

MA SICONG'S VIOLIN ARTISTRY AND COMPOSITIONS

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## ABSTRACT

Ma Sicong was a violinist, composer, and educator of the highest caliber in China who devoted his entire professional life to the instrument. Known for producing violin music in various styles and forms for more than fifty years, Ma Sicong contributed to the violin's popularization in China through his performance and composition with Chinese elements. His violin music incorporates principal melodies from Chinese folk music, and his talents as a mature Western composer talents blend these melodies into violin solos with a distinct national identity.

The *Inner Mongolia Suite* and *First Rondo* by Ma Sicong, both of which are considered among the most outstanding violin solos ever written for the instrument, are examined in this dissertation, as is the composer's own playing experience, to gain a better understanding of the compositions and their meaning. There are several ramifications for Chinese composition for the violin due to the inclusion of national features that affected the design and development of the violin. The author also hopes that this dissertation can serve as a beneficial resource for future students interested in comparable topics.

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## CHAPTER 1

### HISTORY OF MA SICONG

Ma's musical contributions helped lay the groundwork for Chinese classical music as one of the twentieth century's cultural cornerstones. Toward the end of the twentieth century, imperial China ended, and the entire country underwent significant social reconstruction as the Western culture began to affect modern China. Ma was one of the few Chinese musicians of his generation to travel overseas to study music and was one of the first to bring Western music back to China. In order to better understand his compositions, it is necessary to know something about his background and life experience.

#### Ma Sicong's Life

Ma Sicong was born in Haifeng, Guangdong province, China, in 1912. He was the sixth of ten children in his family. At the turn of the twentieth century, it was unusual for a Chinese family to have a father who served as Guangdong province's finance minister and a mother who was a scholar.

Despite coming from a non-musical background, Ma's siblings all went on to have great careers as musicians, including Ma Siju<sup>1</sup> and Ma Sihong<sup>2</sup>, among others. Some of their children also went on to become well-known musicians themselves. According to Ma Sicong's autobiography, which was published in 1937, his interest in music began when he was 5-year-old as he began singing along to his grandfather's gramophone recordings of traditional Chinese music. He began playing the piano

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<sup>1</sup> Ma Siju 马思聪 (1920-2014): Pianist and cellist, piano and cello professor at the Central Conservatory.

<sup>2</sup> Ma Sihong 马思宏 (1922-2009), violinist, invented Roth-Sihon style mute.

when he was seven years old, and two years later, he added the harmonica and the Yueqin (Chinese lute), which he learned while attending a boarding school in Guangdong. When Ma Sicong's brother returned to France from his studies in Paris during the summer of 1923, he brought Ma Sicong a violin as a gift. The eleven-year-old fell in love with the violin right away and decided to join his sibling in France to further his violin studies.

In 1923, Ma and his eldest brother arrived in Paris, France; he was 12. The following year, he was admitted to the Conservatory of Nancy, an affiliate of the Conservatoire de Paris. He studied violin performance and music theory with Paul Oberdoerffer, the Concertmaster of the Paris Opera Orchestra. Simultaneously, he learned piano with Oberdoerffer's wife. However, in March 1927, he was forced to discontinue playing due to a neck issue. He spent his time in the coastal city of Berck, concentrating on the piano, and became acquainted with a variety of composers, his favorite being Claude Debussy. Ma made his way back to France in the fall of 1928. Ma was accepted as a full-time student at the Conservatoire de Paris. He was the first East Asian to be admitted to the Paris Conservatory as a full-time student.

Due to his financial difficulties, Ma had to return to China in 1929. He performed in Chinese cities such as Hong Kong, Nanjing, and Guangzhou. In Shanghai, a local newspaper described him as "the Wunderkind of the Chinese Musical World"(Wang 2009, 274). Critics in Shanghai found his music to be both "mesmerizing and uplifting."

Ma returned to Guangzhou in January 1930 and took a position as a first violinist in the orchestra of the Guangdong Research Institute for Dramatic Arts. In 1930, he went again to France to study composition with financial support from the Guangdong provincial government. Oberdoerffer introduced Ma to Turkish-Jewish composer Janko Binenbaum, who worked as a musical director in Regensburg, Hamburg, and Berlin. Due to his unique background, Binenbaum's compositions possessed a distinct character. As Ma wrote in a letter praising Binenbaum's music, "it was not a sad moment, but rather a scene from a Greek tragedy. There was a fire-like intensity, an uncontrollable passion for music." (Ma 2000, 18). Despite their forty-year age difference, Binenbaum significantly influenced Ma's composition, and the two became close friends. Ma lost contact with Binenbaum when the Second World War began and, according to Ma, "At the time, I had no idea where he had fled. It was, certainly, one of the most heartbreaking moments of my life" (Ma 2000, 21). Ma completed his studies in early 1932 and returned to China. He co-founded a private conservatory in Guangzhou with his colleague Chen Hong and taught violin, piano, composition, and other subjects concurrently. There he met pianist Wang Muli, who he later married. In 1933, he was appointed professor at Nanjing's Central University.

Ma resumed his performance career in Nanjing, where he composed his Piano Trio in B major and the Violin Sonata No. 1 in G major. Ma created the song *You Are My Life* (你是我的生命线) in February 1935, which was his first piece to be sung in public. Later that year, he released his autobiography, *Chasing My Childhood* (童年追想曲), published in Shanghai. Ma organized a concert for his younger brother Ma

Sihong in early 1936. Tung Kwong Kwong, who later became his second wife, was the piano accompanist. Ma and his family moved north to Beijing, where they performed concerts. He accepted a professorship at Guangdong's Sun Yat-sen University in 1937. However, the Sino-Japanese War began on July 7. Ma became the conductor of the patriotic Anti-Japanese Choir and appeared and recorded for numerous media organizations. He arrived in Chongqing in 1940 and was appointed conductor of the Sino Philharmonic. Although his life at the time was unstable, his actions greatly inspired the masses to win the war of resistance against Japan. After the Sino-Japanese War, he successively served as Guizhou Provincial Art Museum curator, conductor of the Taiwan Symphony Orchestra, and President of the Hong Kong Chinese Conservatory of Music. During the Sino-Japanese War, Ma Sicong created many excellent music works in multiple genres, including violin music, chamber music, and vocal “divertimenti,” which also marked a turning point in the maturation of his musical style.

China became a socialist country in 1949 when the People's Republic of China was established. Ma Sicong was appointed the first president of the Central Conservatory of Music and worked as a violin teacher in the Instrumental Studies department. Additionally, he served as Vice-President of the Association of Chinese Musicians. Besides teaching, he lead various music performances across the country, allowing more and more music lovers to experience different music forms, especially those related to the violin. His created mainly large-scale orchestral suites and choruses during this period, such as the grand choruses *Yalu River* (鸭绿江) and

*Tribute of October* (十月礼赞). Ma represented China in the Prague Spring International Music Festival in Czechoslovakia in May and June 1951 (Mezinárodní hudební festival Pražské Jaro), then returned to Beijing in September 1954 as a delegate to the First National People's Congress after serving in various governmental roles. Ma made his first major concert tour of China since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1957, and it was a huge success. He was a jury member in the first Tchaikovsky International Competition jury in March 1958.

Ma became a target of the revolutionary Anti-Academic Elitism movement when the Cultural Revolution began in early June 1966. After being transported to a re-education camp with Central Conservatory colleagues, he was placed under house arrest. In August, the Red Guards harassed Ma's family and seized all their belongings. Ma's wife escaped with their children. In late November, Ma was found to have hepatitis and given permission to return home to heal. He secretly departed Beijing to reunite with his family. Ma and his family fled to Hong Kong by boat on January 15, 1967, an act generally referred to as *en passant*, after the chess move. He then relocated from Hong Kong to the United States, where he stayed until his death. On April 12, 1967, the Associated Press reported that Ma Sicong had fled and taken refuge. In June, the American magazine *Life* published an article on him under the title "Cruelty and Madness Make me a Tramp." In July of the same year, the Soviet Union's *Literature Daily* reprinted it as "Why did I Leave China" (Ma 2000, 57). However, Sicong's escape and public reports were regarded as a "vicious attack on the Cultural Revolution." Dozens of his relatives and friends were implicated. His second

oldest brother jumped from a building in Shanghai and killed himself. His mother-in-law and niece were persecuted to death one after another. From that moment on, Ma Sicong never returned to the Chinese mainland.

As did many other nationalist composers, Ma Sicong incorporated aspects of national folk music into the structures of Western music. He also continued to compose Chinese patriotic music in the United States, although he rarely spoke publicly about his experiences during the Cultural Revolution. Zhou Enlai expressed concern regarding Ma's persecution and escape during President Richard Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's 1972 visit to China. Ma completed the last work of his life, his opera *Rebia*, in 1987 and died during a heart operation in Philadelphia on May 20<sup>th</sup>.

### Ma Sicong's Musical Career

Ma Sicong's musical career can be divided into four periods: early learning, early creation, mature creation, and later years spent in the United States.

#### *Early Learning Period (1924-1932)*

From 1924 to 1932, he went to France twice to study music, mainly violin performance and composition skills. The music education courses he received were completed in France. In 1924, Ma Sicong began his music studies and continued with Oberdoerffer from 1926 to 1928. During this period, the French people's pursuit of freedom deeply affected his life and thought and helped form his views on the purpose of creative work in the future. At the beginning of 1930, Ma Sicong returned to France again. This time, he mainly studied with Binenbaum to learn compositional

technique. This learning experience significantly impacted Ma Sicong's music creative career and artistic outlook. As he said, "Binenbaum brought me not only the study of composition techniques and acoustic knowledge but also the guide of my whole artistic career." (Liang, 1989) Ma Sicong's output includes mainly chamber music, much of which uses Western compositional techniques. His representative work is *Seven Poems of Ancient Words*.

#### *Early Creation Period (1933-1936)*

At this time, Ma Sicong had just returned home from his studies in France and had developed his views on musical creativity. He tried to use the Western compositional skills he learned in France to shape music featuring China's national characteristics. Most of his works were chamber pieces in this period, such as String Quartet in C minor, Piano String Trio in B flat major, *Lullaby*, etc. It was clear from this output that Ma Sicong's talent in music composition had emerged. He was a skilled and traditional composer, but some aspects of his compositional style had not been revealed.

#### *Mature Creation Period (1936-1966)*

In 1936, Ma Sicong traveled all the way north to play his music, until he reached Peiping. On the one hand, having lived in the south and abroad, he had a strong interest in understanding traditional northern folk music, which brought new inspiration to his music creation and significantly changed his compositional style. On the other hand, the Chinese nation was at an essential juncture of life and death. His music was also full of ardent hope for the victory of the war of resistance against

Japan and broad love for the motherland and compatriots, and he incorporated many national elements. He composed many patriotic songs during this period, including the *Call for Freedom* (自由的号声), *Guerilla Squadron Hymn* (游击队歌), *Defend South China* (保卫华南), and *Eternal Life from Death* (不是死是永生). The second movement, the “*Song of Nostalgia* (思乡曲)” from *Inner Mongolia Suite* (内蒙组曲), became synonymous with Ma.

As Ma Sicong himself was a violinist, he was more comfortable creating violin works. However, this was not an exclusive preference, and in his mature period he created works in other genres as well. He began to boldly attempt the creation of large-scale musical structures in genres including the suite, concerto, chorus, symphony, and others. His *Violin Concerto in F major* is the first violin concerto created by a Chinese composer, and its completion marks the beginning of the popularization of violin music.

In the early days of the founding of the People's Republic of China, the whole country was full of vitality, and Ma Sicong's music creation entered a new stage. The Republic's founding made Ma Sicong feel happy and full of creative enthusiasm and power. His works from this period are more fully developed in terms of genre, contain simpler themes, include more nationalized stylistic elements, more closely imitate life, and feature more specific local characteristics. During this period, Ma Sicong's created mainly orchestral music, such as *Song of the Mountain Forest* (山林之歌) and the *Second Symphony*.



### *The Late Period in the United States*

Due to the “Cultural Revolution” outbreak, Ma Sicong’s family was forced to settle in the United States. At this time, although Ma Sicong was over half a century old, he still had an incomparable love for music, and his creative mood was still high. Besides writing, he often held concerts abroad and in Taiwan, featuring both violin performance and teaching. His representative works from this period include the ballet *Sunset Clouds* (晚霞), the suite *Six Poems by Li Bai*<sup>3</sup> (李白诗六首), the opera *Rebia* (热碧亚), etc. In his later years, Ma Sicong lived in a foreign land. His works were concise and straightforward during this period, mostly missing his motherland and hometown. He still insisted on using elements of Chinese national music, but also carried out reforms and added innovations in his compositional technique, which adopted modernist stylistic elements.

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<sup>3</sup> Li Bai 李白 (701-762): One of the greatest Chinese poets of all time, Li Bai has been described as both a genius and romantic character who pushed the boundaries of traditional poetic genres. The “Golden Age of Chinese Poetry” is frequently referred to as the era in which he and his friend Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770) were the most famous figures in the rise of Chinese poetry during the Tang dynasty.

## CHAPTER 2

### MA SICONG'S VIOLIN TEACHING

Ma Sicong made outstanding contributions to the field of violin performance in China. Among his students, there were many masters: Xiang Zepei<sup>4</sup>, Sheng Zhongguo<sup>5</sup>, Lin Yaoji<sup>6</sup>, Yang Baozhi<sup>7</sup>, etc. These violinists were the most outstanding performers and educators in China, but, with the passing of time, there are no longer many students of his left. Xiang Zeping studied the violin with Mr. Ma for fourteen years. Ma Sicong deeply influenced him. Xiang Zeping's student, Liu Lina, significantly benefited from Ma Sicong's violin teaching method during a learning process of nearly ten years during which she completed theoretical research on Ma Sicong's violin teaching system. Her article "Research and Application of Ma Sicong's Violin Teaching Method" offered the following aspects of Ma Sicong's pedagogy for research and discussion.

#### Importance of Hearing

According to Xiang Zepei's recollection, Mr. Ma seldom spoke in daily life and was silent in class. He often sat on the sofa behind the student. When he noticed

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<sup>4</sup> Xiang Zeping 向泽培 (1945-): Former Concertmaster of Beijing Symphony Orchestra, Assistant Concertmaster of the Symphony Orchestra of the Central Opera House.

<sup>5</sup> Sheng Zhongguo 盛中国 (1941-2018): Chinese violinist, best renowned for his performance of the *Butterfly Lovers' Violin Concerto* with orchestra. He is widely regarded as one of China's greatest violinists and is affectionately referred to as "China's Menuhin."

<sup>6</sup> Lin Yaoji 林耀基 (1937-2009): Former violin professor at the Central Conservatory in Beijing, China; the most famous violinist and educator in China.

<sup>7</sup> Yang Baozhi 杨宝智 (1935-): Famous Chinese violinist and composer, violin professor at the Sichuan Conservatory in Chengdu, China.

problems, he would always explain them best with the sound of the violin. Ma's inarticulateness gave students more development in auditory thinking. Ma's classes were a "dialogue between violins." (Liu, 87)

A common controversy regarding the teaching of children or beginners involves whether or not to stick adhesive tape to the fingerboard. If affixed, the tape immediately creates fret-like spacing, as on a guitar, which has a noticeable effect on the intonation of beginners. On the surface, it seems like a fast and easy solution, but in essence, if children often rely on visual judgment for intonation for a long time, the auditory function will degrade. On the contrary, Ma strongly suggested paying more attention to auditory thinking from the beginning and strictly controlling the position of fingers with the ear; this seemingly slow process will be the most stable, active, and effective method. Creating proper intonation with the violin is exacting and challenging, and the intonation problem is a lifelong problem for all violinists. From Ma, Xiang learned a method that is "slow." Practicing each note in the scale slowly with legato bowing in daily practice and feeling the change of intonation by subtle adjustment of the hand shape on the left fingertip is the most accurate practice for the ear and the teaching effect is excellent. In addition, for familiar pieces, it is necessary to practice slowly before performing on stage. Such slow practice can make muscles form reflex functions to solve the intonation problem.

### Opposition and Unity

The law of opposition and unity is the essence and core of materialist dialectics, and everything exists in the contradiction of opposition and unity. Mr. Ma

once summed up the violin's right-hand technique as the relationship between “moving” and “stillness.” From a technical point of view, Ma Sicong used legato bowing exercises to interpret “stillness,” that is “unity,” while he interpreted “moving” with marcato bowing, that is “opposition.”

Ma attached great importance to legato practice in teaching, and the sound produced by legato practice is required to be “concentrated and transparent, without being too loud, thick or coarse” (Liu, 88). Good sound is judged to be full of vibration, and only broad vibration can carry the sound far. As for the strength of the right hand, he advocated gravity, not pressure. The correct way to play is: hand on the bow, bow on the string; one plus one equals two, and that is enough. Long-bow exercises are ‘static’ exercises for the right hand and require evenness, precision, and beauty of sound.

Mr. Xiang told his students more than once that during his fourteen years of violin learning with Ma, Ma was very strict with his marcato technique. He practiced Kreutzer’s No.7 Etude for three years without stopping, repeatedly emphasizing the right hand to control motion and stasis, fast and slow. Xiang’s performances at nearly seventy years of age are still of high quality because of Ma's strict requirements for the right-hand marcato. Legato and marcato contain all the technical possibilities of the right hand and are the root of right-hand technique. As long as students have carefully practiced these two bow techniques, they will significantly progress in their sound. Each student's sound will be different from person to person, each with its characteristics.

## Unique Etude Teaching

In Mr. Ma's teaching, etudes are not dry, technical training; giving life to etudes is an essential part of teaching. The etudes he teaches are always refreshing, and the following examples of etudes illustrate some of the ideas found in his teaching system.

Kayser's 36 Violin Studies, Op. 20, No. 20 focuses on changing bowstrokes. Technically, if the bow is evenly drawn, the right-hand doesn't move too much when changing the strings; it is not a difficult etude. However, in Ma's teaching, it is more important to use music to express the relationship between time and space. Ma once said, "Whoever can play this etude well is an excellent violinist" (Liu 87). It is therefore to be understood that Ma attaches great importance to this etude. In his explanation, the first measure should be played with a *decrescendo*, and the bow speed should move from fast to slow. The first note of this measure almost occupies half of the bow, and the last note is played with the tip, like the motion of a ribbon as it floats out into space. In the second bar, the second note is the local highest note, as if the ribbon has floated to the highest point, there is a moment of stagnation, so appropriate emphasis can be given when playing. Then the music goes into a dive, before leaping toward the fifth note in the third measure, which is the top note of the first phrase and therefore a point of emphasis. After the fifth measure, there is a regularly repeating sixth interval. For each sixth, a *diminuendo* is used to describe the beauty of the ribbon's rhythmic movement.



Figure 2.1 Kayser, Heinrich Ernst, *36 Elementary and Progressive Studies*, Op.20, No.20. mm. 1-12.

Kreutzer's 42 Studies No.13 is an exercise for right-wrist flexibility. But in Mr. Ma's teaching, the exercise is given a dance beat. When practicing this etude, he instructed students to group the notes into groups of eight and accent each group's first, third, fifth, and seventh notes. Strength in the right wrist will emphasize these four notes and add a strong dance rhythm to the music.



Figure 2.2 Kreutzer, Rodolphe, *42 Studies for Violin*. mm. 1-6.

Fiorillo's 36 Etudes No. 28 is a string-changing exercise, developing techniques for the wrist and the arm. In Mr. Ma's interpretation, he said, "This is a stream from the valley, flowing through the grass under the sun and through the woods with sparse branches and leaves, sometimes gently, sometimes splashing waves ...." (Liu 88).



Figure 2.3 Fiorillo, Federigo, *36 Caprices for Violin*, Op.3, No. 28, mm. 1-3; mm. 15-17; mm. 30-31; mm. 61-64.

Part a (mm.1-3) describes the source of a stream, a trickle of groundwater that rises from beneath the rocks. The accent, by the stress of the wrist, is a reflection of this dynamic motion. In Part b (mm. 15-17), the stream races back in a whirlpool. The splash of the current ripples over the rocks. There are two lines in the music. The upper line is “moving,” which outlines the accent with the wrist like a splash on the surface of the stream, while the lower line of repeating Ds is the constant flow of the stream. In part c (mm. 30-31), the little stream flows into the underground river, and suddenly the temperature turns colder and the environment became wet and dark. At this point, the right-hand technique becomes focused on string-changing, which requires each note to be connected. Here the stream merges into a powerful undercurrent and rushes on. Non-chord tones appear in part d, creating a distorted image. The sun's rays hit the leaves and cast their shadows across the stream.

The discussion of the three etudes above describes only a tiny part of Ma Sicong's teaching, which renders technical exercises full of vitality. The teaching method of etudes rooted in concepts more profound than mere technique is a signature characteristic of Ma Sicong's violin teaching.



## CHAPTER 3

### MA SICONG'S COMPOSITION STYLE

Ma's music was deeply influenced by the events of his life and the people he encountered as a child and young adult. Some of the musical patterns he adopted were influenced by where he lived and his personal and professional life conditions. In addition to solo violin pieces, Ma Sicong composed music for choirs, string ensembles, and orchestras. For some reason, he never wrote any solo works for woodwinds or brass instruments.

#### Western Music Influences

As a French-trained violinist and composer, Ma's compositional style owes much to his time in the West. Chinese culture honed his ear for the sounds of his homeland, while France exposed him to the Western musical tradition. According to Ma, "I began to enjoy Bach, Mozart, Liszt, and Chopin. Debussy, Ravel, and Pierne, among other contemporary French composers, were introduced to me" (1942:11). Debussy's use of harmony in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a particular delight to him. Ma may have been drawn to Debussy because of his Eastern musical themes. In addition to the Russian Five, Ma appreciated all of Stravinsky's works. All of them influenced Ma's creative method.

#### *Eighteenth-Century Classical Influence*

Ma composed string quartets, piano trios, and violin sonatas in various traditional styles as an apprentice. Many of his early compositions were inspired by Western Classical composers. Similarities to Beethoven's string quartets can be found

in his String Quartet No. 1. The first movement begins with a rhythmic motif that hints at the influence of Beethoven (Figure 3.1). Instead of a melody, many of Beethoven's pieces start with a motif. The 'awakening' motif in Ma's String Quartet No. 1 can be as striking as the opening motif in Beethoven's String Quartet Op. 18 No. 1 (Figure 3.2). Both composers privilege the usage of motivic fragments over traditional melodic themes in their first movements.



Figure 3.1 Ma, Sicong, String Quartet No. 1, 1<sup>st</sup> movement, mm. 1-5.

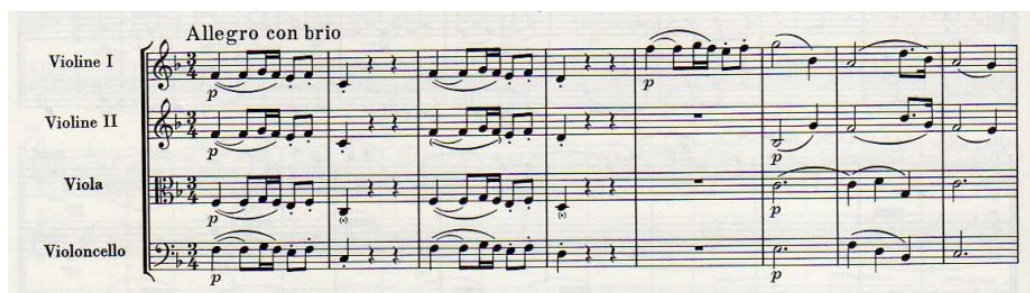


Figure 3.2 Beethoven, Ludwig van, *String Quartet No. 1*, Op. 18, 1<sup>st</sup> movement, mm. 1-8.

The development sections in many of Beethoven's works in sonata form are relatively long due to the variety of Beethoven's motifs and his extensive usage of key areas. Ma's String Quartet No. 1's first movement features a recurring motif that modulates and is subjected to numerous modifications. Its rhythmic evolution, which includes an augmentation, can be seen in Figure 3.3 below.



Figure 3.3 Ma, Sicong, *String Quartet No. 1*, 1<sup>st</sup> movement, mm. 17-20.

Both Beethoven and Ma expand their developing phrases through an opening motif. Many different keys are commonly used in both Classical and Romantic music, and Ma's Violin Concerto in F major also follows this practice. As soon as the development begins, Ma shifts the key from C major to A-flat major, which is not closely related to either C major or F major, the tonic of the composition. After that, the theme in B-flat major is played starting at m. 173. Also, the theme is performed in C major and then B-flat major. When the main motif reappears in m. 226 after a long excursion through foreign keys and three motifs, one expects a recapitulation. Despite this, the dominant theme material is in the key of B-flat major and not the tonic, creating a sense that the major theme has returned unexpectedly.

### *French Influence*

Ma spent most of his late teenage years in France, his second home. In general, Ma appreciated French music, but the works of Debussy were his particular favorites. Ma gathered all of Debussy's compositions and spent a lot of time practicing them on the piano, paying specific attention to Debussy's harmonic technique. Because of this, several of Ma's compositions have a French flavor to them.

In “Lamasery” from *Tibet Tone Poem*, according to Ma's statements, he used half-diminished chords and dissonant tone clusters to support the melody and produce the piece's sorrowful, empty feel (Liang, 1986). The French sixth chord with omitted third that appears here is dissonant in the musical landscape of the scene. Because it is contained within the whole-tone scale, the sonority of a French sixth chord is frequent in 19th-century French music, most notably in the Impressionistic style. Figure 3.4 illustrates both this chord and the half-diminished seventh chord he employed to harmonize the melody.

**Andante maestoso, Quasi una Marcia funebre**

a) mm. 1-4

b) mm. 53-56

Figure 3.4 Ma, Sicong, “Lamasery” from *Tibet Tone Poem*, mm. 1-4; mm. 53-56.

Lack of tonal clarity is another characteristic of Impressionism found in this work. The interval from E flat to B flat is a perfect fifth, which the violin melody encircles later in the piece, yet a sense of tonality was concealed by Ma's use of A and Ab as passing tones. Moreover, melodic ascents and descents tend to outline different modes.

As two leading figures in Impressionism, Debussy and Ravel both influenced Ma's work. A, B, D, E, and G are the only five notes of violin's melody in "Sword Dance" from *Tibet Tone Poem*. A typical interval in Chinese music is the perfect fifth, which occurs between A and E. Perfect fourths, fifths, and octaves in the violin and piano parts demonstrate the influence of both Chinese and Impressionistic music. When Debussy was writing his *La Mer*, he employed perfect fourth and Chinese pentatonic scale (Figure 3.5). From five measures after Rehearsal 35 to four measures after Rehearsal 36, the divided two lines of the first violin only play five notes: the upper line plays F#, G#, B, C#, and E, which is in F# Shang mode; the lower line plays D, E, G, A and C, which is in D Shang mode.

Figure 3.5 Debussy, Claude, *La Mer*, "Jeux de vagues", 5 measures after Rehearsal 35 to 4 measures after Rehearsal 36.

Ravel often uses the same short motif in many pieces to create a rich musical texture. *Bolero* is the most famous example of this technique in his works. It is based

on a rhythmic motif repeated no less than 169 times (Philip, 2018, P.615), and its melody is passed to different instruments 17 times. Ma uses the same texture in “Lamasery,” in which the piano plays the rhythmic motif from the first measure through the whole A section.

Ma Sicong's choice of instruments focused on character rather than quantity. In addition to basic orchestration, he added and subtracted instruments according to the needs of the piece, emphasizing the emotional expression of the work itself, which is also similar to the idea of Impressionism. He sometimes chose to use only one instrument that could represent the musical image to be portrayed. Describing his orchestral composition, he said:

Wind instruments are better for describing natural scenery, string instruments are better for expressing inner feelings, and brass instruments are mainly used for writing powerful music. However, these characteristics should not be viewed in isolation; this characteristic of expressive capacity is relative. Sometimes, it can be used in combination. For example, in *Night*, the fifth movement of *Song of Mountain Forest*, I used clarinet and bassoon to express the sound of wind blowing. It would be completely different if the positions of the two instruments switched. Later in the same movement, brass music is added as the lead; To show the sun's brilliance as it sets. Finally, when the call comes back, I use string instruments entirely (2000, p71).

### *Usage of Polyphony*

Chinese music theorist Zhu Shirui said of Ma's polyphonic techniques that he “learn[ed] from others, ma[de] up [for] his shortcomings; creatively borrow[ed] from the West, [did] not copy it” (1956). Ma tried to use polyphonic techniques in his “Lamasery” to enrich and strengthen the extensions and connections of the musical

theme in each part. From measure 86, the piano imitates the violin's theme one measure later and a perfect fifth lower to create a canonical effect (Figure 3.6).

Figure 3.6 Ma, Sicong, “Lamasery” from *Tibet Tone Poem*, mm. 86-89.

### *Russian Influence*

From 1949 to 1960, there were many economic and cultural exchanges between China and the Soviet Union. Ma Sicong visited the Soviet Union in 1958; he listened to several concerts featuring Russian compositions, such as Tchaikovsky’s Violin Concerto and symphonies, Shostakovich’s symphonies, and various chamber pieces. Moreover, he heard Shostakovich play the piano in his Piano Trio. He also met and talked with Shaporin and Khachaturian, and he got the score of Khachaturian’s Symphony No.2 from the composer.

This journey inspired him and impacted him culturally. One element common to both Russian classical music (mainly nineteenth-century music) and Ma Sicong’s compositions is the use of folk music as a primary source, as in Tchaikovsky’s String Quartet No.1. The mournful second movement, which has achieved an excellent reputation, was inspired by a traditional Ukrainian folk song, “Song of the Volga Boatmen.” Glinka’s operas and orchestral pieces were based on Russian themes and

eventually served as models for other compatriots to incorporate Russian folk music and folk tales into their compositions. His *Kamarinskaya*, composed in 1848, was the first symphonic composition entirely based on two Russian folk songs: one is a wedding song and another is a traditional dance tune.

Another characteristic typical of Russian compositions involves texture and orchestration. Russian Romantic music is typically characterized by powerful melodic lines and an accompanimental texture, in contrast to the generally intricate polyphonic textures of much of Western music. This texture is more distinct in some orchestral pieces. Ma's Violin Concerto uses a similar texture that emphasizes the melody.

Mussorgsky is a composer Ma admired in addition to Debussy. He said: "Mussorgsky's music is bold and expressive, but the content is profoundly touching" (Ma 2000, 93). Many of Ma's compositions use traditional folk music and village melodies like the works of Mussorgsky.

### Chinese Influences

Ma's early works were mostly 'model compositions.' These compositions appear to have been focused on mastering the fundamentals. In other words, Ma's works were based on precedents and imitated established patterns. In general, first-generation Western classical musicians and composers in China were amateurs in their craft. Comparing them to Western musicians of the same era reveals the disparity. It was explained in *Music of the Billion* by Mingyue Liang that composers who were oriented toward Western music had a negative image of Chinese musical instruments because of their lack of knowledge of Chinese traditional music. As a



result, “early attempts at Westernizing or modernizing Chinese music were therefore mainly a superficial imitation of Western styles without traditional elements, a direction which has hindered Chinese music development even into the 1980s” (Liang, 137).

Chinese classical composers of the first generation could learn Western music by imitating it because it was totally foreign to them. A delicate balance between Westernized music and a Chinese personality was achieved by first-generation Chinese composers in the twentieth century. Ma was a pioneer that inspired many by returning to rich Chinese traditions decades before the 1980s. He began to draw inspiration from Chinese folk tunes and ancient literature as early as the 1920s. Traditional folk melodies were subtly integrated into more complicated Western forms in Ma's music, making it difficult to detect them at first. Unfortunately, extremely complex structural designs that are difficult to comprehend without music education are unappreciated in China. As a result, many works, such as his Violin Concerto in F Major, were unfamiliar to Chinese audiences. As a result, after leaving France, Ma shifted his concentration to Chinese folk music and produced a slew of works infused with this style.

### *Chinese Pentatonicism*

Most of Ma Sicong's compositions were written in using Chinese Pentatonicism, which is related to the pentatonic scales in Western music theory. All tones are classified into two classes. One class is called Zhengyin 正音 (main tones), which provides most of the components of Chinese pentatonic scales. Every tone has

a name; they are Gong(宫), Shang(商), Jue(角), Zhi(徵), Yu(羽). The other class is known as Pianyin 偏音 (deviate tones), which comprises departures from the Zhengyin. There are four deviate tones: Bian Gong (变宫), Qing Jue (清角), Bian Zhi (变徵), and Run (闰).



Figure 3.7 Main tones in Chinese pentatonic scale.

Five scales exist because every tone is the tonic of a scale, and each scale shares the same name with its tonic. The scale is transposable in the Roman numeral order. For example, if the scale is F, G, Bb, C, and D, the tonic is F and it is F Zhi mode because of their Roman numeral order.



Figure 3.8 Five types of Chinese pentatonic scale.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The Roman numerals in Figure 3.9 refer to their scale degrees, not to chords.

In Ma Sicong's "Dance Beyond Frontier" from *Inner Mongolia Suite*, mm. 1-43 contain five notes: E, G, A, B and D, with E as the tonic. According to the Roman numeral order I, III, IV, V and VII, this section is in E Yu (羽) mode.

Scalar variations are created by adding one or two Pinyin (deviate tones). The C Gong scale, for example, can be made into a six-tone scale by adding an F or a B. Two deviate tones can also be added to a scale to get a seven-tone scale; however, only three types of seven-tone Chinese music scales exist. Ya Yue scale (added F sharp and B), Yan Yue scale (added F and B flat), and Qing Yue scale (added F and B).

The figure displays three musical staves, each representing a different seven-tone Chinese scale. Each staff includes the scale name in English and Chinese, the notes in Pinyin with their corresponding Gongche notation, and red boxes highlighting the deviate tones.

- Qing Yue Scale (清乐):** Gong(宫) Shang(商) Jue(角) Qing Jue(清角) Zhi(徵) Yu(羽) Bian Gong(变宫). The deviate tones are Qing Jue and Bian Gong.
- Yan Yue Scale (燕乐):** Gong(宫) Shang(商) Jue(角) Qing Jue(清角) Zhi(徵) Yu(羽) Run(闰). The deviate tones are Qing Jue and Run.
- Ya Yue Scale (雅乐):** Gong(宫) Shang(商) Jue(角) Bian Zhi(变徵) Zhi(徵) Yu(羽) Bian Gong(变宫). The deviate tones are Bian Zhi and Bian Gong.

Figure 3.9 Three types of seven-tone Chinese scale.

### *Usage of Chinese Folk Music*

Folk music in China has a long history, includes a wide range of styles, and has been the focus of extensive research. China is home to 56 distinct ethnic groups, with the Han constituting the majority and the 55 others comprising the country's minorities. Each ethnic group has its own dialect, music, and dances, distinct from the other groups. Moreover, the traditional culture of Han is also different in each region. For example, Peking Opera is the most famous genre in Beijing; Yangge (秧歌) is one of the most representative forms of folk art and is popular in both the countryside and cities in northern China; Xintianyou (信天游) is a folk music style from Shaanxi province in Northwestern China; and Kunqu (昆曲), also known as Kunju, originated in Southeastern China, and is the oldest opera form of Chinese opera.

In Ma's works, the folk elements presented are primarily Cantonese, based on where he grew up. Cantonese traditions, also called Guangdong (广东), originated from Guangzhou (广州) and surrounding areas in the Pearl River Delta of Guangdong Province on the southern coast of China. Typically, this region's music is performed by a string and wind ensemble led by Gaoju (高胡), Ruan (阮), Qin (秦琴) and other Chinese traditional instruments with percussion. Musical performances in this genre are primarily devoted to songs and interludes from Cantonese operas. In 1952, Ma composed *Three Pieces of Cantonese Music*, a piano suite solely dedicated to the music he heard growing up. This suite consists of three pieces: “Feathers Dance (羽衣舞),” “Gallop (走马)” and “Lion Roll Ball (狮子滚球).” All three pieces are based on Cantonese folk music and they use the same titles as the original

songs. Among them, "Feathers Dance" does not entirely adopt the main melody of the original song but incorporates the rhythmic and melodic elements commonly used in Cantonese music, describing the gorgeous, dreamlike scene of dancers in colorful feather dresses dancing. "Lion Roll Ball" is based on Cantonese music of the same name. Ma skillfully uses the mode of Guangdong music and adds ornaments to the original song, vividly showing the lively scene of a Cantonese lion dance performance in which lions roll a ball, play ball with each other, and gongs and drums make noise. In "Gallop," the right hand of the piano completely reproduces the original music, while the left hand mainly serves as an accompaniment. The two voices echo each other and form a polyphonic texture.

# 走 马

民间乐曲  
张耀枢编配

中板  $\text{♩} = 76$

声乐 (独唱)

笙

扬琴

古筝

琵琶

中阮

二胡

中胡

大提琴

低音提琴

小军鼓

高胡

笙

扬琴

古筝

琵琶

中阮

二胡

中胡

大提琴

低音提琴

小军鼓

Figure 3.10 Ensemble score of Chinese folk tune *Gallop*, mm. 1-6.

## 走 马\*



Figure 3.11 Ma, Sicong, *Gallop*, mm. 1-6.

Folk songs from Inner Mongolia also provided material that Ma liked to use. Besides the *Inner Mongolia Suite*, his *Rondo No. 1*, composed in 1937, is based on the Mongolian folk song *After You Left Me* (情别, Figure 3.12). It is a heroic northern love song, and syncopated rhythm is essential for the whole work. Ma Sicong chose the melodic theme of this song from among many Mongolian folk songs as his inspiration for composing violin music because its unique syncopated rhythm has a strong national character. When selecting materials, Ma Sicong changed the original song's speed, rhythm, and strength, seizing the syncopated rhythm of the original music and turning the work into a cheerful tune by increasing its speed and strengthening its power by supplementing its texture.





Figure 3.12 Mongolian folk song *After You Left Me*, mm. 1-4.



Figure 3.13 Ma, Sicong, *Rondo No. 1*, mm. 9-14.

Figure 3.13 shows that the composer supplements the original tune with additional rhythm and staccato articulation and makes the melody more prominent in the violin's brilliant upper register, creating a more joyful and dance-like mood.

The folk music from other regions that Ma used included Xinjiang folk music in *Xinjiang Rhapsody* (新疆狂想曲), Tibetan folk music in *Tibet Tone Poem* (西藏音诗), and Taiwanese folk music in *Kaoshan Suite* (高山组曲), and *Amis Suite* (阿美组曲), among other examples.

#### *Imitation of Chinese Instrumental Performance*

Ma's use of glissando is borrowed from Huqin (胡琴), the family of bowed string instruments including the Erhu (二胡) and Gaohu (高胡). Unlike violins, these instruments have only two strings, so the performer has to slide on the string to change the notes. In designing his fingerings, Ma Sicong often uses a glissando with

the same finger, which is rare in Western violin works. For example, he used a lot of *glissando* in “Sword Dance,” especially between large intervals (Figure 3.14).



Figure 3.14 Ma Sicong, “Sword Dance” from *Tibet Tone Poem*, mm. 175-160

In his *Inner Mongolia Suite*, Ma’s ornamentation also emulates Huqin. There are ornaments with a single note followed by a longer note value (a quarter-note or longer). These ornaments are played as an upper appoggiatura, sliding down to the main note when the song is at a slow tempo. Single-note and multiple-note ornaments are shown in Figure 3.15. The single-note ornaments are followed by a quarter-note, which can be played by sliding the same finger down to the main note.



Figure 3.15 Ma Sicong, “Epic” from *Inner Mongolia Suite*, mm. 38-49.

Huqin often use adjacent fingers to play the minor third, and this extended fingering is also used in his works, such as the cadenza at the end of *Shan’ge* (山歌).

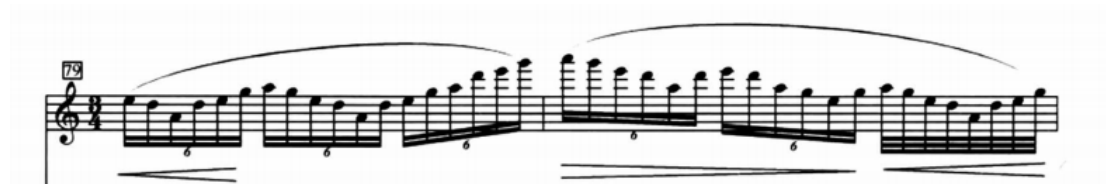


Figure 3.16 Ma Sicong, *Shan’ge*, mm. 79-80.

The grace note from the lower second or minor third is added to the homophonic repetition, as in the *Pastoral*.



Figure 3.17 Ma, Sicong, *Pastoral*, mm. 37-44.

Ma often used an upper mordent of a major second or minor third when the phrase or passage is repeated, such as in the theme from “Song of Nostalgia,” where the ornament is repeated many times (Figure 3.18).



Figure 3.18 Ma, Sicong, “Song of Nostalgia” from *Inner Mongolian Suite*, mm. 76-93

Figure 3.18 also showed the use of double acciaccatura in measure 93. Unlike Western music, the double acciaccatura often features a minor third.

The Pipa (琵琶) is another Chinese instrument. Unlike the Huqin, it is plucked with the fingers of the right hand. Ma imitated the pipa’s alternating fingering on the same note by doing the same on the violin (Figure 3.19).

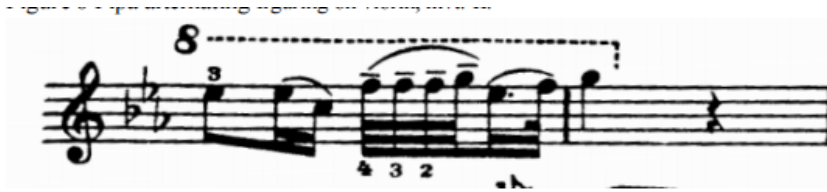


Figure 3.19 Ma, Sicong, *Violin Concerto in F Major*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Movement, mm. 93-94.

### *Imitation of Folk Rhythms*

Folk music is made up of more than just instruments and traditional melodies. There are instances when the rhythm has more folk character than anything else. The *Dragon Lantern Dance*, a 1953 composition, captures the spirit of the dragon lantern dance beat well (Figure. 3.20). Chinese percussion and wind instruments are commonly used to play this dance rhythm, and the rhythms in Ma's violin writing emulated the folk style. An example of this rhythm is depicted in Figure 17 by two-bar groupings that begin and end on a longer note.



Figure 3.20 Ma, Sicong. *Dragon Lantern Dance*, mm. 1-8.

Rhythm may be used to create a variety of emotions and settings. Ma depicts a Buddhist temple's landscape through rhythm in “Lamasery” from the *Tibetan Tone Poem*. As the title indicates, the rhythm is based on the sound of the Tibetan drum, a percussion instrument commonly heard during religious services in Tibet. This rhythmic combination first appears for 15 measures and serves as a setting for the rest of the movement. According to Ma, he “used repeated rhythmic notes in the piano

part to generate the drum sound that resembled the Chinese woodblock, while the bass line maintained the empty perfect fourth to create the gong sound” (Liang, 66).

### *Chinese Harmony*

Harmonic progression powers musical development, and its direction of a melody can be a strong indicator of musical style. Harmonic diversity is a principal characteristic of Ma Sicong's music. Since he had appreciated modernism and Impressionist music styles when studying in France, he dared to take bold steps in harmony. Although his compositions do not adhere strictly to Western traditional composition techniques, through the use of sound effects, and idiomatic stylistic elements Ma conveys emotional expression in his music, while weakening functional harmony and strengthening coloristic harmony. This compositional method made it easy for him to incorporate Chinese national melodies and tunes, so it is used with high frequency in his creation of new folk tunes. In his late-period music creations, along with his intensification of harmonic color, he also used the plagal cadence to emphasize the sub-dominant harmony.

Throughout Ma Sicong's musical output, the Chinese national pentatonic modes are used much more frequently than the Western major or minor modes. Transformations of the Gong mode are the most commonly used. For example, from measure one to measure four at the beginning of "Nostalgia," Ma converts the A Yu mode of C Gong to the D Shang mode, and then, after developing it, shifts to the B Zhi mode of E Gong. This kind of mode-shifting using the same Gong-note will make the progressions smooth and natural and help to more fully develop the thematic

material. This method was not frequently used in his late works, however, indicating that he preferred this constant mode-shifting method when he was young.

In Ma Sicong's early music creation, because he had just returned from France, his works still have the shadow of Western Classicism and Romanticism, which privileged the regular use of triads. As he gradually became interested in and better understood folk music, he slowly added quartal (fourth) and quintal (fifth) chords to highlight national character. For example, in his Rondo No.1, the piano accompaniment part changes back and forth from triads to fourth and fifth chords to strengthen the color of the harmony.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS OF INNER MONGOLIA SUITE

The solo violin piece *Inner Mongolia Suite* (also known as *Suiyuan*<sup>9</sup> *Suite*) was completed by Ma Sicong in 1937. The piece is divided into three movements: “Epic,” “Song of Nostalgia,” and “Dance beyond the Frontier.” The movements are interrelated but independent, revealing a complete and beautiful picture of northern China. The initial compositional order for the movements was “Nostalgia,” “Epic,” and “Dance beyond the Frontier.” In terms of melody, all three movements feature folk melodies from Inner Mongolia (Suiyuan), including *Kangding*<sup>10</sup> *Love Song* (康定情歌, or 跑马溜溜的山上), *Riders of the Great Wall* (城墙上跑马), and *Lady Hongcai* (红彩妹妹).

*Inner Mongolia Suite* is a representative solo instrumental work by Ma Sicong, and it is also an essential beginning of the trend toward the creation of national violin music in China. Ma Sicong always cherished, respected and loved the Motherland as a Chinese composer, and these strong patriotic feelings are revealed in his works. This piece is a violin solo with unique national characteristics based on Chinese traditional folk tunes and the exceptional performance capabilities of the violin. Below, each of the suite’s movements will be analyzed according to the order of composition.

---

9 Suiyuan (绥远) was a historical province of China. The area covered is part of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region today.

10 Kangding (康定), also known as Tachienlu and Dartsedo, is a county-level city in Southwest China's Sichuan province and the seat of Garzê Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture.

## Song of Nostalgia

As the centerpiece of the entire suite, this second movement was written first.

Ma derived its melody from a Suiyuan folk song called *Horse Running on the Wall*

(城墙上跑马, Figure 4.1). He reproduces the entire first verse, to emphasize the

bitterness of refugees who were forced to flee their homes during the war (Figure 4.2).

**城墙上跑马**

城 墙 上 的 个 跑 马 掉 不 回 那 个 头,  
 红 旦 旦 的 个 阳 婆 蓝 格 茵 茵 的 天,  
 数 九 的 那 个 隆 冬 风 吹 雪 花 飞,

思 想 起 咱 们 包 头, 哎 哟 我 就 泪 儿 流。  
 思 想 起 我 的 亲 人, 哎 哟 我 就 泪 不 干。  
 远 路 上 的 个 人 儿, 哎 哟 我 就 盼 春 回。

Figure 4.1 The folk song *Horse Running on the Wall*.

Andante cantabile (♩=80)  
*mf* D

Figure 4.2 Ma Sicong, "Song of Nostalgia," from *Inner Mongolia Suite*, mm. 1-8.

Table 1 displays the movement's ternary structure, which includes a transition and coda. The B section and the transition are based on the original melody and create an emotional "gradient" toward the bright and contrasting center section in E major.



Table 1								
<i>The Structure of "Song of Nostalgia"</i>								
Section	A			B		transition	A'	Coda
Subsection	a	b	c	a	b		a	
Measure	1-16	17-25	26-48	49-58	59-62	63-75	76-91	92-99

Section A, mm.1-16, presents the melody of the original folk song in two phrases. The folk song's theme is in A Yu mode, so Ma began the movement in A minor and introduced it on the G and D strings. Using only minor seventh chords in the accompaniment, Ma softened the song's harmonic vigor to create a mournful mood, replacing all of its more purposeful dominant seventh chords (Figure 4.3).

**Andante cantabile** (♩ = 80)

The image shows a musical score for the first ten measures of 'Song of Nostalgia'. It is written for Violin and Piano. The Violin part is in the treble clef, and the Piano part is in the grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The tempo is 'Andante cantabile' with a quarter note equal to 80 beats per minute. The Violin part is marked 'mf sul D' and the Piano part is marked 'p'. The score shows the first ten measures of the piece, including a first ending bracket over measures 6-10.

Figure 4.3 Ma Sicong, "Song of Nostalgia," from *Inner Mongolia Suite*, mm. 1-10.

Measures 17-25 consist of two phrases of four measures each, with an extra measure at the conclusion. The first three measures are the same in both phrases, but

the fourth measure has a different rhythm. Measures 17-18 in the Allegro part of the first movement are reminiscent of the first melody motif in measures 37-40 (Figure 4.4). It is in keeping with the Chinese method of grouping together similar musical materials instead of the Western practice of emphasizing their difference.



Figure 4.4 “Epic,” mm. 37-40 and “Song of Nostalgia,” mm. 17-18.

Mm. 26-48 comprise three longer phrases. The opening phrase is made up of two groups of four measures each. The violin then repeats the first phrase an octave higher. In measure 48, B becomes the dominant of E major, and a five-measure expansion follows, which transitions into the B section. This contrasting section (mm. 49-75), typically regarded as depicting pleasant thoughts of home, is in E major (E Gong mode). Repeated double stops are arranged in two five-measure units in measures 49-58. The next four-measure unit (measures 59-62) features a two-measure modification of the previous phrase. Measures 63-75 contain a closing phrase and an elongation (2 + 2 + 4 + 2 + 3) that prepares a return to the melancholy of A minor.

The main theme returns in A minor (A Yu mode) one octave higher than its original iteration at measure 76. After two repetitions, an eight-measure long-phrase

appears to travel toward a new G Zhi mode/key. An ascending series of parallel fourths leads to the dominant harmony in the E Jue mode which remains unresolved.

### Epic

Two of the three major melodic themes in this movement were derived from the folk song *Kangding Love Song* (康定情歌), which is popular in the Xikang (西康) region (Figure 4.5). These two melodic motives are featured in the introduction (mm. 1-3) and the Allegro section (mm. 37-40). The Allegro section's second melodic motive (mm. 61-64) is a variation on the first four measures of the second movement's major theme (Figure 4.6)



Example 4.5 The melodic motive from *Kangding Love Song* (康定情歌).

a) mm. 1-3 Violin *f* — *ff*

37 Allegro non troppo.

b) mm. 37-40 Violin *mf*

61 Più Allegro

c) mm. 61-64 Violin *mf*

Figure 4.6 The three melodic motives in “Epic.”

The introduction (Maestoso, measures 1-36) and the main Allegro section (A B A' B' A" + Coda), which begins in measure 37, are the two main sections of the movement; its formal structure is depicted in Table 2.

Table 2							
<i>The structure of "Epic" from Inner Mongolia Suite,</i>							
Section	Introduction	A	B	A'	B'	A'	Coda
Measure	1-36	37-60	61-77	78-101	102-113	114-129	130-143
Key		A minor	A minor	G Major	A minor	G Major	

The introduction is generally in 4/4 (except in m. 28, where it shifts to 6/4, and m. 36, where it is non-metrical). Cadenza-like introductions are standard in the openings and conclusions of traditional Chinese pieces in *san* (散 free) character. Ma's extended introduction here begins with a melodic statement in block chords, first in the violin, then in the piano, which travels through an array of keys before the violin re-enters: A minor, C minor, E minor, B minor, and A minor. An abundance of parallel intervals and progressively more unwieldy virtuosic runs connect the surprisingly frequent modulations. Measure 20 contains enharmonicism, which creates a harmonically ambiguous moment.

The reappearance of A minor (C Zhi mode) in the Allegro non troppo at measure 37 marks the start of the dance-like main section. There are "interludes" throughout the Allegro part, which are essentially rondo-like episodes, creating a five-part A B A' B' A" design. Both the B and A' sections are repeated and varied,

ultimately leading to an enlarged compound ternary form. The initial melodic motive of the Allegro section (measures 37-40), adapted from the folk tune *Kangding Love Song* (康定情歌), is closely related to the main melody of the introduction (Figure 4.2). In the accompanying piano chords, the tonic-subdominant relationship is emphasized. Although a minor-mode piano accompaniment is more appropriate for the violin's C Zhi mode, Ma nonetheless creates a major-mode piano accompaniment. The B motif (measures 61-64) develops the opening four bars of the second movement's principal theme (Figure 4.7), and later in the second movement, the suite is brought together. The coda is a pulsating Presto in C Gong mode in the middle of the movement (C major).



Figure 4.7 "Song of Nostalgia," mm. 1-4 and "Epic," mm. 61-64.

### Dances Beyond the Frontier

The last movement uses the eight-measure folk ballad Lady Hong-cai (红彩妹妹) from Suiyuan, China, as the basis for a dance-like concluding movement (Figure 4.8). This folk tune has two main phrases: dancing in mm. 9-16 and a lyrical interlude in mm. 70-81. (Figure 4.9).

### 红彩妹妹

红彩妹妹, 嗯唉嗨哟! 长得好那么, 嗯唉嗨哟!  
三月里来, 桃花开, 百花香那么, 嗯唉嗨哟!

樱桃小口, 嗯唉嗨哟! 一点点那么, 嗯唉嗨哟!  
八月十五月正圆, 想起了妹妹, 嗯唉嗨哟!

Figure 4.8 The Folk Song “Lady Hong-cai.”

a) mm. 9-16

b) mm. 70-81

Figure 4.9 Ma Sicong, “Dances Beyond the Frontier,” mm. 9-16 and mm. 70-81.

This movement is structured in ternary form, resembling the Allegro section of the first movement (Table 3).

Section	A		B	A'		Coda	
Subsection	a	transition		a'	transition	b'	a'
Measure	1-43	44-69	70-104	105-141	142-165	166-186	187-199
Key	E Yu		E major/minor	E Yu		E	A Shang

The A section's initial part (mm. 1-43) is marked *Allegro vivace*. The piano introduces the subject material, beginning in E major (E Yu mode). At measure 9, the violin repeats the main theme, accompanied by tertian chords embellished with non-

chord tones. Measures 19–28 contains a first variation of the primary theme. A second variation, in mm. 29-43, includes a longer concluding line that modulates before the transition.

Three eight-measure phrases comprise the transition from measure 44 to measure 69. Like the opening to the first movement, this connecting passage has many modulations. The sequential use of parallel intervals, such as the omnipresent parallel sixths in the violin and two distinct sets of parallel intervals in the piano, contribute to its harmonic ambiguity (mm. 58-59, Figure 4.10).



Figure 4.10 Ma Sicong, “Dances Beyond the Frontier,” mm. 58-59.

Slowing down to *Meno mosso*, the B section (mm. 68-104) finally introduces lengthier phrases. Apart from being derived from the folk tune *Lady Hong-cai* (红彩妹妹), the melody, particularly in mm.72-73, is also connected to a section of the second movement's main theme (Figure 4.11).

III. Dance Beyond the Frontier  
a) mm. 72-73



II. Song of Nostalgia  
b) mm. 3-4



Figure 4.11 “Dances Beyond the Frontier,” mm. 72-73 and “Song of Nostalgia,” mm. 3-4

The A material returns in measures 105-123 (A'), with a harmonized rendition of the primary theme (measures 125-140). The following connecting B' section (measures 141-164) is identical to B, except for the written-out repeats. Ma refers to the next section (measures 165-186) as "Coda meno mosso," which extends by six measures the first sixteen measures of C (measures 70-83). The main theme (A) is then played Presto on the piano (measures 187-198), completing the movement in A minor (A Shang mode).



## CHAPTER 5

### ANALYSIS OF TIBET TONE POEM

Sicong Ma traveled to Chongqing in 1940 to work on a documentary titled *An Exploration of Tibet*, which the Central Film Studio was producing. The documentary examined the landscape of Tibet and the manners and customs of the Tibetan people. Ma was enlisted to compose the accompanying music for this documentary, which he did. In the beginning, he composed “Lamasery,” which literally translates as “Temple of the Lamas,” using the musical elements requested for the documentary. During his work on the film, he collected additional musical materials and composed two additional pieces, “Sword Dance” and “Legend Telling.” In 1941, he assembled these three works into a suite still in use today. He titled it the *Tibet Tone Poem* and placed “Legend Telling” at the start of the piece, with “Sword Dance” as the conclusion.

#### Legend Telling

The first movement is in double variation form with an introduction based on a motif (Figure 5.1)

Table 4					
<i>Structure of “Legend Telling”</i>					
Section	Introduction	A	B	A’	B’
Measure	1-37	38-60	61-101	102-124	125-156
Key	E minor	E Yu	E Yu/ C Gong	E Yu	E Yu



Figure 5.1 Ma Sicong, “Legend Telling” from *Tibet Tone Poem*, mm. 5 – 7.

The start of the piece is mysterious but stable, with highly subtle piano dynamics to set the tone. The piano’s left-hand uses tremolo fifths to generate a drum roll or humming sound in the bass. The melody in the violin part is supported by a pure, vacant, and enigmatic atmosphere created by the humming fifth in the lowest register. Following the presentation of the main motif, the violin part contains a swift passage labeled "Recit." by Ma. A recitative is a kind of vocal composition typically written for a single voice and intended to emulate dramatic discourse in a song. In practice, it has taken on various forms depending on era, nationality, origin, and situation. Ma employed the violin's high register to replicate the Tibetan people's impromptu singing while grazing their yaks and goats in the highlands (Figure 5.2). The rapid repetition of sounds from low to high pitch and then down to low pitch resembles the Tibetan people's singing.

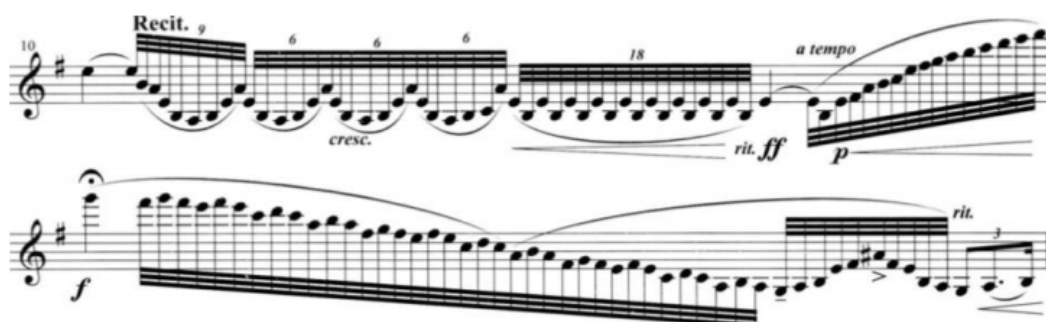


Figure 5.2 Ma Sicong, “Legend Telling” from *Tibet Tone Poem*, m. 10.

Beginning in measure 13, Ma developed a variation on the motif from the opening using double stops (Figure 5.3). He attempted to depict and mimic traditional Tibetan improvisational singing while showcasing the violin's virtuosic capabilities.



Figure 5.3 Ma Sicong, "Legend Telling" from *Tibet Tone Poem*, mm. 13-18.

Ma created mysterious tone colors in the melody by employing numerous fifths in the double stops of the violin part. The entire opening is vast and uninhibited as if a Tibetan folk artist were delivering a mysterious story. This introduction serves as both the opening and end of the piece and an "introduction" to the entire suite.

Beautiful motifs begin to emerge in the introduction after m.38. They are based on the traditional Tibetan music Ma collected while making the documentary. One of the initial themes, which represents the beauty and simplicity of the Tibetan people, is both lyrical and melodic (Figure 5.4).



Figure 5.4 Ma Sicong, "Legend Telling" from *Tibet Tone Poem*, mm. 38-45.

A dance-like tune with staccato sixteenth notes becomes the second theme (Figure 5.5). Every two-measure syncopation played by the piano enhances the sense

of dancing rhythm. The development follows the second theme beginning in m.78, and is a continuation of the second theme's ideas and content. Ma used double stops to demonstrate the violin's brilliance here. He wrote "vigoroso" at this point in the piece, indicating that it should be performed with vigor. Ma used the sound of double stops on the violin to depict the Tibetan people's nightly ritual of singing and dancing around a fire (Figure 5.6)



Figure 5.5 Ma Sicong, "Legend Telling" from *Tibet Tone Poem*, mm.61-66.



Figure 5.6 Ma Sicong, "Legend Telling" from *Tibet Tone Poem*, mm.78-81

The first theme returns an octave higher after the development, while the second theme is compressed, heightening its emotional impact. Interestingly, parallel

fifths were used in the piano part, which was contrary to Western harmonic practice at the time. Furthermore, Ma employed an A-flat seventh chord while in the key of E minor key in the piano part, which is an uncommon chord choice (Figure 5.7).

Figure 5.7 Ma Sicong, “Legend Telling” from *Tibet Tone Poem*, mm. 20 – 22.

Examining the chord progressions in greater detail reveals a significant surprise in the piano part. It began with a C major chord in measure 24 and progresses to a D7 chord in the following measure, followed by C major, Bb major, A major, C minor, and Eb major chords. These chords appear unrelated, with no apparent harmonic direction when viewed individually. Analyzing this section reveals the evident influence of musical Impressionism on Ma's works.

### Lamasery

Ma's tempo marking “Andante maestoso, Quasi Una Marcia funebre” specified that this piece’s musical color should be “nearly like a funeral march.” The musical form of this piece is Ternary with an introduction. In terms of structural proportions, the three-section structure is symmetrical and balanced, and the measure number ratio is 36:34:34.

Table 5				
<i>The Structure of "Lamasery"</i>				
Section	Introduction	A	B	A'
Measure	1-5	6-42	43-86	87-120
Key		E flat Major/Lydian	D Mixolydian	E flat Major

The first five measures are an introduction by the piano. The left hand's repeating descending perfect fourth (Eb-Bb), and the right hand's rhythmic pattern (repeating a Bb) begins the funeral march's initial statement (Figure 5.8). Infrequent attacks and a slow tempo depict tranquility and open space, drawing the audience into a sacred temple on the Tibetan Plateau. The scriptures of Tibetan Buddhism frequently mention a feeling of awe toward the gods, which Ma captures here.



Figure 5.8 Ma Sicong, "Lamasery" from *Tibet Tone Poem*, mm. 1-4.

Section A starts with the main melody played by the violin after the humming backdrop setting established by the piano. This section itself is in a simple ternary form. In part a, the violin melody is in the Lydian mode with a raised 4<sup>th</sup> (A natural) when it is ascending, and in Ionian or E flat major (the A becomes A flat) when it is descending (Figure 5.9). The frequent juxtaposition of A natural and A flat leads to some tonal ambiguity, which lends the work greater magic and mystery. The descending melodic passages convey sorrow, which is the most significant emotional characteristic of this theme. The melody becomes increasingly more intricate as the

development progresses in part b, and part a' repeats the melody from part a but one octave higher, as if the mountains are echoing it.

Table 6			
<i>The structure of Section A from "Lamasery"</i>			
Subsection	a	b	a'
Measure	6-16	17-29	30-42



Figure 5.9 Ma Sicong, "Legend Telling" from *Tibet Tone Poem*, mm. 6 – 12.

To provide contrast to the A section's static sadness, Ma used a faster tempo (*Poco più mosso*) in the B section to depict dynamic grief. He created breathless momentum by using an eighth-note pause and an abbreviated motif (Figure 3.9). Part a (mm. 44-52) derives from the opening motif but shifts it to D Mixolydian mode, part b (53-60) adds a new motif and syncopation for even greater contrast, and part a' transposes the main motif and shifts it from F major to D flat major and then to D major, before part b' finally arrives in E flat. The continuous tonal changes make the music more powerful, increasing color changes and tension while building momentum—the music gradually transitions out of its previously sad mood. Measures

77-85 differ from a traditional retransition toward the home-key dominant; instead, they emphasize the subdominant before modulating back to the tonic E flat.



Figure 5.10 Ma Sicong, “Lamasery” from *Tibet Tone Poem*, mm. 43-49.

Table 7				
<i>The structure of Section B from “Lamasery”</i>				
Subsection	a	b	a'	b'
Measure	44-52	53-60	61-71	73-86

For the recapitulation, Ma softened the dynamic and set the melody an octave higher than in the opening (*pp*). He retained the same rhythms and pitches in the accompaniment but added a counterpoint in the piano’s right hand. The violin melody is supported by a rich accompanimental texture that provides the feeling of people walking slowly and mourning in a funeral procession.

### Sword Dance

This is the concluding movement of this suite. Ma created the complete suite in a fast-slow-fast arrangement, similar to the standard three-movement order in Western music. The inspiration for this composition comes from a book about Tibet and the Tibetan people's sword dance. Liang Maochun recounts that “in between the



swordplay, the sword dancers sang the tunes. ‘My sword! My love!’ they sang. I bury my sword in the mountain during the winter. In the summer, I submerge it in the water. My blade will pierce the adversary ...’” (1986, 4). This movement is the only piece composed in sonata form among Ma Sicong's solo violin works. The use of sonata form was also rare in the works of other Chinese composers at that time. Unlike traditional Classical sonata form, the order of the first and second themes in the recapitulation is reversed. Ma’s use of sonata form in this work influenced the early creation of violin music in China.

Table 8				
<i>The Structure of “Sword Dance”</i>				
Section	Introduction	Exposition	Development	Recapitulation
Measure	1-10	11-128	129-254	255-408
Key	A	A minor-D Major		A minor

A Presto tempo marking gives this piece gigue-like qualities when combined with its 6/8 meter. The gigue, known as a Baroque folk dance, is usually found at the end of a suite, as is this movement. The first theme played by the violin is derived from a Tibetan folk tune and is composed of only four notes: A, B, D, and E. The interval between A and E is a fifth, a frequently used interval in Chinese music. Beginning in m. 41, Ma added a B flat every two measures to create a major seventh interval below A (Figure 5.11). In measures 63 and 64, he added E flat to form a tritone with A (Figure 5.12). These dissonant intervals increase the exotic feeling of

the piece and also demand the violinist's virtuosity. The second theme starts in measure 76 and inverts the first subject's opening, as part of a contrapuntal texture. It is also more lyrical than the beginning. If the first theme is an intense and fast dance, the second theme is an affectionate dance in circles. The second theme is in D major rather than the more common relative major key based on the first theme. Ma did this because he had already established the second theme in counterpoint to the first theme, which calls for identical notes to be used but inverted. Ma added an F# to the second theme to complete the pentatonic.

Table 9

*The Structure of Exposition from "Sword Dance"*

Subsection	FTA	Transition	STA	Closing
Measure	11-66	66-75	76-118	119-128



F

Figure 5.11 Ma Sicong, “Sword Dance” from *Tibet Tone Poem*, mm. 37-48.



F F

Figure 5.12 Ma Sicong, “Sword Dance” from *Tibet Tone Poem*, mm. 61-66.

The development transposes the first theme to D minor and continues modulating to E, G, and F, then back to E by m. 172. The texture after m. 176 is fascinating: the piano is still playing 6/8-meter accompaniment in two-beat groupings. However, the violin plays two quarter-notes and two eighth notes every measure, which is the rhythm of 3/4 meter in a three-beat grouping (Figure 5.13). This two-against-three combination depicts the strength and weakness of the combatants and

the heightened tension when the two swords collide. It suggests feelings of love and hate, spiritual and physical exaltation, which produces a profound artistic effect.



Figure 5.13 Ma Sicong, "Sword Dance" from *Tibet Tone Poem*, mm.175-180.

The "retransition" continues to use the motif from the first theme, and the recapitulation starts with the second theme first. This reversal of the first and second themes is one of the most significant aspects of the section. Another noteworthy moment is the coda in the last sixteen measures. The whole recapitulation is in A minor because both the melodic and harmonic structure emphasize that key. However, in the last-second measure, the melody suddenly ends on D (Figure 5.14). The D becomes an added 7<sup>th</sup> above an E minor triad forms an E minor 7<sup>th</sup> chord, creating a sort of deceptive cadence. This seemingly abrupt and bold coda-writing style brings the song back to the first movement, "Legend Telling," just like "Bazaha<sup>11</sup>!" in Tibetan singing. It balances the beginning and the end and brings a return of tonality so that the music has a sense of completion.

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11 Bazaha is an interjection in the Tibetan language, often used in folk songs as the last word of a phrase.

The image shows a musical score for the piece "Sword Dance" from the *Tibet Tone Poem*, measures 403-408. The score is written for a piano and features two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff begins with a melodic line marked with a forte (*ff*) dynamic. The bass staff provides a rhythmic accompaniment, also marked with *ff*. The music is characterized by a strong, driving rhythm and a melodic line that moves in a generally ascending and then descending pattern. The score concludes with a double bar line.

Figure 5.14 Ma Sicong, "Sword Dance" from *Tibet Tone Poem*, mm. 403-408.

## CONCLUSION

Ma Sicong is of great significance to China's performance, creation, and teaching of violin works. His violin music hastened the adoption of the violin as an important instrument in China and influenced nationalistic compositions by subsequent generations of composers for the violin. By using the melodies of Chinese folk songs and combining them with characteristics idiomatic to the violin, he created Chinese violin works with a solidly national personality that were not available before.

While the success of Ma Sicong's violin music showed that the violin, a Western instrument, needed to be recognized, accepted, and learned by the public in China, his works were nonetheless the result of a fusion of Western instrumental techniques and Eastern traditional music. French Impressionism partly inspired his performance and creation of violin music; Impressionism pursues the richness of harmonic colors, as reflected in Ma Sicong's violin music. Because of his work, traditional Western violin techniques were modified to create a uniquely Chinese musical style, showcase the country's indigenous melodies, and mimic traditional folk instrument playing techniques and sound effects. To a great extent, these modifications enriched violin playing and created modern violin performances in China.

For half a century, Ma Sicong's violin compositions significantly promoted the development of violin art in China. Many people interested in his violin music begin to contact teachers and learn to play the violin, which made the violin, a Western

instrument, popular in China. His music also inspired later composers to create nationalized violin music. Among his late works, *Butterfly Lovers* is the most famous globally, with many internationally renowned violinists having performed it.

Ma Sicong spent his life performing, creating, and teaching music for the violin, pursuing his goal of nationalizing the development of violin music in China. As a member of the first generation of violinist-composers in China, his output has essential research significance and value for its insights into modern Chinese music history. A representative nationalist violinist and composer, he used the violin to play folk music from the beginning, and later composed suitable folk tunes for the violin according to the dictates of folk song melody and the characteristics of the violin.

The historical contribution of Ma Sicong's violin music creation is mainly reflected in his persistent efforts toward the mutual integration of Chinese and Western cultures. In the history of modern Chinese music, he was always a composer who insisted on his own path, yet his music is full of love for his nation.

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