Yangtze Valley. My way of doing field research was to interview people related to Wang Lisan and his music. Over two years, I interviewed not only his classmates, colleagues, friends, relatives and students, but also specialists on the folk songs, regional dramas and ritual music that his compositions are based upon. I also interviewed a specialist on the rightists in the Great Wilderness of the North. For a selective list of the people I have interviewed, see the appendix.

It was not easy to find some of the people on this list through the “human search engine” method. I took advantage of online search engines such as google and baidu, as well as online social networking websites and microblogs, such as weibo. For example, the history of Hejiang Agricultural Bureau’s Art Troupe, to which Wang belonged from 1959 to 1963, was almost impossible to study because the bureau merged with the Northeast Agricultural Bureau in 1962, and the art troupe was abolished in 1963. By searching this troupe online, I found the name of Zhi Li, who worked in the troupe during the same period that Wang was there. There was some information on Zhi Li online, but his contact information was not available. I found out that he was a member of the Yilan History and Cultural Society (依兰历史文化研究会). When searching for that society’s other members, I found a person named Huaisha Liao (廖怀志), who was organizing an event. At that time, the event had already ended, but its web page still remained. On that web page, I found a telephone number. I dialed the number, and Liao himself responded. Liao gave me the contact information for Li, and I visited him in the summer of 2013. Through Li, I found another colleague of Wang’s in the art troupe named Ge Wu.

In most cases, it is better to talk with people face-to-face, and it is always better to talk to them more than one time. The telephone is not always a good way, because sometimes it is difficult for me to understand people’s dialects. Email is not always a good way either, because most of the people that I have interviewed do not use email, and even if they do, they do not write a lot. For some important interviewees such as Wang Duowen, Yin Kang and Zhuquan Zhou, I have continued to keep in contact with them and inform them of what I am doing, so they can always correct me or give me suggestions. Sometimes people give me contradictory information. If I cannot figure out

what is correct, I make note of it in the monograph. For example, Shiren Liu recalled that he and Wang spent the whole summer vacation of 1957 in Sichuan, while Shicheng Wang claimed that Wang only spent a few days there.

My plan of researching Wang's music has changed frequently. The original plan was not to write on the whole life and the complete music of Wang, but only to write on a particular period of his life. However, the people that I have interviewed would not necessarily limit the conversation to one period. After undertaking all the effort to look for them and travel from city to city to meet with them, I simply did not want to waste any of this excellent information, which would attract not only musicians and musicologists, but also people in the field of general history. For example, as I have just mentioned, the history of the Hejiang Agricultural Bureau's Art Troupe would have been lost if I had not interviewed Zhi Li, Ge Wu and Yun Liao. All of them were in their 80s at the time. As a result, I decided to write about Wang's whole life and all of his music, and in September 2014, I finished the draft of a book entitled *Wang Lisan, The Man and His Music*, which serves as the "base area" of this monograph. In order to create this highly-focused, tightly-organized, and properly-formatted monograph, I choose a key angle from *Wang Lisan, The Man and His Music*, which is basically a question that I have been asked myself from day one, i.e, why do Wang's piano pieces, except for two or three popular ones, have not caused enough attention? In fact, most of Wang's piano pieces remained totally unknown before I have noticed them. In answering this question, I trace back to the developing, future and fate of Wang's "base area," which is the folk music of China. I choose five types of folk music that Wang had used, thus creating chapter III, IV, V, VI and VII.

In addition, most of the quotations in this monograph were translated from Chinese to English by me. I also translated some of Wang Lisan's articles and Zhuquan Zhou's interview in the appendix. These writings had never been translated before. I am grateful to Wang Duowen for allowing me to use some of Wang Lisan's manuscripts as musical examples.

CHAPTER 1

BIOGRAPHY OF WANG LISAN

“Those unforgotten Days”: To the Summer of 1951

Wang Lisan’s father, Wang Zhengpiao (汪正燾), was born in 1904. In 1930 he started his own accounting school in Wuhan named “Lide”(立德). Three years later, he and his wife Bihui Su (苏必惠) gave birth to their third son, Wang Lisan. In Chinese, “san” means “three,” so people assume Wang Lisan was called “three” because he was the third son of the family. However, Zhengpiao and Bihui named Wang Lisan “three” simply because the school was founded three years before he was born. Wang was the youngest son in the family. Before him, his parents gave birth to a daughter and two sons, each two years apart.

In 1937, the breaking out of the anti-Japanese war caused the family to move back to Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan province, to hide from the Japanese army. They considered this a move back home, because their hometown of Sanjiang village (三江镇) is also located in this province. However, this home was also not at peace. When Wang Lisan studied in Sanying (三英) elementary school in 1939, the “standard repertoire” included the “running air alert,” that is, hiding from Japanese airplanes. The students sometime had to “run air alert” three times a day, and sometimes they had to “run” again right after they returned back. During the war, most elementary schools moved to the safer countryside, and settled down in places such as Buddhist or ancestral temples. The

school that Wang Lisan and his brother attended moved to an ancestral temple. Later Wang was transfer to two other elementary schools named Central and Diwei.

In 1944, the anti-Japanese War reached its crucial point. The Chinese government appealed to young intellectuals to join the army, so that Wang Gang (汪岗), the oldest brother of the family and by then a student at the Shishi (石室) high school, enlisted. Only one year after enlisting, the war ended with a Chinese victory. As a result, Wang Gang returned back home with two big boxes of recordings. It was these recordings of music from Bach, to Beethoven, to Debussy that not only gave Wang his first impression of classical music, but also deeply educated him. In addition to these recordings, Lisan went to the concerts that began to be held after the war.

In 1944, Wang Lisan entered the Gaoqi middle school, which was attached to Huaxi (华西) University. His music teacher was Qianzhu Zheng (郑乾柱), who was also an architect and underground Communist. It was during this period that Wang showed great interest in classical music. Qianzhu Zheng even sent fourteen-year-old Wang, who had just graduated from this middle school, to Huaxi University to direct the music appreciation class, in which Wang introduced the university students to music from Bach to Debussy. In addition, as a painter, “his works had been chosen to be shown at the province’s middle school student art exhibition.” (Yue, 39)

In 1947, Wang Lisan entered the Shishi (石室) high school, a famous school that had been built 2,000 years before. Besides directing the music appreciation class at Huaxi University, he became an editor of a newspaper with the name *Weekend Tribune*. His brother Wang Gang was the chief editor. Although this newspaper was soon banned by the government, because it was a peripheral organization of the underground Communist

Party, Wang still managed to publish some articles. Among his colleagues, there was a young man with the name Zuxin Jiang (蒋祖馨) who was also his schoolmate in high school, and who was two years older than him. Zuxin Jiang became a significant friend of Wang later.

It was also in 1947 that Wang and his mother had an argument about his future. Wang planned to enter the Sichuan Academy of Art and study music, but his mother did not agree with him. In the meantime, Wang's father abandoned his right to make suggestions about his son's future. As a result, Wang's mother sent him to Shishi high school. Obviously Wang Lisan was not happy about this situation, and one year later he got sick. The doctors of western medicine found that half of his lung was full of liquid, so they suggested drawing the liquid by a syringe. Wang was so scared that he refused to be treated like this. As a result, they turned to an herbalist doctor, who helped cure the disease.

During his recovery, relatives and doctors persuaded Wang's mother that his happiness was important for the sake of his health, so it was necessary to let Wang choose his own future. In the end, Wang's mother compromised and Wang entered the Sichuan Academy of Art in 1948.

The Academy of Art was a five-year junior college, but Wang only stayed there for two years without getting any degree. He studied piano, violin, and very limited fundamental harmony. Zuxin Jiang entered the school in the same year as Wang. Although the two years were short, and Wang also joined a lot of political movements during this period of time, he still managed to improve his piano playing by practicing at

night. This short period of time was very memorable to Wang. In 1993, he wrote on one of his paintings:

I cannot forget. I cannot forget. Indeed, I cannot forget those days.
There were so many young men with boiling blood, and there were so many real artists. (Wang Duowen)

Jiang and Wang left the school and departed to Tianjin in 1950 because the Central Conservatory was newly founded. In Tianjin, Jiang and Wang found out that the Central Conservatory did not enroll new students that year, so Jiang sold his camera, raised enough money to travel south, and entered the Shanghai Conservatory as a cello student (at that time, the school's name was the Eastern Branch of Central Conservatory). In the meantime, Wang, who did not have a camera to sell, had to "be fenced in" (Wang, "In memory of Zuxin Jiang," 7) Tianjin and teach himself in order to get ready for the next year's entrance examination. By that time, he had only learned "I-IV-V" in the Sichuang Academy of Art, but in one year he managed to teach himself the harmonic theory of P. Percy Goetschius and Hindemith. He must have learned these theories really well, because by the early 1950s he was advanced enough to be asked by the Shanghai Conservatory harmony professor to teach his classmates harmony. According to his classmate/student Xiaowei Zheng (郑小维), who herself later became a harmony teacher at Shanghai Conservatory, Wang could easily quote Goetschius and others' conceptions, but also gave his own opinions when teaching harmony. In addition, Shunzhong Ge (葛顺中), another classmate of Wang Lisan at Shanghai Conservatory, concludes that harmony is the most obvious "phenomenon" in Wang's music. After all, it started in Wang's

Tianjin period (1950-1951), during which he also studied other Chinese composers' music.

While teaching himself harmony in Tianjin, Wang found a piano teacher with the name Weiming Peng (彭维明). Peng must have been satisfied with Wang's talent as a pianist, because not only did she teach Wang for free and give him food, but she also insisted that Wang should enter the piano department of the Central Conservatory. At that time, Wang was already leaning towards being a composer. In order not to hurt Peng's feelings, he decided to travel south to Shanghai and try to enter the Shanghai Conservatory. If he had chosen the Central Conservatory, he might have been able to escape the anti-rightist movement disaster, because during this movement in 1957, the Shanghai Conservatory suffered much more than the Central Conservatory.

Years of Sugarcane: Shanghai Conservatory, Summer 1951 to Summer 1959

When registering for the entrance examination of the Shanghai Conservatory, Wang believed the joke of a staff member, who told him that everybody should apply for two departments simultaneously. As a result, he applied for both the piano department and the composition department. Wang got the highest mark in both of the examinations. Tong Sang, by then a teaching assistant at the school, made the decision for Wang to enter the composition department, and it was also Wang's own will to be a composer, but not a pianist, because

my level was very low compared to other students in the piano department. If I chose the piano department, I was afraid I would have to do nothing but practice. Consequently, I would have missed a lot of

things outside the windows of the practice rooms. On the contrary, the composition department was famous for producing “student leaders.” (Su, 5)

Indeed, he would become one of the “student leaders,” which brought him twenty years of troubles.

The class that Wang was in had a nickname: “a class of talent.” However, almost all of Wang’s classmates believe that Wang was the most talented student. Indeed, Wang’s talent and level was so advanced that he almost became another teacher or teaching assistant. He helped other classmates with their studies, and his reputation as a quasi-teacher even brought him students from other departments who planned to transfer to the composition department, as well as students from out of Shanghai Conservatory who planned to get in this school. “He never refused any student, and taught with patience.”

(Jin) Xiaowei Zheng, Wang’s classmate, recalled:

At that time, I could not keep up with professor Tong Sang’s harmony class. . . . Mr. Sang assigned Wang to help me. . . . Because Wang is my age, he was able to offer analogies that I could understand, so the difficult theories became understandable. Twenty years later, I came back to our school and taught harmony. . . . I began to realize how wonderful Wang’s teaching had been. . . . I used similar ways to teach my students. Wang Lisan’s words of the 1950s still inspire me and my students. (Xiaowei Zheng)

However, during most of Wang’s career as a teacher, he only taught music theory and solfeggio.

With his reputation growing, he got a part-time job writing accompaniment for the Shanghai Broadcast Orchestra’s chorus. Shunzhong Ge remembers that every weekend Wang would bring back from the chorus conductor Jinsheng Li (李金声). Very soon the number of songs grew so great that Wang had to distribute some of them to his

classmates, and no matter what difficulties his classmates met with, Wang could always solve the problems in no time. As for Wang's own writing style for the accompaniment, Ge recalls that he rarely used broken chords, and he liked to use minimal notes to build big structures in which every note counted.

It was in the library that Wang met Jialang Mo, who studied in the piano department from 1950 to 1956. Soon Mo became Wang's first girlfriend. According to Mo in 2014, Wang's character was extremely straightforward and "too bold and too free." He "could not hide anything in his heart. He had to persuade others." Mo remembers that sometime Wang stood up in the class and made comments. It is very unusual for students to do this in China, even today. However, Wang's comments was always convincing, and sometimes it was so convincing that both the teacher and students clapped. "Wang has two brains!" Mo concluded. Maojun Jin, another classmate of Wang, also mentioned Wang's straightforward character in the 1950s:

One time I wrote an article talking about a piece, in which I used a lot of good words. Wang Lisan asked me: "do you really hear those many things in the music?" I was so embarrassed (because he told the truth).
(Jin)

Xiaowei Zheng wrote that

Wang's character is open. His mind is swift. When he was with us, there was nothing that he did not dare to talk about, and he was so convincing that everybody liked to hear him talking, and everybody liked him.
(Xiaowei Zheng)

On the other hand, Wang's character had an innocent and naive side. Jin further recalled:

Wang had a girlfriend.⁵ One time he visited her and she was not there. As a result, Wang attached a piece of paper on her door, on which he

⁵ That was Jialang Mo.

wrote the head motive of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. When the girlfriend came back, she realized instantly that "San Mao (Wang's nickname) had come." When the girlfriend said that she did not want to continue their relationship, Wang came to me with an apple, which she sent him as a foy, and asked how to preserve it forever. (Jin)

Naturally, in this case, Wang should have managed to convince the girlfriend to continue the relationship. However, he was so obedient that he only managed to preserve the foy. Logically, Wang's straightforward, bold, naïve and innocent character, as well as his talent, made him the star of the school. It was almost impossible for such a student like him to escape from the "anti-rightist" movement in 1957.

On April 28, 1956, Chairman Mao declared:

Let a hundred flowers blossom, and a hundred schools of thought contend. I think this should become our policy. Regarding art, we prefer to let a hundred flowers blossom; regarding academia, we prefer to let a hundred schools of thought contend." (Mao, Speech in the enlarged meeting of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party)

On May 2, 1956, Mao declared the "double hundred" policy, and on May 1, 1957, the "free airing of views" marked the climax of the movement. The following May 15, Chairman Mao published an article called "Things are Changing." On June 8, the *People's Daily* published an article called "Why?" On the same day, the Communist Party noted "indications about organizing and beating back the attack of the rightists." All these things marked the end of the "double flower" and the beginning of the anti-rightist movement. A lot of people who "freely aired" their opinions were labeled as rightists, thus starting their difficult days.

In the field of music, the most prominent event under the policy of "double hundred" was the "First National Musical Week," which was held in Beijing in August 1956. Almost all the important musicians of the country attended this event, and almost

all the important new works, including Wang Lisan's *Lanhuahua, the beautiful girl* and Zuxin Jiang's *Temple Fair*, were performed. The most important young musician was Shiren Liu, whose choral work *Ode to the Motherland* was played at the opening ceremony of the event on August 1, 1956 (Army Day). This piece soon earned a national reputation, though it is now forgotten. Shiren Liu and Zuxin Jiang went to Beijing to attend this event and were extremely excited about the "double hundred" policy. Without this background, Wang Lisan, Shiren Liu and Zuxin Jiang's article "About the Evaluation of Some of the Symphonic Works by Comrade Xinghai (冼星海)" would not have come into being.

According to Shiren Liu, they were bold enough to criticize the works of Xinghai Xian because they had watched the discussion and criticism made in 1954 by Pingbo Yu (俞平伯), the most authoritative researcher of the "Red Chamber Dream." However, as naive as they were, they did not think of the difference between Xinhai Xian and Pingbo Yu. Yu did not agree with the Party's command in 1953 to interpret Chinese classical literature from the viewpoint of Marxism-Leninism. In addition, Yu insisted that the "Red Chamber Dream" was not, as the Party claimed, a work that criticized feudalism, but an autobiography of the author. On the contrary, Xinghai Xian, the composer of the *Yellow River Cantata*, was labeled by Chairman Mao as the "people's musician." As a result, he became the hero that nobody dared to criticize, except for Wang Lisan, Shiren Liu and Zuxin Jiang.

The three of them sent the article of "About the Evaluation of Some of the Symphonic Works by Comrade Xinghai" to *People's Music* as early as September 1956. However, it was not published until April, 1957, and it caught people's attention instantly.

The second part of the article criticized Xinghai Xian's symphonic works from four perspectives: the use of the head-motif, the shape of musical figuration, the understanding of program music and other techniques. Regarding the understanding of program music, the three authors criticized "comrade Xinghai's" purpose of literally "translating" information into music. For example, in the opening movement of Xinghai's First Symphony, to the composer praises the motherland listing numerous tunes relating to the mountains, rivers, lakes, cities and historical sites of the country in a "raree show"-like way. Consequently, the focal point of the movement became blurred, and the piece became fragmented, loose and tedious. This statement itself was true, and the musical example that they picked from the first symphony was convincing. However, they made a mathematical error with their other musical example: Xinghai's depiction, in his Second symphony, of three military campaigns between Germany and the USSR in which the number of German tanks destroyed by the USSR was 2716, 386, and 2900. Wang, Liu and Jiang discovered that the measure numbers of the music depicting these three campaigns are 10, 6 and 15 respectively, which matches the number of the tanks "proportionally." However, 2716:386:2900 does not correspond to 10:6:15.

In the article's third part, Wang, Liu and Jiang criticized "some theorists and critics" who indiscriminately praised Xinghai's music to the extreme. They not only pointed out the names of these theorist and critics but also wrote:

The strangest thing is that some people praise the music with neither hearing it nor looking at the score. We cannot say that there is no tendency of personality cult. . . . The most general way is to define the shortcomings of comrade Xinghai as inventive merits. (Wang Lisan, Shiren Liu, Zuxin Jiang, Li Wan, Shouzong Chang, Zhongjie Han, Mu Yao, et. al. 1957, 10)

This article caused such a big stir that in that year alone there appeared ten articles in the *People's Music* and the *Liberation Daily*. It became an accusation, because, according to Wang Shicheng, “attacking the ‘People’s Musician’ is attacking the people. Attacking the people is attacking the Party and socialism. It was simply the logic of most of the people in those years.”

Wang was labeled as a rightist in September 1957, and was kept in the school for the struggle sessions⁶ until May 1958. In that month, the school expelled most of the rightists, including Wang Lisan, Shiren Liu and Shutong Liao, to Pudong, which was then a suburb of Shanghai, for “reformation through labor.” According to Shiren Liu, they were still not so much worried about their future, because they had watched so many movements, none of which lasted very long. As a result, they believed that the anti-rightist movement end shortly. But this time they were wrong. In 1959, Wang was sent to the Great Northern Wilderness, located in the very north of the country, to live and be reformed through labor.

The Great Wilderness of the North: Summer 1959 to 1963

The rightists from the Shanghai Conservatory disbanded as soon as they arrived in the Great Wilderness of the North. Shiren Liu and Wang Lisan both arrived in Jiamusi, and were assigned , respectively, to the art troupes of Jiamusi and the Hejiang Agriculture Bureau.

⁶ A **struggle session** was a kind of public meeting in China during the Mao era, whose purpose was to help, educate, criticize, beat down or even execute the bad people such as rightists, landlords, enemies, and etc.

It is difficult to trace the history of the Hejing Agricultural Bureau today, because there is almost no published material that even mentions this art troupe. However, Zhi Li (李直), who was Wang Lisan's colleague in the art troupe, preserved some program notes from 1961 to 1963 containing some important information. I also visited Jiamusi and spent several days talking with Zhi Li. This art troupe was founded in June 1959 on the basis of the 39th army art troupe, which took part in the Korean War. From 1959 to 1963, the members were frequently

Climbing mountains and crossing rivers with their instruments. We go deeply to the farms and the production teams. We perform in the fields. We have performed:

Drama: "wildfire in spring city" (野火春风斗古城), "overcome dragons and tigers" (降龙伏虎), "A song of red tassel" (红缨歌) and "A group of monkeys" (群猴).

Opera: "Red Guerrilla in Hong Lake" (洪湖赤卫队), "March 3" (三月三), "Carpenter escorting his bride" (木匠迎亲) and *Arshin Mal Alan* (货郎与小姐).

Dance: "Kidnap the bride" (抢亲), "Steal the magic grass" (盗仙草)⁷, "Difficult time" (艰苦岁月), "Bow and arrow dance" (弓箭舞), "Hezhe's jumping deer" (赫哲跳鹿), "Go to work" (上工) and "Hezhe's fishing family" (赫哲渔家). (Hejiang Agricultural Bureau, Program Notes)

Although this is an incomplete list of troupe's repertoire, note the overwhelming presence of revolutionary topics. There are two original works by the art troupe: "Hezhe's jumping deer," whose music was composed by Wang Lisan, and "Hezhe's fishing family." Both of the works were based on the music of the Hezhe ethnic group, which lived in the Hejiang area.

According to Zhi Li, the art troupe had about one hundred to two hundred people, of which many were rightists. Wang Lisan was not the only rightist from Shanghai. The rightists in Hejiang usually had more freedom than those in other places. Although the

⁷ *Steal the Magic Grass* was a mini ethnic drama that was composed in 1954 by Kexiang Liang (梁克祥).

supervisors wished that people in the troupe would watch over the rightists, people did not really do it, or did it with “one eye open and the other eye closed,” in Zhi Li’s words.

Zhi Li clearly remembers Wang Lisan’s talent. According to him, Wang dictated the complete opera (including the tunes and the orchestration) of “Red Guerrilla in Hong Lake,” after hearing it twice. His version was basically the same as the published one. However, because of his rightist label, the art troupe could only use him as a cover conductor in the rehearsal of operas such as *Arshin Mal Alan*.⁸ Yun Liao, the leader of the performing team of the troupe, also said that the policy in those years was to “take advantage of the rightists, but not put them in important positions.”

In April 1962, the art troupe stopped doing dramas and focused only on operas. In addition, they absorbed members from the Jiamusi art troupe (though Shiren Liu had already left) and the Hegang art troupe. At the end of 1962, the two agricultural bureaus of the Great Wilderness of the North combined under the new name “Northeastern Agriculture Bureau.” As a result, the art troupe of Hejiang was also renamed the “Art Troupe of Northeastern Agricultural Bureau” in January 1963. Consequently, their performing “territory” expanded enormously. In March 1963, they performed the *Arshin Mal Alan* in Qiqihaer, a city that is very far away from their old “territory,” and these performances marked the “coda” of this art troupe. There were two reasons for the disbandment of the troupe. One was a murder case, which happened in the art troupe, the other was the policy of streamlining organizations in 1962 due to the Three Years of Famine, which also caused the disbandment of the Mudanjiang art troupe as early as the

⁸ *Arshin Mal Alan* was composed in 1913 by the Azerbaijani composer Uzeyir Hajibeyov. It was extremely popular in China after its premiere there on May 1, 1959 by the Central Opera House. This performance was also the premiere of comic opera in Beijing. From 1959 to 1963, this opera was performed by almost all the major and minor opera houses in China. For example, the Central Opera House performed it five times a week during that period.

winter of 1962. With this disbandment, Zhi Li went to the Henan Opera House, Yun Liao returned back to Sichuan, and Wang Lisan went to the Art Institute of Harbin.

A Peaceful Episode within a Violent Episode: 1963 to 1966

From 1960 to 1963, a lot of “rightist” artists and musicians were “fished out” (a term of Wang Duowen, the daughter of Wang Lisan) from the Great Wilderness of the North, and were relocated to Harbin. Most of these people worked in the Harbin Opera House, which was founded in 1962, and the Art Institute of Harbin, which was founded in 1958 during the “Great Leap Forward” movement.

Neither Wang Lisan nor Shiren Liu knew exactly what made the “fishing out” action happen. Shiren Liu attributed it to coincidence. However, my research shows that Harbin did have a policy at that time of using the rightists’ special skills, so that the city residents, who were suffering in the Great Famine, might partly forget the hunger through amusement. The leaders of Harbin who took charge of this policy were probably Zhongyi Ren (任仲夷) and Qien Lv (吕其恩). In addition, the leaders of the Heilongjiang province, such as Zemin Yan (延泽民), also played an important role in fishing out the rightists.

It was because of the disbandment of the art troupe in 1963 that Wang’s label of rightist was removed. As a result, in the summer of 1963, he began to teach composition and counterpoint at the Art Institute of Harbin.

Composer Jingqing Xu was a student of this school from 1961 to 1965, and was one of three students that studied in Wang’s composition class. In the class, Wang

sometimes talked randomly, but what he said was often not only brilliant but also so practical that one could instantly use the advice in his/her compositions. Wang Lisan suggested Jingqing Xu write a piece for the Chinese instrumental ensemble for his final project at the school. His final project became *Ussuri! My Hometown*, which used the material of the Hezhe minority group, and which is still played once in a while now (not too bad for a student composition from forty years ago). In this piece, there are a lot of Wang Lisianian modulations. One modulation from G *gong* to A *gong* is, according to Wang, a typical Chinese modulation.

Jingqing Xu and Wang developed a strong friendship in the early 1960s. According to Xu, Wang was always happy. Xu remembered Wang saying, “Nobody has announced that I was a rightist, so why am I a rightist? Mr. Lvting He has praised me, why am I a rightist?” In those days, the lowest salary of a university teacher was fifty-five yuan (about \$8.50) per month, but Wang only got forty-two yuan per month. However, Wang was still happy because it was enough. He liked to drink, but did not particularly like to smoke. If he did smoke, he liked to stub out the cigarette after two or three puffs. Xu thought it was a big waste.

Wang’s life from 1963 to 1965 was simple. His shoes were always broken at both the front and back ends. (We don’t know, though, if he still wore two different shoes on two feet, as he used to do when laboring in Pudong.) Sometime he ate nothing but 3 ounces of rice for a meal because it was all he could afford. He had neither pots nor pans, so he cooked with lunch boxes. Overall, the three years from 1963 to 1966 were Wang’s relatively better years during otherwise bad years. It was a peaceful episode within a violent episode.

Ten Years without Composing Any Pieces: 1966 to 1976

In October 1965, the Art Institute of Harbin had to close down. In 1966, the Cultural Revolution began. Here is Runyu Mao's description regarding music during the Cultural Revolution:

Therefore, starting in 1966, [Mao] outlawed all books, all music, all paintings, all movies, and all plays created since the birth of civilization. . . . It was astounding that in such a huge country as China, only one book, *Selected Works by Mao Zedong*, was available in any bookstore! But this sole, almighty and magic book had many, many versions, formats, sizes, different groupings of articles, and different bindings, so that his "one" book didn't look like "one" book. (Mao, 116-117)

At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, in Wang Lisan's school, the teachers of the music department lived in a building (1 Central Avenue, Harbin) belonging to the Education Bureau of Harbin.⁹ The organization of the rebels, whose members were mainly former students, was called "Iron Hammer." "Iron Hammer" meant to smash the former Art Institute, which had become "a big jar of contamination." According to Zhuquan Zhou, the teachers were divided into five groups by the "Iron Hammer" and forced to stay in five "cowsheds," which were located on the first floor of the "Literature and History Building" (文史楼).¹⁰ "Cowshed V" was for the "Five Black Categories" (landlords, rich farmers, anti-revolutionists, bad-influencers, and rightists), whose members were considered the worst of all. The rightists who still argued or fought back

⁹ This was a building of two floors. Later another two floors were added on top of the original two floors, which remained the same. In the 2000s, the original two floors became a jewelry store, so it was completely rearranged.

¹⁰ The name of "Literature and History Building" seems to be a later name, since during the Cultural Revolution, such a name would definitely be "smashed" and "beaten down."

were called “dead dogs.” Wang Lisan was in “Cowshed V,” even though his label had been officially removed in 1962. The number of people in the Five Black Categories was huge, so this room was the most crowded. Therefore, Wang could hide in the crowd. Wang was also a teacher that almost all the students liked and admired. As a result, the rebels did not really mistreat him. Wang told Huiqiao Bao (鲍慧莽) that

I was then just past thirty, and I looked young. When we lined up and went out to labor, people saw me and asked: ‘how come there is a kid in the ‘black gang team’? (Bao, 172)

The teachers that the students did not like suffered the most. For example, Zhuquan Zhou was a teacher of western/Chinese music history. Most of the students in the 1960s who went to a music school were aiming to be musicians, so most of them did not understand why they should study music history. In addition, Zhou was such a strict teacher that not only did he give quizzes every week, but he also had two to three (in Jingqing Xu’s recollection, five to six) people supervising the examinations. As a result, although he was in the mildest “Cowshed I,” which contained “questionable people,” it seems that he suffered more than Wang Lisan. The “Iron Hammer” held meetings once in a while, and all the teachers were required to attend. In these cases, there were two hatchet men standing by the door who gave all the teachers two kicks when they were forced to climb into the meeting room. Zhou said he was always nimble enough to avoid these kicks because he trained at the Huangpu military school, the best military school in China before 1949. In the meetings, all people from the “Cowsheds” were “forced to sing ‘a song of the monsters and freaks...’” (Zhou, 1986, 227)

This situation lasted for a little more than a year, and was stopped by the leaders of the university when they kicked the “Iron Hammer” out. In fact, the teachers’ lives

became better not only because the “Iron Hammer” departed, but also because most of the rebels turned their aim at people who were more important. The faculty members in the music department were too “small” to make them feel accomplished.

Around the Spring Festival of 1970, Wang and his colleagues Zhuquan Zhou, Qifang Wu, Weiqi Shi, and Shiren Liu (Liu was in a different village in Shuangcheng) went to Shuangcheng to “settle in the countryside and merge into the peasants.” Wang recalled that “we had been the ‘glorious May-seventh soldiers.’”¹¹ (Wang, 1997, 9) According to Zhuquan Zhou, they really did not suffer that much because they only stayed there for two years before returning in 1972, “right before the wheat harvest.” (In Zhou’s words, “all of a sudden, we departed. All of a sudden, we were back.) In addition, judging from old photos taken in Shuangcheng, most of the teachers and their family members seemed to enjoy this two-year countryside “trip.” Indeed, compared to the “Cowshed,” a countryside village with “poor and lower-middle-class peasants” was like heaven. According to Zhouquan Zhu, when Wang was playing the piano—which he made a big effort to bring with him—his ten square-meter room was so packed with peasants of different ages that even the bed was full of standing people. The peasants liked Wang not only because of his piano playing, but also because of his happy character. They laughed at Wang trying to kindle the oven by putting the kindling on top of the coal. It was said that Wang’s clothes were even worse than the poorest “poor and lower-middle-class peasants.”

¹¹ “May-seventh soldiers” were the people from “May Seventh Cadre Schools,” which were “Chinese labor camps established during the Cultural Revolution that combined hard agricultural work with the study of Mao Zedong his writings in order to “re-educate” cadres and intellectuals in proper socialist thought.” (Spence, 582)

According to Wang Shicheng, the village's People's Commune¹² did not treat Wang Lisan as an unreliable member. This was very unusual because he was a former far rightist. They even assigned him to do the "external investigation" (外调).¹³

Wang Lisan had his own reasons for playing piano for the peasants. At that time, the piano belonged to those "big, western and ancient" things that did not fit the taste of the People. Runyu Mao recalled that

Jiang Qing had repudiated the piano, discrediting it in the following terms: "one of the most bourgeois instruments in the world"; "the worst music ever written was for the piano." (Mao, 122)

Wang planned to demonstrate that this "big, western, and ancient" instrument could also be accepted by the peasants. He also found that "if you lead them properly, the kids of peasants can feel the harmony." (Zhou, 222) He experimented on the peasants to try out his own musical ideas. For example, he played the "Internationale" twice, once with the traditional accompaniment and once with his own accompaniment. His accompaniment must have included a lot of interesting harmonic progressions, but the peasants liked the traditional one. As a whole, these kinds of experiments must have given Wang useful practice for writing later pieces such as *Brother and Sister Cultivate the Wild Land* and *The Memories of Er-Ren-Zhuan*.

In 1971, the music department began to enroll students. These students, however, did not start their school until 1972, after almost all the teachers had come back from the villages. Even to the end of 1977, the school was not back on track, and the students

¹² In the People's Commune, there was no private property. Everything belonged to the Commune, which arranged jobs and living expenses for everybody.

¹³ In those years, movement after movement made people be suspicious of one another. A good way of figuring out the history of a "problematic" person was to do an "external investigation," i.e. sending the investigators to other places associated with that person. Certainly the investigator must be completely reliable, in most cases either a communist or League member. The fact that the local People's Commune sent Wang Lisan, a far rightist without the label, to do an "external investigation" indicates how much he was trusted.

during this period would study for only three years in order to receive a junior college diploma. Wang and his colleagues would start teaching again after a complicated seven years. The bottom line was that Wang was still not allowed to compose publicly, but this was the rule for all composers in the country.

Sometimes Wang had to listen to recordings with the volume turned down so low that he had to put his ears as close to the player as possible. But he could still clearly recognize the harmonic progressions.

Wang and his colleagues' departure from Shuangcheng did not mean the end of their "village life." Once in a while, the teachers still needed to go to the village to "labor" with or without the students. Qingxian Meng (孟庆先), a student who enrolled at the school in 1971 and later became the vice dean of the music department, remembered that Wang was really not good at doing farm work. In addition, the teachers often had to participate in military training in the countryside, during which Wang made plenty of "ridiculous mistakes." For example, during the emergent congregating of the so called "military exercise" in the night-time, people jumped out of the beds, dressed up, and lined up on the playground as fast as they could. Once, Wang did show up with others on the playground, but his belt was not tied up. During the bomb-dropping practice, he would mistakenly drop the bomb backwards. He was about forty years old and was not as nimble as the young students, but he was not nimble anyway even in a younger age.

From 1972 to 1979, Wang's salary was only 42 yuan (about \$6.50) per month. Most of his students could earn a higher salary as soon as they graduated. For example, Jingqing Xu worked in the Agricultural Movie Company in Beijing, and his salary was

four yuan higher than Wang's.¹⁴ In those years, it was governmental policy that determined people's salary, not the school. The head of the school felt sorry for Wang, so he contacted the propaganda department of Harbin's municipal Party Committee. The reply he got was: "We know Wang's situation, but there is nothing we can do. He did not complete his study in the Conservatory, so he does not have a diploma. There is no policy to rely on."

According to Shicheng Wang, however, Wang's life during the 1970s was not so bad. He taught private students, just like most of his colleagues were doing, but did not dare to charge. However, the private students did "pay" by sending their teachers presents, such as food (maconochie) and watches. Wang Lisan used to show Shicheng a nice Mudanjiang watch, which was a present from the parents of a student. At that time, according to Zhuquan Zhou, they did not dare to assign the private students any "foreign" repertoire except for basic materials such as Hanon's exercises. This was why Wang began to write "Children's Hearts" for Jingwen Wu (吴进文), a relative of Qifang Wu, during the summer of 1973 when Wu came to Harbin for vacation. Wang really put his own "heart" into this suite, and kept revising it until 2007.

¹⁴ When he came back to Harbin and visited Wang Lisan, Wang planned to invite him to a dinner. Wang said: "I remember I left my change purse under the bed. Let me look for it," and it took Wang quite a while to find it. According to Xu, Wang's room was always in a mess.

Head, Teacher, Composer, Thinker: 1977 to 2002

With the death of Mao, the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976. In 1977, the Harbin Normal University was back on track and restarted its undergraduate program. In the same year, Wang started to compose again, completing two piano works. However, it was not until the political rehabilitation of 1978 that his rightist label, as well as the labels of his colleagues, was thoroughly removed.

The years from 1977 to 1981 marked Wang's greatest compositional "harvest" in terms of both quality and quantity. Certainly his pieces before and after are of high quality, too, but pieces from these four years stand out for their power and maturity. In comparison with his pieces of the 1950s, Wang's compositional techniques of this period were nothing new. It was experience and being forbidden to compose for so many years that made the difference.

Wang's tenure as head of the music department at Harbin Normal University (1985-1996) was unfortunately his low-water period of composing. He told his student Yin Kang (亢音) privately that he had not "written a note" during his tenure, though this was an exaggeration. Jingqing Xu thought that his low compositional productivity during this period was more severe than it was in the 1960s and early 1970s, when the political climate did not allow him to compose.

When Wang was selected as head, he was only an assistant professor, and his salary was a little bit more than eighty yuan per month. In 1985, Shicheng laughed at him by saying, "I have just been set free from the prison, and my salary is already more than eighty yuan per month. What kind of head are you?" However, Wang Lisan was still satisfied, because his salary had been raised from fifty to eighty yuan in six years.

Wang was promoted to professor in 1986. However, for a long period of time, he had maintained that almost nobody in the Institute was qualified to be a professor. This issue caused strong discontent, and became one of the major issues during Wang's tenure because, without enough professors, the department could not enroll graduate students. Indeed, the quality of the Institute's faculty in the 1980s was not worse than most of the other music schools in the country, which had many more professors. However, Mutian Sun explained that "I know Wang's thinking. He has a standard in his mind, towards which he had striven hard. How could he lower the standard?" (Sun) In my opinion, this standard reflected the level of Wang's own mentors at the Shanghai Conservatory, people such as Tong Sang, Yushi Yang, Zhibai Shen, and Minzhi Chen, to name a few. According to Zhuquan Zhou, Wang was highly against "deceiving oneself as well as others." At the beginning of 1996, a painter named Shunyu Lu (卢舜禹) succeeded Wang as the head of the Art Institute, but Wang still remained professor at the Institute until retiring in 2004.

In 1978, the music department began to enroll undergraduate students again for the first time in sixteen years. In the first year, they enrolled six composition students including Wulantuoga (乌兰托嘎), the inner Mongolian composer who later became famous. Wang Lisan, Shiren Liu, and Zuxin Jiang each got two students. However, these six people were the only formal composition students in the department during Wang's tenure. In 1979 the department stopped enrolling new composition students, since there was no need for such instruction in a normal university whose purpose was to prepare teachers for general education. The Art Institute of Harbin Normal University was founded in 1985. Wang Lisan was appointed as the head of the institute, which has two

parts: the visual art school and the music school. The music school, with the music education major included, was named as conservatory. However, Wang still insisted against having composition major in the conservatory. Wang's reasons were that first, the school did not have enough good teachers to build that major; and second, the level of the students was not high enough. Again, the level of Harbin Normal University's teachers and students was comparable to that at other music schools with a composition department, but Wang had his own standard.

From 1978 to 1984, Wang taught solfeggio, Shiren Liu taught music theory, and Zhengjun Qian taught harmony. With the departure of Liu in 1984, Wang taught music theory as well. Most of the students in the late 1970s and 1980s did not know how important Wang Lisan was as a composer, but they all liked his lively and convincing teaching style.

Wang Lisan was interested in all kinds of fields other than music, and his thoughts regarding philosophy, arts and literature were reflected in his music in one way or another. He never stopped thinking. Even during the Cultural Revolution, he discussed philosophical issues with the philosopher Mutian Sun, who could also not live without thinking. Mutian Sun remembered clearly his very first conversation with Wang in 1973:

One day, Wang asked me suddenly (I did not know how he knew I studied philosophy), "Kant said that beauty is judgment. Is the understanding of music inborn or from experience?" Standing in the passageway of the "Literature and History Building," we discussed this for more than an hour. (Sun)

This was the first time that Sun and Wang talked to each other, so the question that Wang raised must have been on his mind for a long time. Indeed, in a time when only several songs and eight model operas could legally be performed, this kind of thinking

was not only rare, but also dangerous. How could one talk about Kant? Consequently, this kind of discussion between the two had to be private. According to Sun, Wang said that he wrote music to express his inner world, and to express something that knocked at the deepest place of his heart. In this regard, Wang believed that his music was fundamentally different from that of impressionist composers such as Debussy. In other words, his music reflected the “pictures” in his heart. Obviously, these “pictures” were closely related to his personality. Did it mean that his understanding of music came from experience? Sun’s answer to this question was that experience was the materials one used, whereas the sensitivity of feeling the experience and ability of using it were inborn. As a result, an artwork involved both the inborn ability and the experience of the individual.

Thinking in images was a topic that occupied Sun and Wang at the end of the 1970s. (Wang wrote his *Impressions of Paintings by Higashiyama Kaiti* in 1979.) According to Sun, Wang believed that music is a kind of thinking in images, and is as deep as any other art form. For example, although belonging to two different categories, Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9 and *The Communist Manifesto* are equally meaningful, but in their own different ways. Music is more thorough and rich as a kind of tacit knowledge than any other art.

In other words, in Wang’s opinion, music is a kind of indexical sign. It is like a match that you burn to see things in a dark room, or a finger that points to the moon. The “moon” and the “things in the dark room” are what the composer really means. A match or a finger is the means to making the listener “feel” the things or the moon. Some years after the fact, Wang explained to Zhuquan Zhou that in the *Impressions of Paintings by*

Higashiyama Kaiti, “I more or less used [Kaiti’s] paintings to convey my own thoughts.”
Consequently, the paintings of Kaiti were simply the match or the finger.

“I Fight Back!” Life after Harbin, 2002 to 2013

As early as the 1990s, Wang’s family decided to move to Shanghai when he retired from the Harbin Normal University. One of the reasons might be that Shanghai was his wife Qifang Wu’s hometown. It was not until Wang Lisan moved into the new apartment in 2002 or 2003 that he discovered he had a view of the place where he and other rightists had labored from 1958 to 1959.¹⁵ Having realized this, Wang said ironically: “I fight back.” However, the place that they labored some fifty years before was no longer countryside. It had become part of the city.

Unfortunately in 2003, Wang got cerebral infarction, which severely affected his composing. Some have claimed that his illness affected the quality of his late music, but I disagree. The sickness did make his handwriting shaky and imprecise, and it did cause a lot of clerical errors, but his musical ideas were always great and clear. To put it another way way, a good musician who researches Wang’s music well enough can always figure out what the composer was thinking from his manuscripts.

Wang’s wife Qifang Wu died in 2009. Their daughter Wang Duowen played

¹⁵ Pudong is a big district. The chance of buying an apartment and discovering that it was close to where Wang had labored in the 1950s was very small.

“Calligraphy and Chinese Lyre” (from *Other Mountains*) at her funeral. For the sake of his health, Wang Lisan did not attend the funeral. Nobody was even sure if Wang realized Wu had died, for some time later, Wang asked Wang Duowen: “how come there is a person missing?” But Wang did recognize the death of his wife at some point. In 2011 he met Shutong Liao’s children in Harbin. At that time, Liao, a brilliant musicologist that almost nobody knows now, had recently committed suicide after having suffered from cancer. Liao’s children told Wang: “uncle Wang, our father died.” “So did my wife,” Wang answered. At least at that moment, he knew.

In April 2013, Wang made the last trip of his life. Wang Duowen drove him from Shanghai to Shenzhen (around 1,500 kilometers) to visit his sister Wang Meixian. Wang Lisan could not recognize his sister until Wang Duowen showed him Meixian’s picture. Once Lisan recognized Meixian by comparing her to her picture, he held her hands for the entire time of his visit. On July 6, 2013, Wang Lisan passed away at home.

CHAPTER 2

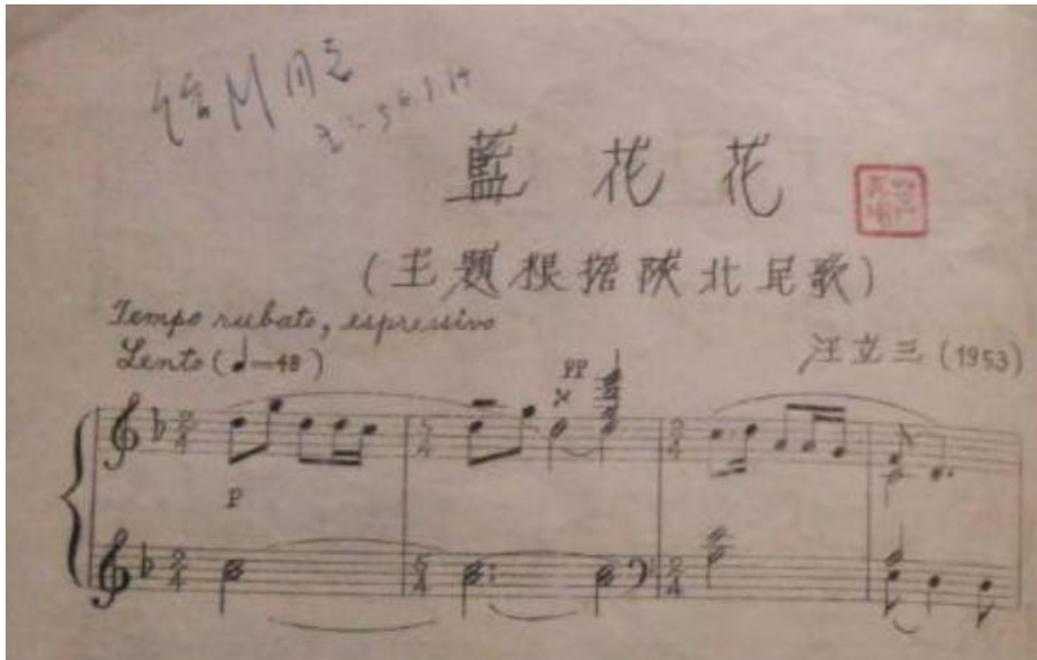
THE GENERAL INFORMATION OF TWO OF THE THREE WANG LISAN'S WORKS THAT THIS MONOGRAPH FOCUSES ON

The purpose of this chapter is to give general information of *Lanhuahua, the Beautiful Girl* and *Other Mountains*. As for the information of *Fantasy-Sonata "Black Soil"*, *Memories of the Er-Ren-Zhuan*, please read chapter III.

***Lanhuahua, the Beautiful Girl* (1953) for piano**

In 1953, Wang Lisan composed this piece as the homework for his (traditional) harmony class, taught by Tong Sang (桑桐). According to Wang, he “had the feeling first, then searched for the best form. A lot of harmonic progressions in *Lanhuahua, the Beautiful Girl* were the result of my feeling.” (Zhou, from an interview) He also told Shutong Liao (廖叔同) how he composed the piece: “I like Mussorgsky, so that I was randomly brave, and wrote randomly.” (Liao, 15) Wang’s mentor Tong Sang “did not change a note, but only made suggestions regarding music in order to enhance (the piece).” (Su, 6) That is to say, professor Sang totally agreed with the hidden octave at the end of the first phrase (Figure 2.1), which Wang used on purpose to illustrate the sobbing ending of *Xin Tian You* (信天游).

Figure 2.1. The hidden octave in *Lanhuhua, the Beautiful Girl* (measure 4). This score is a self-published edition by Shanghai Conservatory. It was a present from Wang Lisan to Jialang Mo. On top of this page, Wang wrote “To Comrade Mo: Wang Lisan 1956.3.14”



Pianist Jialang Mo (莫嘉琅), the schoolmate and former girlfriend of Wang Lisan, premiered this signature piece of Wang not long after its birth. Shortly after its publication in March 1956, it caught people’s attention. In June, 1956, Renkang Qian (钱仁康) published “An Introduction to the Compositions of the Students of the Eastern Branch of the Central Conservatory” (介绍中央音乐学院华东分院学生的创作) in

People's Music, one of the most prominent musical journals in China. This article spoke highly of *Lanhuahua, the Beautiful Girl*.

In 2012, Wang Duowen, the composer's daughter, found an old notebook at home. On the cover of the notebook, her father had written "1953.6," so that June 1953 should be the date of the first item in this book, which is another version of *Lanhuahua, the Beautiful Girl*. Since the date of the piece was 1953, this version might be the first one.

This signature piece of the composer was first published in 1956 in a collection called *Musical Works of the Eastern Branch of Central Conservatory, Volume I: Piano Pieces* by the Beijing Music Publisher. The collection includes six pieces by six young composers, who were at that time all studying at the Eastern Branch of Central Conservatory (the former name of Shanghai Conservatory). This version of *Lanhuahua, the Beautiful Girl* is the same as later publications, and it is very different from the unpublished version of 1953.

The published version has eighty-eight measures, and the 1953 version only has seventy, of which thirty-five are identical to the published version. The 1953 version is in a strict variation form, with a theme and four variations, whereas the published version takes on a freer form by adding new passages after the second variation and at the end of the piece. These two passages, the first one marked "Grave" and the second one starting with the marking of "molto espressivo," create two climaxes, so that the piece fits the storyline of "Lanhuahua" better. The "Grave" passage depicts Lanhuahua's mood after hearing the bad news that her family was going to marry her to somebody she did not love, forcing her to leave her boyfriend, a soldier in the Red army. The new ending

passage serves as the opinion of the narrator, who laments the death of Lanhuahua after she fails to fight against her fate. Obviously, a strict variation form, as in the 1953 version, is not enough to depict such a story, so Wang Lisan added the two passages and made the piece a free variation form. In addition to the form, Wang Lisan also revised some of the harmony. Also, the published version added a lot of long slurs, which makes the piece more romantic in feeling.

Other Mountains: Five Preludes and Fugues (1980) for piano

1. Calligraphy and Chinese Lyre
2. Geometrical Pattern (ca. 1959-1963)
3. The Song of Earth
4. Folk Toys
5. Village in the Mountain

Wang's suite *Other Mountains* contains fugues that are unlike what "Western composers are capable of writing." (Anonymous 1, 19) It is a suite of five preludes and fugues in all five different modes (gong, shang, jiao, zhi, yu) of the Chinese pentatonic scale. According to Yin Kang:

My teacher (Wang Lisan) told me: "I arranged the five tonalities on purpose. The five keys create a chromatic half circle (F#-A-Ab-G-F). . . . The five pieces display different ethnic characters. On the basis of the traditional fugue, I developed and brought forth new ideas based on the artistic needs of ethnic music. ' (Kang, 2013)

As a suite of five preludes and fugues, the arch-like structure of *Other Mountains* resembles that of Bartok's *Concerto for Orchestra*. The slow third movement is the

expressive goal, with two lively, short, and scherzo-like pieces on either side of it. The first piece pays tribute to traditional culture, and the festival-like last movement conveys a feeling of “back to the people.” The name “Other Mountains” comes from the traditional Chinese saying: “stones from other mountains may serve to polish the jade of my hill.” Wang Lisan was always thinking of the relationship between western and eastern music and, more importantly, how composers could take advantage of this relationship. He used to speak highly of Ivan Tcherepnin’s *Cantilenas/Hybrids*. However, it is clear from the poem for the first movement, “Calligraphy and Chinese Lyre,” that the composer locates himself on *Other Mountains* (symbolizing the tradition of western music) and looks back to Chinese tradition:

I would mount *Other Mountains* to look back, and to look afar.
Are those undulating lines the strokes of the calligraphy brush?
Are those rumbling echoes the sound of the Chinese lyre?
As I see, in the art of ancient China,
The souls that are untiringly searching for truth.
(Translated by Gao Lu)

Wang told Yin Kang that when he was writing or playing this movement, his mind was full of the fluent scenes of the cursive (Cao Shu). “The artist writes and draws freely as he/she wishes” (真是挥洒自如啊)(Kang). As a result, he uses the parallel sixteenths to present an exciting melody. The Chinese Lyre (Guqin) is a plucked seven-string instrument with more than two thousand years of history. Quqin and calligraphy have a lot of things in common. First, both of them are symbols of what we call high-class and well educated people,¹⁶ such as scholars and intellectuals, and this is the only movement in the suite that relates to such people. Second, both Quqin and cursive require

¹⁶ The other two symbols are the book and the game of *go* (a type of chess).

improvisatory spontaneousness and great discipline. Third, both of them are the core of Chinese ancient aesthetics.

The composer's poem for the "Geometrical Pattern" reads as follows:

A little whirlpool mirrors the dazzling lights and shadows of the
boundless world. (Translated by Gao Lu)

The "little whirlpools" refer to Chinese wax painting, a popular art form among ethnic groups in southwestern China:

Wax printing, or batik printing, is a mechanical dye-blocking method whereby hot (melted) wax is applied, often in the form of a geometric pattern or an artistic representation (anything from a flower to a human face), to a chosen part of the fabric. Then when the wax has dried sufficiently, the fabric is dyed in a cold-water vat of soluble dye. When the dyeing process is finished and the fabric has been allowed to dry completely, the fabric is then washed in hot water, which dissolves the wax, and the finished product is a piece of fabric with patterns, designs, images, etc., in a contrasting color to the dyed, or background, color. (Zhou, Ruru)

The other, more important, reference in this movement is to the Hunan province's "Flower-Drum" drama. As a dance of the peasants, "Flower-Drum" is accompanied by percussion instruments (what the "drum" symbolizes) and lanterns, either in the shape of a flower or decorated by painted flowers (what "flower" symbolizes). Although "Flower-Drum" operas are now professional, in the past they were always associated with strolling players who were half-musicians, half-peasants, used a simple stage or no stage at all, and employed simple instruments. Wang Lisan became familiar with Hunan's traditional music during the 1950s, while at Shanghai Conservatory. At that time, the school was involved in studying folk songs, first those of Shaanxi, then

those of Hunan. Additional information on this piece and the Hunan Flower-Drum is provided in the following chapter.

The poem of “**The Song of Earth**” reads:

The earth is still alive, still alive.
The earth drenched in pain,
The earth full of hope,
The earth that is ordinary,
And the earth that is miraculous;
I sing for you,
I weep for you,
And I root deeply in your heart.
(Translated by Gao Lu)

The Northern musical style of the Han Chinese can be roughly divided into two sub-styles geographically. One is the northwestern style, and the other is the north-northeastern style. Wang’s “The Song of the Earth” belongs to the former, and his “Fantasy-Sonata, Memories of Er-Ren-Zhuan” belongs to the latter. The main melodies of both pieces broadly use minor seventh. For the “The Song of the Earth,” minor sevenths appear not only in the fugue’s melody, but also in the prelude’s melody:

Example 2.2. Wang Lisan, “The Song of the Earth,” mm. 1-9.



Example 2.3. Wang Lisan, “The Song of the Earth,” mm. 48-57, the ending of the prelude and the beginning of the fugue.



The poem of “**Folk Toys**” reads:

Are you also fond of the cloth tiger, clay rooster, painted candy,
and pinwheel?
And the tireless revolving lamp, the silly, dippy puppet...
O my childhood reveries! (Translated by Gao Lu)

Painted candy is a kind of child’s food. The artist uses melted sugar to paint flowers, birds, fishes, people’s faces, and knives. When the sugar dries, he takes the shapes off of his table and sells them. When the composer was young, painted candy

(also called Tang Guan Dao) was almost only available in Chongqing province and its neighborhoods, where the composer lived.

From the poem, we know that Wang wrote this piece with his “childhood reveries” in mind. Wang Shicheng, Lisan’s brother, realized immediately after looking at the poem that “Lisan was talking about the Follow Fair (also called Temple Fair) that was held in our childhood, every spring beside the Qing Yang Palace.” Wang mentioned the Qing Yang Palace in his article “Tao Follows Nature”:

In the suburb of Chengdu, there is a Taoist temple called “Qing Yang Palace.” Every spring, this is the place for the extremely crowded “Flower Festival.” In my childhood, I went there often, and even skipped elementary school for a month to learn magic with a folk magician. (Wang, “Tao Follows Nature,” 16)

According to Shicheng, in their childhood, the Qing Yang Palace was surrounded by rice paddy fields. Every spring, people (peasants) took a break from planting by drying up the fields and holding the Flower Fair.

The actual “Village in the Mountain” was located in Daliangshan (大凉山), the mountain area that is close to the composer’s hometown. The inhabitants were exclusively Yi, an ethnic group in southwest China. In the 1970s, the composer visited that village as a painter. The villagers first viewed him as a spy. After realizing his purpose for visiting, they treated him nicely, and provided him with models in the form of beautiful young ladies wearing Yi costumes. This amazing experience inspired the composer to write this poem for the piece:

Steep mountains,
Pure folks,
Songs and dances after drinks,
O flowers and grasses sending out exotic fragrance,
May the springtime be with you forever!

(Translated by Gao Lu)

To judge from the piece's subtitle, "Five Preludes and Fugues," one might guess that the suite has a lot to do with the learned style. In a 1997 interview, the composer agreed that fugue is "the product of logos," and he continued to talk about the reason for employing fugal writing in this suite:

Every magician can play tricks, but every individual has his or her personal interpretation. I am creating difficulties for myself by using fugal writing because the content of this suite does not necessarily require it. I did this on purpose, in order to add some special tastes. . . . The beauty in form is one of the special tastes. However, I also added levels and dimensions for the audience's appreciation. For example, dancing on the balance beam is quite different from dancing on the floor. The excitement of the audience is simply not the same. (Su 9)

In another interview in 1986, Lisan mentioned the unusual features of these fugues:

I do not want the audience to recognize instantly that "it is a fugue!" . . . I try to hide it. I always like to weaken the feeling of technical composing, and I would rather the audience does not recognize the "face" of a fugue, which reminds them of Bach or Shostakovich. (Wang 19)

As a result, Wang Lisan made use of the learned style in the *Other Mountains*, not to create an academic feeling (fugue "faces"), but to add more dimensions and layers to his music. These dimensions and layers lead to some new meanings of the often-used learned style, and create new excitement.

Wang Lisan has a natural intimacy with the "learned style." When he was in junior high school, he first tried his hand at composition by writing a fugue after reading a theory textbook. According to Zhuquan Zhou, Wang had never studied harmony and composition nor played the piano at that time. Later, polyphonic writing became one of

the major features of his music, but he always had a tendency to hide the “learned style” in order to make listeners feel that his music not so academic. For example, in the “Winter Blossoms,” he writes a canon-like passage to imitate the “thick and knotted branches” of a winter tree. Most listeners, when first hearing this passage, might have a picture of the winter tree in mind without recognizing the canonic texture. In other words, they enjoy the beauty that is created by the quasi-canon without recognizing what it is, and this is what Wang pursued.

Let us now examine the expositions of the five fugues to see how the composer hides the “face” of the learned style. Each of the five fugues in *Other Mountains* hides its “face” in different ways. The first fugue (starting at measure 34 of “Calligraphy and Chinese Lyre”) hides the fugal “face” by including free counterpoint under the first appearance of the subject. This fugue imitates the Chinese Lyre, which seldom plays unaccompanied melodies. The subject’s elements have already appeared four bars before the fugue, which not only weakens the impact of the fugue’s exposition, but also introduces it. The Lyre is imitated by using what the composer called “fast leaving note” (leave the key off right after one touches it), an example of which is the B-sharp in measure 4.

Example 2.4. Wang Lisan, “Calligraphy and Chinese Lyre,” mm. 32-39.

The image displays a musical score for the piece "Calligraphy and Chinese Lyre" by Wang Lisan, specifically measures 32 through 39. The score is written for piano and is in the key of D major (two sharps). The tempo is marked "Pensieroso" with a quarter note equal to 44 beats (♩ = 44). The music is in 4/4 time. The score is presented in two systems. The first system shows measures 32 and 33. In measure 32, the right hand has a triplet of eighth notes (F#, G, A) followed by a half note (B), while the left hand has a triplet of eighth notes (F#, G, A) followed by a half note (B). A dynamic marking of *p* is present. In measure 33, the right hand has a half note (B) followed by a quarter note (C#), and the left hand has a half note (B) followed by a quarter note (C#). A dynamic marking of *p* is present. The second system shows measures 34, 35, 36, and 37. In measure 34, the right hand has a half note (B) followed by a quarter note (C#), and the left hand has a half note (B) followed by a quarter note (C#). A dynamic marking of *p* is present. In measure 35, the right hand has a half note (B) followed by a quarter note (C#), and the left hand has a half note (B) followed by a quarter note (C#). A dynamic marking of *p* is present. In measure 36, the right hand has a half note (B) followed by a quarter note (C#), and the left hand has a half note (B) followed by a quarter note (C#). A dynamic marking of *p* is present. In measure 37, the right hand has a half note (B) followed by a quarter note (C#), and the left hand has a half note (B) followed by a quarter note (C#). A dynamic marking of *p* is present. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Wang wrote “Geometrical Pattern” about twenty years earlier than the rest of the suite. At that time, he might not have been involved in the “hiding” game that deeply. As a result, the “fugue face” of this fugue is more obvious than the other four fugues in the suite. As with the fugue of “Calligraphy and Chinese Lyre,” the composer uses free counterpoint under the subject’s first appearance (measure 8 of Example 2.5). Nevertheless, the prelude uses the same four-note tone row of the fugue, thus creating a feeling of continuity and cohesion.

Example 2.5, Wang Lisan, “Geometrical Pattern,” mm. 49-65.



The method of “silent keys” (pressing certain keys down silently, so that the same notes will sound in different ranges) had appeared first in Schoenberg’s *Drei Klavierstücke* Op. 11, and later in Bartok’s *Mikrokosmos* (No. 102, “Harmonics”). There is a good chance that Wang knew of this method from Professor Tong Sang as early as the 1950s, while he was still a student at the Shanghai Conservatory. In “The Song of the Earth,” Wang uses “silent keys” to highlight Xin Tian You-style fugue subject, thus imitating the echo effect of the north Shaanxi, where Xin Tian You is popular. As a result, the fugue here is something that “no foreigners can write.” (Anonymous 1, 1986, 19)

The fourth fugue (starting from measure 72 of “Folk Toys”) starts with the countersubject. It repeats in different registers, and the subject does not show up until measure 80. This fugue invokes the “silly dolly” through the staccato character of its countersubject.

Example 2.6. Wang Lisan, “Folk Toys,” mm. 72-90.



The fifth fugue (starting from measure 33 of “Village in the Mountain”) has a tempo change (“poco a poco accel.” at mm. 36-38) when the fugue’s subject is first stated. (See Example 2.7) Tempo changing does not happen often in a fugue when the subject first appears. Consequently, Wang’s arrangement weakens the feeling of the fugue’s exposition. In addition, the countersubject makes use of material from the subject. It continues the subject in an “echoing” way. Again, the echo makes sense because of the “mountain village” background. Last but not least, the first appearance of the subject is in octaves with additional fifths (including an appoggiatura) in the bass part. The music of many ethnic groups in south China uses parallel major seconds in both vocal and instrumental music. Sometimes the music even ends with open parallel major seconds. As a result, the major seconds in measures 61-62 functions as a topical reference to ethnic music. (See Example 2.8)

Example 2.7. Wang Lisan, “Village in the Mountain,” mm. 32-41.

Argentino

m.s.
mf

poco a

sin. — (♩ = 108)

poco accel.

Example 2.8. Wang Lisan, “Village in the Mountain,” mm. 57-66.

sin. — (♩ = 108)

accel.

In conclusion, the composer hides the exposition of the fugues in such artistic ways that the learned style not only becomes less conservative, but also fits the context of

the movements' backgrounds. Meanwhile, Wang uses different topics to invoke Chinese folk music.

CHAPTER 3

SEIZING PAST GLORY: DISAPPEARING FOLK ART IN WANG'S MUSIC

Among the Chinese musical materials Wang used, there are folk songs, folk dances, dramas (regional dramas and Peking Opera) and religious works. Of the Chinese influences on his music Wang recalled:

Regarding my styles, of course we can not skip the ethnic and local styles. Of all the Chinese folk music, I prefer that of Northwest's loess plateau and that of Yunnan. The former has deep feeling and is broad. It often carries pathetic power, which moves me. Yunnan's music is full of beauty, but this kind of beauty is different from that of Jiangnan (south of the River). It is more colorful, and it is magical. (Bao, 177)

In this chapter, I look into the origins of four types of music used by Wang and ask three questions. First, how did Wang deal with these materials? Second, what are the past and current conditions of the materials? Third, given past and current conditions, how is Wang's music likely to be perceived in the future?

North Shaanxi's Xin Tian You in Wang's Music

In the movie *Yellow Earth* (1984), Gu Qing, a musician and soldier who works for the Communist Party, is charged with collecting folk songs and substituting their lyrics with communist-themed ones for propaganda purposes. Consequently, he has to travel to north Shaanxi province, a 98,000-square-kilometer area that at the time was the Party's major military base. What Gu Qing encounters is a type of local accompanied

mountain song called Xin Tian You, which dates back to “at least the 14th century.” (Niu, 2)

This story is not entirely fictional. Even though Xin Tian You literally means “flying in the sky freely and randomly,” the songs had hardly spread out of their local area until the Communist Party arrived in the late 1930s. With the Communist Party ruling over China, the songs became a symbol of the Party’s liberation of poor people and soon “flew” across the country.

As part of the “Loess Plateau,” northern Shaanxi is full of cracks and gaps due to geographical erosion, which is responsible for most people living in poverty. The difficulty of planting and traveling made “jiao fu,”¹⁷ a now disappeared profession, the most important way for people to communicate. It is they, as well as other poor people such as “ruffians, orphans, poor old people, poor ladies, homeless people” and whoever dreamed of “flying freely and randomly,” who are supposed to have created the Xin Tian You (also called “the caravan’s tune”). (Li, 87)

The lyrics of Xin Tian You have three main topics: expressing love, lamenting a difficult life, and praising communism.¹⁸ (This last topic certainly relates to Gu Qing’s re-texting task in *Yellow Earth*.) Most of the Xin Tian You melodies, including those of “The Song of Earth,” are in the mode of Zhi (using the fifth degree of the scale as the principal note).

Wang Lisan became familiar with Xin Tian You in the 1950s, while he was studying at the Shanghai Conservatory. At that time, the headmaster Luting He (贺绿汀) demanded that all students and teachers studied and sang folksongs. Mr. He’s hometown

¹⁷ Jiao fu is a group organized delivery men that travel for long distance. Now this profession has disappeared.

¹⁸ Most lyrics with the love topic involve unfulfilled love. As a result, the love songs of Xin Tian You have a nickname: jealous tunes.

was in Hunan province, and he had worked in Yanan (延安), a city in northern Shaanxi, during the revolutionary period. Thus the folksongs of Hunan and Shaanxi became two of the principal types that the students and teachers studied. Among the folk musicians that Mr. He hired, there was one famous Shaanxi musician named Xicai Ding (丁喜才). It was in such an atmosphere that the folksongs of Shaanxi also became some of Wang's favorites, and he composed *Lanhuahua, the Beautiful Girl* using one of Xin Tian You's most famous tunes of the same title, which was notated after 1944 and became popular in the early 1950s.

Although this piece became Wang's signature work, in August 1956 the composer Shu Yu (俞抒) published a positive review in *People's Music* entitled "On the Piano Solo Piece *Lanhuahua, the Beautiful Girl*" (关于钢琴独奏曲“蓝花花”) in which he also pointed out some shortcomings:

The principal shortcoming is that the composer does not expand his ideas enough in each section, or the whole piece. People feel that the transitions in between sections are in such a hurry that before the listener has time to digest them, the music has already slipped into the next section. Although the whole piece is coherent, listeners still do not feel satisfied. This shortcoming obstructs people's understanding of the music. (Yu, 21)

Indeed, this "shortcoming" is almost inevitable in a miniature telling the complex story of the original folk song. The song is in a strophic form, which is the most common form of Xin Tian You, that repeats endlessly with different lyrics to tell the tragic story of Lanhuahua.¹⁹ Although the tempo might change with the development of the story, it never goes very fast, because people usually sing Xin Tian You in reverberant open

¹⁹ Lanhuahua was a village girl, who had to leave her boyfriend because she was forcefully married to a rich family. She fought and died.

spaces such as valleys and mountains, where a fast tempo is not suitable. Thus transitions between parallel phrases, which are actually long pauses, would not seem to hurry if sung properly. Although the free variation form in Wang's piano solo version shares similarities with the parallel phrase form of the Xin Tian You, some passages, especially the fast one depicting the fighting plots, are obviously the composer's interpretations. These passages all have wonderful "effect," to use a favorite word of the composer, in a solo piano miniature, but would never happen in the real Xin Tian You. However, when Wang wrote another Xin Tian You type of piano piece entitled "The Song of Earth" twenty-seven years later, his approach changed. "The Song of Earth" is the third piece in the suite *Other Mountains*, which "builds in my dreams of our land, mountains and rivers." (Anonymous 1,19). In this case, the composer was closer to the original Xin Tian You regarding observance of the slow tempo and tragic character. This is a much bigger piece than *Lanhuahua, the Beautiful Girl*, and instead of telling a story it is merely about catching a specific feeling described not only by the music itself, but also by the poem that Wang wrote on the score:

The earth is still alive, still alive.
The earth drenched in pain,
The earth full of hope,
The earth that is ordinary,
And the earth that is miraculous;
I sing for you,
I weep for you,
And I root deeply in your heart.
(Translated by Gao Lu)

The first half of the piece, taking the form of a prelude, is in tragic mode, whereas the following double fugue symbolizes "hope." In order to highlight the "Tragico" character of the prelude, the composer creates all kinds of "uncomfortable"

feeling. First, the piece starts with a quartal harmony in the piano's lowest register. Second, the broad use of harmonic dyad of minor seconds actually imitates the so called bitter notes (i.e. microtones) of Xin Tian You. A "bitter note" scale consists of the Chinese pentatonic scale and two additional "bitter notes." One is higher than, but not as high as a half step of the fourth degree of the scale; the other is lower than, but not as low as a half step of the seventh degree of the scale. Consequently, both of the "bitter notes" are not quartal tones. Third, the ostinato in the prelude symbolizes the caravan and/or the geographic feature of the area, whereas the right hand part modulates constantly. The former creates a feeling of compulsion, and the latter a feeling of continuous striving and failing. Both of these characteristics are uncanny. Furthermore, the principle beats of the ostinato almost never meet those of the melody part, so that it creates not only a difficulty for pianists to memorize the piece, but also the uncanniness for the listeners.

Example 3.1. Wang Lisan, "The Song of the Earth," mm. 1-19.

Tragico (♩ = 50)

The musical score consists of four systems of two staves each (treble and bass clef). The first system begins with a treble clef staff containing a whole rest, followed by a bass clef staff with a piano (*pp*) dynamic marking. The second system shows the right hand entering with a melodic line and the left hand with a harmonic accompaniment. The third system continues the melodic development in the right hand. The fourth system concludes the passage with a first ending bracket above measures 1-8 and a second ending bracket above measures 10-19. A dashed line is drawn above the first ending bracket. The piece ends with a final chord in the right hand.

Example 3.2. Wang Lisan, “The Song of the Earth,” mm. 37-47.

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system shows the initial piano accompaniment with complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth notes. The second system features a melodic line in the right hand with a fermata over measure 40, marked *sf appassionato*. The third system includes markings for *accelerare* and *dim. a tempo*.

From measure 5 to 16, we see the only complete statement of the melody, which includes the parallel phrase of the Xin Tian You and a supplementary phrase (mm.13-16). From measure 16 to 38, the melody struggles to return to its complete form, but has failed each time. Measures.39-40 not only break the melody and ostinato, but also the rhythmic pattern. The music here is in the style of the Shaanxi province’s Yangko, a type of peasant song/dance associated with festivals.²⁰ However, at this moment, the appearance of the

²⁰ Yangko literally means “transplant seeding song.” It is popular in northern China, and elements of its style vary from town to town.

festival-like Yangko is ironic . It is like a forced carnival, where people have to be happy no matter what the reality is. This Shostakovich-like moment²¹ opens the truly despairing scream from measure 41 to 45, which is a variation of the melody. The ostinato is gone; the rhythm of the head motif is distorted. These two things and the indication of “*appassionato...accelerate*” break the pulse of the melody. This moment is the emotional high point of the piece and the entire suite. It is the death-bed struggle of the Xin Tian You melody. It eventually dies, and the “hope” part (fugue) follows.

In the double fugue, the right hand plays the first subject as the left hand silently depressing all five notes of the D-flat *Gong* mode in the bass register, creating a harmonics effect. With a slow tempo (now “*vaneggiando*,” no longer “*tragico*”) and beginning with two fourths piling up together, it is a typical Xin Tian You type of melody. The second subject is in triplet rhythm and causes the music to become more lively. After the the second subject is stated, the two subjects combine in the climax of this central movement of the suite.

There are only two tempo indications (“*tragico*” and “*vaneggiando*”) in “The Song of Earth,” whereas the much shorter *Lanhuahua, the Beautiful Girl* has nine of them, including words such as “*espressivo*” and “*appassionato*” in addition to metronome markings.²² As mentioned above, the latter work has a story to tell, so these frequent changes become necessary. However, there are other plots as well. The constant tempo and textural changes of *Lanhuahua, the Beautiful Girl* somehow symbolizes the spirit of 1950s China, during which period people “fought with God, earth, and people.” In addition, Xin Tian You itself, as a symbol of northern Shaanxi, reminds us of communism

²¹ It reminds us of Shostakovich Fifth Symphony’s ending.

²² The tempo indications are as follows: “Lento-Tempo rubato *espressivo*-Andantino-Piu mosso-Grave-Agitato-Allargando-*Appassionato*-molto *espressivo*.”

during the revolutionary period. However, the slow, tragic and steady “The Song of Earth” is an recollection of these warmblooded “fighting” periods. Although we can find a few changes in the prelude, such as modulations of the melody, they all lead to failure and cause desperation. After all the fighting, what did we achieve? “The Song of the Earth” reflects not only the common man’s life on the “Loess Plateau,” but also that of the country and of the composer himself.

In the fugue part, it seems that we do achieve something. However, the quartal harmony that appears at the beginning of the piece concludes the piece. In fact, it appears also between the prelude and fugue, and before the combining of the two subjects. It functions as landmark, but carries more meanings than a geographical landmark. Its characteristic intervals and low register create a sound of the Earth, or of Nature. Its appearance at key places of the piece symbolizes that no matter what people do, Mother Nature always stays the same.

Now, the environment of the Xin Tian You has changed. According to Dongxia Ma, a Shaanxi folk song collector, people no longer stand on top of the mountains and sing to the valley about their unfulfilled love or sad lives. Now they sing in the playgrounds. Their singing style has changed, too. The traditional Xin Tian You is performed only by professional Xin Tian You singers. However, starting with a song entitled “Loess Plateau” (1986), sung by Linlin Fan (范琳琳), the style of Xin Tian You has influenced a lot of recent popular and rock singers. These include Huan Liu (刘欢), Jian Cui (崔健), Ying Na (那英), and Tianqi Hang (杭天琪), to name a few. In fact, it was the musical style of northern Shaanxi that inspired composition of original popular

music on the mainland. In other words, Xin Tian You did not die, but melted into other musical forms.

The Hunan Flower-Drum Drama and “Geometric Patterns”

For most Chinese people, Hunan province reminds them of three things: spicy food, Chairman Mao and the Hunan flower-drum drama. Surprisingly, perhaps, these three things are related. For example, without ornamentation, the flower-drum drama will lose its attractiveness and become something else; without spicy ingredients, Hunan cuisine also loses a big part of its taste. For the flower-drum drama, where and how to add the vibrato/trill to the notes is crucial. An inexperienced singer often does the vibrato/trill on the wrong notes, or does too much or too little of it. This is unbearable, just like putting too much hot pepper in the food. It was the appearance of Chairman Mao that brought both the Hunan spicy food and the Hunan flower-drum drama to their special positions. Both of them were no longer local, and became national. During the Cultural Revolution, while other local dramas were forbidden, the Hunan flower-drum got some freedom, because Chairman Mao loved it. In 1974, a movie entitled “On the Way of Delivering” was released. It was the film version of the Hunan flower-drum drama with the same title. This was a privilege that other regional dramas could not even dream of.

The Hunan Flower-Drum drama is complicated and cannot be discussed at length here, but it is necessary to devote some attention to the Yu-Chuan (羽川) mode, the one Wang used in his “Geometrical Pattern.” Yu-Chuan mode is the most famous and

characteristic of the Hunan Flower-Drum drama's four principle modes.²³ Three of its four notes are those of any minor triad, and the fourth note has an unsteady pitch that shifts from a semitone to a whole note below the root note of the minor triad. For instance, in a song in Yu-Chuan mode, using an a4-c5-e5 minor triad, over ninety percent of the singer's notes will normally be a4 (and a5 as its version in the higher octave), c5 (and c4 as its version in the lower octave), e5 (and e4 as its version in the lower octave), g5 and g4↑. Occasionally, d5↑ may also appear, and its pitch, like that of g4↑, varies from d5 to d#5.

In this case, a4 and e5 are the most important notes, and either of them would be the principal note of the mode. As a result, they are the most steady notes. The singers almost never add ornamentation (vibrato or trills) on them. g4↑ and d5↑ are the two most unsteady notes, and singers almost always add vibrato or trills on them. In fact, according to the observation of Juewen Ouyang, who is a specialist in Hunan Flower-Drum drama, and whom I visited in Changsha in 2013, the unsteadiness of pitches are caused by the constant presence of ornamentation. Thus the two notes do not have a precise pitch, but a range of pitch. However, the vibrato on g4↑ is faster and wider than that on d5↑, and it also appears much more often, because after all, the d5↑ does not belong to the four-note set class. The singers sometime add mild vibrato on c5 because it is less steady than a4 and e5, but more steady than g4↑ and d5↑. As for g5, it is the highest note that singers usually reach in the Yu-Chuan mode (a5 only appears occasionally), and its pitch is steady. As a result, of all the notes that the singers encounter in the Yu-Chuan mode, we have the following rules:

²³ The other three are *Gong-Chuan* (宫川) mode, *Da-luo* (打锣) mode and *Dong-qiang* (洞腔) mode.

Table 3.1. The Notes of Yu-Chuan Mode

Notes	Vibrato or trill	Stability	The frequency of appearance
g4↑	most	most unsteady	occasionally omitted
a4 (a5)	none	very steady (principal note)	the most (must appear)
c5 (c4)	some	moderate	must appear
d5↑	second most	unsteady	the least (omit-able)
e5 (e4)	none	very steady (principal note)	the most (must appear)
g5	none	steady	occasionally omitted

Melodic shape is another important characteristic of the Yu-Chuan mode. Wang Lisan, in his poem of “Geometrical Pattern, refers the Hunan flower-drum drama to whirlpool.²⁴ In most cases, the two “whirlpools” in the Yu-Chuan mode melodies are the minor triad (a4-c5-e5) and the major triad (c5-e5-g5), which conflict and co-operate at the same time. The relationship between them is like that of "yin-yang" (Picture C.1), reflecting Taoists’ belief about how the world is built. For people who understand and practice Taoism, such as Wang Lisan, it is inarguable that the minor triad (swirl) here belongs to Yin and the major triad (another swirl) belongs to Yang, in which “the dazzling lights and shadows of the boundless world” are “mirrored.”

²⁴ His poem reads: A little whirlpool mirrors the dazzling lights and shadows of the boundless world.
(Translated by Gao Lu)

Figure 3.1. A Picture of “Yin-Yang.”



Specifically, according to Gu Jia (賈古), the shape of melodies in the Yu-Chuan mode “follows such patterns (figuration) as: a4-c5-e5-g5, e5-g5-e5-c5, e5-a4-c5-e5 and a4-c5-e4-g4↑...” (Jia, 191). One might continue the list by adding c5-a4-e5-c5, c5-a4-e4-g4↑, and so on. Large leaps would never appear in such patterns. For example, if a minor seventh of “a4-g5” appeared in a Yu-Chuan-mode song, an experienced listener would feel strange, because it is a typical melodic feature of northern Chinese music, such as Xin Tian You (North Shaanxi), Pa Shan tune (Inner Mongolia) and Er-Ren-Zhuan (Northeast).²⁵

²⁵ For an example of minor seventh leaps in Xin Tian You-style music, see the first fugue subject of “The Song of the Earth.” Such leaps may also be found in Pa Shan tunes (see “Folk Song III” in Wang Lisan’s *Children’s Hearts*. It is a tune of the regional drama Er-Ren-tTai) and in the Er-Ren-Zhuan (see the “Yang” tune, Example 3.9).

Example 3.3. Jingqing Xu, “Zhu Bajie carrying his Fiancé.”



Example 3.3 shows the melody of Jingqing Xu’s “Zhu Bajie carrying his Fiancé.” It is in a typical Er-Ren-Zhuan style. Although this melody is basically made of the same four notes as Hunan Flower-Drum drama, experienced listeners of Er-Ren-Zhuan or Hunan Flower-Drum drama would never confuse the two.

The prelude of “Geometric Patterns” is based on the theory that I have just generalized.

Example 3.4. Wang Lisan, “Geometrical Pattern,” mm. 1-17.

Chiaroscuro (♩ = 120)

p

m.f.

In fact, the right hand figuration that opens this piece is so melodically typical in Hunan flower-drum drama that it is almost identical to the figuration in the middle part of Qiming Xi’s piano piece “Hunan Flower-Drum” (1959-60), but Xi and Wang were not aware of each other’s pieces until later.

Example 3.5. Wang Lisan, “Geometrical Pattern,” mm. 49-65.

Grottesco ma espressivo (♩ = 104)

p

mf

For the first sixteen measures of the prelude (Example 3.4), Wang Lisan used invertible counterpoint to symbolize the symmetry of the Yin-yang or swirls. The fugue is prepared by the major seventh of G-G# in the bass (m. 6 in Example 3.5). This idea came from the uncertain pitch of g4↑. In the fugue's subject, he also uses the minor seconds of "g4-g#4" and "e5-e#5," playing either together or separately, to imitate the feeling of g4↑ and e5↑. The most exciting moment happens at measure 62 (m. 14 in Example 3.5), where the last minor second (g4-g#4) of the subject crashes into the first note of the answer (g4).

The fugue's subject is composed with the notes in of the Yu-Chuan mode in A, but there is also a note that does not belong to the mode: b4 (mm. 12-13 of the above example). Although in the vocal performances, the mode would possibly include some pitches that do not belong, b4 almost never appears. This is the composer's "breaking of the pattern" (quoting a common expression of Wang Lisan). The lower double appoggiatura at the beginning of the subject (m. 9 of the above example) is called "up-slide" in Hunan Flower-Drum drama. It is a common ornament, and is broadly used when the text includes the sound "r," as in "ru" and "ri." (Ouyang, 2011) The two mordants in the subject in measure 13 are another kind of ornamentation called "hilt." When Wang first wrote this subject in 1957 in Arzamanov's counterpoint class, Arzamanov, without being familiar with the Hunan Flower-Drum drama, defined it as "rococo" in style. In fact, the Hunan Flower-Drum drama does share a similarity with the rococo style in terms of heavily ornamented melodies. The list of ornaments in this drama could go on and on, and all of them have interesting names, such as "hilt," "toothbrush," "bar," "cough," "haha," to name a few.

Example 3.6. Wang Lisan, “Geometrical Pattern,” mm. 99-110.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a piano piece. The first system, spanning measures 99 to 110, shows a complex melodic line in the right hand with a long trill and a rhythmic accompaniment in the left hand. The second system, spanning measures 109 to 110, features a cluster of notes in the right hand and a percussive-like pattern in the left hand. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like 'ff' and 'm.s. sfz'.

Wang Lisan uses a long trill before the recapitulation of the fugue to imitate the “flowers tongue” of the Hunan Flower-Drum drama, which is a *tour de force* (a kind of special singing technique) in the Hunan flower-drum drama (Example 3.6). According to Juewen Ouyang, some singers cannot do it, so they cannot handle some of the songs. He also observes that “this kind of cadenza really makes people excited” (Ouyang). In “Geometric Pattern,” the long trill marks the climax that opens the recapitulation. There is an even more exciting cluster between the cadenza and the recapitulation made of d#, e, f, g and g# distributed in different registers (m. 109). It imitates a percussion ensemble, which is another important feature of Hunan Flower-Drum drama.

Figure 3.2. and 3.3. Flower-Drum Playing in Huo Gong Dian, Changsha.



2013)



I took the above two pictures in the summer of 2013 on *Huo Gong Dian*'s (火宮殿)'s stage in Changsha. These picture capture all the commonly-used percussion instruments of this drama. They include small tamtam, large tamtam, two drums, two pairs of Chinese cymbals and a wood block. At first glance, this combination of percussion instruments is not much different from many other regional dramas in China, such as the Peking opera. However, the Chinese cymbals in Hunan Flower-Drum drama are thinner, so their sound is smaller but sharper. As a result, Wang uses extremely high notes (mm.7-11 of the above example) to imitate its sound.

At the end of the fugue, the subject's motives and their varied forms appear and disappear in different tonalities. Nothing is consistent, as if nothing is real. This roughly resembles Buddhist philosophy, which Wang Lisan was interested in.

Hunan Flower-Drum was at first a particular style of folk dance and song. It gradually developed into a drama that used those songs and dances to tell stories. According to Juewen Ouyang, the development of this drama went through three stages. The first stage was the "floor Flower-Drum," in which two actors/peasants used simple tools such as towels, cups and chopsticks to perform on the floor. In fact, Ouyang felt ashamed to mention that in most cases, the actors of the so-called "floor Flower-Drum" were actually beggars who begged from door to door. The second stage was "stage Flower-Drum," in which a stage was involved, but most stages were very primitive. It was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that professional troupes began to emerge. From that period until the foundation of the People's Republic of China, the Hunan Flower-Drum drama developed naturally.

On 6 August 1949, the Communist Party took over Changsha, the capital of Hunan. Before the army attacked the city, they had already begun to plan, in the city of Wuhan, what they should do after the expected victory. One of the plans was to create an art troupe named Xiang-Jiang (湘江), which was said to be a combination of the army's own art troupe and the "Sixth Team of Performing Arts." In 1951, the Xiang-Jiang troupe was divided into the Xiang-Jiang Drama Troupe and the Xiang-Jiang Opera Troupe. The following year, these two troupes were combined with some other organizations and developed into the Art Troupe of Hunan Province. In 1953, with more local art troupes

and organizations merged in, they eventually founded four separated troupes, performing drama, folk dance and singing, Xiang drama, and Flower-Drum drama.

This is the first time that the flower-drum drama became officially sanctioned, and not long after, more and more flower-drum troupes at all levels (town, village, and so on) were founded by the government. Two things came from this. First, with governmental support, this drama developed faster than any time in the past. Performance quality improved and became more systematic,²⁶ and theory books and collections of tunes appeared. Second, the government got involved in the “content” of the drama. Modern librettos that contained political propaganda appeared and gradually took over. However, regardless of the subject matter, the music still remained in the traditional style.

It was in the 1950s that Wang Lisan was exposed to the Flower-Drum drama. He even mentioned to Kabalevsky in the 1950s that the first movement of Kabalevsky’s *Sonatina* op. 13 no. 1 was similar to the *Yu* mode. However, Wang never resided in Hunan, nor could he speak any dialects, which are crucial to the Hunan Flower-Drum drama.

During the Cultural Revolution, obviously the Flower-Drum had to stop. Although the fate of the Hunan Flower-Drum drama was similar to all other dramas in the country during that period of time, it did have privileges. Chairman Mao was from Hunan, and he liked the Hunan Flower-Drum. As a result, while everybody else had nothing but the eight model operas to watch, the Hunan Province’s Flower-Drum troupe had to perform for an audience consisting of only *one* person.

²⁶ It was from this period of time that the libretto appeared. Before, they used a “scene plot,” which was a brief guideline.

From the end of the Cultural Revolution to the end of the 1980s, the Hunan Flower-Drum went through a true golden age. However, from the 1990s, it became less and less popular. The formal troupes in Changsha are still running now. People can still watch the performances in *Huo Gong Dian* and *Xiangjiang* Theaters (on the other side of the road of *Huo Gong Dian*) almost on a daily basis. However, these two places are located in the center of the downtown. In other words, most people in the audience are tourists. On the other hand, the “floor Flower-Drum,” which is not quite the same as the formal dramas, is still popular in the countryside. (The three stages were not only different stages of the drama’s development, but also different forms that existed simultaneously. Now the “stage Flower-Drum” is extinct.) Peasants are still entertaining themselves with their own performances. In the Chinese New Year, the beggars still go from door to door while singing Flower-Drum songs. According to Ouyang, the “floor Flower-Drum” is like the dialects. It is part of people’s lives and will never be extinct.

The Gourd Sheng Dance and “Village in the Mountain”

“Village in the Mountain” of *Other Mountains* was written during the spring festival of 1980. However, its story dates back to Wang’s 1970 trip to a Yi village in the Daliangshan area. The Yi is an ethnic group that generally lives in Sichuan and Yunnan provinces. The music of the Yi changes from place to place. For example, some of the Yunnan Yi have songs in two parts, whereas the Sichuan Yi do not have polyphonic music. That is to say, any contrapuntal writing in the prelude and fugue of “Village in the Mountain” was the composer’s own creation, because the village that Wang visited in

1970 was in the Daliangsha area of Sichuan province. In fact, the fugue does not seem to be related to the Yi's music, though the appearances of the fugue subject in different keys, which is a nature of fugal writing, can be heard to convey a feeling of the echo effect in the foggy mountain area in Southwest China.

The prelude uses the opening motives of the famous Sichuan Yi song “Happy Luosuo,” and was composed by Yusheng Yang (杨玉生) as a song in a dance drama. “Luosuo,” in the Yi's language, means “Yi,” and its pronunciation in Yi is the same as the pronunciation of “verbose” in Chinese. Separate arrangements of the song for piano solo were made by Shiye Zhang (张式业) and Chengzong Yin (殷承宗). However, Wang's treatment of the opening motive in the first two measures was so covert that nobody before has discovered the relationship between the song and Wang's piece, though there has been plenty of research and analysis regarding *Other Mountains*. Here is the melody of the “Happy Luosuo” that is extremely popular in China:

Example 3.7. the melody of *Happy Luosuo*, mm. 1-8.

The musical score consists of two systems of piano accompaniment. The first system contains measures 1 through 4, and the second system contains measures 5 through 8. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 2/4. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1 through 5 above or below notes.

System 1 (Measures 1-4):
 Measure 1: Treble clef, notes G4 (finger 5), A4 (finger 3), B4. Bass clef, notes G3 (finger 1), A3 (finger 3), B3.
 Measure 2: Treble clef, notes A4, B4, C5. Bass clef, notes G3, A3, B3.
 Measure 3: Treble clef, notes B4, C5, D5. Bass clef, notes G3, A3, B3.
 Measure 4: Treble clef, notes C5, B4, A4. Bass clef, notes G3, A3, B3.

System 2 (Measures 5-8):
 Measure 5: Treble clef, notes G4 (finger 3), A4 (finger 5), B4. Bass clef, notes G3 (finger 3), A3 (finger 1), B3.
 Measure 6: Treble clef, notes A4 (finger 3), B4 (finger 4), C5 (finger 1). Bass clef, notes G3 (finger 3), A3 (finger 2), B3 (finger 5).
 Measure 7: Treble clef, notes B4, C5, D5. Bass clef, notes G3, A3, B3.
 Measure 8: Treble clef, notes C5, B4, A4. Bass clef, notes G3, A3, B3.

And Wang uses the “head motif” (the first two measures) of it to create his prelude:

Example 3.8. Wang Lisan, “Village in the Mountain,” mm. 1-3.



Layi Qumu (曲木拉一), a Yi (Sichuan) gourd sheng²⁷ maker and player in Ganluo (甘洛), a city in the Daliangshan (大凉山) area, discovered this “secret” in 2013, when I visited him and played my recording of this piece to him. However, the real purpose of my visit was to study the gourd sheng, which was the only instrument of the Sichuan Yi that could play two notes at the same time (occasionally, it plays three notes simultaneously), and was associated with a dance named “gourd sheng dance.” The dance-like prelude of Wang is full of double notes, so I originally believed it refers to the gourd sheng and gourd sheng dance. However, after having visited Layi Qumu, I found out that other possibilities exist.

²⁷ Sheng is a Chinese reed pipe wind instrument. Gourd sheng uses gourd to build the body and bamboo to build the pipes. It is a common instrument in the ethnic groups in Southwest China. In Liangshan, Sichuan, it is popular in ethnic groups Yi, Naxi (纳西) and Li-Su(傈僳). However, this instrument is slightly different from group to group, and from place to place. Layi Qumu’s gourd sheng belongs to the Sichuan Yi style.

Figure 3.4. Gourd Sheng made by Layi Qumu.



First, the way of doubling the notes in gourd sheng is almost exclusively in one form. One part plays the melodies, and the other part plays only one note throughout. (In most cases, this note is the principal note of the key.) Second, the gourd sheng of the Sichuan Yi almost always uses only the five notes of the Chinese pentatonic scale. Obviously neither of these two features can be found in Wang's prelude, which does not have continuous notes, but which has plenty of interval class 1.

Wang might have used such intervals, together with polytonality, to capture the effects of ensemble playing that is not in tune, or does not fit equal temperament. In other words, a major seventh is treated as an out-of-tune octave, and a minor second is either an out-of-tune unison or a quarter-tone between the two notes of the interval. This sound effect is very common in ethnic music in China. According to composer Jianer Zhu

(朱踐耳), often the pitch of one note is different from village to village. In addition, from my own experience of listening to \ folk music, good players and good instrument makers might purposely adjust the pitches of some notes to make a better effect. For example, Layi Qumu likes to play the octave more like a minor ninth, and it makes a difference in terms of color. Interestingly enough, he did not admit that he was adjusting the pitch.

The dance rhythm in the left hand is in groups of three eighth notes, thus creating an effect of polyrhythm against the melody.²⁸ It increases the feeling of a “fiesta” at which people drink and dance. The fifths in the left hand well capture the echoing sound (overtones) of the dance step in opening spaces, such as a bonfire party. The imitation of echoing sound (overtones) through fifths was also used by Sicong Ma in his “Drum Dance” (1951), a piece that influenced Wang at Tianjin in 1950, during the early stage of career.

Although one cannot prove that Wang’s prelude is related to the gourd sheng or gourd sheng dance in particular, it does convey a sense of a Yi bonfire party or group dance in terms of polyrhythm and the major seconds in the right hand. Wang may have desired to give an impression of the gourd sheng or the Sichuan Yi’s music, of which the gourd sheng is an important part. In fact, Wang Lisan never imitated something literally. For example, the range of *A Miniature – The Impression of Dulcimer* much bigger than any kind of dulcimer. However, this is what “impression” is about.

Layi Qumu is one of only two existing Sichuan Yi gourd sheng makers, and he is now over seventy years old. The other maker produces a different kind of gourd sheng.

²⁸ As I learned from Layi Qumu’s dance, the strong beats almost always have accents due to the dance steps. In fact, the dance steps greatly affect the musicians’ playing. For example, in a piece with a 2/4 time signature in a relatively fast tempo, their playing of a measure consisting of two quarter notes sounds like two eighth notes and an eighth-note rest, thus sounding like a 3/8 time signature. Layi Qumu did not admit that he changed the rhythm, and I have observed the same situation in other gourd sheng players’ performance.

Layi was a retired projectionist with Ganluo County's mobile cinema team, for whom he worked between 1965 and 1997. He was a bamboo flute player at first. One day in the 1970s, when he was performing in Xichang (西昌), he met the famous gourd sheng player Bure Jijue (吉觉补惹)²⁹, who was interested in his playing and visited him with an empty stomach. Honored by the master's visit, Layi Qumu bought pork and mutton from the street and had dinner with Jijue. Jijue taught Layi some basic knowledge of making the gourd sheng, and this was how Layi started with the instrument.

It was not until the 1980s that Layi Qumu gradually figured out how to make a good gourd sheng, which is an extremely complicated instrument. For example, choosing the right bamboo is difficult. He has to go to the sunny slope in the middle of a particular mountain in another county named Mianning (冕宁)—where Jieju's family lives—to choose bamboo that is not too stiff, not too soft, not too dry, not too wet, not too thick and not too thin. This is only the first step. Picking the right gourd is even more difficult, because the best type of gourd is almost extinct. According to Layi, the time it takes him to make a good instrument is variable. Sometimes he spends plenty of time but makes nothing good.

The most obvious reason for the gourd sheng's gradual disappearance is that the instrument is so difficult to make. Its sister instrument, the gourd Xiao, is extremely popular in China because the maker only needs to pass one bamboo pipe through the gourd, whereas the gourd sheng requires at least five bamboo pipes. Another reason is the modernization of the area where Sichuan Yi live. When I visited Layi Qumu, his two grandchildren sitting in front of the computer were immediately annoyed by his playing

²⁹ In Yi's language, "Bure" means gourd sheng.

but were instantly interested in my video cameras. The Liangshan art troupe used to be effective in spreading the Yi's ethnic music and dance. However, now they take advantage of modern technical devices such as amplified music and modern stage settings, and combine them with the native Yi's music and dance in an unconvincing way. yyyyyI sought out a dancer in that art troupe with the hope that she could introduce me to some gourd sheng specialists. She said that her job was dancing, and she did not know anything about the instrumental part of the troupe. I have also asked a toastmaster of the Lianshan Television Station. He said that there were a lot of people like Layi Qumu, and the Station had already gathered enough documentation on the gourd sheng. However, he could not introduce me to anybody like Layi, and he could not provide me with any relevant documentation.

Memories of an Unmemorable Dream: Er-Ren-Zhuan

The Er-Ren-Zhuan regional drama in Northeast China dates back to the early nineteenth century, but it was not called by this name until 1953. Before then, it had multiple names, among which “jump-jump” was the most common. However, most musicians and performers did not like “jump-jump” because it was a derogatory term that underscored their low status.

This form of drama digests everything. It is based on the Northeast grand Yangko, a peasant group dance and drama, and the Lian-Hua-Luo, a kind of talking-and-singing drama of the North performed mostly by beggar-artists. Er-Ren-Zhuan, as a combination

of singing, dancing, talking, and vaudeville, absorbs folk songs, shadow play, drum-song of the Northeast, magic, cross talk, popular music, contemporary dance (including discos and street dance), among other genres. Er-Ren-Zhuan artist Dianqing Wang (王殿卿) recalled that “the kinds of wandering artists of different types of dramas met in the hotels. In the nighttime, you sang a song, I sang a song. We influenced each other and improved. That was how today’s Er-Ren-Zhuan came into being. (Tian, 31) Certainly this style belongs to the days when modern civilization had not greatly influenced the Northeast, a period that ended in the late 1980s, when television became popular in the countryside there.

Although Er-Ren-Zhuan is also sometimes played by one actor (called “dan-chu-tou”) or a group of people (called “la-chang-xi”), a much more common method is to have a duet. A famous saying is “thousands of soldiers and horse all rely on the two of us.” Traditionally, an Er-Ren-Zhuan group of wandering artists was made up of seven to twelve people. Such groups were like gypsy artists that constantly traveled all over the Northeast, even during the extremely cold winters. They performed in villages, mines, fields, hotels, fisheries, and elsewhere. They even performed at bandits’ nests, and it was sometimes dangerous (though the bandits needed them badly). All the experienced performers knew what to talk about in different places. If not, they might be in trouble. For example, they did not talk about death in front of bandits. When they had to mention it, they would have to substitute “death” with “sleeping” or “down.”

Er-Ren-Zhuan has never developed into a formal type of drama. Some have assumed this is because of the historical poverty of the Northeast, but I suggest instead that because the constantly traveling Er-Ren-Zhuan troupes were forced to perform in

houses during the cold Northeast winters, small groups of around ten people were much more flexible than larger ones.

A major issue surrounding the Er-Ren-Zhuan is the “sexy stories” (Adult’s themes and “dirty” jokes), which caused governments of different periods to forbid the drama. In those cases, troupes would become illegal and were called “small black troupes.” These troupes never disappeared, except for the period of the Cultural Revolution. But even during the Cultural Revolution, people performed the Er-Ren-Zhuan. They would hide the performers in closets when inspectors came, and sometimes the heads of the village helped them to hide as well:

One time I went to the Commune to attend a meeting, and met my former classmate from the other side of the mountain. She told me secretly that her team was so interesting. Once in a while they would bring a small black troupe of Er-Ren-Zhuan, which hid in the sorghum field and performed. The old team leader would watch for them. The members of the small black troupe all pretended to come to visit relatives. . . (Ma, 2003, 27)

Indeed, everybody liked Er-Ren-Zhuan, especially in those difficult years.

When a small black troupe entered a village, it generally only performed after midnight. The “official” reason was to prevent people from other villages from coming and watching the performance. (In these cases, the village paid the troupe, but people from other villages would nevertheless come and watch for free.) In fact, with women and children going to sleep before midnight, the sexy stories appeared. These stories bear a close relationship with tradition in Northeastern rural China. Historically, Chinese villages valued male children much more than female children, and most people planned to marry their daughters to richer husbands. As a result, the poorer a place was, the more

unmarried men there would be. In the Northeast, the male-female ratio was even more imbalanced in favor of men because of Chuang Guandong.³⁰ The fact that the Er-Ren-Zhuan was full of sexy stories indicates that it was very much related to the poorest places, where the male-female ratio was the most imbalanced, and where folk music flourished in the most natural and unpolished way. In fact, the sexy stories were common in almost all the regional dramas and folk songs of China.

An Er-Ren-Zhuan performance proceeds as follows. The audience gathers with the opening percussion playing. The first actor to appear is the clown. He tells some jokes and introduces his partner, the female lead, to the audience. The latter appears on the stage and the two of them sing the a short song called the “small hat.” Following the song, they perform three dances, which lights up the audience. Then follows the real drama, which can be a historical or contemporary story. However, the clown and the female role never follow the story line slavishly. They jump from role to role, and in and out of the story. They may criticize the roles, make comments on the story, explain the story to the audience, or even engage in some dialogue with the audience. They can plunge into other stories, sing a popular song, play some magic, and so on. This kind of “jumping in-and-out” comes so naturally that the distance between the audience and the performers is minimized. The story line, which probably everybody is familiar with, is only a general guideline, and the fresh improvisation, which is full of surprise, is the real charm of this regional drama. After the story, the performers start to play encores, which are more

³⁰ Qing dynasty had a policy of prohibiting the Han people from entering the Northeast. It led to the small population of the Northeast (Inner Manchuria) during the nineteenth century. On the other hand, during the middle of the nineteenth century, the population of Yellow River’s lower reaches area grew rapidly, and people’s lives there were extremely difficult. As a result, starting from approximately the 1850s, millions of Han people emigrated into the Northeast illegally. It was a difficult adventure, and of the people who succeeded, most were male.

songs, tricks, and jokes. After all, Er-Ren-Zhuan became part of people's lives in the Northeast in the old days.

Memories of Er-Ren-Zhuan comes from Wang Lisan's experience in the Great Wilderness of the North:

In the north,
The north further than Xiao Hong's Hulan River,
Remained my footprints and dreams.

Days of gales, blizzards and hardships faded in my head,
Yet the songs, gongs and drums in the field I never forget.
How I wish my music
Will not violate
Your wildness
Your boldness
And your balminess.
(Translated by Wei Chunxiao)

But the question remains as to what kind of Er-Ren-Zhuan Wang heard and how he heard it during the period 1959-63.

Although during his years in Shanghai Conservatory (1951-59), Wang learned plenty of folk songs, he did not know anything about Er-Ren-Zhuan before he was sent to the Great Wilderness of the North. One of the main reasons might be that at that time, people consider Er-Ren-Zhuan, with its sexy stories, improper for introduction into the conservatory. All of a sudden, Wang was in the Northeast in 1959, where Er-Ren-Zhuan was extremely popular. How popular was it? Jingqing Xu was born in 1942 in Boli county, which is 150 kilometers away from Jiamusi, where Wang Lisan was sent to. He recalled that when he was young, he liked to stand beside the wire pole on which the loudspeaker of the village's broadcast station was installed and listen to the Er-Ren-Zhuan music. Without television and home radio, the broadcast station's loudspeaker was

the only source of entertainment for villagers. In fact, people were so used to the loudspeakers that they thought the music it played was the best. When musicians played concerts in those villages, a common compliment was: “you played as well as the loudspeakers.”

However, since the People’s Republic of China was founded, Er-Ren-Zhuan, like all other regional dramas, had changed. After the government published “About the reformation of the dramas” in May 1951, a lot of new dramas appeared. They no longer told ancient stories, but instead told stories about modern society, mostly for propaganda purposes. In addition, the sexy stories were broadly cut.

The adjusted Er-Ren-Zhuan lost some of its original character but also reached a higher level due to governmental support. For example, performers left the lower, laboring class as their incomes grew, and female actors appeared for the first time. Some instruments that had never been used before (including bamboo flute, er-hu, sheng, dulcimer, and even cello) were added to the band. Official troupes were established in provinces, counties, and districts.

What might Wang have heard when he was in the Great Wilderness of the North? First, the unofficial “small black troupes” still existed in the countryside. They still told sexy stories, and it was they who maintained the traditional performance practices of the Er-Ren-Zhuan. How authentic was that kind of Er-Ren-Zhuan? Shiren Liu claims that “it was as sexy as you can imagine,” and Zhi Li adds that “there were millions of tricks. The more money you added, the more sexy stories they told.” When Wang’s art troupe toured in the countryside, he would have had opportunities to watch these performances. But I

doubt that he did, for Wang was a rightist at that time and had to “stick his tail up.” He would not have dared to watch these illegal performances.

Second, the art troupe that Wang belonged to did not perform Er-Ren-Zhuan except for some songs, but they did have opportunities to visit some local official Er-Re-Zhuan troupes (not the illegal “small black troupes”). Ge Wu said that one time they visited Boli County’s Er-Ren-Zhuan troupe (the county where Jingqing Xu lived at the time and listened to the Er-Ren-Zhuan from the loudspeakers!) for ten days to study and collect their music. However, because Wang was a rightist, he probably would not have had the opportunity to visit other troupes.

Third, in Jiamusi, where Wang’s art troupe was, there were plenty of official and professional Er-Ren-Zhuan troupes to observe. Their performances took place in the city, and emphasized the new dramas without the sexy stories. Although these performances were different from the original Er-Ren-Zhuan, the music remained the same. Technically, Wang could watch these performances in his spare time. However, we know that, according to Ge Wu, Wang stayed in the Jiamusi library all the time during the weekends, and I doubt Wang was particularly interested in these kinds of performances. In 1980 and 1981, when Wang was writing *Memories of Er-Ren-Zhuan*, he looked for opportunities to watch the most authentic Er-Ren-Zhuan performances. However, although there existed these professional Er-Ren-Zhuan troupes in Harbin in those years, which gave performances of this kind of “cleaned-up” Er-Ren-Zhuan in the theaters, none of Wang’s contacts from this time recall him going to these performances. Instead, most of them recall that he made all these adventures to the “heavily polluted” places in Qingbin (清滨)

Park in Harbin, where “you can see all types of different people” (Yin Kang’s words), to watch the illegal but authentic performances of Er-Ren-Zhuan.³¹

In his Great Wilderness of the North period, Wang probably knew the melodies of Er-Ren-Zhuan through books in the Jiamusi library. At that time, there were a lot of newly-published books on the theory and the music of Er-Ren-Zhuan. For example, Heilongjiang Province’s Heilongjiang qunzhongyishuguan (群众艺术馆) publisher issued forty-four books on Er-Ren-Zhuan in 1961. In addition, Wang was so sensitive to Er-Ren-Zhuan’s music that he really did not need to research that much to be familiar with it. Several months after he was sent to the Great Wilderness of the North, he wrote the song *The Girls of Great Wilderness of the North*. According to Shigui Jin, this wonderful piece is in the style of Er-Ren-Zhuan. From 1963 to 1966, Wang continued writing a mini opera, whose music and interpretation was in the style of Er-Ren-Zhuan, entitled *Three Married Women*.

During the Cultural Revolution, Wang did not have opportunities to listen to Er-Ren-Zhuan. From August 1980 to February 1981, the pianist Guangren Zhou (周广仁) made a concert tour in USA, during which she played *Lanhuahua, the Beautiful Girl*. As a result, the piece won an international reputation. An American pianist named Jeffrey Jacob liked this piece so much that he commissioned a piece from Wang. After having reviewed Jacob’s repertoire list, Wang decided to “introduce Er-Ren-Zhuan to the USA. Let the most native thing of Heilongjiang Province meet with the USA.” That gave birth

³¹ According to Yin Kang, in 1980 or 1981, when Wang first went to the Qingbin park, he learned that the Er-Ren-Zhuan performers changed their topics as soon as he walked in. All the sexy stories disappeared. Later, he figured out that they thought he looked like a cadre. Next time, he dressed in a shabby coat and took off his big black-framed glasses. Consequently, he heard the authentic Er-Ren-Zhuan. Three decades later, these performance have been banned for long time, and Qingbin Park has been rebuilt into a “high, western and above” (a newly invented phrase in China) place with Greek-style pillars.

to “Memories of Er-Ren-Zhuan.” In addition to going to Qingbin Park, Yin Kang said that Wang also “collected a lot of materials, such as the books containing Er-Ren-Zhuan’s melodies.”³² Mutian Sun told Wang around that time that as early as 1964, he was amazed by a seventeen-year-old girl who played “dan-chu-tou” (a performance that involves only one performer) wonderfully. The drama she played was “pretty girl tending ducks.” After Wang heard this, he was so excited that he asked: “is it possible for us to find that girl?” Sun laughed at Wang: “this was seventeen years ago! How can we find her?” Wang was disappointed and said: “What a pity! I wish I could have her music.” Sun concluded that: “you belong to the impulsive type.”

Wang Lisan’s *Fantasy-Sonata, Memories of Er-Ren-Zhuan*³³ more or less incorporates the performance pattern of a real Er-Ren-Zhuan performance, which I just described.³⁴ Over the first fifty-one measures, the six-note principal motive appears in the bass part as an extremely slow ostinato, creating a picture of extremely cold weather. In the meantime, we can hear the sound of the opening percussion instrument in the high register. The sound becomes louder and louder, as if the listeners are following the sound

³² According to Yin Kang (personal conversation, March 5-7, 2014), Wang read *Historical Researching Materials of Er-Ren-Zhuan* (Volume II) and *Researching Materials of Er-Ren-Zhuan* (Volume I) when writing the 1981 version. For more details of these two books, please read the “Bibliography.”

³³ Jeffrey Jacob was very pleased after receiving Wang’s piece. His commission fee was originally \$400, and he added \$100 to it. He later recorded and published the work.

³⁴ This piece has three versions, from 1981, 2002, and 2007. In addition to Jeffrey Jacob, Qifang Wu and pianist Qing Li have played the 1981 version. Nobody has played the 2002 version, and I have been the only one to play the 2007 version.

The 2007 version has two manuscripts, of which we do not know which one is earlier. Both of the manuscripts were preserved in Wang’s apartment in Shanghai. Manuscript A was proofread by Wang Lisan and Wang Duowen twice on August 26, 2009 and March 26, 2010. The published score (2013) was based on this manuscript. However, there are only eleven dynamic indications in the score’s eighteen pages. For such a complicated piece, this is very unusual. I believe it was not Wang Lisan’s original intention, because there were plenty of minor mistakes such as notes beyond the register of the piano, which could all be due to the composer’s sickness when working on this version. In this case, manuscript B might greatly help performers. It has twenty-six pages, of which page five is missing. Obviously it is much longer than manuscript A, but the passages that make it longer than A are all repetitions. In other words, although it is much longer, manuscript B does not include any new music. However, it has much more detailed dynamic indications.

and walking to the show. The first twenty-two measures were added in the 2007 version, which increases the feeling of vastness in the Great Wilderness of the North.

The “three dances” in the real Er-Ren-Zhuan are reflected in measures 52-76, in which Wang uses the widely used “Yang” tune of the Er-Ren-Zhuan. It originated as a folk song.

Example 3.9. Wang Lisan, *Fantasy-Sonata, Memories of Er-Ren-Zhuan*, mm. 51-56

The image shows a musical score for Example 3.9, measures 51-56. It consists of two systems of music. The first system (measures 51-53) features a treble clef staff with a melodic line and a bass clef staff with a rhythmic accompaniment. The second system (measures 54-56) continues the piece, with the treble clef staff playing a melodic line and the bass clef staff providing accompaniment. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Following this, the real drama starts. From measure 76 to 101, Wang uses another principal tune of the Er-Ren-Zhuan called “Huhu Qiang.” The particular form of the tune here is called “First Huhu Qiang”(头板胡胡腔), which is normally used at the beginning of the main part of the drama. In Example 3.10, the “Huhu Qiang” melody appears in the right hand at measure 78.

Example 3.10. Wang Lisan, *Fantasy-Sonata, Memories of Er-Ren-Zhuan*, mm. 76-83.

The image shows a musical score for Example 3.10, consisting of two systems of music. The first system covers measures 76 to 80, and the second system covers measures 81 to 83. The music is written for piano in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. The right hand plays a melodic line with a six-note motif and a 'Huhu Qiang' melody, while the left hand provides a bass line. The score includes a first ending bracket and a second ending bracket.

At measure 101, the style changes from lyric to majestic. The opening six-note motive is juxtaposed with elements of the “Huhu Qiang” melody. Shigui Jin, a specialist in Er-Ren-Zhuan, was excited about this moment. He said that the way Wang doubled the Er-Ren-Zhuan elements with his own motives, which happens quite often, was “so convincing that it clearly shows Wang’s understanding and love of this regional drama.” Jin was a composer of Er-Ren-Zhuan and the head of the Jilin Folk Art Troupe (one of the two troupes in China that still perform the original Er-Ren-Zhuan). He also mentioned that there were plenty of composers that visited his art troupe. Most of them simply copied and quoted the melodies, and their pieces either changed the Er-Ren-Zhuan tune beyond recognition or kept the original elements. On the contrary, Wang not only kept the charm of the Er-Ren-Zhuan, but also sublimated it. In general, he liked to break the melodies into motives and re-organizing these motives in his own ways, and it happens a lot in this piece. However, Jin maintained that anybody who was familiar with Er-Ren-Zhuan’s music could recognize the influence of this regional drama by certain elements

such as the style and shape of the melodies and the use of ornamentation, though the listener might not be able to recognize the particular melodies. Jin believed that without the experience in the Northeast and without a love of the Er-Ren-Zhuan's music, Wang could not have written such a piece.

From measures 120 to 166, the “Yang” tune and the “First Huhu Qiang” reappear in different forms. The reappearance of the former marks the first climax of the piece. According to Shigui Jin, the “Yang” tune is “usually a happy dance tune in the authentic Er-Ren-Zhuan.” In this piece, Wang used it in a “bright” way.³⁵

At measure 167, a new melody appears. Although it is Wang's own melody, it is in the style of Er-Ren-Zhuan. For one thing, the melody changes registers phrase by phrase frequently. This technique is called “climbing up” (翻高) in Er-Ren-Zhuan. The changing of register was sometimes caused by the different vocal registers of the clown and the female role, but sometimes even one actor could sing in different registers. Three variations and a small “development” follow the melody, and the contrast of the melody's registers becomes bigger and bigger. The whole passage is festival-like and Yangko march-like. (A big part of the Northeast Yangko dance is dancing and marching.)

³⁵ In “A Brief Survey of Polytonality,” an unpublished article, Wang characterizes his use of the melody in this piece as “bright.”

Example 3.11. “Climbing up” in *Fantasy-Sonata, Memories of Er-Ren-Zhuan*, mm. 193-202.

The next section (mm. 221-244) is a cadenza-like passage. Anybody who is familiar with Chinese dramatic music would recognize its style of “running through the stage,”³⁶ which is one of the exciting moments in this kind of performance. In Er-Ren-Zhuan’s performance, there is a saying: “the female role should be able to hold, and the clown should be able to gambol.” A typical way of gamboling is “running through the stage.”

³⁶ “Running through the stage” is a pattern of Chinese drama performance. The actor runs in circles, whose center is the center of the stage.

Example 3.12. "Running Through the Stage" in *Fantasy-Sonata, Memories of Er-Ren-Zhuan*, mm. 218-230

The image displays a musical score for the piece "Running Through the Stage" from the Fantasy-Sonata, Memories of Er-Ren-Zhuan, covering measures 218 to 230. The score is presented in three systems, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 2/4. The first system (measures 218-222) features a melodic line in the treble clef with a slur and a fermata over the final measure, and a bass line with chords and a fermata. The second system (measures 223-226) continues the melodic and bass lines with various rhythmic patterns and slurs. The third system (measures 227-230) shows the melodic line moving to the bass clef and the bass line continuing with rhythmic accompaniment. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, fermatas, and dynamic markings.

The piece's climax occurs between measures 245 and 280. The introduction in 5/8 uses the motives of a Northeast folk song named "the Wind of Northeast," also frequently used in Er-Ren-Zhuan. Then follows the exciting doubling, in different keys, of "the wind of Northeast" and the opening six-note motive. After measure 280, the music gradually calms down and returns to the original feeling of vastness and calm. A segment of a melody called "Wuhaihai" (a traditional tune of Er-Ren-Zhuan) arrives at measure 314.

Example 3.13. Wang Lisan, *Fantasy-Sonata, Memories of Er-Ren-Zhuan*, mm. 310-321.

Then appears the final exciting coda with the “running through the stage” reappearing, and the opening six-note motive reappeared and was developed, in term of the texture, dynamic and tonality, as a much more solid way than the opening of the piece.

A comparison of the three versions of this piece (1981, 2002, 2007) shows the composer’s much deeper understanding of Er-Ren-Zhuan in his late period. The major differences between the three versions are as follows. First, the 2007 version has a twenty-two-measure-long opening passage, which neither of the earlier two versions has. Second, right before the reappearance of the “Yang” tune, the 1981 version has a thirty-five-measure-long passage that is based on the “Wuhaihai” melody. In the 2002 version, this passage shrinks to twenty-eight measures. In the 2007 version, it disappears, so the recapitulation of the “Yang” tune becomes much more immediate, thus creating the first climax of the piece. Later, in a very quiet passage of the 2007 version, the segment of this

“Wuhaihai” melody appears. For people who don’t know the first two versions, the “new” melody seems to come from nowhere, but it still gives them a good feeling, a feeling of surprise. Third, the ending passages of the three versions become longer and longer. The 2007 version (manuscript A) has 367 measures. If we use the measure numbers of the 2007 version as a reference, the 1981 version ends around measure 265, right after the combination of “the wind of the Northeast” and the opening six-note motive, and the 2002 version ends at measure 302. The added opening passage and the gradually expanding ending broadened the dimensions of the piece.

In addition, the title of the piece kept changing. The 1981 version was called “Memories of the Er-Ren-Zhuan.” It does not have the poem. The 2002 version is called *Black Soil* and has the poem. Manuscript B of the 2007 version is called *Fantasy-sonata, Memories of Er-Ren-Zhuan* and lacks the poem.³⁷ Finally, Manuscript A of the 2007 version (the published one) is called *Fantasy-sonata “Black Soil,” “Memories of Er-Ren-Zhuan”* and includes the poem.

The Er-Ren-Zhuan became popular again after the Cultural Revolution. In the 1980s, the Jilin Folk Art Troupe, which Shigui Jin belonged to, sold about 1,000,000 cassettes. “The peasants might not know who the head of the province is, but they know every actor of the Jilin Folk Art Troupe. The mid-1980s to the mid-1990s was the hottest age of the Troupe...” (Tian, 216) However, starting from the late 1980s, with the spread of television, art troupes began to collapse. First, smaller troupes shut down, eventually the famous Jilin Folk Art Troupe was also in a difficult situation. For example, in the summer of 2001, the first performance was as late as the end of August. This was unimaginable

³⁷ The reason that manuscript B lacks the poem is unknown. Maybe it is only a draft of manuscript A.

before, because the summer was the busy season. In the golden age, sometimes they perform 100 times from July to September.

In March 2014, the director and cameraman of the documentary film “Searching for Wang Lisan” arrived in Changchun. “Memories of Er-Ren-Zhuan” is the film’s focus, and they planned to capture some authentic Er-Ren-Zhuan, but the Jilin Folk Art Troupe had not been performing for a long time. After a difficult search, Shigui Jin eventually learned of a performance in a remote village. Consequently, the director and cameraman had to “run crazily” for hundreds of kilometers in the freezing weather to film it.

Yet a new type of Er-Ren-Zhuan has become popular not only across the Northeast, but also nationwide. Now almost everybody in China knows of Er-Ren-Zhuan, but over 90% of the people do not know the authentic one. The new Er-Ren-Zhuan includes neither the drama part nor traditional songs. It retains only the jokes and magic. Sometimes the performing standard is so “low-brow” that the two actors slap each other at length to amuse the audience. As a result, many listeners may not imagine that Wang’s music was actually inspired by the Er-Ren-Zhuan. In composer Weijie Gao’s opinion, the “new” Er-Ren-Zhuan is in a strange situation. “The feathers are flying all over the place, but the chicken disappears.”(Personal conversation, June, 2014)

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**APPENDIX: A SELECTIVE LIST OF THE PEOPLE I HAVE
INTERVIEWED**

No .	English name	Chinese name	Relation to the composer or his music	My connection	Times of interviews	Interview method
1	Bao, Huiqiao	鲍慧荞	Pianist, friend	Mrs.Bao came to my concert in the China Conservatory in June 2013.	1	Face-to-face, Beijing
2	Bian, Meng	卞萌	Pianist who played Zuxin Jiang's music	Through Siqian Zhang	1	Telephone
3	Chen, Weiping	陈伟平	Author of "Review and Thoughts about the Discussions of Wang Lisan about Xinghai Xian's Symphonic Works"	Searching online	1	Telephone
4	Channg, Shouzong	常受宗	Colleague and co-author of the article "A Big Victory of the Shanghai Conservatory's anti-rightist battle---the rightists group that with Wang Lisan as the center was totally broken" (1957)	Through Shunzhong Ge	1	Face to face, Shanghai

5	Dai, Penghai	戴鹏海	Classmate in the 1950s and friend	Through Xiaosheng Zhao	1	Telephone
6	Fan, Yuanji	范元绩	Colleague, the former chair of the piano department of Shenyang Conservatory	I played a concert in March 2014 in the Weihai Branch of Shandong University, at which Mr. Fan taught.	1	Face to face, the city of Weihai
7	Gao, Weijie	高为杰	Composer, friend	Through Lixin Xie (谢力昕), a chief editor at Shanghai TV Station.	2	Face to face, Beijing
8	Ge, Shunzhong	葛顺中	Composer, classmate and roommate of the 1950s, friend	Through Wang Duowen	3	Face to face, Shanghai
9	Jacob, Jeffrey		Pianist, the dedicatee of <i>The Memory of Er-Ren-Zhuan</i> (1981 version)	Internet search	1	Telephone
10	Jiang, Lai	蒋来	Zuxin Jiang's son	Through Yizhi Zeng	1	Telephone
11	Jin, Lianhua	金莲花	The author of "A Study of Wang Lisan's Other Mountains"	I played a concert in March 2014 in Changchun Normal University, at which Jin taught.	2	Face to face, the city of Changchun
12	Jin, Shigui	金士贵	Composer, A specialist on Er-Ren-Zhuan	Searching from internet	numerous	Face to face, the city of Changchun, telephone and qq

13	Kang, Yin	亢音	Private composition student	Through Wang Duowen	numerous	Face to face, Harbin, and telephone
14	Li, Hang	李航	Chief editor of the journal <i>Piano Arts</i>	Through Hongjin Ni	1	Face to face, Beijing
15	Li, Qing	李青	Pianist, friend, the daughter of Jie-fu Li who wrote the song "We are on the Broad Road."	Through Yang Zhang (张杨), a friend of mine	1	Face to face, Shenyang
16	Li, Shouhua	李寿华	Student, editor of the journal <i>Northern Music</i>	Searching from internet	2	Face to face, Harbin, and telephone
17	Li, Zhi	李直	Colleague at the Hejiang Agricultural Bureau's Art Troupe (1959-1963), Great Wilderness of the North	Searching from internet	numerous	Face to face, the city of Jiamusi, and telephone
18	Liao, Yun	廖云	Colleague at the Hejiang Agricultural Bureau's Art Troupe (1959-1963), Great Wilderness of the North. The lyric writer of <i>The Girls of Great Wilderness of the North</i>	Searching from internet	2	Telephone and emails
19	Lin, Bailin	林百玲	Student from the 1970s	Through Zhuquan Zhou	2	qq

20	Liu, Shiren	刘施任	Classmate, co-writer of the article in 1957, rightist friends, colleague in Harbin	Through Wang Duowen	2	Face to face, Shanghai
21	Ma, Dongxia	马东霞	Collector of Xintianyou	I met her in the Xi'an Conservatory	1	Face to face, Xi'an
22	Ma, Yufeng	马玉峰	Author of "The Harmony of Wang Lisan's Sonatina"	Searching from internet	1	email
23	Ma, Weixin	马卫星	Student and colleague	In Harbin Normal University	2	Face to face, Harbin, and telephone
24	Meng, Fanyu	孟凡玉	Specialist of Nuo drama	Searching from internet	2	Telephone and email
25	Mo, Jialang	莫嘉琅	Classmate of the 1950s, pianist, friend	Through Hongjin Ni	numerous	Face to face, Nanjing, and telephone
26	Ouyang, Juewen	欧阳觉文	Specialist on the Hunan Flower-drum	Searching from internet	1	Face to face, Changsha
27	Ni, Hongjin	倪洪进	Composer, pianist, classmate of the 1950s, friend	Through Wang Duowen	numerous	Face to face, Beijing, and telephone
28	Pu, Fang	蒲方	Musicologist	Searching from internet	1	Email

29	Qumu, Layi	曲木拉一	Gourd Sheng maker, musician of Yi minority group	Searching from internet	2	Face to face, the city of Ganluo, Sichuan
30	Rao, Hongmei	饶红妹	The daughter of composer Yuyan Rao, who was Wang's classmate in the 1950s	Through Daojin Tong	1	Telephone
31	Shui, Yihua	水漪华	The wife of Yushi Yang, who was Wang's teacher	Through Zhaoying Yang (杨朝婴)	1	Zhaoying Yang (杨朝婴) asked her about Wang Lisan for me.
32	Su, Lanshen	苏澜深	Musicologist who interviewed Wang in 1996	Through Hang Li	1	Telephone
33	Su, Yang	苏杨	Student, pianist	Searching from internet	1	qq
34	Sun, Mutian	孙慕天	Philosopher, friend	Searching from internet	1	telephone
35	Tao, Ya-bing	陶亚兵	Student, musicologist, colleague and successor	Through Joyce Lindorff (professor at Temple University)	3	Face to face, Harbin
36	Tong, Daojing	童道锦	Chief Editor of the "Selected Piano Works of Wang Lisan"	Through Hongjin Ni	1	Telephone
37	Wang, Duowen	汪多文	daughter	Through Shanghai Music Publisher	numerous	Face to face, Shanghai, telephone and weibo

38	Wang, Meixian	汪梅先	sister	Through Lu Gao (高璐)	1	Lu Gao (高璐) interviewed her about Wang Lisan for me.
39	Wang, Shicheng	汪世成	brother	Through Wang Duowen	2	Face to face, Chengdu and telephone
40	Wang, Wenjun	王文军	Author of “A research of Wang Lisan’s Piano Music”	Through Hang Li	1	Telephone
41	Wu, Ge	吴歌	Colleague at the Hejiang Agricultural Bureau’s Art Troupe (1959-1963), Great Wilderness of the North	Through Zhi Li	2	Telephone
42	Xi, Qiming	奚其明	composer	Through Lixin Xie	2	Face to face, Shanghai, and telephone
43	Xian, Nina	洗妮娜	Xinghai Xian’s daughter	Through Taiyuan Zha (查太元)	1	Taiyuan Zha (查太元) asked her some questions about Wang Lisan for me in his interview with Mrs. Xian
44	Xu, Jingqing	许镜清	Composer, student and friend.	Searching from internet	2	Face to face, Beijing, and telephone
45	Yang, Chongdao	杨崇道	Specialist of the rightists in the Great Wilderness of the North	Searching from internet	1	Telephone

46	Yu, Zhengmin	郁正民	Student and colleague	In Harbin Normal University	2	Face to face, Harbin and telephone
47	Yu, Guang	于光	Son of Zhonghai Yu, who was a colleague of Wang	Yu is a relative of composer Ma Sicong (马思聪), whose music always attracted me.	1	Face to face, Philadelphia
48	Zeng, Yizhi	曾一智	Journalist, who interviewed Wang in 1994	Searching from internet	numerous	www.weibo.sina.com.cn
49	Zhang, Siqian	张思谦	Private piano student	Through Wang Duowen	1	Face to face, Beijing
50	Zhao, Xiaosheng	赵晓生	Composer, friend	Searching from internet	numerous	weibo
51	Zheng, Xiaowei	郑小维	Classmate in the 1950s	Through Wang Duowen	2	Face to face, Shanghai
52	Zheng, Yinglie	郑英烈	Music theorist	Searching from internet	1	weibo
53	Zhou, Zhuquan	周柱铨	Colleague, musicologist	Through Yangbing Tao	numerous	Face to face, Harbin, telephone and email
54	Zhou, Xing	周行	student	Through Zhuquan Zhou	2	Face to face, Harbin
55	Zhu, Lingyun	朱凌云	Editor of the "Selected Piano Works of Wang Lisan"	From Shanghai Music Publisher	1	Face to face, Shanghai
56	Zou,	邹向平	Composer who	Through Weijie	2	Telephone

	Xiangping		published Wang's "Emperor Qin Drinking"	Gao		
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