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INTERCULTURAL TWO-PIANO REPERTOIRE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE WORKS OF CHINESE FEMALE COMPOSERS CHEN YI, ALICE PING YEE HO, AND FANG MAN

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A DOCUMENT APPROVED FOR THE
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Abstract

This study examines how Chinese cultural identity is expressed in the two-piano ensemble works of three contemporary living Chinese female composers: Chen Yi, Alice Ping Yee Ho, and Fang Man. Situating these works within the broader historical development of the two-piano medium and the development of piano music in China, including the integration of Western compositional techniques with Chinese music elements such as pentatonic systems, folk tradition, and instrumental idioms, the study builds on an overview of two-piano repertoire and intercultural musical exchange to establish a framework for analysis. Each of these composers occupies a significant position as a transnational artist, drawing on both Eastern and Western musical traditions. By focusing on Chen's *China West Suite* (2007), a work shaped by Chinese regional folk materials, contrapuntal textures, and rhythmic vitality; Ho's *An Eastern Apparition* (1994), which draws on the philosophical concept of *yin* and *yang* and translates it into contrasting timbral and atmospheric gestures; and Fang's *Two Colors* (2001–2002), defined by the contrast between its two movements and its emphasis on texture inspired by György Ligeti (1923–2006) and sonic imagery from *jingju*, this study explores how these composers, each trained and professionally active across Asia and North America, articulate their intercultural identities through musical language.

Drawing in part on composer interviews, including those with Ho and Fang, the study also considers how each composer reflects on her relationship to cultural heritage and compositional practice. Through detailed musical analysis, the study highlights each composer's strategies for synthesizing traditional Chinese musical idioms, including pentatonic pitch materials, characteristic rhythmic and timbral gestures, and culturally rooted thematic ideas, with Western contemporary compositional techniques. In addition to focused analysis of these works,

the dissertation surveys each composer's broader piano output, including solo piano works, piano ensemble repertoire, and piano concertos, situating the selected two-piano compositions within their larger compositional trajectories and artistic development. Even though all three composers work with similar materials, they take different paths. Chen builds from folk sources, Ho shapes her music through philosophical ideas, and Fang focuses on sound and texture. The diversity suggests that intercultural composition unfolds through a range of individual approaches rather than a single fixed framework.

The study also includes a pedagogical guide for pianists and educators, offering interpretive insights, technical considerations specific to two-piano performance, and ensemble strategies that support meaningful engagement with these works in both studio and concert settings. By centering the contributions of living Chinese female composers and situating their work within a transnational framework, this study contributes to a more inclusive understanding of contemporary piano ensemble literature. It further demonstrates the artistic and pedagogical value of this repertoire and encourages its continued exploration within both performance and scholarship.

Author's Note

There are a variety of systems used for the transliteration of Chinese names and words into the Latin alphabet, the most prominent of these being *pinyin*. In the footnote citations, Chinese organizations and works will be written first in pinyin, then in characters, and finally in English translation.

Chinese personal names follow a surname-given name order, the opposite of that used in most Western countries. Thus, with the composer Chen Yi, her surname is Chen and her given name is Yi. Likewise, with Fang Man, her surname is Fang and her given name is Man. There are exceptions to this, however, especially when a Chinese person has adopted a Western name. For example, Alice Ping Yee Ho's surname is Ho and her given names are Alice Ping Yee. After first mention, composers will be referred to solely by their surnames. Key Chinese terms referenced throughout this study are collected and defined in the glossary below for ease of reference.

GLOSSARY

Dong people	An ethnic group primarily living in Guizhou, Guangxi, and Hunan provinces, known for rich traditions of polyphonic singing, festivals, and folk crafts.
Gong	A handheld brass percussion instrument that produces a high-pitched sound and is commonly used in jingju.
Guzheng	A twenty-one-stringed Chinese zither.
Inner Mongolia	An autonomous region of China where Mongolians form a sizeable minority; Mongolian populations also reside in the sovereign country of Mongolia.
Jingju	Commonly known in English as Peking opera, a form of traditional Chinese music theater combining singing, speech, instrumental accompaniment, and stylized movement.

Li people	An ethnic group living on Hainan Island, recognized as one of China's 56 official ethnic groups.
Morin khuur	A traditional Mongolian bowed string instrument, also known as the horsehead fiddle.
Pipa	A pear-shaped plucked string instrument.
Wang Ya (王涯; d. 835)	A Tang dynasty chancellor and poet under Emperors Xianzong and Wenzong.
Yao people	A mountain-dwelling ethnic minority in southern China, concentrated in Guangxi province, known for distinct languages, the Panwang Festival, long-drum dance, herbal bath traditions, and intricate embroidery.
Yueju	Also referred to as Cantonese opera, a form combining singing, acting, and martial arts.
Yuju	A regional Chinese operatic form originating in Henan province.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview

In the past several decades, intercultural composition has become an increasingly prominent area of study within contemporary music, reflecting intensified global exchange and evolving expressions of cultural identity. Composers working across musical traditions often integrate folk materials, philosophical concepts, and traditional instrumental idioms with Western compositional practices, creating works that negotiate multiple cultural perspectives. Within this context, the piano has played a central role due to its wide expressive range and its capacity to evoke diverse timbral, rhythmic, and textural qualities associated with non-Western traditions.

Alongside these developments, the contemporary two-piano repertoire has experienced notable growth in both performance and pedagogical contexts. Two-piano works present unique technical, interpretive, and collaborative challenges, and their expanded sonic space allows for heightened contrast, dialogue, and contrapuntal complexity. This growing interest is reflected in the increased visibility of two-piano repertoire in major competitions, including the MTNA Stecher and Horowitz Two Piano Competition, the Dranoff International Two Piano Competition, and the Ohio International Piano Duet and Duo Competition, as well as the inclusion of two-piano works in the semi-final round of the Cleveland International Piano Competition. These platforms not only signal the rising prestige of the ensemble but also create opportunities for composers whose works engage with diverse cultural identities to reach broader audiences.

Within this expanding intercultural and two-piano landscape, Chinese composers have been particularly active in exploring the synthesis of traditional Chinese musical elements such

as folk melodies, pentatonic materials, and instrumental timbres with Western contemporary techniques. The two-piano medium offers a particularly effective platform for this synthesis, as the interaction between the two instruments allows composers to juxtapose or blend contrasting musical languages in ways that a single piano cannot. Texture, timbre, form, and spatial interplay become key vehicles through which cultural dialogue can unfold.

The works of Chen Yi (b. 1953), Alice Ping Yee Ho, and Fang Man (b. 1977) exemplify these intercultural possibilities within the two-piano genre. Chen's *China West Suite* (2007) reconstructs Chinese folk materials through rhythmic vitality and harmonic interplay; Ho's *An Eastern Apparition* (1994) draws on Taoist *yin* and *yang* philosophy, shaping musical balance and contrast between the two pianos; and Fang's *Two Colors* (2001–2002) incorporates elements of *jingju*[1] through contrapuntal textures and polytonal layering. Together, these works demonstrate varied approaches to articulating Chinese cultural identity within a Western contemporary framework.

Examining these three composers collectively is particularly significant because their musical voices have been shaped by distinct generational, historical, and migratory experiences. Chen was born on the Chinese mainland during the early years of the People's Republic of China and lived through the Cultural Revolution; Ho was born and raised in Hong Kong under British rule; and Fang was born on the mainland shortly after the Cultural Revolution ended. These differing life circumstances inform their compositional perspectives and result in divergent yet interconnected approaches to intercultural expression. By studying their two-piano works in chronological order, this dissertation illuminates how generational and biographical factors shape

[1] Commonly known in English as Peking opera, a form of traditional Chinese music theater that combines singing, speech, instrumental accompaniment, and stylized movement.

contemporary Chinese music, offering a multifaceted view of identity, intercultural exchange, and artistic innovation within the two-piano repertoire.

Chen (b. 1953), is a prolific Chinese-American composer who has achieved international recognition for integrating Chinese and Western music traditions. Growing up in a family of doctors who loved classical music, Chen began studying piano at age three and violin at four. Her early training gave her a strong foundation in both Western and Chinese traditions, which later shaped her voice as a composer. At thirteen, during the Cultural Revolution, she was sent to the countryside for reeducation, where she labored alongside farmers, shared music on her violin, and absorbed folk traditions that would influence her style. After the Revolution, she studied composition at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, studying a combination of Western techniques and Chinese traditions and traveling to record folk songs. She later moved to the United States to pursue a doctorate at Columbia University, studying with Chou Wenchung and Mario Davidovsky, where she explored atonality, twelve-tone techniques, and the works of Bartók, Stravinsky, and Schoenberg. She ultimately forged a distinctive compositional voice that synthesizes traditional Chinese melodies with modern harmonic language. Her growing international profile was affirmed through major honors such as awards from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1994, the Guggenheim Foundation in 1996, the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1996, and the Koussevitzky Music Foundation at the Library of Congress in 1997, as well as through frequent performances of her works by leading ensembles including the New York Philharmonic, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the BBC Symphony Orchestra.

Ho is a Chinese-Canadian composer recognized for her imaginative, eclectic, and emotionally charged works that bridge cultures and genres. Raised in a musically supportive family, she began piano studies at an early age and developed a fascination with both Western

classical and Asian musical traditions. After moving to Canada, she pursued formal studies and earned her Bachelor of Music in Composition from Indiana University, followed by a Master of Music from the University of Toronto. Ho's compositional voice is marked by a synthesis of Eastern and Western influences, vivid orchestration, and theatrical expressiveness. Her output spans opera, orchestra, chamber, vocal, electronic, and multimedia works, often characterized by rhythmic vitality, dramatic contrast, and timbre exploration. She is known for integrating elements of Chinese folk music, mythology, and spirituality with contemporary Western techniques, creating a sound world that is at once personal and cosmopolitan. Her artistic achievements have been recognized through numerous honors, including the 2024 Jules Léger Prize for New Chamber Music, the 2022 Barlow Endowment Commissioning Award, the 2022 Symphony Nova Scotia Maria Anna Mozart Award, the 2019 Johanna Metcalf Performing Arts Prize, and the 2013 Dora Mavor Moore Award for Outstanding Original Opera for *The Lesson of Da Ji*, as well as two nominations for the JUNO Award.

Fang (b. 1977) is a Chinese-born American composer whose works blend Western compositional techniques with Chinese musical traditions. Fang earned her Master of Music and Doctor of Musical Arts degrees in Composition from Cornell University, where she studied with distinguished composers Steven Stucky and Roberto Sierra. Prior to her studies at Cornell University, she received rigorous training in composition at the University of Colorado Boulder and the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, where she developed a strong command of Western compositional techniques and cultivated a deep and lasting connection to Chinese musical traditions. This dual foundation has become a hallmark of her distinctive compositional voice. Fang has received major honors including the Charles Ives Fellowship in 2024, the Guggenheim Fellowship in 2012, and the Koussevitzky Foundation Commission in 2010. Her

works have been premiered by leading ensembles including the Los Angeles Philharmonic New Music Group, Camerata Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and Mannheimer Philharmoniker.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine how Chinese cultural identity is expressed through the two-piano works of three living Chinese female composers: Chen, Ho, and Fang. The selected compositions, Chen's *China West Suite* (2007), Ho's *An Eastern Apparition* (1994), and Fang's *Two Colors* (2001–2002), represent distinctive examples of cross-cultural synthesis that blend Chinese musical idioms with Western compositional techniques.

The study combines detailed musical analysis with composer interviews, including original interviews with Ho and Fang, in order to gain firsthand insight into their artistic influences, compositional choices, and perspectives on cultural identity. Due to scheduling constraints, Chen was not available for interview. In addition, the study provides pedagogical and performance guidance to assist teachers and performers in understanding and interpreting these works. In doing so, the study contributes to the growing scholarship on contemporary Chinese two-piano music, serves as a valuable resource for performers and educators, and expands the available repertoire and programming possibilities for two-piano works.

Need for the Study

While Chen, Ho, and Fang have gained international recognition and actively engage in multimedia collaborations, their two-piano works have received limited scholarly attention. To date, insufficient in-depth studies, analyses, or pedagogical resources exist that focus on these compositions, and they remain largely unexplored in the piano literature.

This gap is particularly significant because cultural context directly informs interpretation, stylistic understanding, and accurate performance. Therefore, there is a clear and

pressing need for research that provides performers and educators with practical guidance and analytical resources for approaching their two-piano repertoire. By examining how these compositions express cultural identity, this study contributes to ongoing discussions of intercultural music-making and the global circulation of musical ideas. Moreover, it addresses a gap in current scholarship by offering a focused analysis of selected two-piano works by Chen, Ho, and Fang, situating their contributions within the broader landscape of contemporary music and cross-cultural artistic exchange.

Limitation of the Study

This study focuses on three composers and analyzes one work by each of them: *China West Suite* (2007) by Chen, *An Eastern Apparition* (1994) by Ho, and *Two Colors* (2001–2002) by Fang. These are all living composers who were born in China and immigrated to North America. As a result, there are many composers who are not included in this study, including those who are American-born, who remained in China, or who are deceased. These three composers were chosen for the niche ways in which their selected works effectively represent the integration of Chinese and Western musical traditions, and for the ways their distinct backgrounds, including their birth in different decades, their varied cultural and educational experiences during periods of rapid sociopolitical change in China, and their subsequent immigration paths to North America, inform their compositional voices and approaches to intercultural musical expression. This study's purpose is to analyze selected works from their oeuvre so that specific themes and techniques of this fusion may be explored in depth.

Apart from continuing their work as composers, Chen and Fang are also professors at the University of Missouri–Kansas City and the University of South Carolina, respectively. They are all from a similar cultural background, but have utilized their knowledge of the diverse cultures

within China to enrich their works. Because of the ongoing nature of their professional activity, their works reflect the continuing cultural interchange between the East and the West.

Procedures of Study

The study began with a review of relevant literature, including journal articles, books, dissertations, and other scholarly sources, to establish the historical, cultural, and pedagogical context of the works under study. Following this, primary materials for each two-piano work, including scores, recordings, public interviews, and composers' websites, were collected and examined. Interviews with Ho and Fang were conducted to gain insight into their compositional intentions, cultural influences, and the distinctive characteristics of the two-piano works. Specifically, the research did not include an interview with Chen, as she was unavailable during the period of this study. Instead, the study drew on existing published dissertations, theses, journal articles, and books to inform the discussion of her biography and her work, *China West Suite*. Because comprehensive biographical information on Chen was already available, this portion of the study concentrated on the work itself. In addition, the study included one ninety-minute interview with each of the other two composers, addressing background, aesthetic perspectives, and analytical considerations.

Because these interviews involved human subjects, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained to ensure adherence to all ethical standards. Following IRB approval, these interviews were conducted to gain insight into their compositional intentions, cultural influences, and the distinctive characteristics of the two-piano works. The study then undertook a detailed score analysis, focusing on musical, cultural, and pedagogical aspects, including learning the works with other pianists, technical challenges, interpretive approaches, and ensemble collaboration.

Review of Related Literature

This section surveys selected sources on contemporary Chinese composers Chen, Ho, and Fang, with a focus on their piano and two-piano works. Drawing on a range of materials, including several books and book chapters, a small group of journal articles and dissertations, multiple interviews, as well as recording and scores, it highlights their compositional approaches, stylistic features, and artistic influences. Organized by composer, the discussion also incorporates broader studies on Chinese piano music, historical development, and twentieth-century notation, providing context that situates their works within both Chinese traditions and the wider contemporary music landscape.

Chen Yi

Books

Leta Miller and Michele Edwards wrote an extensive biography titled *Chen Yi*, which examines the composer's life, training, and music up to 2019.[2] The book combines in-depth interviews, analyses of her piano, chamber, orchestral, instrumental, and vocal works, and highlights her compositional style, which blends Chinese and Western traditions in a distinctive, sophisticated way. The two-piano work China West Suite is discussed alongside Chen's Three Bagatelles from China West for piano and flute (2006). In this work, Chen begins to explore extended treatments of folk songs in her instrumental writing, moving beyond brief quotations or general folk-inspired ideas.[3]

Chen's *China West Suite* (2007) is based on her earlier *Three Bagatelles* for piano and flute, with the finale of the bagatelles expanded into a fourth movement for the piano suite. The suite's opening movement draws on "Ashima," linking it to the second movement of the

[2] Leta E. Miller and J. Michele Edwards, *Chen Yi* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2020).
[3] Miller and Edwards, *Chen Yi*, 91–92.

bagatelles. In the third movement, Chen combines two Tibetan tunes, one a composite developed from several folk song sources and the other a lyrical melody derived more directly from a single tune, using a process similar to that in the bagatelles.[4] This book also examines issues of identity, gender, and transnationalism, providing a comprehensive view of Chen's artistic voice and influence in contemporary music.[5]

Jennifer Kelly's book chapter on Chen Yi found in *In Her Own Words: Conversations with Composers in the United States* provides both a biographical overview and a transcription of Kelly's interview with the composer.[6] Chen emphasizes that all her musical intentions are fully expressed in the score itself. The chapter is significant because Chen explains her creative process, detailing how she transforms traditional folk songs into her own distinctive musical language.

Journal Articles

Chih-Suei Shaw's article, "Identity and Cultural Translation in the Music of Chinese American Composer Chen Yi" (2015), published in *Chinese America: History and Perspective*, explores how Chen constructs her Chinese-American identity through music.[7] Shaw emphasizes Chen's view of music as a translatable language that bridges cultures. In *China West Suite*, Chen similarly fuses authentic musical elements from four regions of Western China with Western compositional techniques, creating a work that communicates Chinese cultural identity to a

[4] Miller and Edwards, 91–92.
[5] Miller and Edwards, 159–178.
[6] Jennifer Kelly, "Chen Yi," in *In Her Own Words: Conversations with Composers in the United States*, 101-20 (University of Illinois Press, 2013), http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/j.ctt2tt9pb.11.
[7] Chih-Suei Shaw, "Identity and Cultural Translation in the Music of Chinese American Composer Chen Yi," *Chinese America: History and Perspectives* (2015): 3–16, 83, https://login.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Fidentity-cultural-translation-music-chinese%2Fdocview%2F1781565693%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12964.

broader, international audience. The suite's blending of folk melodies, traditional timbres, and modern pianistic textures exemplifies Shaw's point that Chen's music promotes cross-cultural understanding while reflecting her personal and cultural identity. Thus, Shaw's analysis helps situate *China West Suite* not only as a musical work but also as an expression of Chen's ongoing negotiation of cultural identity within a cross-cultural context.

Dissertations and Thesis

Two recent dissertations examine the use of Tibetan idioms in Chen's works. Sihui Liu's dissertation, "Exploring Tibetan Music Idioms: A Comparative Study of Selected Compositions by Chen and Andrea Clearfield," compares Chen's *China West Suite* with *Tibetan Tunes* (2023), noting that both incorporate Tibetan musical elements.[8] Liu's research includes email correspondence with Chen, providing primary source material for *China West Suite*. In particular, Appendix D of Liu's dissertation contains Chen's detailed notes on the suite, including descriptions of the folk song materials and precise measures where each theme begins, offering invaluable insight into the composer's intentions and thematic construction.[9] Liu's dissertation informs this study by providing a reliable framework for identifying and contextualizing the folk materials in *China West Suite*, allowing Chen's own commentary to serve as an authentic guideline for structural, cultural, and interpretive analysis in the present dissertation.

Yueh-Yin Liao's master's thesis "Three Piano Chamber Music Works of Chen Yi: 'Night Thoughts', 'Romance and Dance', 'Tibetan Tunes': An Aesthetic and Structural Analysis with

[8] Sihui Liu, "Exploring Tibetan Music Idioms: A Comparative Study of Selected Compositions by Chen Yi and Andrea Clearfield" (DMA diss., Florida State University, 2023), 15–28.
[9] Liu, "Exploring Tibetan Music Idioms," 61.

Suggestions for Performance,"[10] highlights Chen's use of Tibetan folk tune materials, including "Du Mu," "Dui Xie," and "Amaliehuo."[11] These same tunes also appear in *China West Suite*, specifically in the first movement, "Introduction," and the third movement, "Zang Songs." Liao's analysis provides a basis for identifying these melodies as a recurring *idée fixe* in Chen's compositions, demonstrating how she reworks folk materials across multiple works to create thematic cohesion and cultural continuity. This approach illustrates Chen's compositional practice of drawing on traditional Chinese sources while shaping them through Western forms and pianistic techniques. Recognizing these recurring elements provide a deeper understanding of her musical language, interpretive possibilities, and the ways in which her works communicate Chinese cultural identity across different compositions.

Qin Nadia Feeken's dissertation, "The Complete Solo Piano Works of Chen Yi: A Recording, Analysis, and Interpretation," analyzes seven of Chen's solo piano works, including *Variations on "Awariguli," Duo Ye*, *Guessing*, *Two Chinese Bagatelles*, *Ba Ban*, *Singing in the Mountain*, and *Ji-Dong-Nuo*, through both analysis and performance notes.[12] Feeken's work includes detailed formal analysis, examination of pitch and rhythmic materials, and consideration of cultural and textural elements. Together, these analyses provide an analytical model for examining Chen's *China West Suite*.

[10] Yueh-Yin Liao, "Three Piano Chamber Music Works of Chen Yi: "Night Thoughts," "Romance and Dance," "Tibetan Tunes": An Aesthetic and Structural Analysis with Suggestions for Performance" (Master's thesis, University of Miami, 2014), 117–28.
[11] "Du Mu" is a Tibetan goddess. "Dui Xie" is a Tibetan folk ensemble consist of plucking instrument *Zhamunie*, bamboo flute, and Chinese fiddle *Erhu*, often accompanied by singing and tapping dance.
[12] Feeken, Qing Nadia. "The Complete Solo Piano Works of Chen Yi: A Recording, Analysis, and Interpretation." (*PhD* diss., Arizona State University, 2012).

Alice Ping Yee Ho

Composer Interviews and Website

Vania Chan conducted two interviews with Ho. The first, in 2021, focused on her song *Spring*,[13] while the second, in 2025, explored her overall compositional process and creative approach.[14] In these interviews, Ho cited several composers as inspirations, particularly Ravel and the avant-garde artist Yoko Ono.[15] In an interview with Patti Chan from the Center for Music Innovations in 2021, Ho discusses her compositional philosophy and the ways her approach to intercultural synthesis and identity in contemporary music has evolved.[16] In this interview, Ho recounts her early training in Western classical and avant-garde traditions under composers such as John Eaton and Brian Ferneyhough, emphasizing how her later experiences in Toronto's multicultural environment inspired her to rediscover her Chinese heritage. She explains that her compositional style seeks to balance Western harmonic and structural techniques with Chinese timbres, instruments, and narrative traditions, creating works that reflect both personal and cultural hybridity.[17] Although the interview does not focus directly on Ho's piano works, it informs this document's discussion of cultural identity and stylistic fusion in Chinese piano composition. Navo Arts (NAVO Inc., an organization of internationally recognized artists in Kansas dedicated to enriching Midwest communities and supporting underserved populations) interviewed Ho in 2022 about her children's opera, *The Monkiest*

[13] Spring by Alice Ping Yee Ho, YouTube video, 1:20, uploaded by Vania Chan Music, July 15, 2021, https://youtu.be/TLx0dbW3QTo.
[14] When Music Meets Mindfulness - Alice Ping Yee Ho, YouTube video, 14:50, uploaded by Vania Chan Music, March 31, 2025, https://youtu.be/obwzJiXyj6Q?si=jpf8dsJuWdJke-0o.
[15] Spring by Alice Ping Yee Ho, YouTube video, 1:20, uploaded by Vania Chan Music, July 15, 2021, https://youtu.be/TLx0dbW3QTo.
[16] CMI Interview with Alice Ping Yee Ho," YouTube video, 28: 09, uploaded by Center for Music Innovation, May 31, 2021, https://youtu.be/0tSrJLEUVxA?si=qRtQ-StYuWGQOPta.
[17] CMI Interview with Alice Ping Yee Ho," YouTube video, 28: 09, uploaded by Center for Music Innovation, May 31, 2021, https://youtu.be/0tSrJLEUVxA?si=qRtQ-StYuWGQOPta.

King.[18] Although this interview does not directly address Ho's piano works, it is useful for this dissertation because Ho discusses how she uses Chinese instruments and blends them into her work. An additional podcast interview by the Canadian Music Centre (2025) emphasizes Ho's eclectic artistic identity, her commitment to language preservation, and her view of music as a means of communication with diverse audiences.[19]

James Sommerville interviewed Ho about her piece *The Phantom Bird of Han (2025)*.[20] Discussing her use of microtones in *The Phantom*, Ho articulated that she is drawn to sounds that evoke an otherworldly quality, noting that these sonic effects are not merely aesthetic but serve a narrative function, imbuing the music with expressive and structural meaning.[21] The composer's official website offers a comprehensive overview of her biography, press coverage, discography, compositional catalogue, and awards.[22]

Performance Review

In an interview, Katherine Dowling, who recorded two of Ho's solo piano works on her album *Awake and Dreaming*, reflected on her experience performing Ho's music.[23] She observed the distinctive otherworldly character of the compositions and noted the absence of conventional

[18] NAVO Listens! An Interview with Composer Alice Ping Yee Ho, YouTube video, 28:49, uploaded by Navo Arts, February 2, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j3ZezLv433I&t=766s.
[19] MUSING: April 14, 2025 - Alice Ping Yee Ho," YouTube video, 59:57, uploaded by Janna Sailor, April 14, 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W7btNaTK_RQ&t=407s.
[20] James Sommerville, interview with Alice Ho, *"James Sommerville interviews Alice Ho about her piece, 'The Phantom Bird of …'"*, YouTube video, 13:39, uploaded by Hamilton Philharmonic Orchesctra, July 14, 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9H3AIBtlucs&t=698s.
[21] James Sommerville, interview with Alice Ho, *"James Sommerville interviews Alice Ho about her piece, 'The Phantom Bird of …'"*, YouTube video, 13:39, uploaded by Hamilton Philharmonic Orchesctra, July 14, 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9H3AIBtlucs&t=698s.
[22] Alice Ping Yee Ho, "Home," accessed November 2, 2025, https://www.alicepyho.com/.
[23] Katherine Dowling, "Katherine Dowling discusses her CD Awake and Dreaming that features the music of Alice Ping-Yee Ho," YouTube video, 24:05, uploaded by Classic 107, October 4, 2024, https://youtu.be/sRjQKm_7XJY?si=R_ogLevwgYZ7IiPL.

bar lines, emphasizing Ho's meticulous notation, which provides performers with detailed guidance for interpretation.

The CD review of *Glistening Pianos - Music by Alice Ping Yee Ho* by Brian Christopher Thompson, published in the *CAML Review* in 2014, provides a detailed examination of the album, which includes *An Eastern Apparition* for two pianos, performed by Piano Duo 2X10 (Midori Koga and Lydia Wong).[24] Thompson emphasizes how *An Eastern Apparition* reflects Ho's interest in balancing opposing forces, including *yin* and *yang* and the positive and negative aspects of *xiqu* characters, through its pianistic textures and musical dialogue.

Book Entry

Ho is mentioned in several books. Arlene Chan discusses her in *The Chinese Community in Toronto: Then and Now*[25] as a Canadian pianist and composer within the Toronto Chinese community. John Beckwith, who was Ho's master's composition teacher, references her as his student and names her as one of a group of new composers in Canada in *Unheard Of: Memoirs of a Canadian Composer*.[26] Although these references are brief, they collectively attest to her recognition as a significant composer within the Canadian community.

Journal Articles

Two scholarly studies have examined various aspects of Ho's music, highlighting both interpretive and physical dimensions of performance. In "Pacing, Performance, and Perception in Alice Ping Yee Ho's *Angst,*" Hannah David-Abraham and collaborators explore how pacing and

[24] Brian Thompson, "Glistening Pianos – Music by Alice Ping Yee Ho (CD Review)," *CAML Review / Revue de l'ACBM* 42 (2014), https://doi.org/10.25071/1708-6701.39681.
[25] Arlene Chan, *The Chinese Community in Toronto: Then and Now* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2013), 143.
[26] John Beckwith, *Unheard Of: Memoirs of a Canadian Composer* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012), 156.

perception shape the listener's experience of her music.[27] Likewise, Michele Duguay's "Physical Balance, Gravity, and Tension in Contemporary Piano Works" analyzes Ho's solo piano work *Garage*, focusing on the performer's physical engagement and the expressive tension inherent in her writing.[28] Although these studies do not directly analyze Ho's two-piano works, they highlight key elements of compositional style, including both interpretive and physical dimensions of performance.

Fang Man

Composer Interviews and Website

In the New Music USA interview with Fang, titled "Fang Man Wins ACO's 2006 Underwood Emerging Composers Commission," the composer discusses her artistic inspirations, compositional approach, and professional experiences.[29] She highlights her admiration for composers such as Steven Stucky, Bartók, and Magnus Lindberg, whose orchestral works inform her own writing, and explains her preference for dense, emotionally "big" orchestration. Fang also emphasizes her upcoming studies at Institut de recherche et coordination acoustique/musique (IRCAM) and her long-standing interest in computer music as a tool to expand her palette and enhance acoustic composition. Reflecting on her experiences studying and living abroad, she underscores the importance of emotion in music and how personal feelings shape her work. Additionally, she shares her listening habits, French musical influences,

[27] Hannah Davis-Abraham. "Pacing, Performance, and Perception in Alice Ping Yee Ho's *Angst*." *Contemporary Music Review* 42, no. 1 (2023): 4-21. https://doi.org/10.1080/07494467.2023.2227507.
[28] Michèle Duguay, "Physical Balance, Gravity, and Tension in Contemporary Piano Works," *Contemporary Music Review* 38, no. 3 (2019): 1–35.
[29] Molly Sheridan, "Fang Man Wins ACO's 2006 Underwood Emerging Composers Commission," *NewMusicUSA*, April 19, 2006, https://newmusicusa.org/nmbx/fang-man-wins-acos-2006-underwood-emerging-composers-commission/.

and respect for mentors, while noting the challenges and rewards of orchestral composition, including her desire for more rehearsal time to fully realize her musical ideas.

In an interview posted by Baldwin Wallace College in 2010, Fang discusses the inspirations behind her compositions, citing nature, including trees, flowers, and the ocean, as significant influences. She also emphasizes her fascination with color, often naming her works after colors that inspire them. Additionally, Fang draws creative inspiration from listening to a wide variety of music, which informs her own compositional ideas.[30]

Fang's composer website provides her biography, list of compositions, awards, recordings, upcoming performances, and information about her creative projects, offering a comprehensive overview of her career and musical output.[31]

Performance Review

In Jasmine Liu's performance review entitled "The Chinese Sheng Takes Pride of Place with the SF Orchestra This Week," Liu discusses the world premiere of Fang Man's *Song of the Flaming Phoenix*, which was performed by *sheng* specialist Wu Wei with the San Francisco Symphony under Esa-Pekka Salonen. Fang composed the concerto specifically for Wu Wei, showcasing the *sheng*, an ancient Chinese free-reed instrument. Wu Wei performed on a modified 37-pipe *sheng*, which allows greater versatility, including chords, polyphony, and an extended range. The piece employs an octatonic scale and incorporates birdsong, a recurring inspiration for Fang, with symbolic references to seven birds, including the phoenix. The

[30] Fang Man, Fang Man Interview, YouTube video, 9:05, uploaded by Baldwin Wallace, December 2, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4g0S_PZtuCM.
[31] Fang Man, "Home," *Fang Man Music*, accessed November 20, 2025, https://www.fangmanmusic.com/.

concerto presents significant performance challenges, particularly in balancing the *sheng* with a full orchestra.[32]

Online Conference

Fang presented at the IRCAM video conference in 2023 on the topic of "Color, Birdsong, and Symmetry."[33] Fang discussed her orchestral work *Song of the Flaming Phoenix*, offering insights into her compositional process, creative inspirations, and the integration of contemporary techniques with cultural and narrative elements. Although *Song of the Flaming Phoenix* is not a two-piano work, this discussion is relevant because it reveals the composer's approach to creating music, providing a window into her thought process and methods that can inform an understanding of her compositional style more broadly.

Chinese Piano Music, Culture, and History

Four books provide a general overview of Chinese piano music, culture, and history: *The Formation and Development of Chinese Piano Culture*,[34] *Chinese Piano Music Culture*,[35] *Chinese Music Culture and Piano Music Study (1949–1979)*,[36] and *Exploration of Nationalization in Chinese Piano Works and Their Interpretations*.[37] They trace the introduction

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[32] Jasmine Liu, "The Chinese Sheng Takes Pride of Place With the SF Orchestra This Week," *San Francisco Classical Voice*, March 1, 2022, https://www.sfcv.org/articles/music-news/chinese-sheng-takes-pride-place-sf-symphony-week.

[33] Fang, Man. "Color, Birdsongs, and Symmetry," Séminaire 16: Sheng! L'orgue à bouche … Concertos pour Sheng et orchestre, IRCAM, Salle Igor-Stravinsky, Paris, March 14, 2023, video, 1:06:00, accessed November 21, 2025, https://ressources.ircam.fr/en/media/xe89f33_chang-man-color-birdsongs-and-symmetry.

[34] Bian Meng 卞萌, *Zhongguo gangqin wenhua xingcheng yu fazhan* 中国钢琴文化形成与发展 [The Formation and Development of Chinese Piano Culture] (Beijing: Huale Press, 1996).

[35] Wang Changkui 王昌逵, Zhongguo gangqin yinyue wenhua 中国钢琴音乐文化 [*Chinese Piano Music Culture*] (Beijing: Guangming Daily Publishing House, 2010).

[36] Wang Mei 王梅, *Zhongguo yinyue wenhua yu gangqin yinyue yanjiu (1949–1979)* 中国音乐文化与钢琴音乐研究（1949–1979 [Chinese Music Culture and Piano Music Study (1949–1979)] (Jinan: Shandong University Press, 2016).

[37] Zhang Zehui 张泽惠 and Wei Ming 威鸣, *Zhongguo gangqin zuopin de minzuhua tansuo yu zuopin jiedu* 中国钢琴作品的民族化探索与作品解读 [Exploration of Nationalization in Chinese Piano Works and Their Interpretations] (Beijing: Beijing University of Technology Press, 2021).

and influence of keyboard instruments in China, beginning with Jesuit missionaries in the late sixteenth century, whose instruments remained largely confined to the imperial court, and continuing with the reemergence of the piano in the mid-nineteenth century through missionary schools and Western-influenced music education. By the early twentieth century, Chinese composers began blending Western techniques with folk traditions to form a distinct national style. Despite disruptions from war and political movements, particularly the Cultural Revolution, Chinese piano music revived after 1977, entering a pluralistic era in which composers expanded traditional harmonic language while exploring modern techniques such as atonality, twelve-tone writing, and innovative compositional systems, producing works that balanced Chinese identity with contemporary creativity.

An Introduction to Traditional Chinese Music includes a discussion of different ethnic groups in China and their folk tune characteristics.[38] In particular, the sections on the Meng (Mongolian), Zang (Tibetan), Yi, and Miao people inform the analysis of Chen's *China West Suite*, while the discussion of *jingju* will inform the study of Fang Man's *Two Colors*. *A Course in Basic Music Theory* presents Chinese pentatonic scales and their derived modes,[39] supporting the analysis of chapters 3, 4, and 5, on *China West Suite*, *An Eastern Apparition*, and *Two Colors*. Together, these books provide essential context for exploring the cultural identity of Chen, Ho, and Fang.

[38] Yuan Jingfang 袁静芳, ed., *Zhongguo chuantong yinyue gainian* 中国传统音乐概论 [An Introduction to Traditional Chinese Music] (Shanghai: Shanghai Music Press, 2000), 48–61.
[39] Yan Chengquan 晏成佺 and Tong Zhongliang 童忠良, *Jiben yueli jiaocheng* 基本乐理教程 [A Course in Basic Music Theory] (Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 2006), 84–93.

Twentieth-Century Notation

Books on twentieth-century notation, such as *Music Notation in the Twentieth Century: A Practical Guidebook* by Kurt Stone[40] and *Music Notation: A Manual of Modern Practice* by Gardner Read,[41] offer essential guidance for understanding the wide range of notational practices found in modern scores. They explain how composers convey rhythm, pitch, dynamics, articulation, and unconventional techniques, which is especially helpful when analyzing the extended piano techniques employed in *China West Suite* and *An Eastern Apparition*. These books are valuable resources for identifying innovations in graphic and non-standard notation and for understanding how Chen and Ho communicate musical ideas and technical challenges.

Organization of Study

Chapter One outlines the purpose, need, procedures, and limitations of the study and provides a summary of related literature on the compositions of Chen, Ho, and Fang. Chapter Two provides an overview of the history of the piano in China and includes a survey of Chinese composers who have written two-piano works. Chapters Three through Five focus individually on Chen, Ho, and Fang, centering on one of each composer's two-piano works; for each, a biographical sketch is presented, followed by a detailed analysis of the selected work with attention to pedagogical and performance considerations. Finally, Chapter Six presents the conclusion of the study. The appendices include the IRB approval letter and an interview guide for Ho and Fang.

[40] Kurt Stone, *Music Notation in the Twentieth Century: A Practical Guidebook* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1980), 257–273.
[41] Gardner Read, *Music Notation: A Manual of Modern Practice* (New York: Taplinger, 1979), 300–322.

Chapter 2: Chinese Piano Music Overview

The chapter provides context for analysis of Chinese elements in the selected two-piano works by Chen, Ho, and Fang, this chapter covers the history of the piano in China and surveys Chinese composers' two-piano works from 1980 to 2025, exploring how contemporary collaborations have expanded the repertoire, incorporated folk and modern elements, and contributed to the evolution of Chinese piano music. Keyboard instruments were introduced to China in the late sixteenth century by Jesuit missionaries who brought harpsichords and clavichords to the imperial court and introduced Western notation and theory. During the Qing dynasty, emperors such as Kangxi received instruction in Western instruments, but political isolation limited the piano's broader influence. The modern piano arrived in the nineteenth century, gaining popularity through religious schools and educational reforms, which encouraged the blending of Western techniques with Chinese folk melodies. By the twentieth century, composers increasingly fused Western compositional methods with Chinese folk music, as seen in works from the Tcherepnin[42] Competition and compositions by He Luting.[43] Political upheavals between 1937 and 1977 restricted piano composition to folk-inspired or politically sanctioned works. After 1977, composers regained creative freedom, exploring both modern techniques and traditional pentatonic melodies. Contemporary composers such as Chen, Ho, and Fang reinterpret these scales within modern harmonic and textural frameworks, creating works that honor Chinese musical heritage while embracing innovation.

[42] Alexander Tcherepnin (1899-1977), a Russian-born composer and pianist, lived in China from 1934 to 1937, where he taught, performed, and was appointed honorary professor at the Shanghai Conservatory. In 1934, he founded a *Call for Chinese-Style Piano Pieces* competition, which played an important role in the early development of Chinese piano music.

[43] He Luting (1903-1999), Chinese composer, he was a composer and the director of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. He was the winner of Tcherepnin's *Call for Chinese-Style Piano Pieces* competition.

Brief History of Chinese Piano Music

The earliest documented introduction of a keyboard instrument to China dates back to 1583. Italian Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci brought a harpsichord to a church in Zhaoqing, a city in Guangdong province. Later, in 1600, Ricci visited Beijing at the invitation of Emperor Wanli. As a tribute, he presented a clavichord to the emperor, who was captivated by its sound. Four court eunuchs were even trained to play the instrument, and Ricci, along with Spanish Jesuit Diego de Pantoja, collaborated on a collection of pieces titled *Eight Songs for a Western Stringed Instrument*, with lyrics in both Chinese and Italian. In 1639, another missionary, Francesco Sambiasi, continued this exchange by presenting a clavichord to the Chongzhen Emperor. A year later, Johann Adam Schall von Bell restored Ricci's clavichord and wrote a Chinese instruction manual for it. Unfortunately, this manual has been lost to history.[44]

During the Qing dynasty, Emperor Kangxi (1654–1722), a music enthusiast, took a particular interest in Western instruments and even learned to play the harpsichord. He appointed Jesuit missionaries Tomas Pereira and Ferdinand Verbiest as his music teachers. Under Kangxi's direction, Pereira helped edit the first Chinese music theory book (Lü Lü Zuan Yao) to introduce Western concepts such as notation, time signatures, and harmony. Despite this early fascination, by the late eighteenth century, during the reign of Emperor Qianlong (1711–1799), Western keyboard instruments began to fade from prominence at the Chinese court. Political isolation and a lack of widespread interest confined these instruments to the Forbidden City, limiting their influence on Chinese music.[45]

The modern piano arrived in China after the Anglo-Chinese War in 1840. Following the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842, British piano manufacturers saw China as a potential market and

[44] Wang, Zhongguo gangqin yinyue wenhua, 42–43.
[45] Bian, *Zhongguo gangqin wenhua xingcheng yu fazhan*, 7.

began shipping instruments there. However, the piano remained a novelty for many years, with only limited adoption. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, the piano began to take root in China's music scene. Religious schools played a key role in introducing piano education, leading to a broader acceptance of the instrument. This period also saw the rise of School Music Songs, a movement that sought to modernize music education in China by blending foreign influences with traditional Chinese folk music. As Chinese composers became more familiar with Western music, they began applying Western techniques to traditional Chinese melodies, laying the foundation for a distinctive Chinese piano style that seamlessly integrated Chinese themes with Western techniques. This fusion became more pronounced in the 1930s and 1940s, when composers actively integrated European compositional techniques with Chinese folk music. A pivotal moment came with Alexander Tcherepnin's Call for Chinese-Style Piano Pieces competition, which led to the creation of iconic works like He Luting's *The Cowherd's Flute*. Tcherepnin, a Russian composer and educator, played a significant role in shaping Chinese piano music by mentoring influential composers such as Luting He, Shande Ding, and Xiaolin Tan, encouraging them to explore and develop a Chinese pianistic voice.[46]

Between 1937 and 1949, China's wars and political upheaval shifted the focus of music toward social mobilization and patriotism. With limited resources, composers prioritized folk-inspired works over large-scale piano compositions, resulting in only about 30 piano pieces during this period.[47] After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the government promoted patriotic themes in music, further elevating folk traditions. Composers aimed to preserve the essence of traditional melodies while integrating more advanced artistic techniques, creating a distinctive blend of heritage and innovation. Between 1967 and 1977, the

[46] Bian, 22–24.
[47] Bian, 25–31.

Cultural Revolution brought significant challenges to piano music, restricting artistic expression and shifting the focus to politically driven works. Composers were primarily tasked with adapting folk and revolutionary music for piano, emphasizing themes that aligned with political ideology. As a result, piano music from this period fell into three main categories:

1. Model opera arrangements: focused on political narratives rather than artistic depth.
2. Traditional instrument adaptations: folk music originally written for traditional instruments was reworked for piano.
3. Folk-inspired works: based on traditional melodies, lacked creative freedom due to strict oversight.[48]

After 1977, China's music scene experienced a revival as composers, freed from many political constraints, began embracing new techniques and expanding their creative horizons. This period also marked a renewed emphasis on piano education and composition, laying the foundation for the Chinese piano repertoire known today. In contemporary Chinese piano music, two main stylistic approaches have emerged. One involves the fusion of modern techniques with Chinese elements, in which some composers abroad integrate tone clusters, polytonality, and atonality while maintaining a connection to traditional cultural influences. The other approach draws on traditional melodies and pentatonic harmony, as composers take inspiration from folk songs and instrumental works to create lyrical and expressive pieces that highlight the beauty of Chinese musical traditions through the piano's wide range of colors and textures.[49]

Pentatonic scales are fundamental to Chinese music, shaping both the melodies and the overall character of much Chinese piano repertoire. Unlike the Western musical system, traditional Chinese music is centered around the pentatonic scale, which is based on five pitches: *gong (do)*, *shang (re), jue (mi), zhi (sol),* and *yu (la)* (see Table 2.1 for the complete scale). In the pentatonic system, any of the five notes can serve as the tonic, or central pitch of a piece, giving

[48] Wang, 157–158.
[49] Wang, 204–207.

rise to five different modes. The modes *gong (do)*, *shang (re), jue (mi), zhi (sol),* and *yu (la)* always keep the same intervallic relationship with one another, but the sense of the music changes depending on which tone is treated as the center. When *gong* is the tonic, the mode is called the *gong* mode; when *shang* becomes the tonic, it forms forms *shang* mode, and the same principle applies to the others. The Chinese pentatonic scale serves as the melodic basis for Chinese folk songs, operas, and instrumental works. In contemporary composition, composers like Chen, Ho, and Fang adapt or reinterpret these scales within modern harmonic and textural frameworks, blending traditional Chinese sounds with Western contemporary techniques.

Table 2.1 Pentatonic Modes and Tonal Center

Mode	**Tonic**	**Solfège**	**Scale**	**Interval Pattern**
Gong	gong	do	do – re – mi – sol – la	M2 – M2 – m3 – M2
Shang	shang	re	re – mi – sol – la – do	M2 – m3 – M2 – m3
Jue	jue	mi	mi – sol – la – do – re	m3 – M2 – m3 – M2
Zhi	zhi	sol	sol – la – do – re – mi	M2 – m3 – M2 – M2
Yu	yu	la	la – do – re – mi – sol	m3 – M2 – M2 – m3

Survey of Chinese Composers' Two-Piano Works

The two-piano format was introduced in China in the early twentieth century, yet performances and teaching largely drew on Western repertoire. Original Chinese compositions in this medium remained limited until the publication of *The Selected Chinese Two-Piano Works* by Hunan Literature and Art Publishing House in 2006, a landmark that signified the formal beginning of two-piano composition in China.[50] The anthology features twenty-five works,

[50] Zhang Youyu 张友瑜 ed., *Zhongguo huanggangqin zuopinxuan* 中国双钢琴作品选 [The Selected Chinese Two-Piano Works] (Hunan: Hunan Literature and Art Publishing House, 2006).

primarily drawn from award-winning entries of the First Chinese-Style Two-Piano Composition Competition at the Wuhan Conservatory of Music.[51] These works are organized into three categories: arrangements of solo piano pieces, new works based on Chinese folk materials, and compositions employing modern compositional and performance techniques.

In recent decades, two-piano repertoire by Chinese composers has flourished, integrating Eastern and Western musical languages and an ongoing dialogue between cultural heritage and contemporary expression. Two major publications, *Collection of Contemporary Two-Piano Works by Chinese Women Composers*[52] and *Selected Chinese Contemporary Two-Piano Works*,[53] have featured works that exemplify this fusion through diverse approaches. Tables 2.2 and 2.3 present lists and brief descriptions of the works included. Notably, the works by both Ho and Chen analyzed in the present study are represented.

In these anthologies, some works allude to traditional Chinese folk music, while others employ narrative or programmatic structures inspired by Chinese painting, folklore, philosophy, and cultural imagery. Across these two-piano works, composers reveal a wide spectrum of stylistic and aesthetic directions that collectively illuminate the evolving landscape of Chinese two-piano writing. Despite differences in form, language, and imagery, these works share a deep engagement with the fusion of Eastern and Western idioms, the exploration of cultural identity, and the expression of philosophical, historical, or personal narratives. Another publication, *The Selected Piano Ensemble Works in Chinese Style*, includes twelve four-hand duets and six two-

[51] This competition is ongoing, with the recent edition in 2025.
[52] Pu Fang 蒲方 ed. Huaren Nü zuoqujia xianddai shuang gangqin zuopinji 华人女作曲家现代双钢琴作品集 [Collection of Contemporary Two-Piano Works by Chinese Women Composers]. (Beijing: Central Conservatory of Music Press, 2018).
[53] Yu Meina 于美娜 and Fu Hong 傅红 ed., Zhongguo dangdai shuang gangqin zuopin jingxuan 中国当代双钢琴作品 精选 [*The Collection of Contemporary Compositions for Two Pianos*] (Beijing: Central Conservatory of Music Press, 2018).

piano works. Some of these pieces are original compositions, while others are transcriptions from works originally written for other instruments.[54]

[54] Zhang Kai 张凯 and Yihong Zhan 詹艺虹 eds, *Zhongguo fengge gangqin chongzou zuopin jingxuan* 中国风格钢琴重奏作品精选 [Selected Piano Ensemble Works in Chinese Style] (Wuhan: Central China Normal University Press, 2014).

Table 2.2 *Two-Piano Works by Chinese Women Composers* (2018)

Composer	Title	Inspiration	Key Characteristics
Alice Ping Yee Ho	*An Eastern Apparition* (1994)	Philosophy	Embodies *yin* and *yang* through the dynamic interplay of two pianos
Wen Tze Grace Lu	*Song of Formosa* (2001)	Taiwan scenery	Depicts natural beauty and cultural scenes of southern Taiwan
Dong Kui	*Miniatures V–VII* (2003)	Abstract	Emphasizes phrasing, space, and timbral transparency
Chen Yi	*China West Suite* (2007)	Folk songs of Yi, Meng, Zang, Miao	Integrates authentic folk materials, contrapuntal textures, modern harmonies
Sun Fanling	*Taoist Exorcist* (2007)	Regional folklore / Spiritual	Rhythmical vitality, pentatonic color
Shi Fuhong	*Traces of Time* (2008)	Personal memories; regional folk imagery	Explores how time breaks memory into scattered "pearls"; layers overlapping memories; evokes vigor, liveliness, contemplation, innocence, and youthful longing
Gao Yuan	*Sisters* (2010)	Lyrical / Personal	Tonal lyricism conveying nostalgia, loss, familial love
Li Yiding	*Olunchun in Xiaoxing'anling Mountain* (2010)	Regional folklore	Portrays regional culture through rhythmical vitality and pentatonic color
Lam Shun	*The Little Dolly Man and the Unhappy Giant* (2010)	Playful / Narrative	Sophisticated variation and rondo structures, humor and narrative

Zhang Ning	*Diffuse Heart* (2010)	Lyrical / Personal	Tonal lyricism conveying nostalgia, loss, familial love
Liu Qing	*Fantasia of Chinese Ancient Dance* (2011)	Tang dynasty dances and poetry	Captures elegance and motion of ancient dances

Table 2.3 *Selected Chinese Contemporary Two-Piano Works* (2018)

Composer	**Title**	**Inspiration**	**Key Characteristics**
Gao Ping	*Valley Echoes* (2009)	Landscape	Evokes mountain landscapes via melodic contour and resonance
Luo Maishuo	*The Twelve Beauties of Prince Yong* (2014)	Qing dynasty paintings	Musical "song cycle"; aesthetic refinement, humanism
Monkzula	*Relativity* (2014)	Abstract	Explores opposing forces via contrasting timbres, harmonies, performance gestures
Zhang Zhiliang	*The Beauty of Six Operatic Female Roles* (2017)	Sichuanese opera	Portrays six female character types; vivid characterization and continuity

Chapter 3: Chen Yi and China West Suite

This chapter provides an overview of Chen's life and musical works, highlighting how her early life, education, and cultural experiences shaped her compositional voice. It situates her piano works within the broader context of her engagement with both Chinese folk traditions and Western compositional techniques, illustrating how she transforms traditional melodies into a modern pianistic language. The chapter also offers pedagogical and performance insights, providing guidance for interpretation and practical engagement with these works.

Biographical Sketch

Chen was born in 1953 in Guangzhou, China, into a family of medical doctors with a deep appreciation for classical music; her mother, Du Dianqin, and her father, Chen Ernan, both fostered an environment in which music played a central role in her early life. From an early age, Chen was fully immersed in music, beginning piano lessons with Li Suxin at the age of three and violin lessons with Zheng Rihua and Zheng Zhong at four. Her parents actively nurtured her musical development, taking her to symphony concerts and ballet performances from countries such as the Soviet Union, England, and France. In addition, her father introduced her to a wide range of international folk dances, including Romanian, African, and Japanese traditions, broadening her early exposure to diverse musical and cultural expressions.[55]

Growing up in such a musically enriched environment allowed her to develop a strong foundation in both Western and Chinese music, setting the stage for her future as a composer. In 1966, when Chen was thirteen, the Cultural Revolution began, marking a period of immense political and cultural upheaval in China. During this time, she was sent to the countryside for "reeducation" through labor, where she worked alongside farmers and laborers. Despite these

[55] Miller and Edwards, *Chen Yi*, 6-8.

harsh conditions, Chen remained devoted to her music, playing her violin for her fellow workers and offering them moments of comfort and joy. Chen also engaged with folk songs firsthand, performing the melodies on her violin while adding her own ornamentation and virtuosic, Paganini-like cadenzas between stanzas.[56] Chen's violin ultimately enabled her to be relieved of the most physically demanding labor during this period. In 1970, Chen was brought back to Guangzhou, and after a series of auditions, she joined the Guangzhou Beijing Opera Troupe as a leading violinist for eight years. The Troupe included both Chinese traditional instruments and Western instruments, and the mission of the Troupe was to serve and promote the ideology of the government. During her years at the Troupe, Chen composed numerous works for performance, including overtures, incidental music, and interludes, and she also orchestrated the accompaniments for arias in the operas.[57]

Following the end of the Cultural Revolution, Chen pursued formal studies at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, where she studied both Western compositional techniques and traditional Chinese music. As part of the conservatory's emphasis on the academic study of folk music, composition students were regularly taken to rural areas to engage directly with local musical traditions. One of the most influential of these trips was to Guangxi Province, which later inspired Chen's piano solo work *Duo Ye*. During these excursions, she recorded and transcribed folk songs that had been transmitted orally for generations, gaining a deep appreciation for China's traditional music that would later shape her own compositional style. During Chen's studies at the Central Conservatory of Music, she met the fellow composer Zhou Long, who later became her husband.[58]

[56] Miller and Edwards, 16.
[57] Miller and Edwards, 22.
[58] Miller and Edwards, 28.

In 1985, Columbia professor Chou Wen-chung visited China to scout promising composers to become students at Columbia University. Zhou Long was invited to join the doctoral program that year, and in 1986, Chen was admitted as well, joining her husband in the United States after completing her master's degree.[59] Chen earned her Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Composition at Columbia University, studying under Chou Wen-chung and Mario Davidovsky. During her time there, she engaged deeply with atonality, twelve-tone techniques, and the compositional languages of Bartók, Stravinsky, and Schoenberg. Rather than adopting these Western methods wholesale, she integrated them into her own musical language while preserving strong connections to her Chinese heritage.[60]

In 1998, Chen joined the faculty at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, where she continues to mentor young composers and promote cross-cultural understanding through music. The following year, she became a U.S. citizen, marking a new chapter in her professional journey. Her distinguished career has been recognized through numerous honors and awards, including the National Endowment for the Arts Award (1994), the Guggenheim Fellowship (1996), the Charles Ives Living Award (2001), recognition as a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize (2006) for *Si Ji* (*Four Seasons*), an Honorary Doctorate from The New School (2010), the Brock Commission from the American Choral Directors Association (2012), and election to the American Academy of Arts and Letters (2019). Beyond these accolades, her works have been commissioned and performed by major artists and ensembles, including Yo-Yo Ma and the New York Philharmonic. Chen's ability to bridge Eastern and Western traditions has established her

[59] Miller and Edwards, 30.
[60] Miller and Edwards, 31-34.

as one of the most influential and pioneering composers of her generation, whose music continues to inspire global audiences and expand the boundaries of cross-cultural composition.[61]

Works for Piano

Chen wrote fourteen piano solo works (see Table 3.1). In her piano works, Chen draws directly on Chinese folk traditions and transforms them within a modern pianistic framework. Her piano output can be understood in three chronological phases that reflect the development of her compositional style.

Early works (1984–1993):

In her earliest piano works, Chen draws directly on traditional sources while maintaining a clear pedagogical focus. *Yu Diao* adapts pitch material from *yuju*,[62] blending modal inflections with a Western ABA' structure and rhythmic irregularity that evokes the percussive sonority of the *yangqin* (dulcimer). Its B section unfolds as a canon, reminiscent of a *yuju* duet scene, while frequent meter changes and off-beat accents contribute to the rhythmic vitality characteristic of Chen's style. A similar approach to transformation appears in *Guessing*, where a playful children's folk song is developed across six variations. Here, Chen expands the simple original tune through motivic transformation, antiphonal textures, and rhythmic acceleration. In contrast, *Small Beijing Gong*,[63] a concise one-page work for children, focuses on timbral imitation. Through shifting meters, sharp dynamic contrasts, and explosive off-beat accents, Chen captures the resonance and percussive character of the *jingju gong*.

[61] Miller and Edwards, 39-44.
[62] Reginal Chinese operatic form originated in Henan province, China.
[63] The gong is a handheld brass percussion instrument that produces a high-pitched sound and is commonly used in jingju.

Middle period (1999–2007):

During this period, Chen expands both the structural scope of her compositions and the sophistication with which she transforms folk materials. *Ba Ban* draws on the traditional Chinese tune *Ba Ban*, an old folk melody structured in sixty-eight beats across eight phrases, demonstrating her early interest in adapting large-scale traditional forms for the piano. This engagement with folk traditions becomes more texturally and rhythmically dynamic in *Duo Ye*, which is inspired by the song-and-dance traditions of the Dong people[64] in Guangxi, observed firsthand during her labor years in the Cultural Revolution. Here, Chen translates communal call-and-response singing into pianistic texture by developing three recurring intervals, a minor third, a perfect fourth, and a major second as melodic and rhythmic motives, expanded through frequent meter and tempo changes.

A similar interest in vocal models appears in *Singing in the Mountain*, where Chen incorporates southern Chinese mountain songs, reimagining their call-and-response style through dynamic contrasts and pentatonic sonorities that mimic vocal exchange. Chen evokes the sense of echoing across mountains by sustaining long intervals in the low register against a lyrical melody in the high register, creating a piano-based call-and-response texture. This exploration of timbre and cultural reference reaches a heightened level of refinement in *Ji-Dong-Nuo*, which incorporates elements of a Yao[65] ethnic ballad. Through pentatonic-based hexatonic collections, birdsong motifs, and the imitation of the *zheng* (Chinese zither), Chen portrays the singing quail and the lyrical character of the melody.

[64] Dong people mainly live in Guizhou, Guangxi, and Hunan provinces and preserve rich traditions of polyphonic singing, festivals, and folk crafts.

[65] Yao people are mountain-dwelling ethnic minority in southern China and concentrated in Guangxi province; they preserve distinct languages, celebrate the Panwang Festival, perform the long-drum dance, practice traditional herbal baths, and create intricate embroidery.

Later works (2011–2022):

In her later works, Chen integrates folk materials with increasingly abstract structural and programmatic ideas. *Variations on "Awariguli"* draws from a Uyghur folk song from Xinjiang, about a young man traveling through mountains, deserts, and rivers in search of the beautiful girl Awariguli. A similar engagement with cultural imagery appears in *Bamboo Dance* recreates the Li people's[66] bamboo clapping through repeated staccato chords, rhythmic ostinati, and descending sevenths. This emphasis on imagery expands further in *Northern Scenes*, which evokes the vast landscapes of northern China. Structurally, the work grows out of a six-note set ("One") that functions as a generative kernel, reflecting Daoist principles of creation and harmony, where motives ("Two"), thematic materials ("Three"), and full textures ("All things") evolve seamlessly throughout the piece. In *Bamboo Song*, Chen continues her engagement with traditional forms by employing the *Ba Ban* structure, while the piano imitates bamboo instruments and conveys the spiritual symbolism of the bamboo flute. Returning to variation technique, *Plum Blossom* develops a traditional Chinese children's song into a set of variations that explore different performing techniques. Chen's newest published piano tone poem, *Song for Spring Outing*, draws inspiration from classical Chinese poetry by Wang Ya[67] and unfolds through a richly layered sound world.

[66] Li people live in Hainan Island and recognized as one of China's 56 official ethnic groups.

[67] Wang Ya (王涯; died 835), was a Tang dynasty chancellor and poet under Emperors Xianzong and Wenzong.

Table 3.1 Chen Yi Solo Piano Work

Year	Title	Key Characteristics
Early Works (1984–1993)		
1984	*Yu Diao*	Piano solo for children; based on Henan opera (*yuju*)
1990	*Guessing*	Variations based on a children's folk song
1993	*Small Beijing Gong*	Short children's piece imitating *jingju* gong
Middle Period (1999–2007)		
1999	*Ba Ban*	Based on the traditional *Ba Ban* tune and its 68-beat structure
2000	*Duo Ye*	Inspired by Dong ethnic song-and-dance traditions
2005	*Singing in the Mountain*	Uses Southern Chinese mountain songs; call-and-response textures
2007	*Ji-Dong-Nuo*	Based on a Yao ethnic ballad; includes birdsong motifs
Late Works (2011–2022)		
2011	*Variations on "Awariguli"*	Draws from a Uyghur folk song from Xinjiang
2014	*Bamboo Dance*	Evokes Li people's bamboo-clapping dance
2015	*Northern Scenes*	Landscape piece with Daoist structural symbolism
2018	*In Memory of Steve*	In memorial of Steve Stucky
2019	*Bamboo Song*	Uses *Ba Ban* form; imitates bamboo instruments
2021	*Plum Blossom*	Variations on a children's song
2022	*Song for Spring Outing*	Pastoral and celebratory character

China West Suite

China West Suite for two pianos consists of four movements, each drawing on regional folk music from different areas of western China and reinterpreted by Chen to create a contemporary piano sound. See Table 3.2 for an overview of the suite and its movements.[68] The first movement, "Introduction," incorporates themes from "Du Mu*"* and "Ashima," folk melodies of the Tibetan and Yi people.[69] The first theme is adapted from the Tibetan folk song "Du Mu," named after a revered Tibetan Buddhist goddess. Its gentle character reflects the goddess's grace and tranquility, establishing a contemplative and devotional atmosphere. The second theme, by contrast, is drawn from "Ashima," a traditional folk song of the Yi people in Yunnan Province, which tells the captivating legend of a young woman celebrated for her extraordinary beauty.

The second movement, "Meng Songs," features two Mongolian folk songs, "Gadameilin*"* and "Pastoral Song."[70] It draws its cultural inspiration from the musical traditions of the Mongolian ethnic minority in China. The title uses the term *Meng*, which commonly refers to the Mongolian people, one of China's officially recognized minority nationalities. Their primary historical and cultural region within China is Inner Mongolia, where folk music plays an important role in expressing pastoral life, history, and regional identity. The movement incorporates melodic material from these two well-known Mongolian folk songs, reflecting characteristic elements of Mongolian musical expression. The melodies also create contrasting musical characters: "Gadameilin" conveys a solemn and grounded quality often associated with

[68] *China West Suite* is also available in alternative arrangements by Chen, including an arrangement for wind symphony.
[69] Yi people are an ethnic group who mainly live in Yunnan, Sichuan, Guizhou, and Guangxi provinces in China.
[70] There are Mongolians in both the sovereign country of Mongolia and in the Chinese autonomous region of Inner Mongolia, where they are a sizeable minority.

the lower register, while “Pastoral Song” presents a brighter and more transparent character in the upper register.

The third movement, “Zang Songs,” draws on Tibetan musical traditions, particularly the folk melody “Amaliehuo” and the *dui xie* style. The term *Zang* refers to the Tibetan ethnic group in China. *Dui xie* is a form of Tibetan folk ensemble music characterized by repeated melodic patterns and is traditionally performed with instruments such as the *dramyin* (six-string lute), *dizi* (bamboo flute), and *erhu* (two-string bowed instrument). These ensembles are often accompanied by singing and rhythmic tap dancing, reflecting the close connection between music and dance in Tibetan cultural life. The melody “Amaliehuo” is a long-standing Tibetan tune known for its expressive character, lyrical vocal quality, and flowing tempo.

The final movement ,“Miao Dances,” is inspired by the lively dance traditions of the Miao ethnic groups in China. The movement draws on the folk tune “Duo Duo,” traditionally performed by a *lusheng* ensemble in Miao villages. The *lusheng*, a bamboo-pipe mouth organ with a bright and reedy timbre, is a central instrument in Miao musical culture and is often associated with communal celebrations, festivals, and dance gatherings.[71]

[71] Miller and Edwards, 91-92.

Table 3.2 Movement Structure and Features of *China West Suite*

Movement Name	**Length**	**Tempo/character**	**Features**
"Introduction"	3: 16	Quarter=50, freely	"Du Mu" and "Ashima" folk melody of Tibetan and the Yi people
"Meng Songs"	3: 08	Quarter=50, solemnly	Mongolian folksongs "Gadameilin" and "Pastoral Songs"
"Zang Songs"	4: 29	Quarter=80, lively	based on the Tibetan folk tunes "*Dui Xie"* and "*Amaliehuo*"
"Miao Dances"	2: 00	Quarter=112, Vividly	inspiration from "*Dou Duo"* and the *Lusheng* ensemble music of the Miao people

In an interview with Zhang Dan in 2018, Chen explained that *China West Suite* is a work that flows from deep within her. She shared that the piece incorporates many operatic and artificial scales, reflecting her desire to move beyond conventional tonal systems. At times, she intentionally avoids using the natural diatonic or chromatic scales, instead creating her own artificial scales, a technique that also appears in many of her orchestral works. Chen believes that these self-created scales allow her to break away from established musical languages and form her own distinctive voice, which she regards as the essence of her individuality.[72] Yet, despite this emphasis, the analysis in this chapter focuses on pentatonic structures, which plays a meaningful role in shaping this work.

Chen employs these modern compositional techniques to reshape and reorganize traditional ethnic musical elements, with each movement representing two folk materials. The

[72] Zhang Dan 张丹, ""Fang zuoqujia Chen Yi" 访作曲家陈怡 [Interview of Composer Chen Yi], Gangqin Yishu 钢琴艺术 7 (2018): 9-10.

result is a multidimensional soundscape in which the themes intertwine, overlap, and respond to one another with striking complementarity, fully showcasing the expressive potential of the piano duo. Across the four movements, each of which juxtaposes and integrates two contrasting themes, Chen creates a continuous dialogue between regional folk traditions and contemporary compositional language.

Musical Analysis

"Introduction"

The opening movement, "Introduction," marked freely in 4/4, draws on two principal thematic sources from Tibet and Yunnan Province. The first theme is taken from the Tibetan folk song "Du Mu," which is named after a Tibetan Buddhist goddess. It evokes her calm and graceful spirit, creating an atmosphere of serenity and devotion. In contrast, the second theme is derived from "Ashima," a folk song of the Yi people from Yunnan Province that recounts the enchanting tale of the eponymous young woman of great beauty.[73]

The "Du Mu" theme is first articulated in Piano I, unfolding through three distinct ideas (see Fig. 3.1).[74] The first idea (marked in red) consists of figuration in the upper register, organized into varied rhythmic groupings. It begins with a broken arpeggiated chord and expands into ornamental turns, slides, and cascading passagework that exploit the brilliance and transparency of the high register. The second idea (marked in orange) contrasts by grounding the texture, beginning on a low B-flat and ascending through a succession of triplets, quintuplets, and sextuplets, culminating in a resonant rolling polychord E-flat–A-flat–D-flat combined with F–B–E in Piano I (see Fig. 3.2, marked in orange). The third idea (marked in blue), introduced in

[73] Liu, "Exploring Tibetan Music Idioms," 61.

[74] Musical examples from *China West Suite* by Chen Yi are reproduced in accordance with fair use for scholarly and analytical purposes.

Piano II, departs from pitch altogether, as the performer is instructed to strike the lowest strings with the palm, producing a percussive, non-pitched sonority. Together, these three ideas create a dense, multi-layered soundscape in which shimmering figuration, harmonic clusters, and percussive resonance converge to form a modernist soundscape.

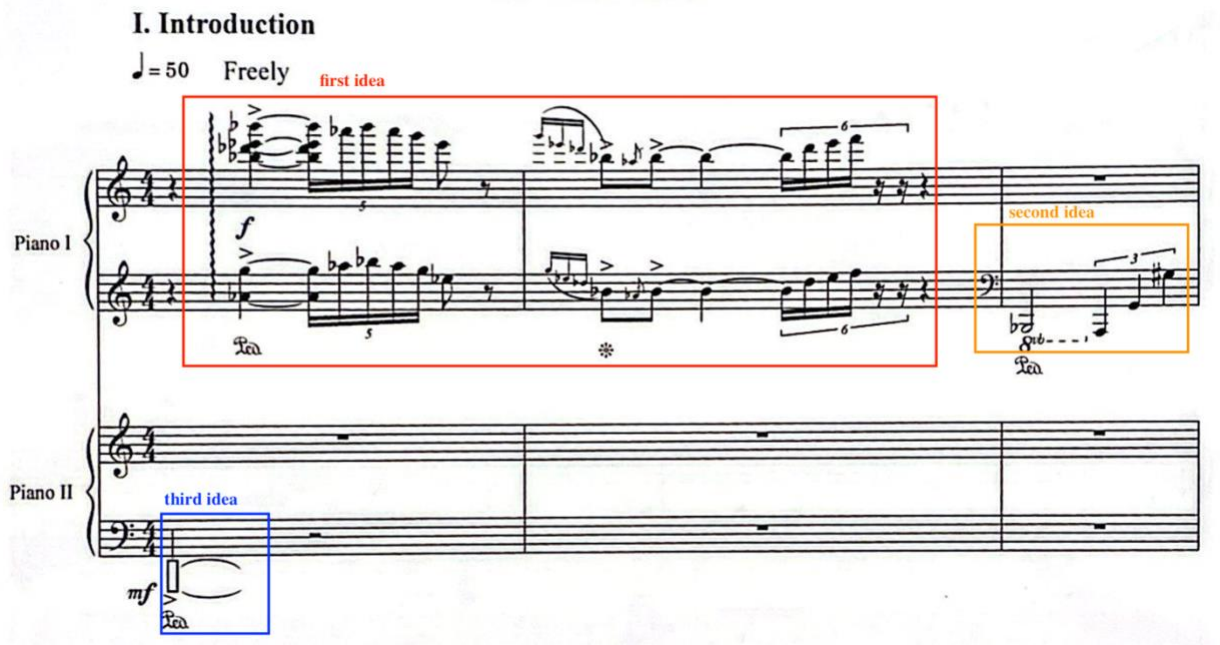
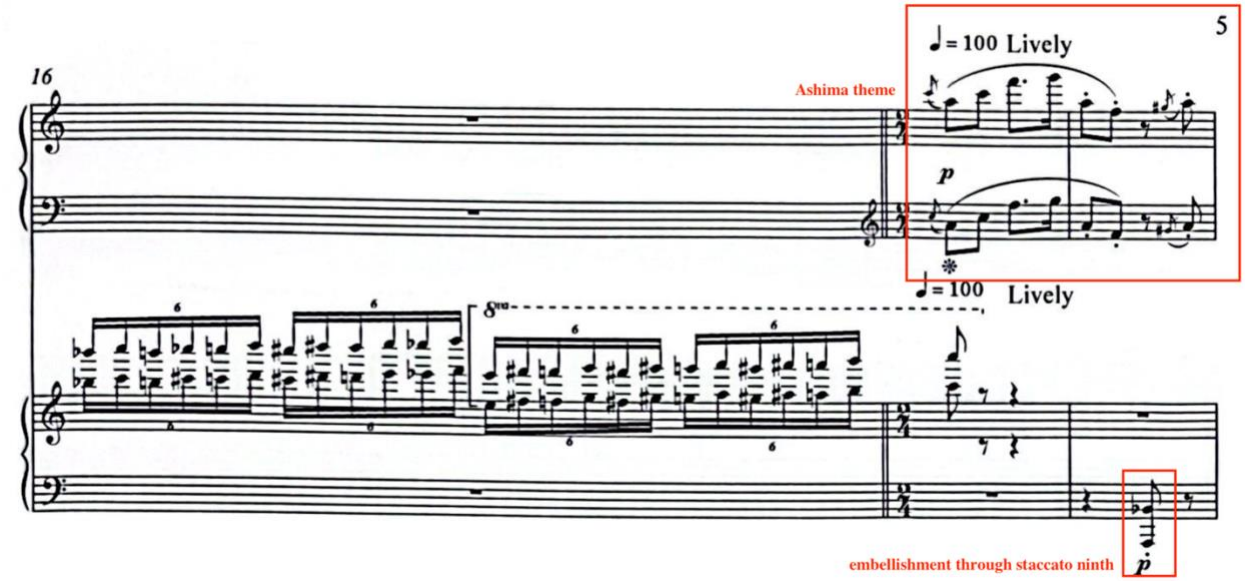


Figure 3.1. *China West Suite*, "Introduction," mm.1–2, first theme
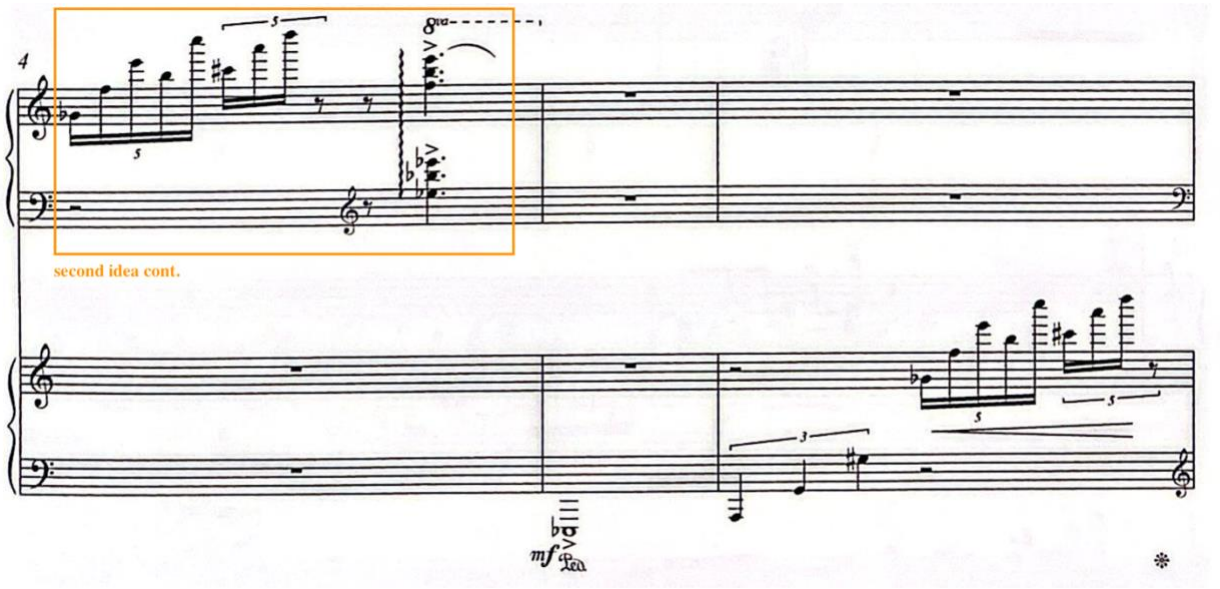


Figure 3.2. *China West Suite*, "Introduction," mm. 4–6, second idea continued

The "Ashima" theme enters at measure 17 in Piano I (see Fig. 3.3, marked in red), emerging unexpectedly without a cadential break from the preceding "Du Mu" material. This seamless overlap blurs formal boundaries, allowing the new theme to arise organically rather than as a clearly demarcated contrast. The "Ashima" melody alternates between the C *zhi* mode (C–D–F–G–A) and the F *gong* mode (F–G–A–C–D). Within this framework, the melodic line employs all scale degrees except D, which Chen strategically reserves for measure 38. Rhythmically, the theme incorporates sixteenth notes, eighth notes, and dotted figures, moving primarily in a playful back-and-forth motion between A–C–F–G. Chen has noted that she constructed a loop based on the "Ashima" theme by extracting and reorganizing pitch and rhythmic materials from the original folk melody.[75] While Piano I presents the melody, Piano II provides embellishing textures consisting of staccato ninths and occasional ascending perfect fourths in the left hand.



[75] Liu, "Exploring Tibetan Music Idioms," 61.

Figure 3.3. *China West Suite*, “Introduction,” mm. 16–17, “Ashima” theme entrance

Development begins at measure 40, where Piano II takes over the “Ashima” theme. At measure 43, Piano I reintroduces a transformed version of the “Du Mu” theme, enriched with trills, thirty-second-note flourishes, and ornamental gestures. This iteration employs a modified B *yu* mode (B–D–E–F-sharp–A), adding G-sharp, thereby producing a distinct color that contrasts with the “Ashima” material. In the development section, the two pianos exchange and alternate roles, presenting the “Du Mu” and “Ashima” themes in a contrapuntal texture that creates a dynamic dialogic interplay at measure 81. The passage unfolds in a canonic texture, with one piano presenting the theme in the lower register and the other answering in the higher register. This spatial contrast enhances and intensifies the sense of dialogic interplay, ultimately converging toward a moment of unification at measure 99. The first movement concludes at measure 106, with the last statement of the “Du Mu” theme, serving as a coda.
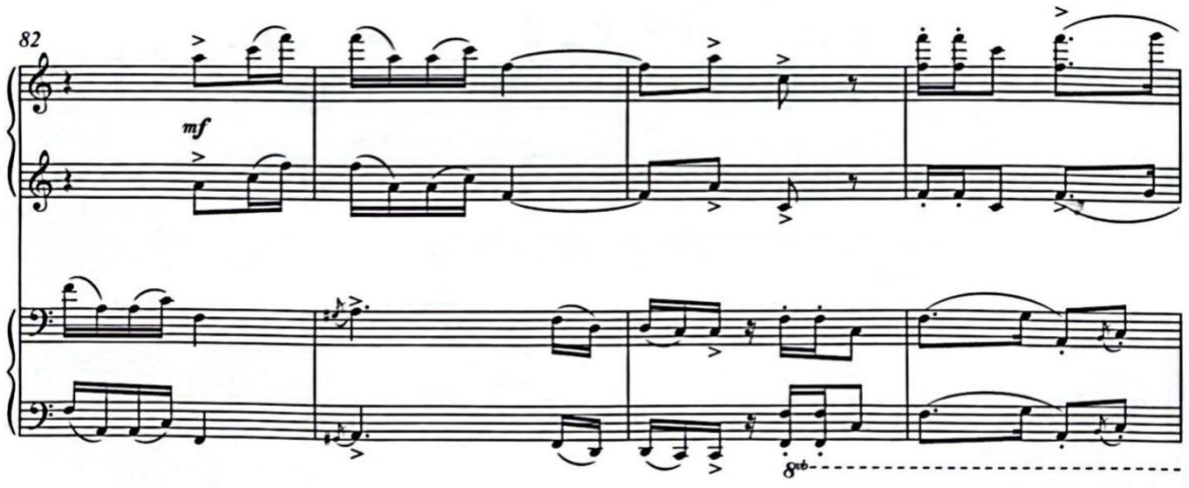


Figure 3.4. *China West Suite*, “Introduction,” mm. 82–85, canonic entrance

“Meng Songs”

The second movement, “Meng Songs,” is based on Mongolian folk songs and spans approximately 33 measures in 4/4 time. It is a slower, more melancholy movement and the shortest in the suite. “Meng Songs” combines the C-flat *gong* mode (C-flat–D-flat–E-flat–G-

flat–A-flat) and the A-flat *yu* mode (A-flat–C-flat–D-flat–E-flat–G-flat), creating a tonal palette that reflects Mongolian musical idioms. The movement draws its primary melodic material from the iconic Mongolian folk songs "Gadameilin" and "Pastoral Song."[76] These sources introduce two distinct musical characters: "Gadameilin" is solemn and grounded in the lower register, while "Pastoral Song" is characterized by a clear, bright quality in the upper register.

"Gadameilin" refers to a celebrated Mongolian hero, and the folk song bearing his name was composed to honor his protection of the people. Chen characterizes "Gadameilin" through Piano II's left hand articulating descending chordal textures in a steady quarter-note pulse, while the right hand projects a lyrical melody in the upper voice (see Fig. 3.5, marked in red). This combination evokes a sense of resolute forward motion. Its dense, layered harmonies imitate the long, resonant sound of the *morin khuur*,[77] the traditional Mongolian bowed string instrument. Chen emulates the timbre of the *morin khuur* sound in the bass section of the piano. The melody of "Gadameilin" is placed in the A-flat *yu* mode (A-flat–C-flat–D-flat–E-flat–G-flat).

In contrast, "Pastoral Song," beginning in F *zhi* mode (F–G–B-flat–C–D), is presented in a higher register and characterized by fast rhythmic structures including syncopation, dotted rhythms, small notes, and quintuplets (see Fig. 3.6, marked in red). The melodic character of "Pastoral Song" evokes the freedom of nomadic life and the expansive openness of the grasslands in Inner Mongolia. The texture is straightforward; when one piano states the theme, the other sustains long chords, serving as harmonic support. The juxtaposition of the A-flat *yu* and D *yu* modes creates a sense of polytonality. Throughout the movement, the two pianos

[76] Chen Yi, *China West Suite* (Philadelphia: Theodore Presser Company, 2008).
[77] Morin khuur, a traditional Mongolian bowed string instrument, is also known as a horsehead fiddle.

alternate roles, engaging in textural exchanges that produce an antiphonal style that enhances the dialogue between the contrasting themes.

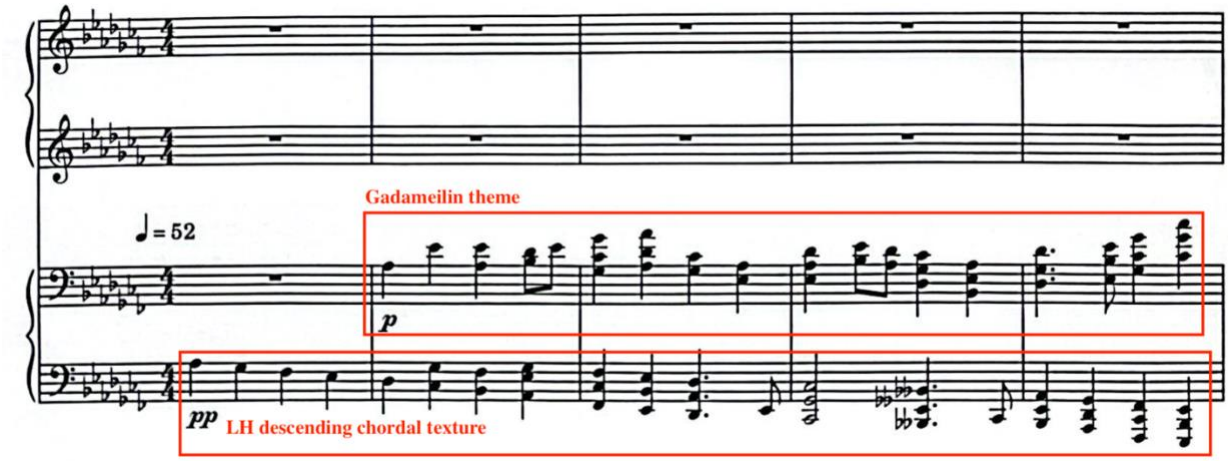


Figure 3.5. *China West Suite*, "Meng Songs," mm. 1–5, Gadameilin theme
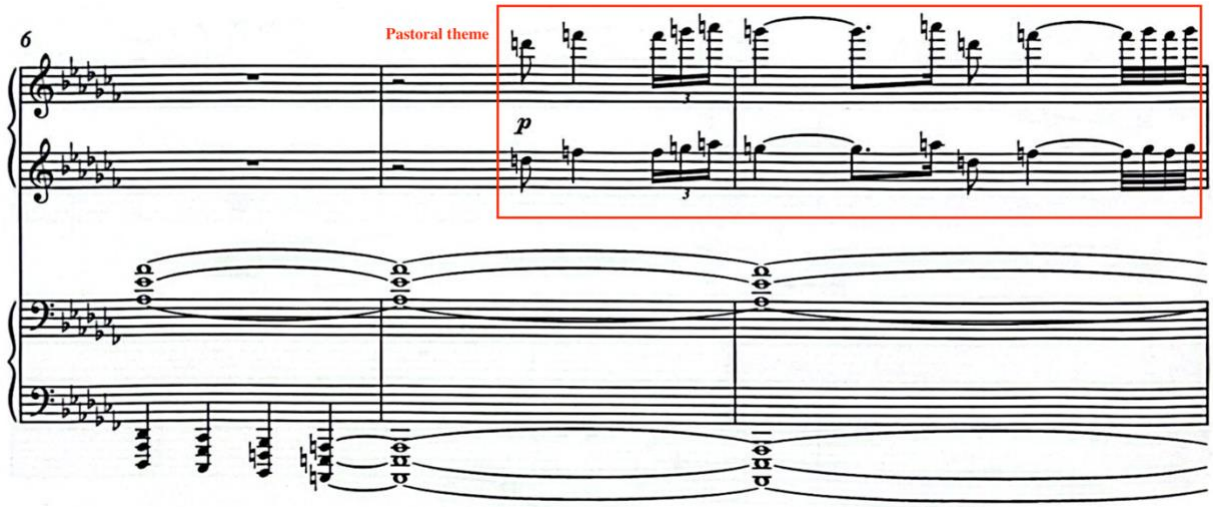


Figure 3.6. *China West Suite*, "Meng Songs," mm. 6–8, Pastoral Songs theme.

"Zang Songs"

The third movement, "Zang Songs" draws on a Tibetan folk melody, "Amaliehuo," and the *dui xie* musical style from which it derives. *Dui xie* is a form of Tibetan folk ensemble music characterized by repeated melodic patterns and typically performed with instruments such as the *dramyin* (six-string lute), *dizi* (bamboo flute), and *erhu* (bowed two-stringed instrument). *Dui xie* ensembles are often accompanied by singing and rhythmic tap dancing. "Amaliehuo" is a long-standing Tibetan folk song, notable for its profound emotional character, lyrical vocal quality, and flowing tempo.[78]

The "Dui Xie" theme is introduced by Piano II in five-measure units and, through a perpetually developing texture, evokes a sense of infinite repetition characteristic of Tibetan folk dance music (see Fig. 3.7, marked in red). The "Dui Xie" theme is based on the D *gong* mode (D–E–G–A–C) and is structured in five-measure units. The pitch materials of the "Dui Xie" theme consist of D *gong* scale degrees moving up and down within a limited range, with the lowest pitch B and the highest being A. The melody mirrors the natural range of the human voice: each motion of the melody move by steps and thirds to the highest note of the phrase, then descends by step, fourth, and fifth. Accents are all placed on weak beats.

The "Amaliehuo" theme appears in Piano I at measure 12 and is characterized by employing triplets, quintuplets, sextuplets, and tremolos to create expansive, free-flowing melodic lines (see Fig. 3.8, marked in red). The pitches of the "Amaliehuo" are remain within the D gong mode. The theme of "Amaliehuo" then transposes to G gong mode (G–A–C–D–E) at measure 26, restating itself in ascending scale notes. At measure 60, the pianos exchange roles: Piano I assumes the *dui xie* motif while Piano II plays "Amaliehuo." This antiphonal interplay

[78] Chen, *China West Suite.*

establishes contrasting musical characters while maintaining thematic cohesion. The elongated rhythm in the "Amaliehuo" theme and the "Dui Xie" theme creates a polyrhythmic structure, reinforcing an illusion of two separate songs clashing with each other.
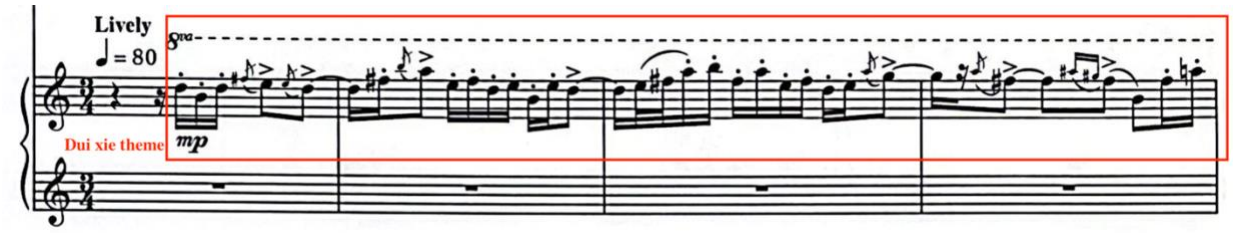


Figure 3.7. *China West Suite*, "Zang Songs," mm. 1–4, Dui xie theme in Piano II

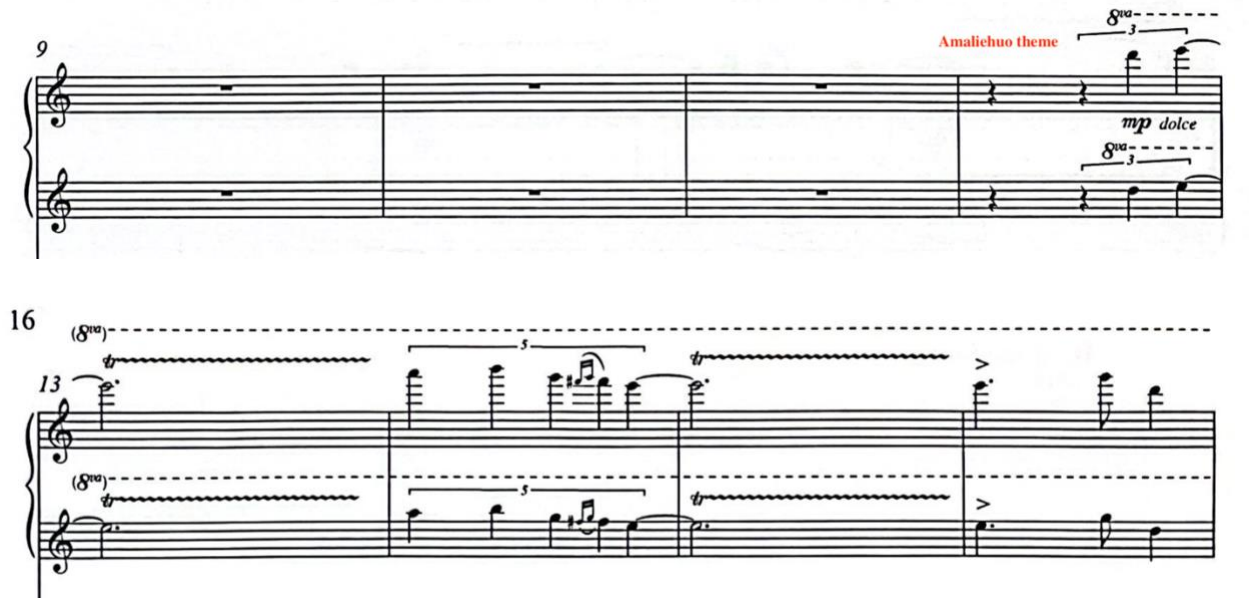


Figure 3.8. *China West Suite*, "Zang Songs," mm. 9–15, Amaliehuo theme in Piano I

"Miao Dances"

"Miao Dances" depicts the lively dance traditions of the Miao ethnic groups in China. The final movement draws inspiration from the performance of the folk tune "Duo Duo" by a traditional *lusheng* ensemble in a Miao village. The *lusheng*, a bamboo-pipe mouth organ with a bright and reedy timbre, provides the sonic model for the movement's vibrant sonority.[79] The

[79] Miller and Edwards, 91-92.

perpetual, driving chordal texture reflects the jubilant atmosphere of a communal celebration. Chen designs three rhythmic configurations that dominate the piece: (1) toccata-like alternating chords between the hands in rapid sixteenth notes; (2) repeated sixteenth-note fourths followed by stepwise motion, a descending third, and a final second; and (3) an ascending seventh followed by a falling fifth, articulated through dotted and eighth-note rhythms. As in the previous movements, two contrasting themes are distributed between the two pianos, creating an antiphonal dialogue and textural interplay.

The fourth movement opens with a toccata-like figuration in Piano II, characterized by relentless sixteenth notes (see Fig. 3.9, marked in red). Shortly thereafter, Piano I joins in unison, reinforcing the driving rhythmic energy of this perpetual figuration (see Fig. 3.9, marked in orange). The dynamics shift frequently, creating waves of intensity that heighten the sense of momentum and capture the spirited energy of the Miao dance. At measure 9, the "Duoduo" singing theme emerges, distinguished by its ascending seventh figuration and rooted in the E-flat *zhi* mode (E-flat–F–A-flat–B-flat–C) (see Fig. 3.10, marked in blue). Notably, the expected G is omitted from the motif, leaving the modal framework incomplete and producing a strikingly open sonority. At this point, the toccata figuration, modal theme, and percussive elements all come together.

Although the music for both pianos is notated entirely in the treble clef, Chen carefully balances the textures to preserve clarity for both performers and listeners. The ascending seventh motif is placed in the high register of Piano I, while the perpetual sixteenth-note figuration occupies the middle register around C4, creating a stratified texture. The motif is further ornamented with dotted rhythms and rapid embellishments, intensifying its folk-like character.

The textural buildup of the movement begins with two relatively independent lines, one in each piano part. As the music progresses, the texture gradually thickens, becoming denser and more unified until it reaches a climactic conclusion in powerful unison. The driving repeated-note gestures descend stepwise, reinforcing the primal rhythmic energy at the movement's close.

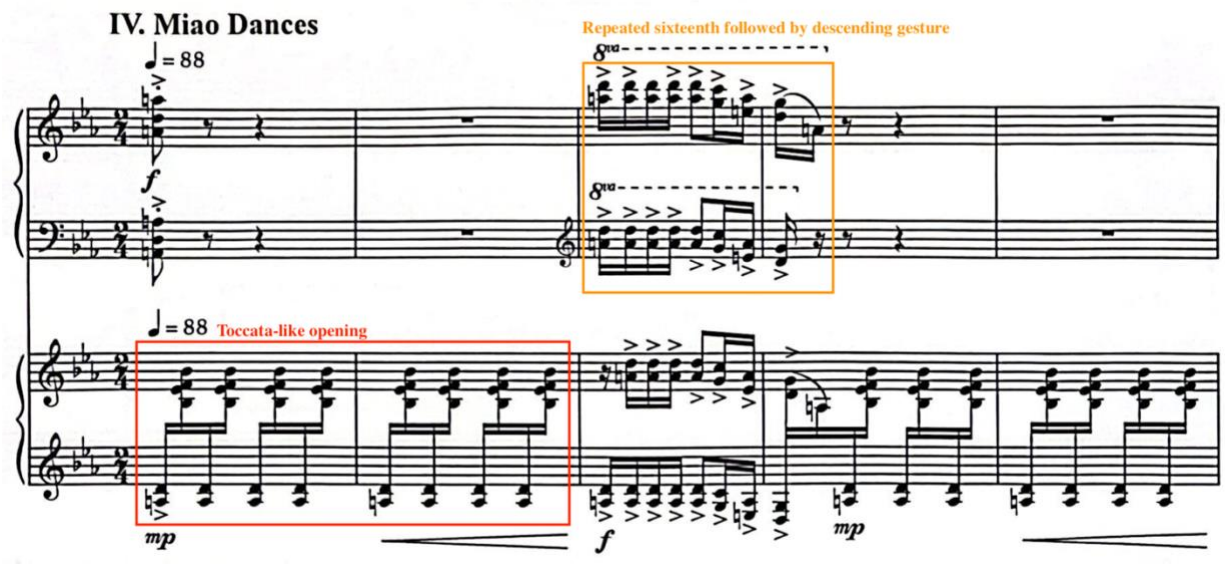


Figure 3.9. *China West Suite*, "Miao Dances," mm. 1–5, toccata-like opening and repeated sixteenth gesture

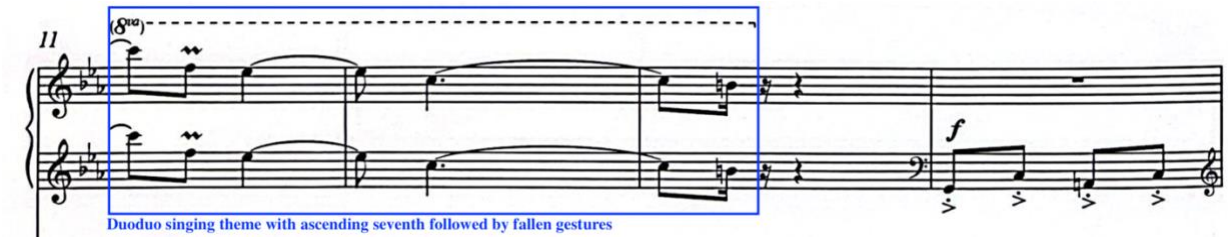


Figure 3.10. *China West Suite*, Miao Dances, mm. 11–13, Ascending seventh followed by falling gestures in Piano I

Chen's *China West Suite* stands as a vivid example of cross-cultural synthesis, bringing together the vitality of Chinese ethnic folk traditions with the expressive range of modern piano writing. Each movement of *China West Suite* brings together contrasting folk themes within a modern compositional framework. Through variation, ornamentation, rhythmic stratification, and textural layering, Chen both preserves the essence of these traditions and reimagines them in a

new artistic language. By employing pentatonic scales, a variety of textures and moods, and complex rhythmic groupings, Chen creates a multidimensional soundscape that transcends the boundaries of either tradition alone. The use of two pianos enables antiphonal exchange, imitative dialogue, and layered textures that recall folk heterophony while exploiting the piano's percussive and virtuosic potential. In *China West Suite*, Chen reinterprets folk traditions through modern compositional methods, forging a language rooted in cultural memory yet receptive to global influence. In doing so, she unites Eastern and Western idioms and extends the expressive and pedagogical reach of the piano duo in the twenty-first century.

Pedagogical and Performance Notes

China West Suite presents pianists with a range of interpretive and technical challenges that reflect Chen's distinctive compositional style. Across its four movements, the work combines fragmented melodic material, irregular rhythmic structures, and contrasting articulations, requiring performers to navigate both individual and ensemble complexities. The following discussion examines three main areas: reading demand, which focuses on the performer's ability to interpret and connect Chen's fragmented melodic and rhythmic ideas; technical demand, which addresses the specific physical and expressive challenges of executing the suite; and ensemble collaboration, which highlights the precise coordination and sensitive dialogue between the two pianists. Within technical demand, particular attention is given to irregular groupings of rapid notes, contrasting articulations between pianos, and the toccata-like virtuosity of the final movement. This structure highlights the interplay between technical skill and interpretive understanding, both of which are essential for capturing the suite's distinctive musical character.

Reading Demand

The reading demand of *China West Suite* lies primarily in the performer's ability to interpret Chen's fragmented melodic writing and to discern how these fragments develop throughout the work. The melodic material is often presented in short, irregular gestures rather than in continuous phrases, requiring performers to read beyond the immediate notation and understand the implied connections between fragments. The phrasing itself is highly disjunct, demanding careful attention to articulation and timing in order to shape musical continuity within fragmented textures. Irregular groups of rapid notes appear frequently, challenging the performer's rhythmic precision and coordination, particularly in ensemble settings. The contrapuntal texture between the two pianos further heightens the reading complexity, as performers must maintain independence while ensuring clarity of dialogue and balance between voices. In the third movement, "Zang Songs," the use of grace notes adds another layer of intricacy, calling for both agility and sensitivity in execution. Additionally, Chen's frequent use of off-beat accents disrupts regular metric expectations, compelling performers to internalize shifting rhythmic patterns and to sustain rhythmic stability amidst constant syncopation.

Technical Demand

Irregular groupings of rapid notes are typical in Chen's piano works and appear frequently in *China West Suite*. In the first movement, "Introduction," as well as in the third movement, "Zang Songs," and the fourth movement, "Miao Dances," Chen combines triplets, quintuplets, and sextuplets within short phrases in both pianos (see Fig. 3.11). Because these groupings often appear side by side, and one piano frequently continues the other's irregular rhythmic figures, the pianists must switch quickly between different rhythmic divisions while maintaining the flow and continuity of the phrasing. This requires a clear sense of pulse,

flexibility in rhythm, and careful coordination between the two pianos. The challenge lies not only in playing the notes accurately but also in keeping the musical line cohesive and expressive throughout these constantly shifting rhythmic figures.
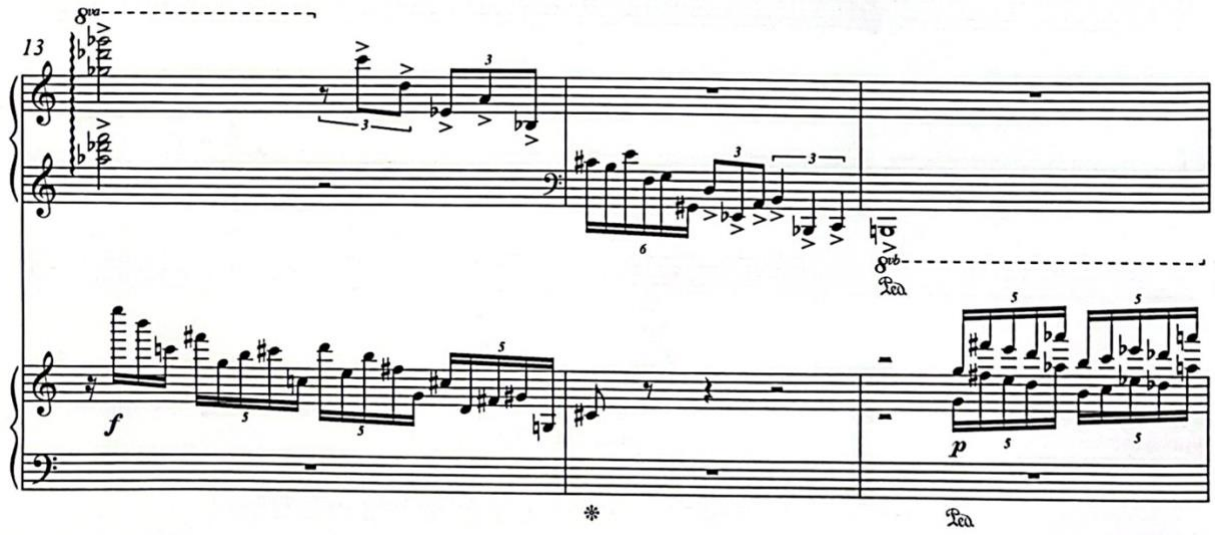


Figure 3.11. *China West Suite*, "Introduction," mm. 13–15, irregular grouping

The second movement, "Meng Songs," though simple in texture, features one piano playing a lyrical, longing chordal passage while the other presents a more animated, fragmented phrase that evokes the pastoral character of Mongolian folk songs. The main technical challenge for both pianists lies in achieving two distinct types of articulation. The chordal passage should be played deeply into the keys with a full, weighted tone, evoking the sound of a folk song resonating across the vast prairies of Inner Mongolia (see Fig. 3.12, marked in blue). In contrast, the pastoral theme should be rendered with a detached touch in the upper register, using minimal pedal to preserve clarity and a sense of openness in the texture (see Fig. 3.13, marked in red).
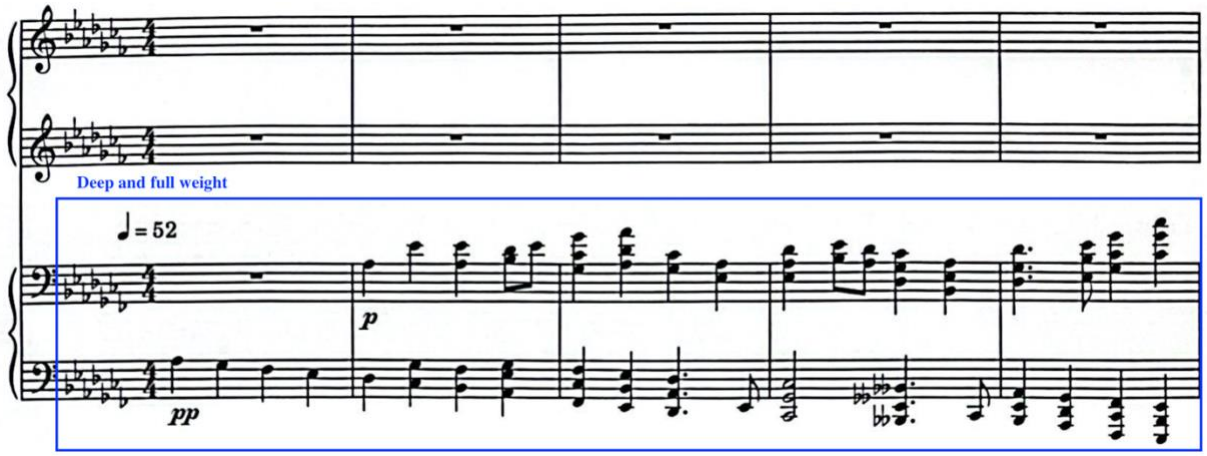


Figure 3.12. *China West Suite*, "Zang Songs," mm. 1–5, weighted tone
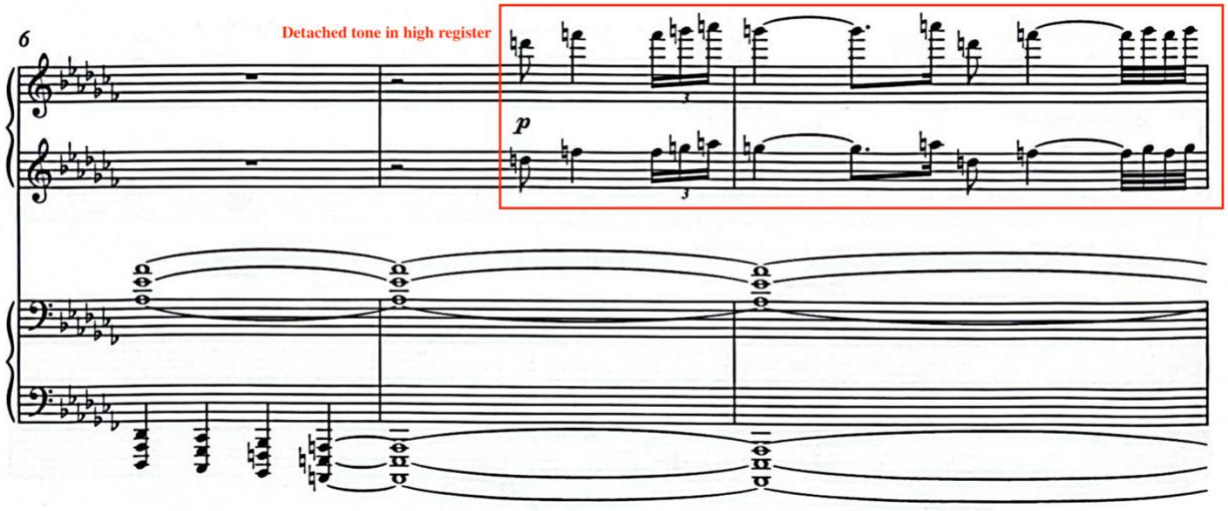


Figure 3.13. *China West Suite*, "Zang Songs," mm. 6–9, detached tone

The third movement, "Zang Songs," likewise features alternating articulations between the two pianos, requiring both performers to shift seamlessly between contrasting touches and tone colors. The articulated staccato "Dui Xie" theme should be played with agility and precision, using the fingertips to lightly hook the keys for a crisp and lively sound (see Fig. 3.14, marked in blue). In contrast, the "Amaliehuo" theme consists of longer, sustained notes that create a continuous melodic line while the "Dui Xie" theme flows beneath it (see Fig. 3.14, marked in red). Structurally, this movement resembles the second movement, "Meng Songs," but

the texture here is more active, and the "Dui Xie" theme is less fragmented, functioning as a continuous ostinato that propels the rhythmic energy of the music.
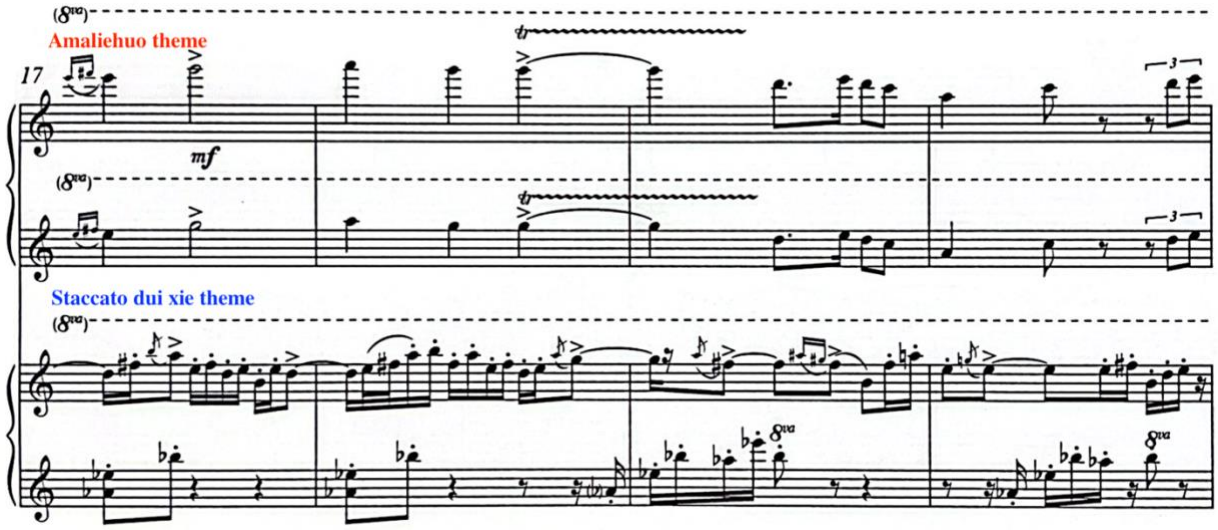


Figure 3.14. *China West Suite*, "Zang Song," mm. 17–20, Amaliehuo and dui xie theme

The final movement, "Miao Dances," requires a fast tempo, repeated chords, rapid passagework, and constant rhythmic drive (see Fig. 3.15, marked in blue and red). The quick chordal passages and energetic rhythms test the pianists' endurance and coordination. Most of the chordal passages alternate between the left and right hands, generally maintaining the same pattern. Chen carefully balances the dynamics in these chordal passages, marking them *mp* to indicate that they should not be played too loudly, so they do not cover the melody in the other piano. These chords need to be played with clarity and precise articulation, without using the pedal.

In "Miao Dances," the repeated chords require careful attention to both technique and musicality. Pianists should use a relaxed wrist and natural forearm rebound to produce even, consistent attacks while avoiding tension and fatigue. Dynamic control is equally important: the repeated chords should be shaped in a gradual crescendo with a clear sense of direction, enhancing the phrasing and rhythmic vitality of the passage. Both pianists must keep the sound

bright and clear while maintaining precision at a rapid tempo. Frequent leaps, changes of hand position, and sudden dynamic contrasts make this movement technically demanding and rhythmically exciting. The percussive texture is punctuated by sharp accents and rhythmic bursts, evoking the energy of traditional Miao drumming and dance movements.

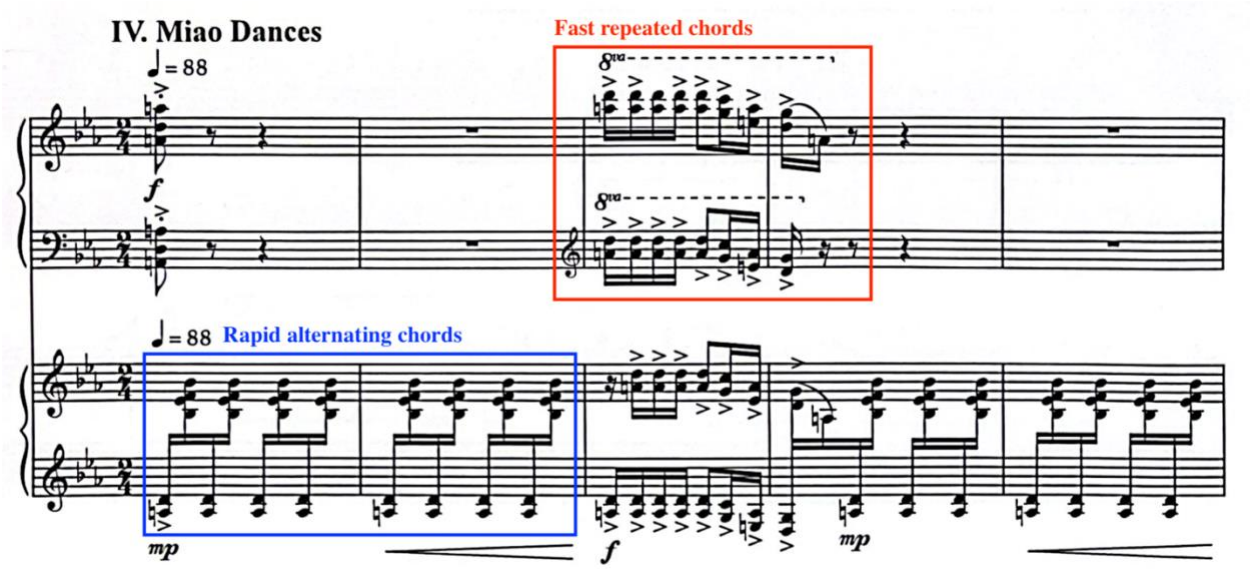


Figure 3.15. *China West Suite*, "Miao Dances," mm. 1–5, rapid and repeated chords

Following this percussive texture, "Miao Dances" continues to pose challenges for the pianists. A series of rapid chromatic passages presents a significant challenge for both pianists due to awkward hand positions and the demand for speed and precision in a chromatic context. These passages, written as fast sextuplets with strong accents, require both technical control and stamina. Effective fingering plays a crucial role in executing them successfully. For the left hand, two fingering patterns are suggested: the first group follows 5–3–4–2–3–1, and the second group follows 4–2–3–1–2–1–3 (see Fig. 3.16, marked in blue). These fingerings use the stronger fingers to articulate each note percussively while allowing for quick finger alternation. The frequent motion between fingers spaced a third apart (such as 5 to 3 or 4 to 2) facilitates smooth

transitions and takes advantage of the wrist's natural rolling motion, promoting both fluidity and clarity in performance.

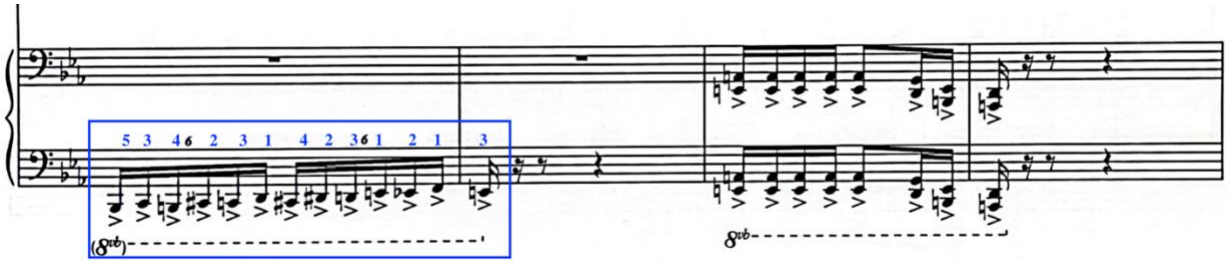


Figure 3.16. *China West Suite*, "Miao Dances," mm.70–73, fingerings in Piano II

Ensemble Collaboration

Regarding the two-piano writing, Chen states:

> Two pianos have the roles to support and compete with each other, rotating their parts, sometimes in different registers but sometimes concentrate in a narrow range. You find the space and the focus, the mysterious atmosphere, and the energetic power, with contrast between parts and movements. The articulations and rich color in different touch on keyboard echo the Chinese vocal and instrumental performing technique and musical styles.[80]

In *China West Suite*, maintaining cohesive phrasing and articulation is essential for a successful duo performance. As mentioned earlier, Chen's music is built from fragmented materials that interlock and evolve throughout the piece. The challenge for the performers is to shape these short, contrasting motives into a continuous musical flow, ensuring that the fragmented gestures sound connected rather than disjointed.

Off-beat entrance pose a challenge in ensemble collaboration. In the first movement, "Introduction," special attention is required in measure 43, where Piano I enters between Piano II's dotted rhythms while Piano II continues the loop of the "Ashima" theme (see Fig. 3.17, marked in red). Likewise, in measure 81, when the canon begins, the two pianos enter two beats

[80] Chen Yi, "Materials related to *China West Suite*," shared with author via email, February 23, 2026.

apart and then continue one beat apart. The ensemble must remain focused and aligned to clearly articulate the two canonic lines, which are distinct in register (see Fig. 3.18, marked in red).
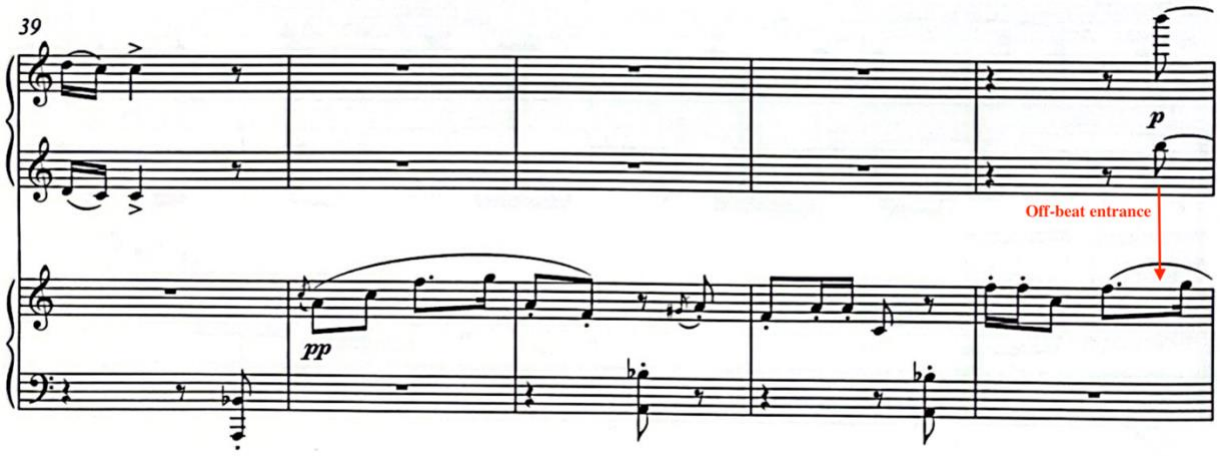


Figure 3.17. *China West Suite*, "Introduction," mm. 39–43, off-beat entrance of piano I
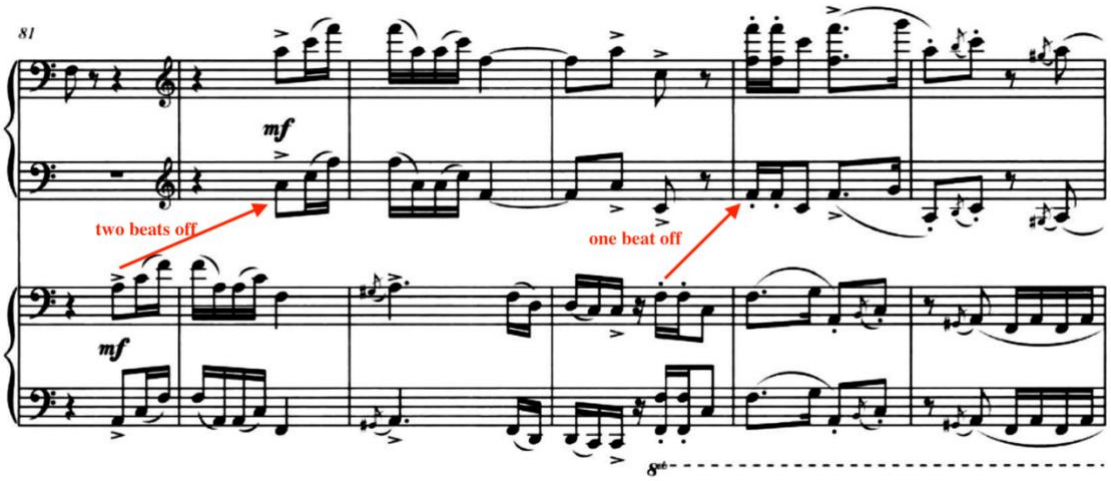


Figure 3.18. *China West Suite*, "Introduction," mm. 81–86, canon section

In "Meng Songs," the two pianos must maintain a conversational interplay, with Piano II's solemn chordal sections evoking the *morin khuur* while the high register imitates the human voice. Performers can imagine an ensemble of *morin khuur* accompanying a vocal line, providing timbral inspiration for shaping the sonorities of the two pianos (see Fig. 3.19, marked in red and blue).
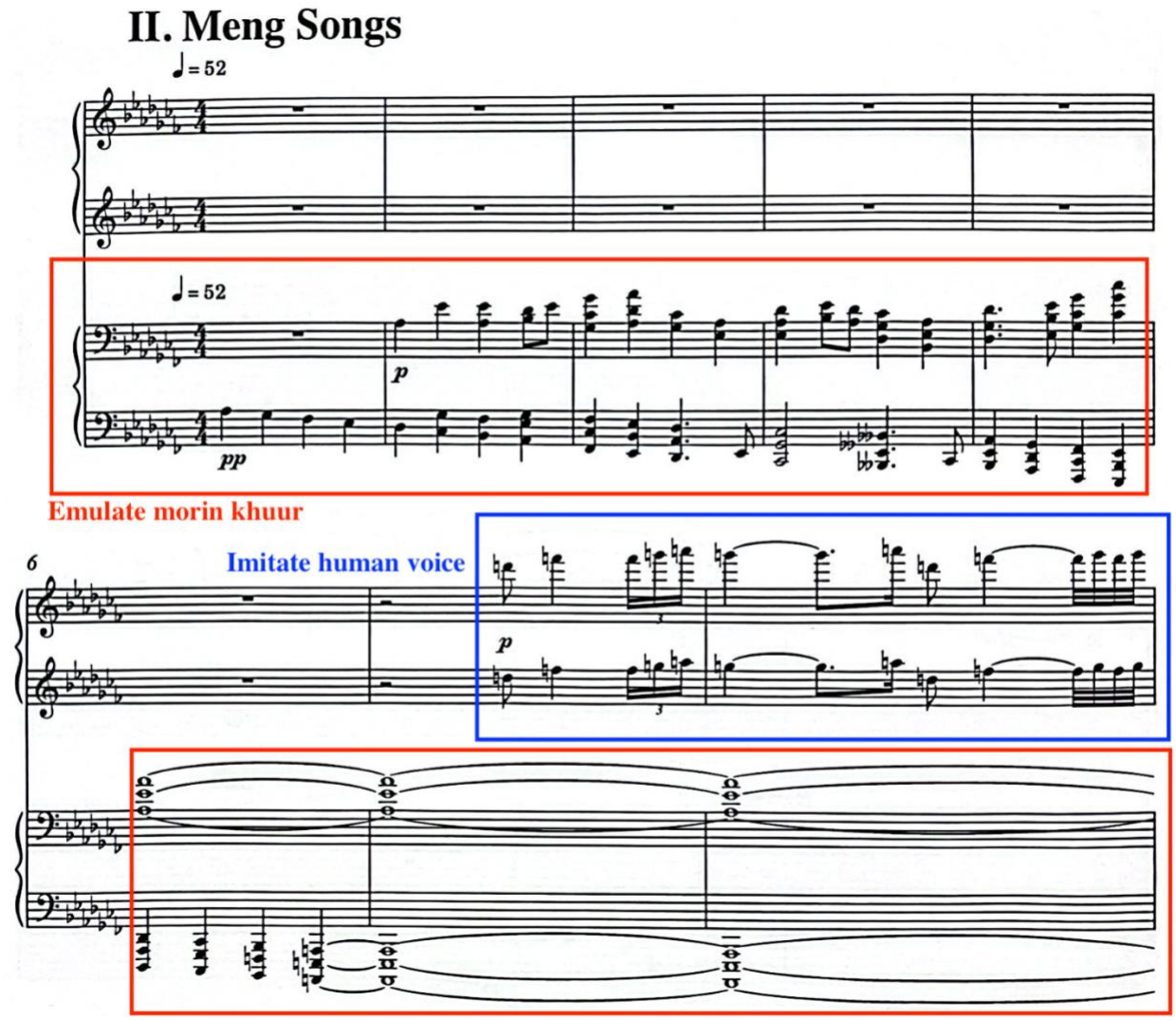


Figure 3.19. *China West Suite*, "Meng Songs," mm. 1–9, morin khuur and voice ensemble

The third movement, "Zang Songs" also presents challenging off-beat entrances. In measure 12, Piano I enters on the second note of a triplet, requiring precise alignment with the active Piano II part (see Fig. 3.20, marked in red). Another challenge occurs in measure 29, where the alignment between the quintuplet in Piano I and the fast figures in Piano II requires careful rhythmic coordination (see Fig. 3.21, marked in red).

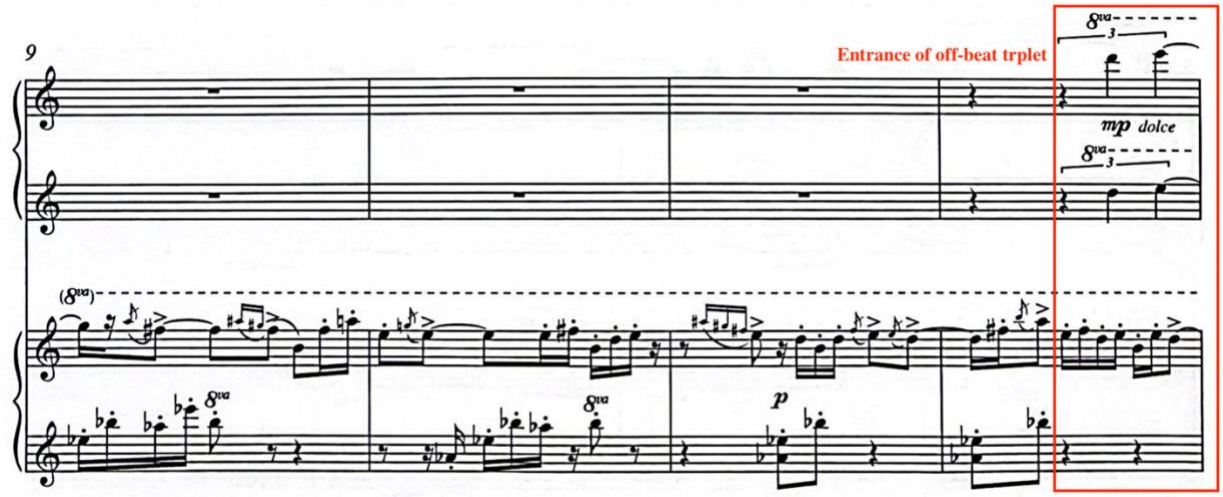


Figure 3.20. *China West Suite*, "Zang Songs," mm. 9–12, entrance of off-beat triplet
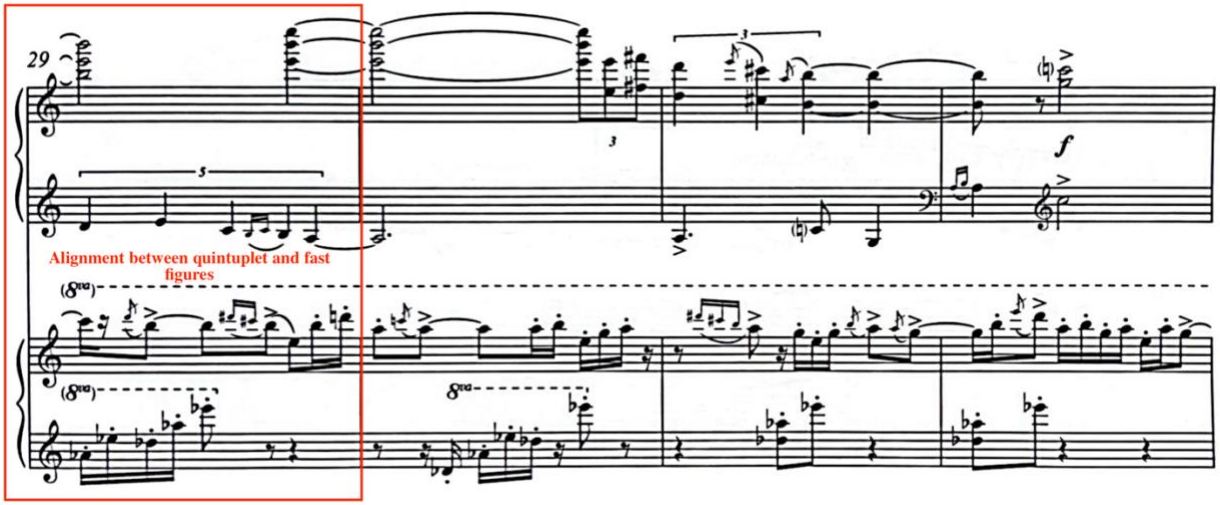


Figure 3.21. *China West Suite*, "Zang Songs," mm. 29–32, alignment between Piano I-II

In the final movement, "Miao Dances" the perpetual rapid chords require the two pianos to align perfectly in unison, including both the entrances and the cutoffs. Rhythmically, they must coordinate with precision, as if played by a single performer (see Fig. 3.22, marked in red). Ensemble coordination challenges also occur in measures 68 to 77, where Piano I sustains perpetual rapid chordal motion while Piano II introduces a series of septuplets (see Fig. 3.23, marked in red). The simultaneous layering of these rhythms results in a three-against-two polyrhythmic structure. This requires Piano II to align precisely with Piano I to achieve a sense of ensemble unity.

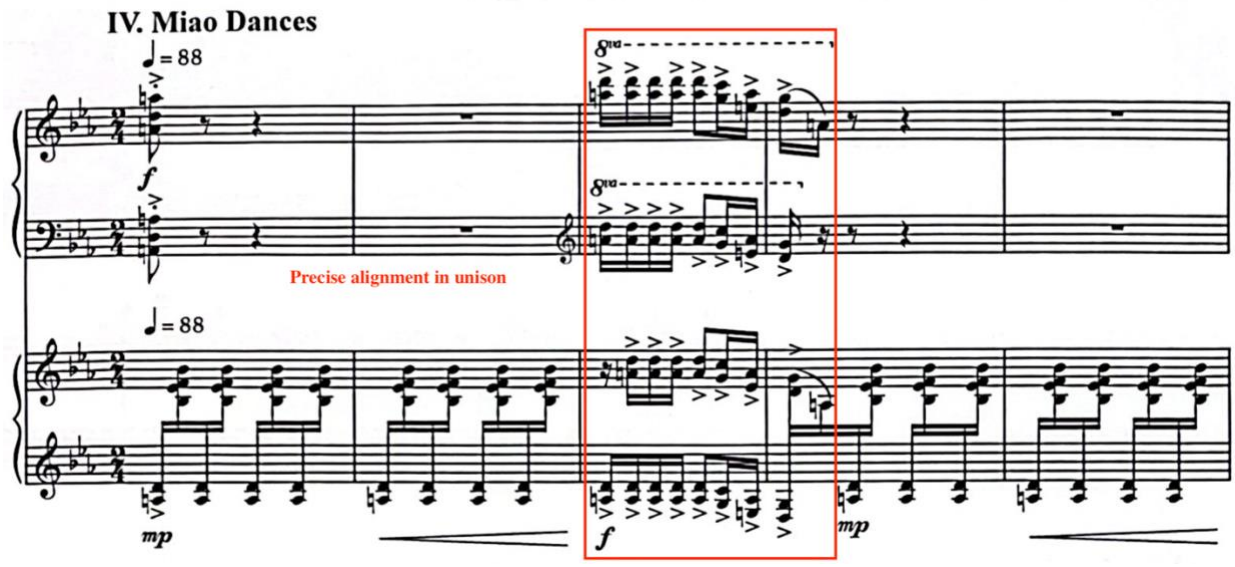


Figure 3.22. *China West Suite*, "Miao Dances," mm. 1–5, alignment in unison
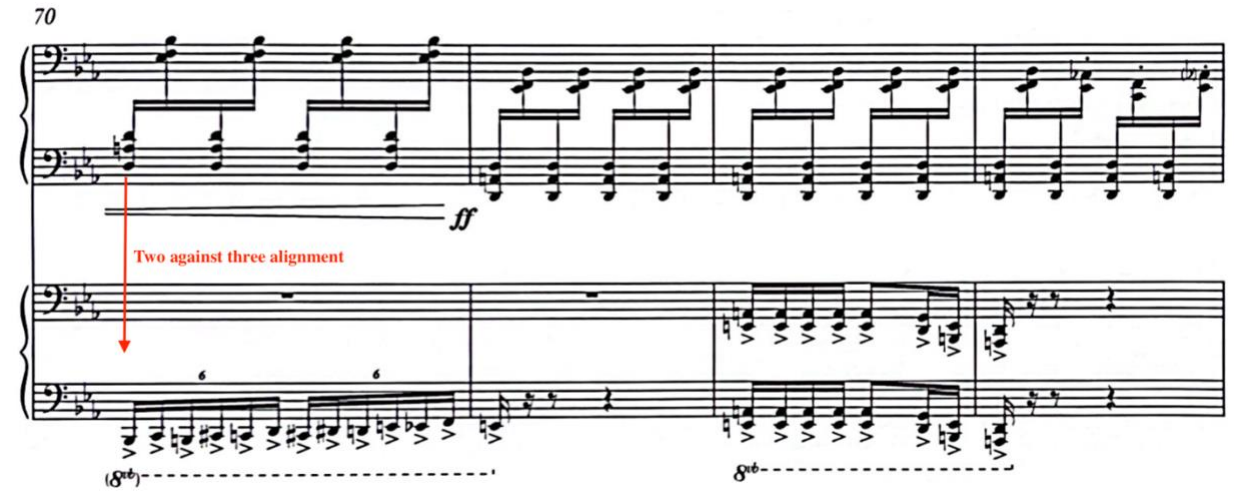


Figure 3.23. *China West Suite*, "Miao Dances," mm. 70–73, 2 against 3 alignment

Conclusion

This analysis shows that *China West Suite* demands both advanced technique and careful interpretive insight, requiring performers to navigate fragmented melodies, irregular rhythms, contrasting articulations, and virtuosic toccata textures while maintaining tight ensemble coordination. Chen's fragmented melodic writing, irregular rhythmic groupings, and off-beat entrances, as seen in the first and third movements ("Introduction" and "Zang Songs"), require performers to read beyond surface notation and create continuity from disjunct materials.

Technically, the suite tests flexibility, articulation, and endurance, particularly in the contrasting touches of “Meng Songs” and the rapid chords, chromatic passages, and driving rhythms of “Miao Dances.” Ensemble awareness is equally crucial: precise coordination in canonic passages, off-beat alignments, and unison textures underscores the duo’s role as a single, responsive musical entity. Pedagogically, the suite strengthens rhythmic precision, articulation control, technical versatility, and collaborative musicianship, making it a valuable work for developing advanced pianists. Most importantly, *China West Suite* exemplifies how Chinese and Western techniques converge to express cultural interaction within the two-piano medium. By blending Chinese folk-inspired melodies and modal patterns with Western contrapuntal textures and virtuosic piano techniques, the two pianos create a unified sound that reflects cultural dialogue and expressive synthesis. This merging of styles directly supports the thesis, highlighting the cultural and musical synthesis central to Chen’s compositional language.

Chapter 4: Alice Ping Yee Ho and An Eastern Apparition

Following the preceding chapter's examination of Chen and her integration of Chinese and Western musical idioms, this chapter turns to Ho, situating her life and works within a similarly cross-cultural context. It considers how Ho's early experiences, education, and cultural background inform her compositional voice, particularly in her piano repertoire, which transforms elements of Chinese folk tradition through contemporary Western techniques. In addition, the chapter provides analytical, pedagogical, and performance-oriented perspectives, offering guidance for interpreting and engaging with Ho's works within both scholarly and practical frameworks.

Biographical Sketch

Ho is a Hong Kong-born Canadian composer and pianist. Ho's early musical journey began through ballet.[81] Growing up in Hong Kong, she took ballet classes accompanied by music from composers such as Tchaikovsky, Prokofiev, and Rimsky-Korsakov. Her interest in music deepened when she began piano lessons with the ballet accompanist, eventually becoming a classically trained pianist. Ho later reflected that the combined training in dance and piano during childhood cultivated the discipline and stamina that would sustain her throughout her musical career. At the same time, Ho was exposed to Chinese musical traditions through everyday cultural experiences. She attended *Yueju*[82] performances in Hong Kong with her grandparents. She also listened to radio programs that featured traditional Chinese music along with Cantonese, Mandarin, and Japanese pop songs. Rather than forming separate spheres, these

[81] Biographical information in this section is drawn in part from online sources and an interview conducted by the author with the composer via Zoom on March 5, 2026.
[82] Yueju, also referred as Cantonese opera, combines singing, acting, and martial arts.

Western and Chinese influences coexisted from an early age and later contributed to the intercultural character of her musical language.

During high school, Ho was active in her local music community; she served as conductor of her school choir, arranging and conducting the songs the ensemble performed. Growing up in British Hong Kong, where the education system was highly competitive, it was common for students of her generation to aspire to prestigious professions such as medicine, law, or engineering. Ho initially intended to pursue a medical career, however, her musical talent earned her a scholarship to Indiana University, where she majored in piano performance. During her undergraduate studies, she discovered her passion for composition. Although composition lessons were typically reserved for composition majors, she enrolled by chance and soon realized that creating music was her true calling, leading her to commit fully to composition. Ho's formal compositional training at Indiana University under John Eaton introduced her to microtonal and avant-garde techniques. She later recognized that these concepts were not limited to contemporary Western practice but resonated with traditional musical idioms she had encountered earlier, in which microtonal inflections are naturally present in ethnic instruments and folk singing.[83]

Ho pursued a Master of Music in composition at the University of Toronto, where she studied with John Beckwith, whose pedagogical approach encouraged her to refine her compositional voice through an emphasis on clarity, economy, and the expressive potential of limited musical materials. One exercise he assigned was to compose for the Baroque recorder. Because of the instrument's single melodic line, limited register, and restricted dynamic range, the task prompted Ho to think carefully about musical economy and clarity, leading her to

[83] Alice Ho, interviewed by author via Zoom, March 5, 2026.

appreciate the expressive potential of simplicity. During the summer while pursuing her master's at the University of Toronto, Ho attended the Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik in Germany, where she studied with Brian Ferneyhough, whom she described as one of the most mathematically minded composers she had encountered. Ho recalled her first lesson with Ferneyhough, in which he analyzed each pitch and its relationship to the others in a highly logical and analytical manner. This encounter prompted her to expand her approach to composition, balancing her intuitive instincts with a more conscious and methodical consideration of pitch relationships.

After obtaining her Master of Music in Composition, Ho dedicated years to raising her family while working as a full-time piano teacher. As her children grew older, she gradually returned to composing full-time, marking a new phase in her artistic development. Having grown up in Hong Kong, Ho's early musical training and aesthetic sensibility were shaped largely by European traditions. In the past fifteen years, however, she has turned increasingly toward her Chinese heritage, exploring folk tales, traditional instruments, and folk melodies to create music that blends Chinese cultural elements with a contemporary sonic language. This process of rediscovery and reinvention has become a defining feature of her recent works. In addition to Chinese influences, Ho has also engaged with Japanese culture, incorporating elements such as *taiko*[84] drumming and mythological themes into her compositions.

A notable turning point in this evolving artistic direction occurred with *The Lesson of Da Ji* (2013). Commissioned by Toronto Masque Theatre, the project required Ho to combine Baroque instruments and vocal writing with traditional Chinese instruments. Preparing the work prompted her to study the performance practices and expressive possibilities of instruments such

[84] Taiko, a collective term for Japanese percussion instruments.

as the *pipa*[85] and *guzheng*[86] while also engaging with Baroque stylistic conventions. Ho has described this experience as a significant revelation in her compositional development.[87] Prior to this project, much of Ho's music reflected the avant-garde aesthetic often associated with academic composition and contemporary music festivals. However, working on *The Lesson of Da Ji* encouraged her to explore new cultural and stylistic possibilities and to reconnect more consciously with her Chinese heritage. Following this project, Ho increasingly embraced a flexible and pluralistic compositional approach, recognizing that she could navigate among a wide range of aesthetic languages, from highly complex modernist works to music rooted in traditional tonal or folk idioms. This realization opened new artistic directions in her work, including collaborations with performers from diverse cultural backgrounds and projects incorporating elements of jazz, Japanese culture, electronic media, and percussion theatre. Rather than viewing stylistic diversity as contradictory, Ho regards it as a source of creative freedom, allowing her to respond to the expressive and cultural demands of each project.

Reflecting on her compositional philosophy, Ho has described her musical language as broadly eclectic, shaped by exposure to multiple musical traditions since childhood. Although her academic training encouraged certain modernist aesthetics, she has remained open to a wide range of musical possibilities, including tonal writing and traditional materials. Rather than viewing such materials as limited or outdated, she emphasizes their expressive potential, observing that "magic can be transformed if you utilize them."[88] In recent years, she has

[85] Pipa, pear-shaped lucked instrument.
[86] Guzheng, twenty-one stringed zither.
[87] Alice Ho, interviewed by author via Zoom, March 5, 2026.
[88] Ho, interview by the author, March 5, 2026.

increasingly focused on creating works that communicate directly with audiences, seeking to balance intellectual rigor with emotional immediacy.

Ho's works have been performed internationally by leading orchestras and ensembles, including the Finnish Lapland Chamber Orchestra, China National Symphony, Shanghai Philharmonic, Taiwan National Symphony, Luxembourg Sinfonietta, Estonia's Ellerhein Girls' Choir, Polish Radio Choir, and major Canadian symphonies and contemporary music ensembles. She has collaborated with prominent soloists and ensembles, such as the Penderecki String Quartet, TorQ Percussion Quartet, Duo Concertante, violist Rivka Golani, pianists Christina Petrowska Quilico, Philip Chiu, and Katherine Dowling, percussionists Evelyn Glennie and Sumire Yoshihara, and flutists Robert Aitken and Patrick Gallois.

A two-time JUNO Award nominee, Ho has released ten albums spanning solo, chamber, operatic, and electronic music, including *Ming*, *Glistening Pianos*, *The Lesson of Da Ji*, *The Monkiest King*, *Venom of Love*, and *CHINATOWN*. Her operatic works exemplify her ability to integrate diverse musical traditions into compelling narratives, reflecting her heritage while engaging global audiences and highlighting her distinctive voice in contemporary music.

Works for Piano

Ho describes her compositional style as eclectic, reflecting a balance between two creative impulses. One side of her is rooted in traditionalism, drawing upon tonal color, lyricism, and emotional connection. In this mode, her music tends to be idiomatic, natural, and deeply expressive. The other side embraces experimentation and conceptual exploration, incorporating pure sound, extended techniques, and electronic media. Her early works were strongly influenced by the European classical tradition, with an emphasis on structure, harmony, and formal complexity. Over time, however, Ho began to move away from this academic framework,

seeking instead to compose from the heart. She strives to find equilibrium among conceptual innovation, sound exploration, and tonality, integrating these elements in a way that feels both personal and engaging to audiences. Reflecting this eclecticism, Ho draws inspiration from a wide range of genres and styles, demonstrating her openness to diverse musical expressions.

Ho has composed across a wide range of genres, including orchestral works, chamber music, vocal and choral compositions, opera, theatre, film music, electronic music, dance music, and keyboard music. Ho's body of piano works spans from her early works in the 1980s to her most recent compositions in 2024, demonstrating both a consistent exploration of pianistic textures and an evolving engagement with contemporary idioms (see Table 4.1). Her earliest work, *Arc* (1985), is followed by the *Musical Tableau* series (1989–1994), comprising *Shade* (1989), *Blaze* (1991), and *Cyclone* (1994). Later solo piano works include *Caprice* (1997), *Seed of Passion* (1997), *Garage* (2005, the theme for the independent film *Garage*), *Aeon* (2012, commissioned by Claudia Chan as a competition piece for the Concours international de piano d'Orléans), *Solus* (2013, commissioned by Yoko Hirota), and *Evanescent Pleasures* (2019). More recent compositions such as *The Weeping Woman* (2022, commissioned by Corey Hamm), *Hong Kong Nostalgia* (2023, commissioned by Philip Chiu, in three movements: *Connaught Centre*, *Ten Thousand Buddhas Monastery*, and *Night Market*), *There Is No Night Without a Dawning* (2023, commissioned by Katherine Dowling), and *A Manic Ride Through Lollipop Hell* (2024, commissioned by Tong Wang through the Toronto Arts Council), demonstrate the continued expansion of her pianistic language.

In addition to her solo piano works, Ho has also composed two piano concertos (see Table 4.2). The first, *Through the Forest of Songs*, is written for one piano, four hands, and orchestra. The work consists of three movements, each inspired by a natural landscape: Elk Glen

National Park in Canada, the bamboo forests of China, and the Amazon rainforest in Brazil. Through these movements, the composer reflects on the relationship between humans and the natural world across different continents and cultural contexts. Her second piano concerto, *Pictures from an Imaginary Exhibition* (2024), is written for solo piano and orchestra and alludes to *Pictures at an Exhibition* by Mussorgsky. The work draws inspiration from paintings by Wesley Tongson and Christina Petrowska Quilico, the latter of whom also premiered the concerto as soloist.

Ho's contributions also extend to works for multiple pianists, including compositions for two pianos and piano four hands (see Table 4.3). Among these are *An Eastern Apparition* (1994) and *Glistening Pianos* (2009), commissioned by Midori Koga and Lydia Wong through the Ontario Arts Council. *Heart to Heart* (2012) exists in two versions, for either two pianos or one piano four hands, while *Under the Shattered Skies* (2022) was commissioned by Muzewest Concert for the Vieness Piano Duo. Each of these works reflects Ho's distinctive approach to texture, collaboration, and pianistic color.

Table 4.1 Alice Ping Yee Ho Solo Piano Works

Year	**Title**	**Notes**
1985	*Arc*	Earliest piano work; conceptual, natural inspired
1989	*Musical Tableau* series: *Shade*	Inspired by Starry Night by Vincent van Gogh
1991	*Musical Tableau* series: *Blaze*	Inspired by nature
1994	*Musical Tableau* series: *Cyclone*	Virtuosic and energetic work
1997	*Caprice*	The work is a transcription of Ho's original composition for solo cello. Ho has also made Caprice available in multiple instruments

1997	*Seed of Passion*	Composed for a solo dancer and a chair, the work serves as an expression of the artist's passion
2005	*Garage*	Conveys entrapment and despair through bleak sonorities, resonant silences, and stark contrasts of tremolo, dynamics, and register
2012	*Aeon*	Inspired by Salvador Dali's surrealist painting "The Persistence of Memory"
2013	*Solus*	Commissioned by Yoko Hirota
2019	*Evanescent Pleasures*	Single-line pianistic gestures, combining spontaneity with a restrained poignancy
2022	*The Weeping Woman*	Inspired by Picasso's anti-war paintings "The Weeping Woman"
2023	*Hong Kong Nostalgia*	Commissioned by Philip Chiu, three movements: *Connaught Centre*, *Ten Thousand Buddhas Monastery*, *Night Market*
2023	*There Is No Night Without A Dawning*	A single-movement work that evolves from a contemplative, prayer-like opening to a rhapsodic close
2024	*A Manic Ride Through Lollipop Hell*	Piano overture for the one-act anime horror opera *Labyrinth of Tears*, depicting four magical schoolgirls navigating their comatose friend's mind to save her

Table 4.2 Alice Ping Yee Ho Piano Concertos

Year	Title	Notes
2023	*Through the Forest of Songs*	Written for one piano, four hands, contains three movements, each dedicated to a national park in Canada, China, and Brazil
2024	*Pictures from an Imaginary Exhibition*	A nod *to Pictures at an Exhibition* by Mussorgsky, draws inspiration from paintings by Wesley Tongson and from pianist Christina Petrowska Quilico

Table 4.3 Alice Ping Yee Ho Two-piano/Four-hand Works

Year	Title	Instrumentation	Notes
1994	*An Eastern Apparition*	Two-piano	Aspects of yin and yang is explored through two pianos
2009	*Glistening Pianos*	Two-piano	Virtuosic, inspired by Byron's *She Walks in Beauty*
2012	*Heart to Heart*	Available for both two-piano and one piano four-hand	Inspired by Emily Dickinson, with each section reflecting the poem's emotions
2022	*Under the Shattered Skies*	One piano four-hand	Composer's personal threnody for the War in Ukraine, honoring lives lost and displaced while celebrating the enduring strength of the human spirit

Ho's experimentation also extends to other keyboard instruments and media. *Qim* (2013) for solo harpsichord demonstrates her interest in historical textures, while works integrating electronics, such as *The Chinese Nightingale* (2022, commissioned by Muzewest Concert for Han Chen) and *Erupting Skies* (2022, for Christina Quilico), explore the interplay between acoustic piano and electronic soundscapes. Together, these compositions reveal a career characterized by stylistic breadth and an ongoing exploration of contemporary pianistic and sonic possibilities.

An Eastern Apparition

An Eastern Apparition was written in 1994, printed by the Canadian Music Centre in Canada, and later published by Central Conservatory of Music Press in 2016 in Beijing, China. The work originated from an invitation for the composer to present a piano recital for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). During this period, Ho discussed with a Chinese pianist the possibility of performing a work for two pianos or piano four hands, which led her to compose *An Eastern Apparition* for two pianos. At the time, Ho noted that her primary association with Chinese culture was philosophical, particularly the concept of *yin* and *yang*, which subsequently became the central conceptual framework for the piece.

An Eastern Apparition explores the ancient Chinese concept of duality through the medium of two pianos, which symbolize the opposing yet interconnected forces of *yin* and *yang*. Drawing on traditional beliefs that a ghost embodies two complementary components, one visible and the other existing in a parallel realm, the work transforms this metaphysical idea into sound. The two pianos interact as shifting entities, sometimes merging, alternating, or opposing each other under mysterious and unseen powers. Through this interplay, the composition portrays the ghost not merely as a supernatural presence but as a reflection of the balance and tension between opposing forces that lie at the heart of Chinese philosophy. As Ho explains in the introduction to the score:
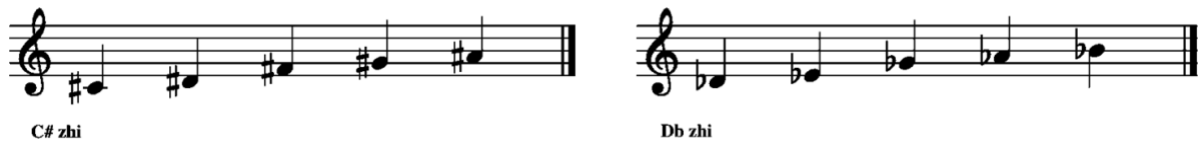
> In this work, the two pianos play the roles of "Yin" and "Yang" of an Eastern Apparition. While one part surface, the other emerges as a counter part from the other parallel world. While governed by mysterious power, the two can interchange or act against each other, and the entity exists in a state of balance between opposing forces.[89]

[89] Alice Ping Yee Ho, *An Eastern Apparition*. (Canadian Music Centre, 1994), program note.

Musical Analysis

The philosophical idea of opposing yet interconnected forces shapes not only the conceptual framework of the work but also its musical language. The interaction between the two pianos reflects these dualistic forces as they sometimes converge, diverge, or move in contrasting directions. Ho described this relationship as a dramatic musical journey that reflects the dynamic balance of natural forces.[90] The sonic world of the piece also evokes Chinese cultural imagery. Ho sought to create resonant sonorities reminiscent of gongs and temple environments through extended techniques such as playing inside the piano, clusters, and glissandi. These sounds contribute to an imagined soundscape that evokes ancient spaces characterized by both tranquility and grandeur. Although pentatonic elements are present in the work, they do not appear in a straightforward, traditional manner. Instead, these pitch collections function as underlying structural materials that are often obscured within an atonal context. Much of the melodic and harmonic content is derived from a C-sharp/D-flat *zhi*-based pitch foundation (see Fig. 4.1), which functions more as a point of reference than a conventional tonal center. The work also employs extreme dynamic contrasts ranging from *pianississimo* (*ppp*) to *fortississimo* (*fff*), further contributing to its dramatic expressive range.

Figure 4.1. C-sharp/D-flat pitch foundation



[90] Alice Ho, interviewed by author via Zoom, March 5, 2026.

Rhythmically, repetition and *accelerando* (see Fig. 4.6, marked in red) contribute to a ritualistic character that reflects the cyclical and unpredictable qualities of nature. Ho also emphasizes the contrast between sparse resonant textures and dense clusters, creating a sound world that alternates between moments of stillness and high energy. Although structural logic informs her compositional thinking, Ho emphasizes that her creative process is guided primarily by attentive listening.[91] Structural planning provides a conceptual framework, while musical ideas develop organically through engagement with sound.

Structurally, the work unfolds in three large sections followed by a brief coda, delineated primarily through tempo changes and textural contrast (see Table 4.4). The piece is unified by its use of the *zhi* pentatonic mode, beginning in C-sharp *zhi* (C-sharp–D-sharp–F-sharp–G-sharp–A-sharp) and then shifting to D-flat *zhi* (D-flat–E-flat–G-flat–A-flat–B-flat). This notational change reflects Ho's structural design rather than a change in pitch content. The music remains centered on the D-flat *zhi* mode through sections I to III before returning to C-sharp *zhi* at the end of the coda, thereby creating a cyclical tonal framework. An opening thematic idea recurs throughout the piece in varied forms.

[91] Alice Ho, interviewed by author via Zoom, March 5, 2026.

Table 4.4 Formal Outline of *An Eastern Apparition*

Section	Tempo Indication	Measures	Description
Section I	♩ = 60 → più mosso (♩ = 72–76)	mm. 1–47	Establishes C-sharp–D-flat *zhi* framework with repeated notes and chromatic expansion; builds rhythmic momentum.
Section II	Presto; *del movimento precedente*	mm. 48–123	Energetic, motive-driven section with ascending gestures and increasing density.
Section III	Tranquillo → veloce → largo → animato	mm. 124–~226	Slower, lyrical textures emphasizing resonance and contrast.
Coda	Accelerating gestures	mm. 227–end (m. 241)	Chromatic descent returns to C-sharp *zhi*, completing a cyclical close.

Section I (see Fig. 4.2)[92] opens at a moderate tempo (quarter = 60) and later transitions to *più mosso* (quarter = 72–76). Built on the C-sharp *zhi* to D-flat *zhi* modal transition, this section features repeated-note figures and chromatic groups derived from the pentatonic collection with added chromatic pitches. These elements establish the work's rhythmic drive and introduce Ho's practice of expanding pentatonic materials through chromatic coloration. Section II (See Fig. 4.3, marked in red) begins in *presto*, defined by a distinct rhythmic motive that unfolds sequentially and ascends gradually to the registral climax on F-sharp. Within this rapid and energetic texture, Ho manipulates the D-flat *zhi* pentatonic tones through short, fragmented rhythmic gestures with accents, maintaining the modal center while introducing significant melodic and registral variation. In the *Del Movimento prevedente* subsection, the D-flat *zhi* mode reappears in swift, unfolding lines that intensify the sense of forward motion in sixteenth notes.

[92] Musical examples from *An Eastern Apparition* by Alice Ping Yee Ho are reproduced with permission of the composer.
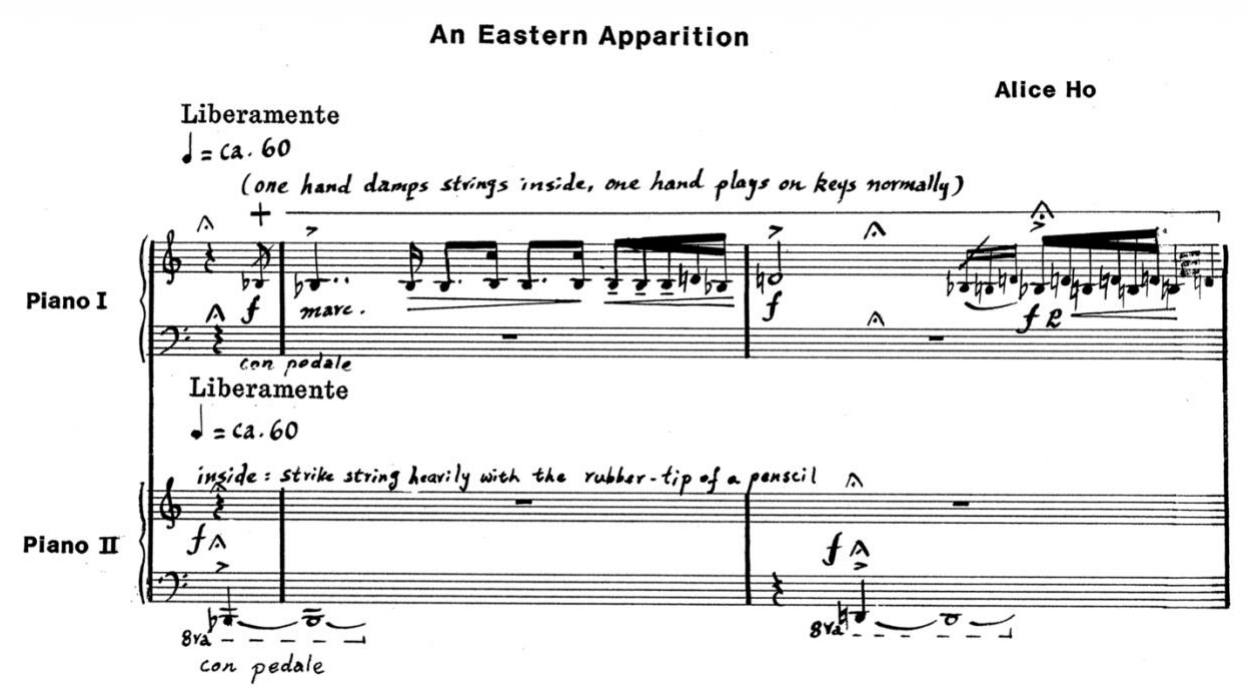


Figure 4.2. *An Eastern Apparition,* measure 1, beginning of section I
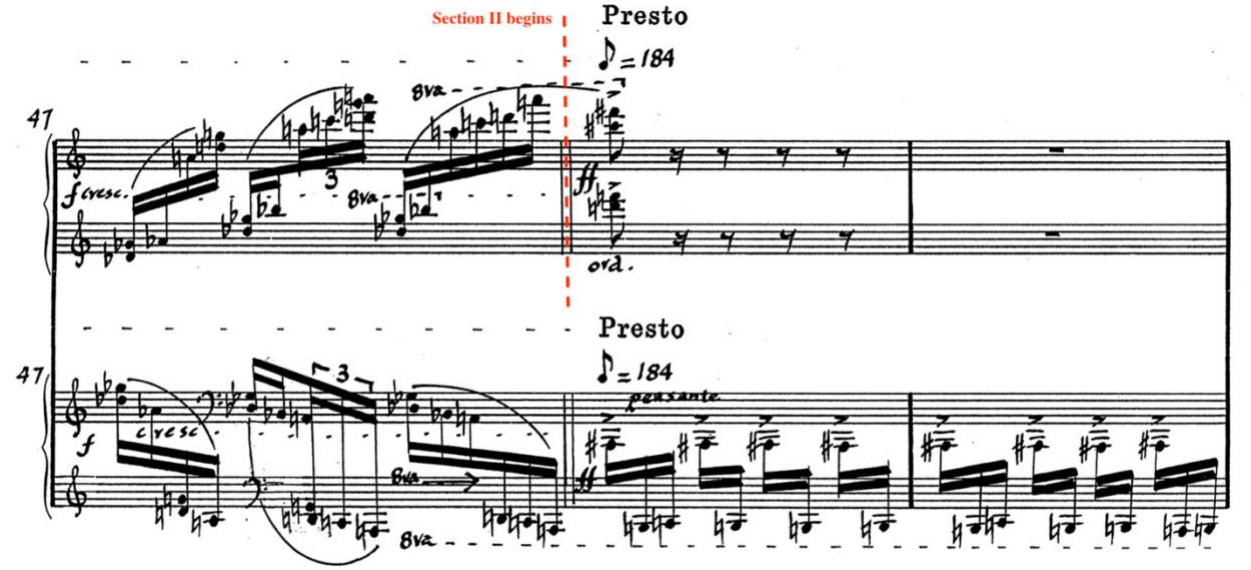


Figure 4.3. *An Eastern Apparition,* measure 48, beginning of section II

Section III (see Fig. 4.4, marked in red) provides a contrasting slow, tranquil, and introspective atmosphere. It includes several smaller subsections, *tranquillo*, *veloce*, *largo*, and *animato*, that highlight the interplay of contrasting energies. Throughout these passages, the D-flat *zhi* mode is retained, now expressed in more lyrical, spacious textures that emphasize

resonance and color. The coda introduces rapid descending chromatic figurations, a final surge of kinetic energy. As the chromatic gestures dissipate, the music returns to the C-sharp *zhi* mode, mirroring the very opening of the work. This return not only restores the initial pitch framework but also creates a sense of structural completion and circularity. Across the work, the dialogue between the two pianos embodies *yin* and *yang*, expressed through contrasts in register, articulation, density, and rhythmic character. These complementary textures reinforce the philosophical interplay at the heart of the piece.
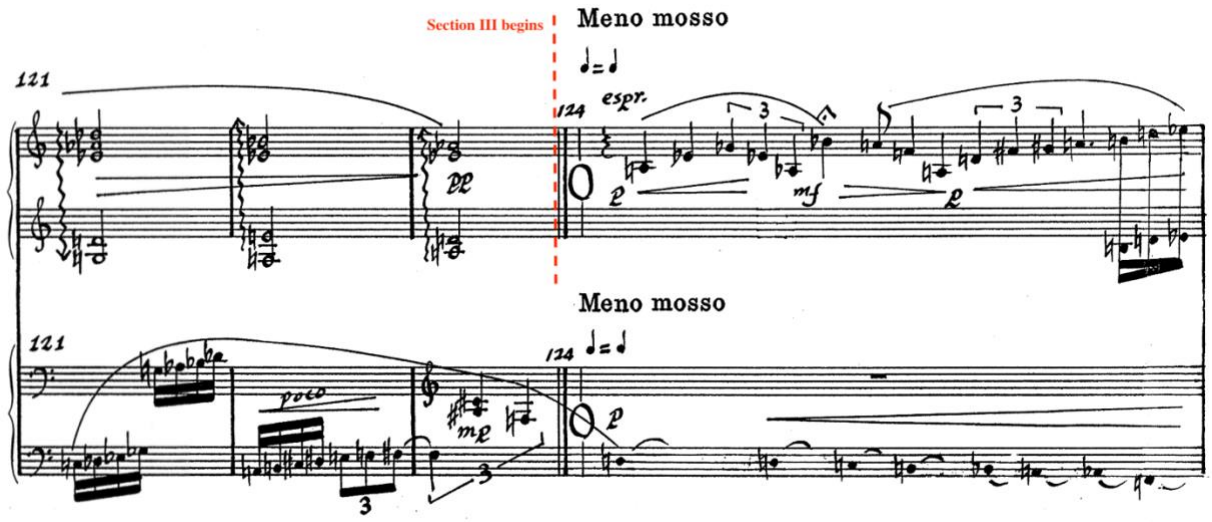


Figure 4.4. *An Eastern Apparition,* measure 124, beginning of section III

Pedagogical and Performance Notes

Reading Demand

One of the primary challenges in *An Eastern Apparition* is navigating the contemporary notation presented in the score. In the version published by the Canadian Music Centre, Ho provides performance notes to guide performers (see Fig. 4.5). These notes highlight features such as unconventional notation, the use of performance directions, and graphic representations for extended techniques. The score often presents several musical events at the same time, which results in a high density of notes and requires careful visual scanning and mental organization.

Ho also offers instructions for hand positioning, fingerings, and specific techniques like glissandos, clusters, and muted string effects, ensuring clarity in execution while preserving the work's expressive and textural complexity. These notes serve both as practical guidance and as interpretive insight, helping performers translate Ho's innovative compositional language into coherent musical texture.

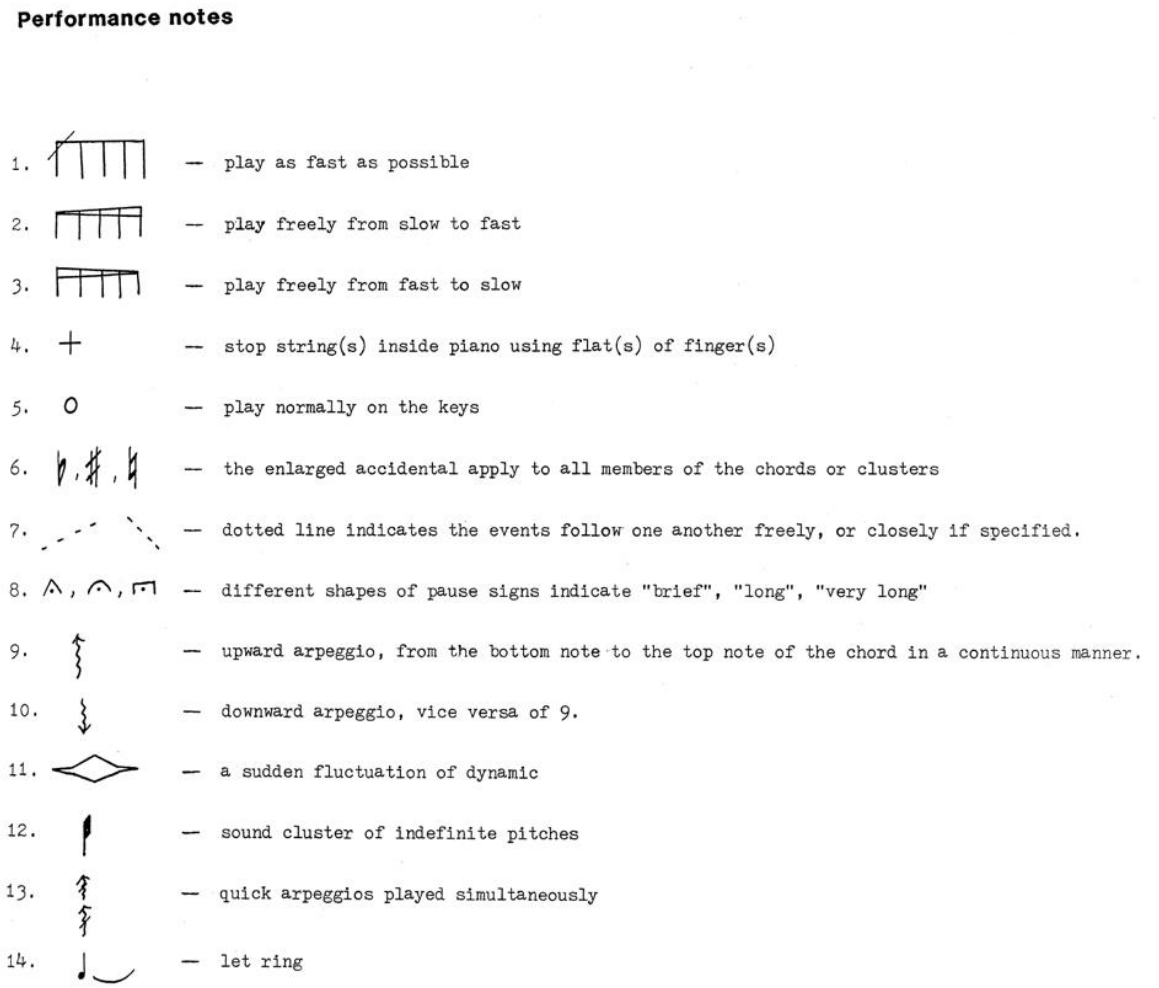


Figure 4.5. *An Eastern Apparition*, Performance Notes by Ho

Fermata

Contemporary composers such as Poulenc and Penderecki have adopted more flexible approaches to *fermata* notation, varying both shape and size, including square (very long) and triangular (brief) symbols, to indicate approximate durations and to distinguish notes held for

differing lengths of time. In a similar manner, Ho incorporates these modern *fermata* notations in *An Eastern Apparition*. At the opening of the work, the score features triangular *fermatas*, and uses them continuously throughout the work. In this context, the *fermatas* indicate brief pauses, illustrating the nuanced expressive potential of modern *fermata* notation. The triangular *fermata* recurs throughout the piece, appearing in measures 3, 23, 26, 121, 122, 147, 196, and 197 (see Fig. 4.6, marked in green).

Accelerando and Ritardando Beams

Accelerandos and *ritardandos* notated on beamed figures appear frequently throughout the work. The fanning of beams outward and inward signifies a gradual acceleration and subsequent slowing of rhythmic values, progressing from eighth notes to sixteenth or thirty-second notes. This notation guides the performer to approach the marked tempo with precision while maintaining clarity and evenness in rapid passages. From measures 1 to 4 in Piano I, similar beamed accelerando figures appear in tremolos and repeated-note patterns, establishing a sense of rhythmic propulsion and fluidity (see Fig. 4.6, marked in red). Although Ho's notation is meticulous, the resulting sound often transcends barline divisions, creating an impression of continuous motion and temporal freedom. Comparable effects occur in the following measures: Piano I (mm. 7, 9, 124–125) and Piano II (mm. 6, 10, 12, 20, 24–25, 147–148, 202), with both parts in m. 203. Each occurrence should be examined on its own terms, with attention to its current tempo relationships and ensemble balance so that acceleration and return feel natural rather than mechanical.

Indication of Time

Ho is highly precise in her musical notation, especially in the opening and closing sections, where she specifies the exact duration she wants the performers to sustain certain

sounds. The indicated durations include 3, 4, 3–4, and 6 seconds. In some cases, such as the 3–4 second markings, Ho allows performers slight interpretive freedom to determine the final duration within that range. In measure 240, she writes "6 ca.," meaning "approximately six seconds," further emphasizing performer discretion within a defined temporal framework (see Fig. 4.6, marked in red square). In measures 5–6 (Piano I), the marking "3″–4″" indicates the approximate duration Ho intends the performer to sustain the sound, providing a sense of temporal fluidity rather than a fixed rhythmic value (see Fig. 4.6, marked in blue circle). Similar indications appear at the end of the score in both pianos, in measures 233, 235, 238, and 240, where these sustained moments shape the pacing and serve as structural markers that frame the work's closing section (see Fig. 4.7, marked in red square).

Extended Techniques on Strings

Ho employs four extended techniques that engage the interior of the piano, each contributing distinct timbral and percussive effects. There are four extended techniques used. The first is using one hand to mute the string while the other plays on the keyboard. Mutes are produced by lightly touching the strings just before the dampers, near the agraffes. The closer the contact is to the agraffe, the more resonant the sound, as more of the string is allowed to vibrate.[93] At the beginning of Piano I, the pianist places one hand directly on the strings inside the piano, using a finger to mute the B♭3 string with a flat finger, while the other hand plays the same note on the keyboard. The best practice is to use the left hand to mute the string and the right hand to play the key, as this technique requires the pianist to stand, reach inside the piano, and coordinate both actions simultaneously. Throughout the piece, the "+" and "0" symbols

[93] Jean-François Proulx, *A Pedagogical Guide to Extended Piano Techniques* (DMA diss., Temple University, May 2009), 49–50.

indicate this effect; in addition, Ho marks a "ord." to indicate return to unmuted strings. In measure 5, Piano I further develops the use of extended string and keyboard techniques, alternating rapidly between unmuted strings played with the right hand, indicated by "0," and muted strings played with the left hand, indicated by "+," in a succession of repeated notes, until "ord." is marked. The remainder of the piece continues to employ these extended techniques, indicated by the markings "+," "0," (see Fig. 4.6, marked with a pink arrow) and "ord." (see Fig. 4.6, marked with an orange square). The mute technique can also be executed with gradual pressure. In measure 201, Ho instructs the performer to "stop the string slightly, gradually apply the pressure" on the B♭3 note in Piano I (see Fig. 4.8, marked in red and indicated by a pink arrow).

The second technique involves placing the rubber tip of a pencil or a rubber mallet on the string and striking it firmly to produce a percussive effect. At the beginning of the piece, Piano II is instructed to "strike the string heavily with the rubber tip of a pencil or any rubber mallet." In measure 203, Piano II is instructed to "strike the strings forcefully with the fingernails of all fingers" (see Fig. 4.9, marked in red). The third technique entails performing a glissando directly on the strings. As indicated in measures 146–148, Piano II utilizes two approaches: the first employs the flat part of the fingers to execute the glissando, while the second uses a pencil or the fingernails to create the effect (see Fig. 4.9, marked in blue)—similar effects also are indicated in measures 203–204. In addition, Ho indicates that the pianist should execute the glissando on strings in the middle register with fingernails or the rubber tip of a pencil, moving from a narrow span of strings to a wider sweep across multiple strings and back again (see Fig. 4.9, marked in blue bottom right). The fourth technique involves striking the strings with the palm of the hand

to create a resonant percussive effect, and using the length of a pencil to strike the strings, producing a sharper and more metallic timbre (see Fig. 4.10, marked in blue).

Tone Clusters of Indefinite Pitch

The clusters employed by Ho reflect a broader use of indeterminate pitch in contemporary piano writing. Here, they function as *indeterminate boundary notes*, in which upper and lower pitch limits are defined while the internal pitches remain approximate.[94] In measure 26, a cluster chord in Piano II is struck immediately after a glissando (see Fig. 4.11, marked in blue). In measures 146–148, the cluster is indicated to be played with the palm of the hand in the lowest register of the keyboard. The final cluster occurs in the last measure, beginning on a single note, then expanding into a cluster using the hands, and finally incorporating the forearms, which are placed parallel to the keys to achieve a broader sonority.

[94] Stone, *Music Notation in the Twentieth Century,* 257–273.

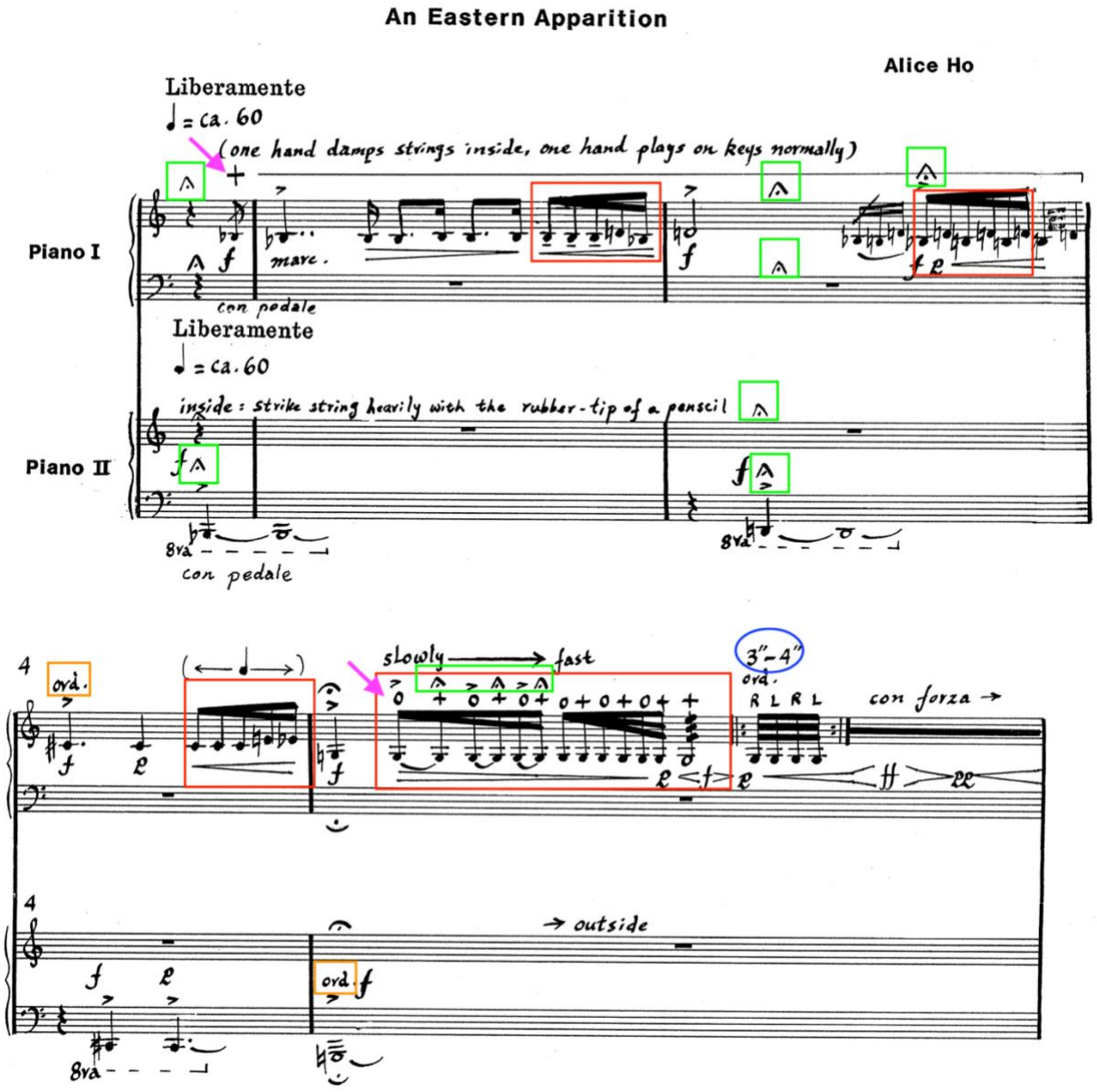


Figure 4.6. *An Eastern Apparition*, mm. 1–4

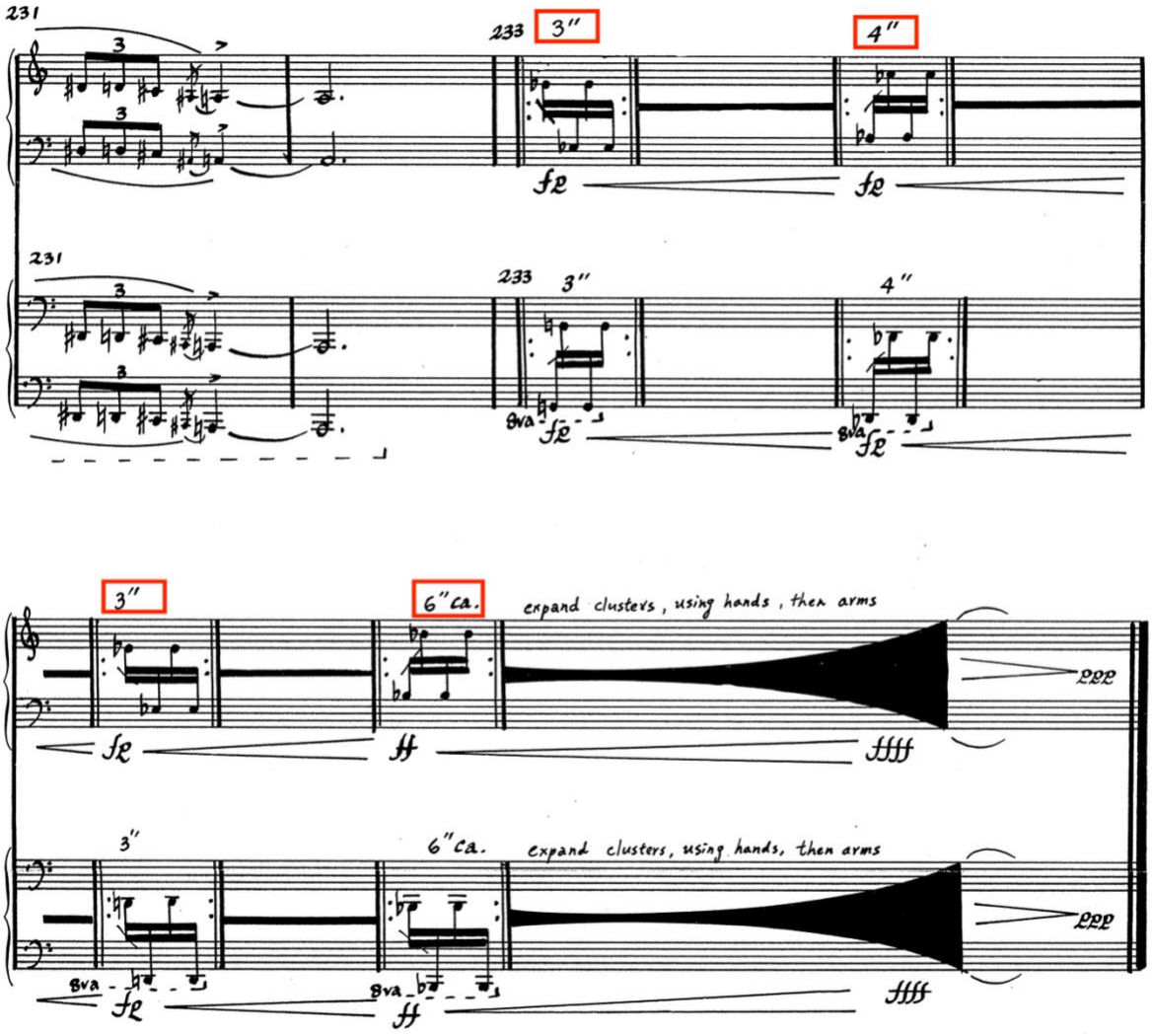


Figure 4.7. *An Eastern Apparition*, mm. 231–241, indication of time

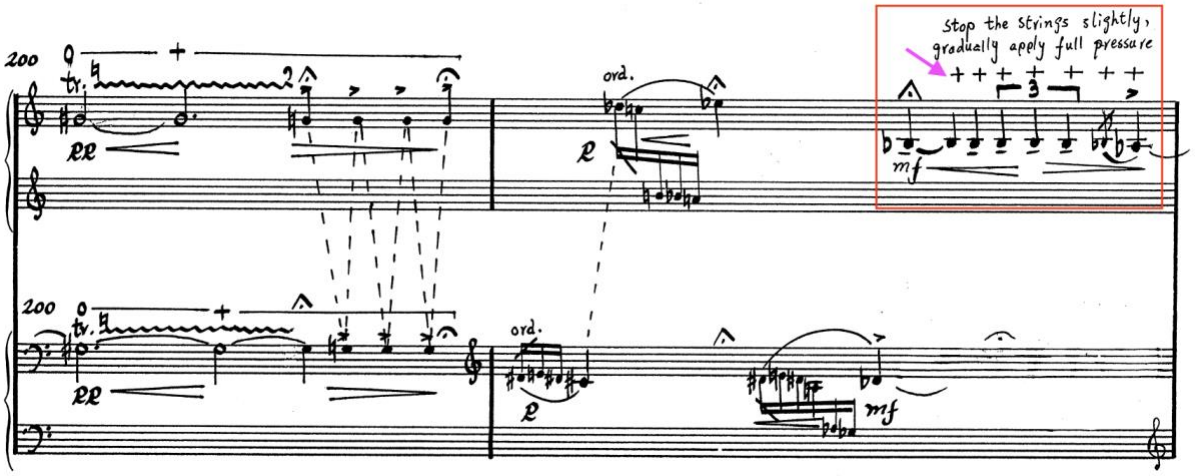


Figure 4.8. *An Eastern Apparition*, mm. 200–201, gradual pressure on mute

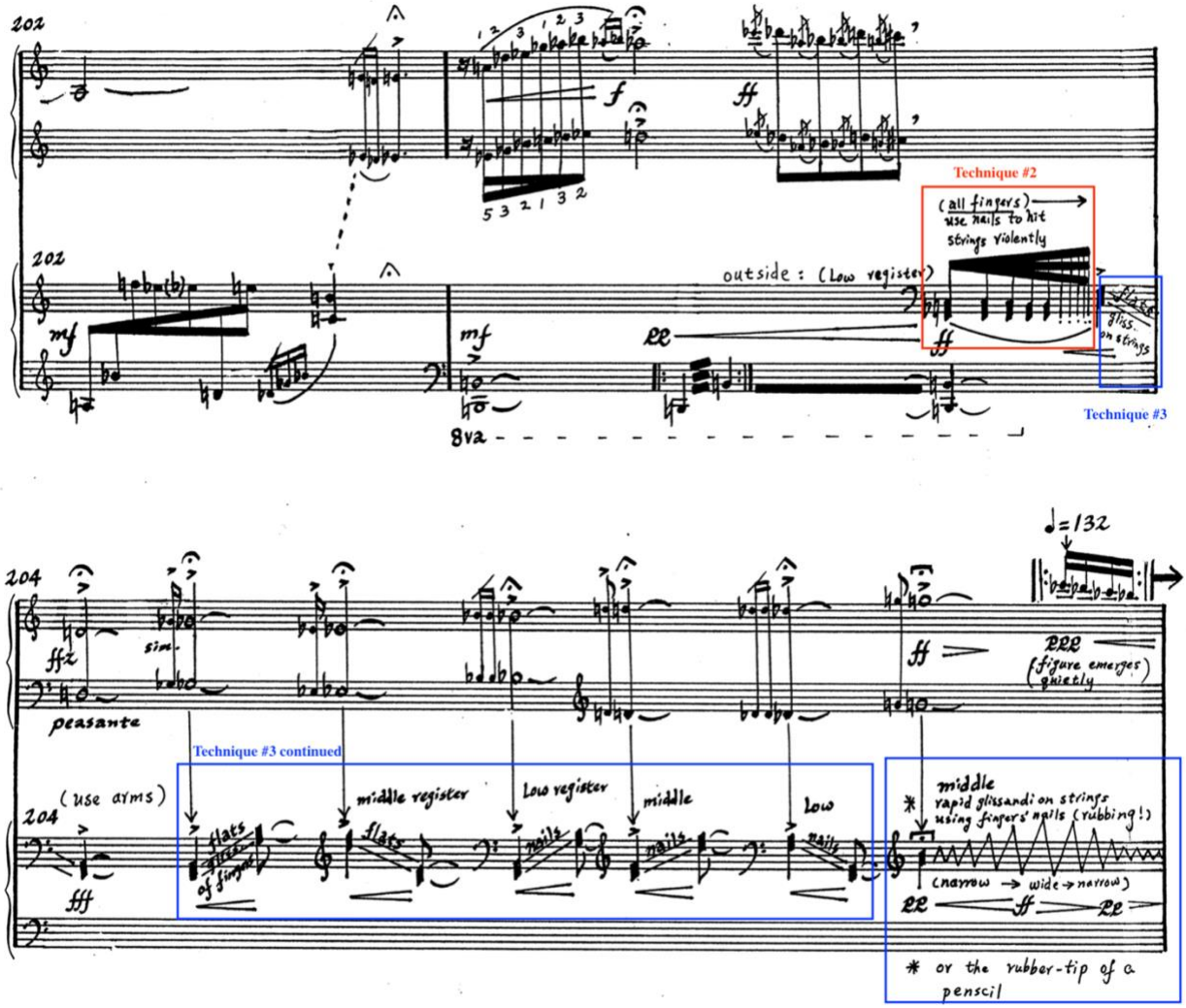


Figure 4.9. *An Eastern Apparition*, mm. 202–204, the second and fourth extended techniques

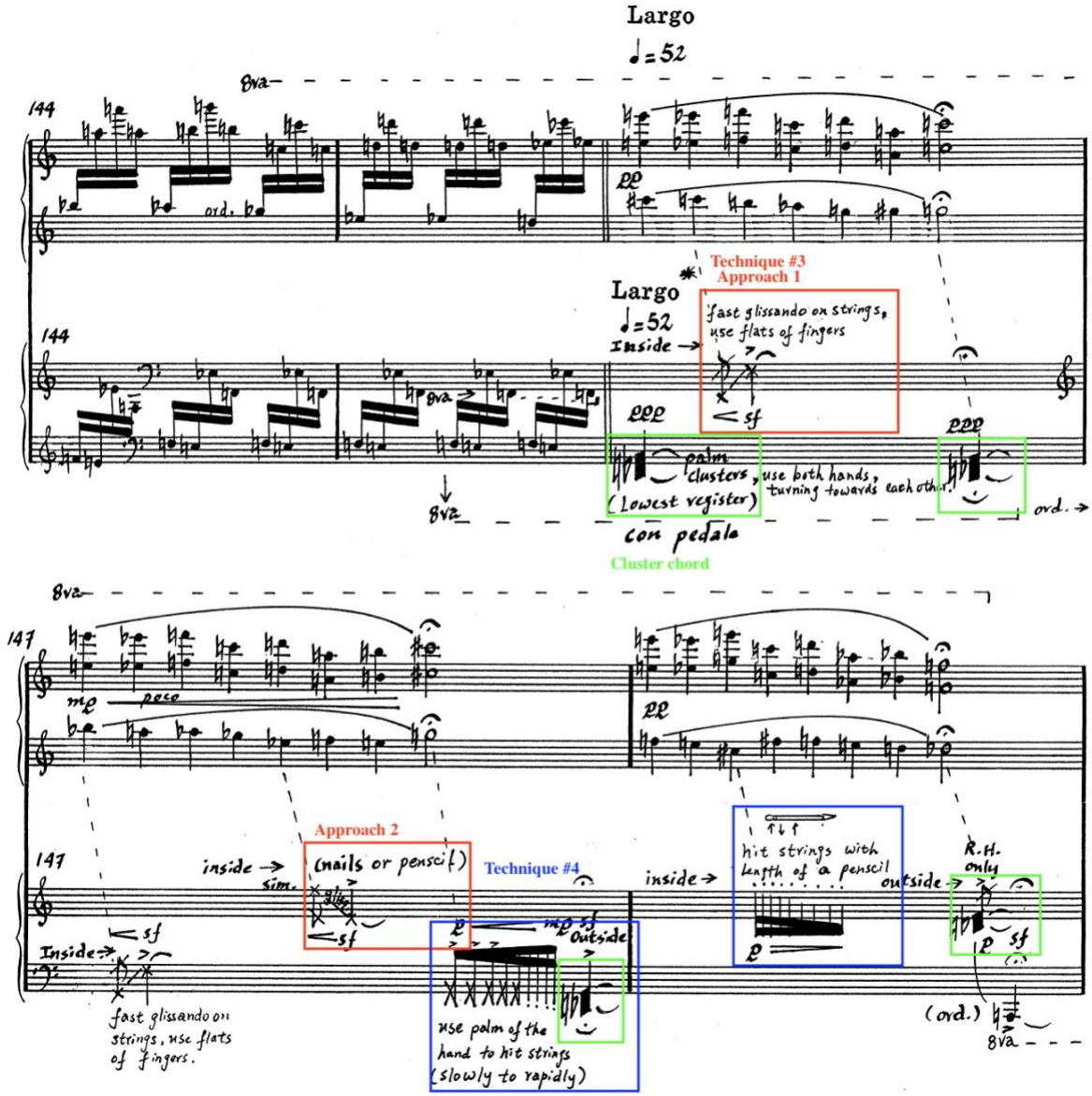


Figure 4.10. *An Eastern Apparition*, mm. 146–148, techniques #3

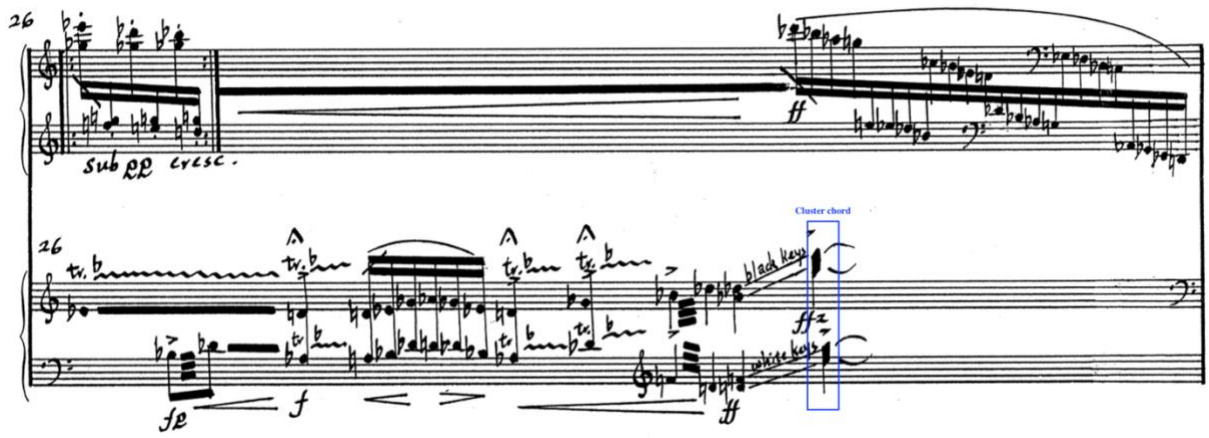


Figure 4.11. *An Eastern Apparition*, mm. 26, cluster chord after glissando

Technical Demand

An Eastern Apparition is a highly virtuosic and technically demanding composition for two pianos. To realize the full artistic and pedagogical potential of this work, it is necessary to examine the specific technical challenges it presents. This section focuses on four primary areas: (1) rapid passagework in irregular groupings, (2) rapid repeated notes, (3) coordination between extended techniques on the strings and the keyboard, and (4) execution of glissandi.

Rapid Passagework in Irregular Groupings

The first technical challenge involves performing irregular groupings of rapid eighth notes, sixteenth notes, and thirty-second notes with both clarity and a clear sense of direction. These irregular rhythmic groupings, which include quintuplets, sextuplets, septuplets, octuplets, nonuplets, and decuplets, require careful interpretation and control (see Fig. 4.12, marked in red). Ho notates her intentions for these rapid passages explicitly, using hairpin crescendos and diminuendos as well as accelerando and ritardando beams. Although most of the running passages appear in irregular groupings, they move consistently in a single direction each time, either upward or downward, making the phrasing direction clear and straightforward. As a professional pianist, Ho also provides fingerings for many of these passages to guide performers

and alleviate the technical demands of executing the rapid notes. While additional rubato or hesitation is unnecessary, performers should project the contour and energy leading to the highest note in order to preserve both direction and expressive intensity.
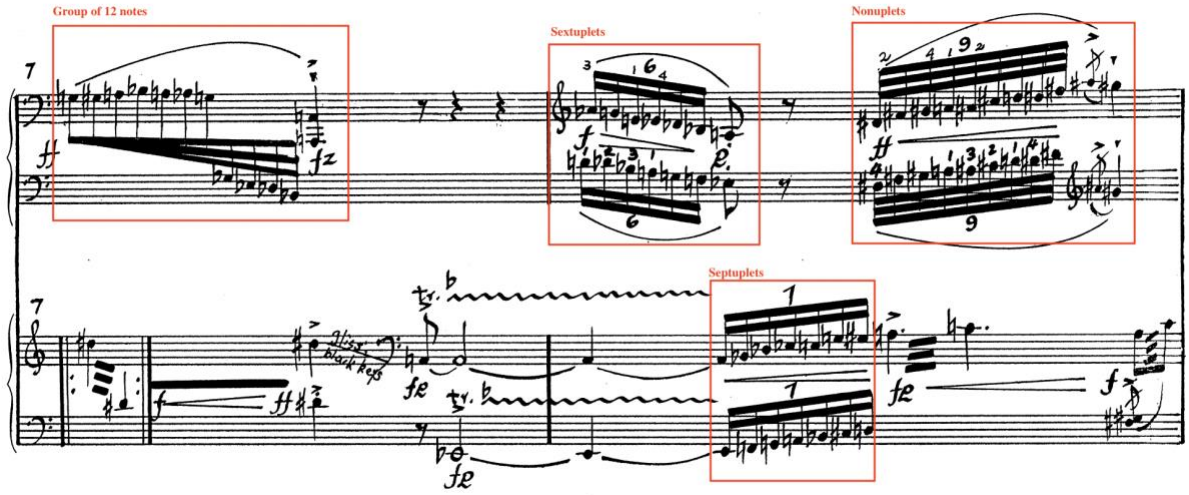


Figure 4.12. *An Eastern Apparition*, mm. 7–8, rapid passagework in irregular groupings

Rapid Repeated Notes

Within this symbolic framework, the rapid repeated notes serve as a musical representation of *yin* and *yang*. Their interplay demands clarity and precision, reflecting the tension and equilibrium between the two forces. To achieve an articulated yet fluid sound, a fingering of 1–2 or 1–3 is recommended, as these fingers facilitate the quick and even repetitions necessary to convey the work's dynamic duality. In addition, playing the repeated notes closer to the edge of the keys facilitates easier execution, since the edge of the keys offers a lighter touch and greater responsiveness than the area closer to the fallboard. It is important to note that the repeated notes in these measures involve differing rhythmic values. In measures 13–14, Piano I executes sixteenth-note repetitions while Piano II performs thirty-second-note repetitions. This requires the performers to maintain careful rhythmic coordination, listening attentively to one another. Furthermore, the dynamic interplay necessitates that Piano I sustain a predominantly

soft (piano) dynamic, allowing Piano II to convey the rapid and frequent dynamic fluctuations with clarity and precision (see Fig. 4.13).

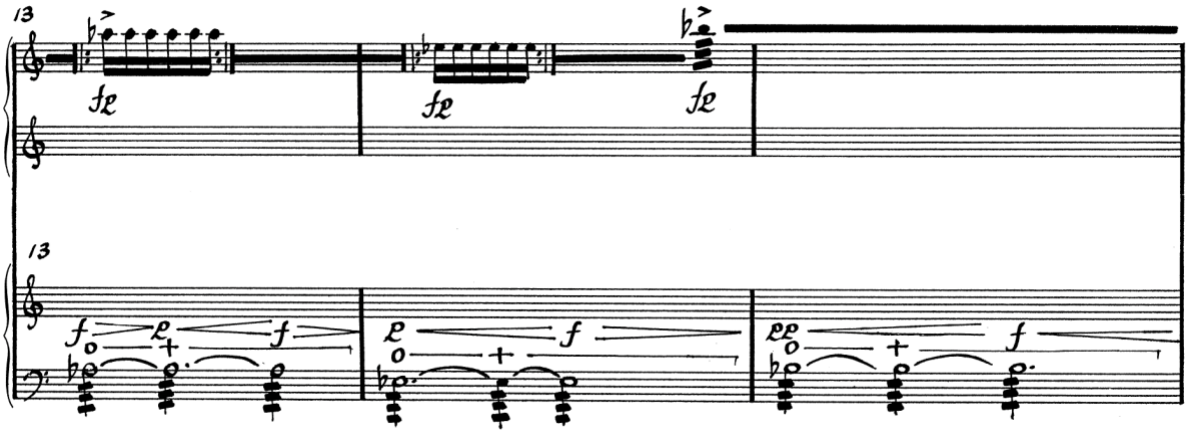


Figure 4.13. *An Eastern Apparition*, mm. 13–15, rapid repeated notes

Coordination Between Extended Techniques on the Strings and the Keyboard

When performing extended piano techniques, standing is often required for accessing strings beyond the dampers and executing inside-the-piano effects, as it allows an unobstructed view and greater physical freedom. Many works require performers to alternate between standing and sitting; such changes should be kept to a minimum and carried out smoothly. If an ideal posture is not possible, passages may need to be played in a less optimal position while preserving technical accuracy and musical expression. Understanding the functional benefits of each posture helps pianists balance ergonomic demands with interpretive goals.[95]

From measures 1–4, both Piano I and Piano II are required to stand in order to perform extended techniques on the strings, returning gradually to a seated position in measure 5 while continuing to play without engaging the mute strings (see Fig. 4.14, marked in red). Later, from measure 10, Piano II prepares for the extended technique in measure 13 by standing after the

[95] Proulx, *A Pedagogical Guide to Extended Piano Techniques*, 102.

fermata at the end of measure 10, positioning the left hand to execute the muted-string technique while the right hand continues the repeated notes (see Fig. 4.15, marked in red). This extended technique continues until measure 18, when the pianist resumes a seated position while executing fast trills with the right hand (see Fig. 4.16, marked in red). In measures 146–150, Piano II remains standing for four measures due to the application of extended techniques on strings, and may gradually return to a seated position at measure 150 (see Fig. 4.17, marked in red). Towards the conclusion of the piece, in measures 200–201, both Piano I and Piano II rise to a standing position on the first beat, with the left hand preparing to mute the strings. After the *fermata* in measure 200, Piano II returns to a seated position, while Piano I remains standing in preparation for the subsequent string-muting passage (see Fig. 4.18, marked in red). Such alternation between postures illustrates the performer's need to balance ergonomic considerations with musical demands, and transitions should be executed smoothly to maintain continuity and expressive integrity.
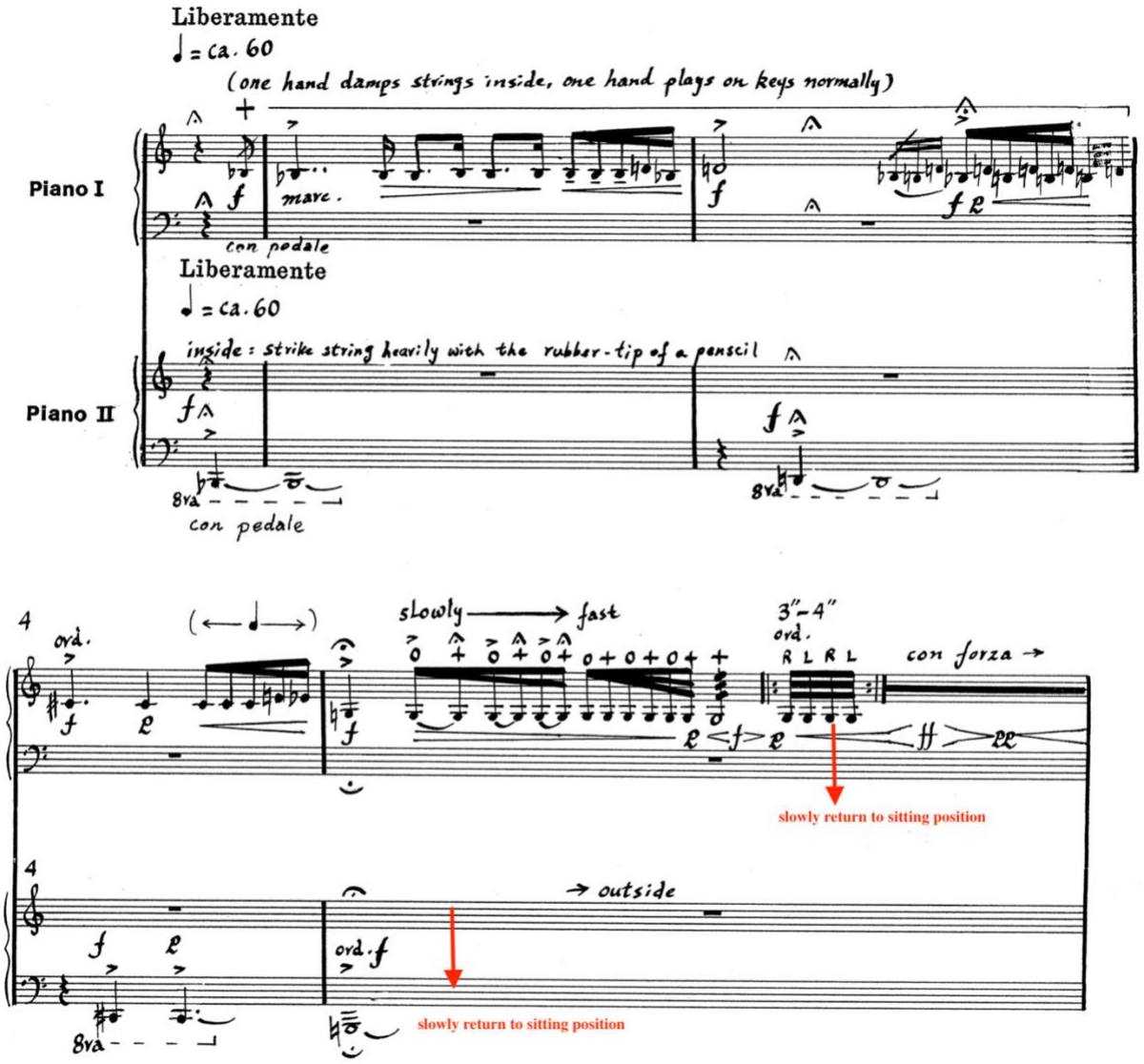


Figure 4.14. *An Eastern Apparition*, mm. 1–4, coordination

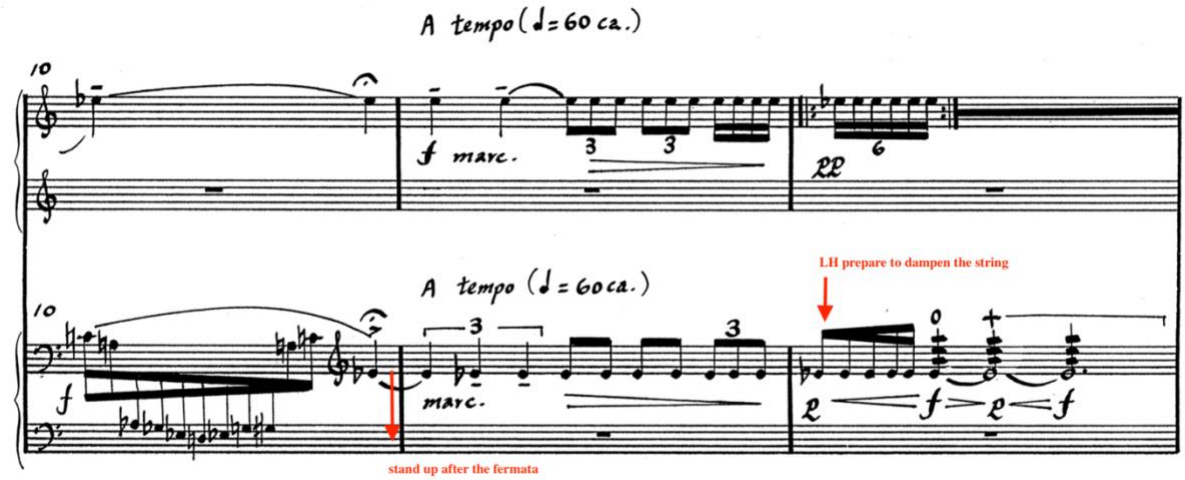


Figure 4.15. *An Eastern Apparition*, mm. 10–13, coordination

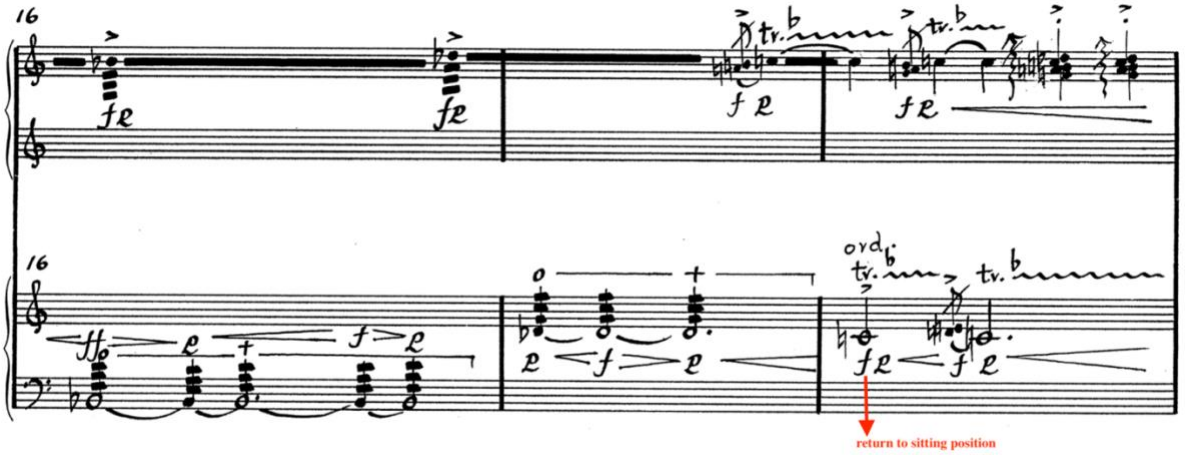


Figure 4.16. *An Eastern Apparition*, mm. 16–18, coordination

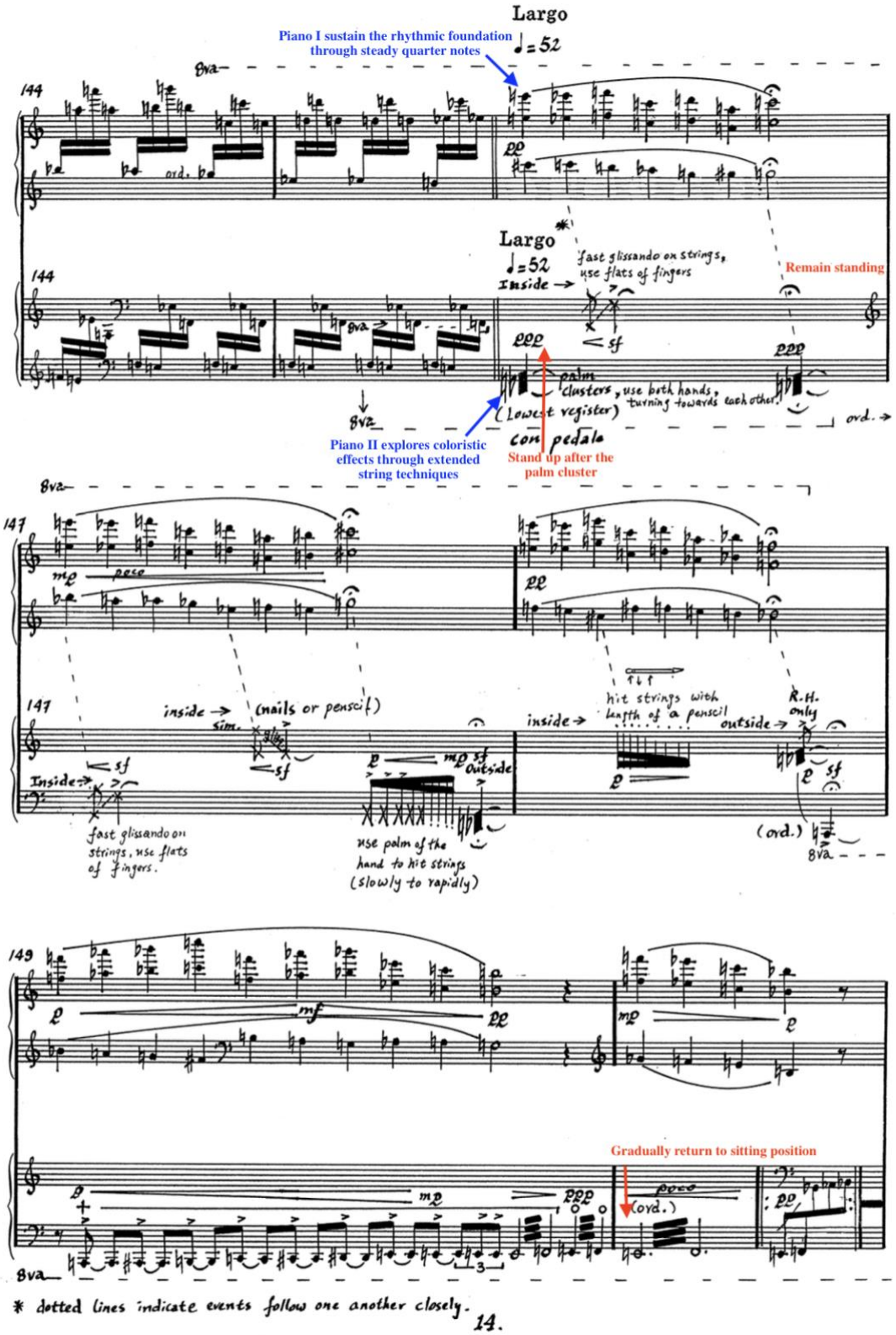


Figure 4.17. *An Eastern Apparition*, mm. 146–150, coordination

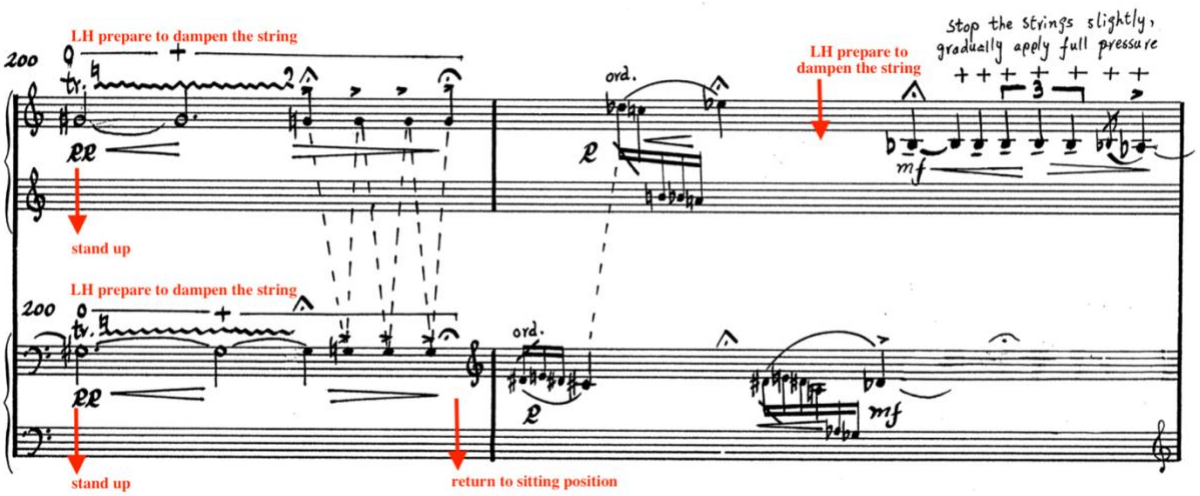


Figure 4.18. *An Eastern Apparition*, mm. 200–201, coordination

Execution of Glissandi

Unlike a keyboard glissando, the string *glissando* on the piano has two primary types. The first, the chromatic glissando, involves sweeping one or more fingers across several strings to produce a soft, harp-like effect, with dynamics ranging from very quiet to *mezzo forte* depending on finger pressure. The second, the longitudinal glissando, is created by sliding a finger along a single bass string, producing ghostly, sighing sounds rather than distinct pitches, with dynamics from *ppp* to *mf*.[96] In *An Eastern Apparition*, the first type is employed. In measures 146–148 and 203–204, Piano II executes chromatic glissandos on the strings using flat fingers, fingernails, or the rubber tip of a pencil (see Fig. 4.10, marked in red in mm. 146). These glissandos are marked with indefinite pitches and cluster chords; while specific notes are not indicated, Ho specifies registers to guide the performer. The technical challenge lies in coordinating the string glissandos with cluster chords on the keyboard. The pianist remains standing in measures 146–148 to facilitate smooth coordination between strings and keyboard.

[96] Proulx, 58-59.

During this passage, the right hand navigates the string glissandos while the left hand plays cluster chords. The performer must also adjust articulation, switching between the softer effect of flat fingers and the sharper, more pronounced sound produced by nails or the pencil tip (see Fig. 4.10, marked in red in mm. 147).

In measures 203–204, a glissando is executed with both hands, sweeping across the register as marked by Ho (see Fig. 4.9, marked in blue). Each glissando is marked by hairpin *cresc*., and the entire measure 204 is marked *fff* to indicate the powerful effect of the *glissando*. It is challenging to maintain a smooth and even sweep on the strings. To play the *glissando* smoothly and evenly, a pianist may practice slow, controlled sweeps on the strings with gradual application of weight. For *crescendos*, this can be achieved through increased speed and the gradual application of weight to the strings, producing a progressively louder effect.

Ensemble Collaboration

Successful ensemble collaboration in this two-piano work demands an exceptional level of focus and thorough familiarity with both parts. In *An Eastern Apparition*, this requirement is particularly pronounced, as the pianists must not only maintain constant awareness of each other's material but also ensure that the two instruments function as complementary forces, reflecting the interchangeable principles of *yin* and *yang*. Ho explained that the concept of the piece emerged from a discussion with a Chinese pianist about performing together in a two-piano or four-hands setting. This collaborative context shaped her compositional vision, as she became interested in exploring how two pianists could represent opposing forces that sometimes move in different directions but ultimately converge.[97] Achieving a cohesive performance therefore requires meticulous attention to timing, phrasing, and dynamics, fostering a continuous interplay

[97] Alice Ho, interviewed by author via Zoom, March 5, 2026.

in which contrast and unity are carefully balanced throughout the work. Ho also emphasized that listening is the most important element in realizing the composition, encouraging performers to approach the piece intuitively so that the musical dialogue unfolds organically rather than mechanically.[98]

For this work, two grand pianos are positioned tail to tail, with the pianists directly opposite and facing one another. Piano I's lid is fully open while the lid of Piano II is removed completely to achieve the desired balance and projection. The spatial arrangement of two pianos facing each other presents unique challenges, as the performers cannot directly observe each other's hands, making coordination of timing, phrasing, and expressive intent more difficult. Consequently, successful execution of a two-piano work requires both pianists to develop precise technical control and an acute sensitivity to ensemble balance. Pianos of comparable quality are essential, ideally with similar tone capabilities. Equally important is the selection of an appropriate collaborator. Differences in training, technical proficiency, and interpretive approach can significantly affect ensemble cohesion; therefore, choosing a partner with compatible skills and a shared artistic sensibility, as well as an understanding of each other's musical and personal tendencies, is critical to achieving a unified and responsive performance.

Throughout the work, the interaction between the two pianos is organized around three principal textures: conversational exchange, contrasting parts, and unison passages. The composition relies primarily on a conversational framework, where one pianist's gesture prompts an immediate response from the other, forming a fluid and evolving musical dialogue. Ho described this interaction as a dramatic journey in which the two musical forces may diverge before eventually coming together, mirroring the unpredictable yet interconnected processes

[98] Alice Ho, interviewed by author via Zoom, March 5, 2026.

found in nature.[99] In measures 28–46, Piano II introduces the material, followed by Piano I, as the two pianos alternate and develop the ideas in a call-and-response manner (see Fig. 4.19, marked in red arrows). The exchange begins solemnly, gradually intensifying as both textures become denser, ultimately converging into a unified unison passage at measure 47. The sense of ritual repetition present in these exchanges also reflects Ho's intention to evoke natural and ceremonial forces, where recurring rhythmic gestures create momentum and symbolic resonance.[100]

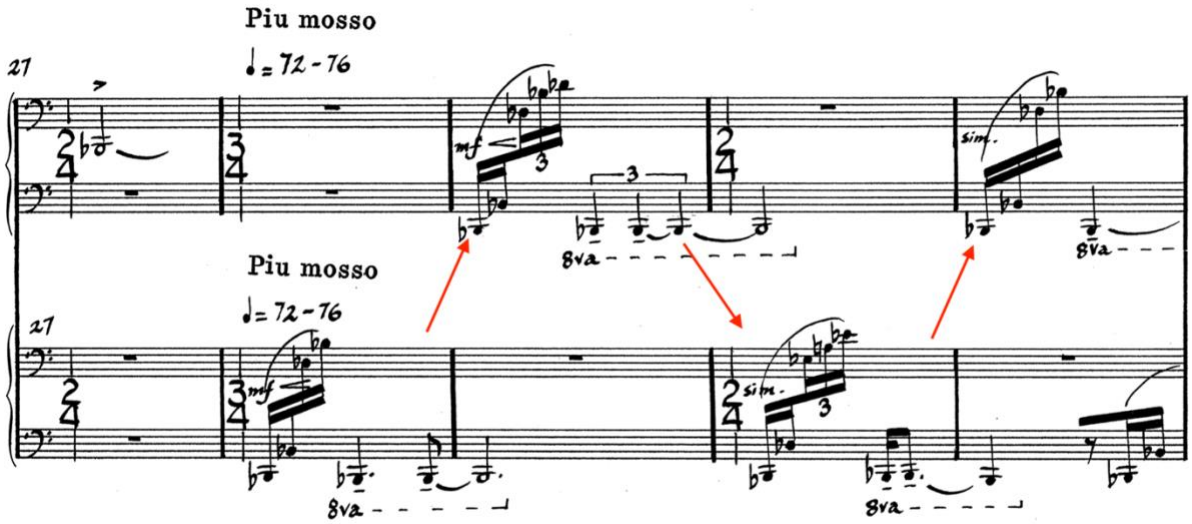


Figure 4.19. *An Eastern Apparition*, mm. 27–31, ensemble collaboration

In measures 146–149, the dialogue between the two pianos reaches a point of textural contrast and expressive tension. While Piano I sustains the rhythmic foundation through steady quarter notes leading to a fermata, Piano II explores coloristic effects through extended string techniques (see Fig. 4.17, marked in blue). The notated 3/4 meter in the previous measure 143 becomes increasingly elastic here, as the rhythmic flow stretches beyond the confines of the bar line, producing a fluid and improvisatory character. To achieve coherence within the rhythmic

[99] Alice Ho, interviewed by author via Zoom, March 5, 2026.
[100] Alice Ho, interviewed by author via Zoom, March 5, 2026.

flexibility, both performers should maintain a shared internal pulse based on the quarter note, ensuring stability while allowing expressive freedom. The dotted lines indicated by Ho connecting the two parts serve as cues for coordination and mutual awareness, helping the performers anticipate each other's gestures and transitions. This passage encourages attentive listening and balanced interaction, as each pianist must learn to alternate between leading and responding. Pianists should approach this section as an organic conversation: one voice provides structural stability while the other introduces textural spontaneity. Its success depends less on strict synchronization and more on an intuitive balance of timing, timbre, and mutual responsiveness.

Moments of unity function as structural anchors within the work, guiding the musical trajectory toward climactic points of convergence. These passages provide a sense of resolution and cohesion within the overall texture, symbolizing the merging of two distinct musical forces into one. Such moments occur throughout the piece, including in measures 19 –20, 125, 140–145, 188–194, and 212, 220–225, each serving as a structural anchor that gradually leads toward a climactic unison. Achieving these moments effectively requires refined ensemble skills. Both pianists must maintain precise rhythmic consistency while balancing their dynamic intensity, shaping the tension and release together as the music moves toward convergence. The process of building up to these unified moments should feel organic, with each pianist listening closely to the other's phrasing and timing to ensure the climactic arrival is shared rather than dominated by one part. This collaborative shaping toward the unison passages transforms them into powerful expressions of ensemble unity and musical synthesis.

Finally, the work introduces additional collaborative challenges through the use of extended techniques. Ho emphasized that these techniques should not appear as isolated gestures

but must blend seamlessly into the overall musical expression. Performers must therefore integrate movements such as standing, reaching inside the instrument, and returning to the keyboard into a natural performance flow. Ho suggested that this physical choreography can become part of the expressive dimension of the work, provided it is executed convincingly and without disrupting the musical continuity.[101] A successful performance thus depends not only on technical preparation but also on imaginative collaboration, as both pianists must remain flexible and open to exploring the sonic possibilities suggested by the score.

Conclusion

An Eastern Apparition represents a remarkable synthesis of technical virtuosity, interpretive depth, and philosophical expression, making it both a formidable and rewarding work for two pianists. Technically, the piece challenges performers with rapid passagework in irregular groupings, intricate repeated-note figures, complex coordination between extended techniques on the strings and keyboard, and demanding glissandi, all of which require not only precision but also a refined sense of physical control and ergonomics. Equally essential is the ensemble collaboration, as the two pianists must engage in continuous, attentive listening, balancing independence and interdependence to convey the interplay of opposing yet complementary forces central to the work's conceptual foundation. Extended techniques, inside-piano effects, and posture changes further expand the performers' role, transforming technical gestures into expressive, textural, and theatrical elements. Beyond technical mastery, success in performing *An Eastern Apparition* depends on internalizing its philosophical core, the dynamic equilibrium of yin and yang, and translating this duality into sound. The dialogue between the

[101] Alice Ho, interviewed by author via Zoom, March 5, 2026.

two pianos, alternating between convergence, contrast, and unison, embodies this principle, requiring performers to shape the music intuitively, with sensitivity to timing, color, and energy.

In sum, the work exemplifies Ho's ability to merge rigorous contemporary pianistic demands with profound cultural and conceptual depth. Rooted in a synthesis of Western compositional techniques and the philosophical principal of *yin* and *yang*, *An Eastern Apparition* invites performers to engage not only with its technical challenges but also with its underlying cultural resonance. The interplay of dualities, reflected in texture, gesture, and ensemble interaction, echoes the principle of *yin* and *yang*, while the integration of timbral exploration and gesture-based writing reflects a broader engagement with Chinese artistic sensibilities. Through this fusion, the work offers performers and audiences an immersive exploration of musical, philosophical, and cultural identity.

Chapter 5: Fang Man and Two Colors

Two Colors is a two-movement work for two pianos in which Fang explores contrast through color, texture, and cultural reference. Following the approaches of Chen and Ho, which engage with intercultural expression through the transformation of folk materials and philosophical concepts, respectively, Fang's work represents a third perspective, one that centers on tinbre, gesture, and color as primary means of articulating cultural identity. Fang (b. 1977) is a Chinese-born composer whose training in China, the United States, and France informs her synthesis of traditional Chinese musical aesthetics and contemporary Western techniques. The first movement, "Big Red," draws on Beijing opera traditions, emphasizing rhythmic vitality, polytonality, and contrapuntal displacement between the two pianos. In contrast, "Pure White" evokes stillness and reflection through impressionistic textures, Chinese modal systems, and evolving ostinato patterns. In addition to these two movements, Fang has noted that the suite originally included a third movement, "Dark Blue," written for two pianos and pre-recorded tape, incorporating both natural sounds, such as ocean waves, and synthesized sonorities.[102] Fang has also expressed interest in expanding Two Colors into a larger suite, potentially adding new movements associated with additional colors if future commissions make such a project possible.[103] As the movement "Dark Blue" requires the use of pre-recorded tape, it falls outside the scope of the present study, and the following discussion will focus exclusively on "Big Red" and "Pure White," as presented in the printed score. Together, the two movements present complementary approaches to color and expression. This chapter presents a musical analysis of

[102] Fang Man, interviewed by author via Zoom, March 25, 2026.
[103] Fang Man, Interview.

Two Colors and further discusses pedagogical considerations and performance notes relevant to pianists preparing the work.

Biographical Sketch

Fang Man, also known as Mandy Fang, is a Chinese-born American composer whose music reflects a distinctive synthesis of Eastern and Western traditions. Born on November 11, 1977, in Jiujiang, Jiangxi Province, China, Fang grew up in a family that valued both education and music. Her father, an engineer with a deep personal passion for music, and her mother, an accountant, were committed to supporting her musical development despite limited resources. Encouraged by her family after demonstrating early musical aptitude, Fang began studying piano at a young age. Her childhood training was shaped by intensive practice and limited access to instruments, often requiring long journeys to practice on the only available piano in town. Fang later reflected that this environment fostered an unusual level of concentration and resilience, qualities that became essential in her compositional process.

Fang pursued formal training at the Affiliated Middle School of the Guangzhou Xinghai Conservatory of Music (1992–1995), where rigorous ear training shaped her ability to internalize sound directly from notation. During this period, she began studying composition with Guangping Cao,[104] developing an early affinity for twentieth-century repertoire, particularly Béla Bartók, which contributed to her openness toward dissonance and contemporary idioms. She continued her studies at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing (1995–2000), where her

[104] Guangping Cao (曹光平), a Chinese composer and pedagogue, is a professor of Xinghai Conservatory of Music in Guangzhou, China.

teachers Xiaogang Ye[105] and Mingxin Du[106] provided both a foundation in traditional harmony and melody and an introduction to modern compositional approaches.

Fang moved to the United States in the early 2000s, initially studying at the University of Colorado Boulder on a fellowship. She described this period as one of adjustment, during which she focused on adapting to a new cultural and academic environment while improving her English. After approximately one year, she transferred to Cornell University, where she studied primarily with Steven Stucky. This decision was shaped both by personal circumstances and by her strong interest in the music of Witold Lutosławski, of whom Stucky was a leading scholar. Her years at Cornell proved highly formative. Fang described this period as intellectually demanding yet artistically productive, during which she composed orchestral and chamber works and developed a more systematic and analytical approach to composition. Under Stucky's guidance, she deepened her understanding of harmony, structure, and large-scale planning, moving beyond the more intuitive approach that characterized her earlier training in China.

From 2006 to 2007, Fang studied at Institut de recherche et coordination acoustique/musique (IRCAM) in Paris, where she received a Certificate in Composition and Computer Music. She described the program as highly intensive and initially challenging, as she had no prior experience with computer music upon arrival. The first half of the year was devoted primarily to learning a wide range of software systems developed at IRCAM, including OpenMusic, Max/MSP, and other tools that integrate musical composition with mathematics, acoustics, and computer science. Working within a small, international cohort of composers,

[105] Xiaogang Ye (叶小刚), a Chinese composer and music educator, currently serve as the Dean of the School of Music in The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen.

[106] Du Mingxin (杜鸣心) is a Chinese composer and educator, best known for his contributions to twentieth-century Chinese art music and film music; he served as a professor at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing.

Fang engaged in an interdisciplinary environment where instruction was led not only by composers but also by specialists in mathematics, physics, and computer science. During her time at IRCAM, Fang studied with a diverse group of mentors whose backgrounds reflected this interdisciplinary framework. Her primary instructor, Mikhail Malt, approached composition from a mathematical perspective, particularly through the use of OpenMusic. In addition, she worked with resident composer Yan Marez and participated in masterclasses and consultations with visiting composers such as Tristan Murail, Brian Ferneyhough, and Jonathan Harvey. Rather than directly shaping her compositional style, these figures contributed to the refinement of specific aspects of her musical thinking, including precision in notation, approaches to orchestration, and the application of technological tools in composition.

More broadly, her time in Paris reinforced her affinity with French musical aesthetics, particularly the emphasis on timbre, color, and the subtlety of expression. These experiences, combined with her exposure to composers such as Olivier Messiaen and Tōru Takemitsu, further shaped her approach to orchestration and her attention to the delicate interplay between sound and silence, elements that remain central to her compositional voice.

Fang's music also reflects a broader aesthetic position that resists clear categorization. Although her work draws on elements associated with both Eastern and Western traditions, she does not consciously align herself with either. Instead, she describes her music as existing "in between," a space shaped by multiple cultural, historical, and stylistic influences, as well as by tensions between intuition and structure, complexity and clarity, and sound and silence. As Fang explains:

> My aesthetic dwells in the in-between, where beauty resides in the subtle —where the borders between East and West dissolve, and where sound and silence, presence and

memory, unfold gently into a space where meaning is felt before it is understood.[107]

Fang's music has been performed internationally by leading ensembles and orchestras, including the Los Angeles Philharmonic New Music Group, Camerata Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Mannheimer Philharmoniker, Basel Sinfonietta, American Composers Orchestra, Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra, and Minnesota Orchestra. Her *sheng* concerto *Song of the Flaming Phoenix* (2021–2022), commissioned by the San Francisco Symphony and the League of American Orchestras, was premiered by Wu Wei under the baton of Esa-Pekka Salonen. She is the recipient of numerous honors, including the Charles Ives Fellowship (2024), the Guggenheim Fellowship (2012), and the Koussevitzky Foundation Commission (2010), among others. Her works have been featured at major international festivals such as the Darmstadt New Music Festival and Aspen Music Festival.

Currently, Fang serves as Associate Professor of Composition and Coordinator of the Composition Program at the University of South Carolina School of Music. Reflecting on her artistic identity, she resists a fixed definition of her style, instead describing her music as situated between traditions, aesthetics, and expressive aims. Her work can be understood as an evolving search shaped by both cultural heritage and contemporary practice.

Works for Piano

Fang's piano compositions include *Drunk in the Shade of Blossoms* (*醉花阴*, 2017, Op. 36), a nine-minute solo work commissioned by Joanne Chang; *That Raindrops Have Hastened the Falling Flowers I* (*被雨滴催落的花儿(一)*, 2016, Op. 34), written in memory of Steven Stucky for piano and toy piano; and *Ban Qiang Melody* (*板腔调*, 1996, Op. 1), a four-minute solo piece influenced by traditional *xiqu*. These works show her continued use of Chinese

[107] Fang Man, interviewed by author via Zoom, March 25, 2026.

musical elements within a modern style. Her two-piano work *Two Colors* was inspired by nature and color, incorporating elements of Beijing opera and pentatonic scale modes.

Two Colors

Musical Analysis

Two Colors was premiered on July 28, 2001, by pianists Myung-Jin Paik and Sarah Oh at the Bowdoin Music Festival in Brunswick, Maine.[108] The work consists of two movements: the first, "Big Red," and the second, "Pure White." The uniqueness of this work lies in its use of extended measures and the absence of a time signature. In both "Big Red" and "Pure White," traditional barlines are largely absent; instead, Fang employs dotted lines and sectional labels (A, A1, etc.) to indicate formal divisions, transitions, and shifts in musical material.

"Big Red"

"Big Red" draws on elements of *jingju*[109] and reflects Chinese pentatonic scales, with Fang employing polytonality throughout the piece. "Big Red" was originally composed in 1997 as a solo piano work during her studies at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, named *Ban Qiang Melody* (*板腔调*, 1996, Op. 1), inspired by György Ligeti's *Études* (particularly Étude No. 1). The work was later revised for two pianos after Fang moved to the United States, both to reduce its technical difficulty and to make it more engaging and practical for performers.[110]

The music unfolds through a continuous evolution of ideas rather than a traditional formal structure, progressing as a series of events marked by variations in patterns. The work is

[108] Fang Man, *Two Colors*, unpublished score with program note (in possession of the composer).
[109] Commonly known in English as Peking opera, a form of traditional Chinese music theater that combines singing, speech, instrumental accompaniment, and stylized movement.
[110] Fang Man, interviewed by author via Zoom, March 26, 2026.

divided into fifteen small sections, each featuring subtle variations, creating a sense of organic development (see Table 5.1). Unlike much of Fang's predominantly homophonic and harmony-driven writing, "Big Red" adopts a more contrapuntal approach, with the two pianos functioning as independent melodic voices rather than as chordal support. The contrapuntal texture is closely connected to the work's polytonal language. Fang builds the musical surface from clearly defined pentatonic collections. Instead of placing them in conventional tonal relationships such as fifths or fourths, she combines them in less traditional ways. In particular, she explores tritone-based relationships between the two pianos. This approach reflects the influence of pedagogical and stylistic models such as Ligeti's *Études* and Bartók's *Mikrokosmos* and allows each piano to occupy a distinct tonal space while remaining closely connected.[111]

Rhythmically, "Big Red" avoids clear downbeats and barlines. Instead, it relies on shifting accents and offbeat gestures to create a strong sense of motion and instability. As the composer noted, this approach was influenced by Ligeti's *Études*, particularly in the use of displaced accents and the absence of a stable metric framework. Within this flexible rhythmic framework, the music is built primarily on a continuous stream of eighth notes, often embellished with sixteenth-note figures, except in the opening and interlude percussion-texture sections. The offbeat accents weaken the perception of metrical regularity and heighten rhythmic tension, contributing to the work's forward momentum.

Table 5.1 Formal Outline of "Big Red"

Sections	**Measures**
Introduction	mm. 1–21
A1	m. 22
A2	m. 23
A3	m. 24
B	mm. 25–29
B1	m.30

[111] Fang Man, interviewed by author via Zoom, March 26, 2026.

B2	m. 31
C	m. 32
C1	m. 33
C2	m. 34
D	m. 35
E	mm. 36-40
E1	m. 41
E2	mm. 42-43

In the introduction section, both Piano I and Piano II play only three pitches, G-flat, F, and G (see Fig. 5.1, marked in red).[112] The three pitches are organized as a single note and a major second interval, resulting in G-flat played by the left hand, and F-G played by the right hand. Both pianos follow this pattern of organization, and it is varied in rhythm and register as the music continues through the introduction section (see Fig. 5.1).

The opening section of "Big Red" evokes the percussive qualities of *jingju*,[113] with the piano imitating the timbres and rhythmic energy of a traditional percussion ensemble. This imitation is achieved through the translation of characteristic percussion gestures into keyboard technique, particularly the rhythmic patterns and dynamic inflections associated with *jingju* performance. The *jingju* percussion ensemble typically consist of *guban* (drum and clapper), *xiaoluo* and *daluo* (small and large bronze drums, respectively), and a cymbal. Fang draws on these sonorities in both the introduction and the E section. Deep, resonant bass tones suggest the *daluo* (see Fig. 5.1, marked in blue), while short, incisive figures in the upper register recall the cueing patterns of the *guban* (see Fig. 5.1, marked in green). Together, these elements recreate the dramatic tension and rhythmic vitality characteristic of *jingju* performance.

[112] Musical examples from *Two Colors* by Fang Man are reproduced with permission of the composer.
[113] Commonly known in English as Peking opera, a form of traditional Chinese music theater that combines singing, speech, instrumental accompaniment, and stylized movement.

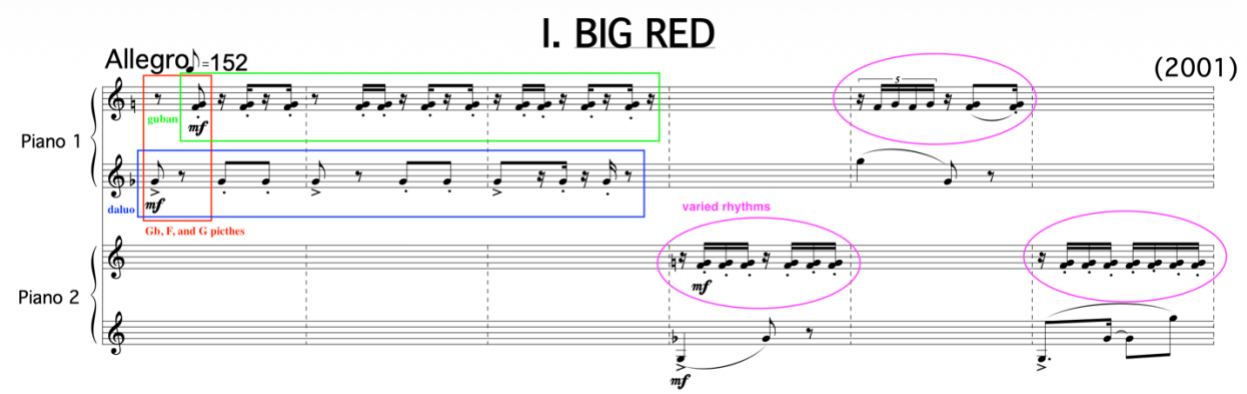


Figure 5.1. Two Colors, "Big Red," mm. 1–6, percussion ensemble sonority, three pitches, G-flat, F, and G, varied rhythm and register
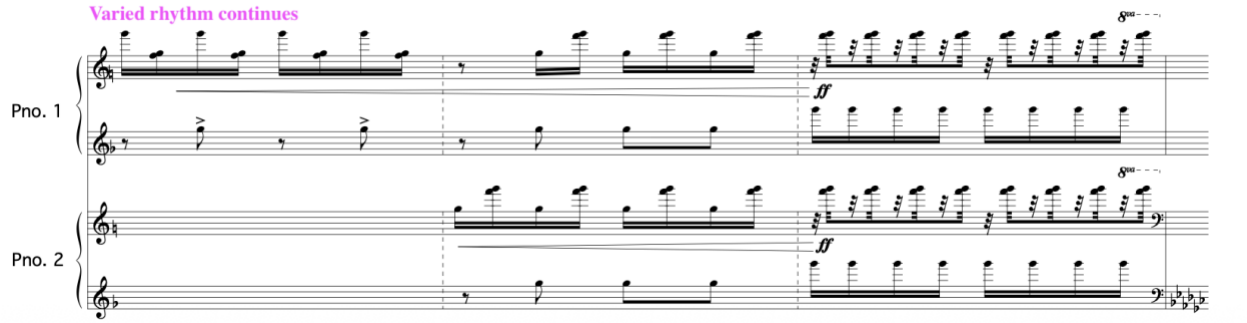


Figure 5.2 *Two Colors*, "Big Red," mm. 19–21, varied rhythm and register continues

The A1 section states the first movement's theme, presented by Piano I in B *yu* mode (B–D–E–F-sharp–A). Piano II enters simultaneously, stating the same theme in E-flat *yu* mode (E-flat–G-flat–A-flat–B-flat–D-flat), creating a polytonal texture. The simultaneous use of B *yu* (see Fig. 5.2, marked in red) and E-flat *yu* (see Fig. 5.2, marked in blue) generates a striking sonority, as the two pentatonic collections overlap yet remain distinct. At the outset, both pianos articulate the theme with offset accents, creating a one-note displacement between the parts that immediately establishes the contrapuntal texture, which continues to develop across sections A1, A2, and A3 (see Fig. 5.3, marked in green).
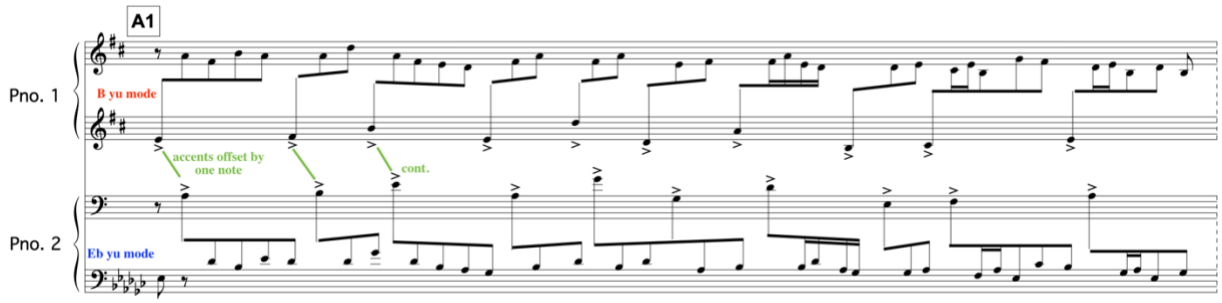


Figure 5.3. *Two Colors*, "Big Red," mm. 22, B *yu* and E-flat *yu* mode, accents offset

In the B section, following a brief return of the percussion ensemble sonority (see Fig. 5.2, marked in red), both Piano I and Piano II present the thematic statement together in a similar register as before. Unlike the previous sections, the accents are now aligned, creating a more unified rhythmic profile. At the same time, Fang introduces a subtle registral shift: the right hand of Piano I is placed higher than in section A, while Piano II remains in its original register, allowing for clearer separation between the two parts within the shared texture (see Fig. 5.4, marked in red and blue). In the B1 section, the one-note offset between the two pianos returns (see Fig. 5.5, marked in red and blue). However, the thematic material is treated differently in each part. Piano I no longer presents the complete theme; instead, Fang fragments it into a looping pattern (B-flat–E-flat–A-flat–F–B-flat–A-flat) that moves between higher and lower registers (see Fig. 5.5, marked in green). In contrast, Piano II continues to state the full theme. This contrast between fragmentation and continuity creates a layered texture in which Piano I functions as a circulating figure while Piano II maintains the structural clarity of the thematic line.
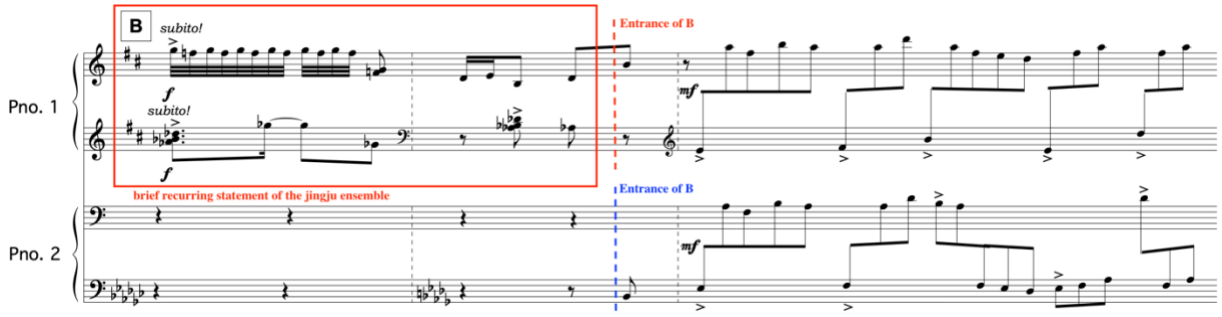


Figure 5.4. *Two Colors*, "Big Red," mm. 25–27, brief statement of *jingju* ensemble, entrances of B

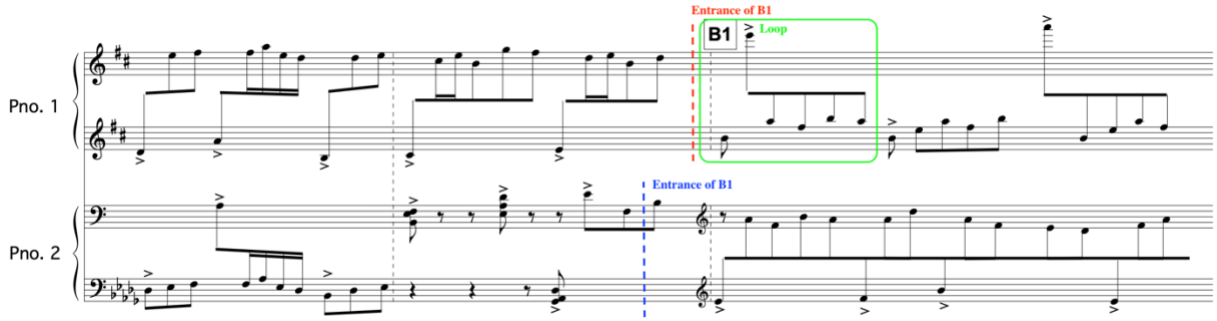


Figure 5.5. *Two Colors*, "Big Red," mm. 30, entrance of B1

In the B2 section, Fang establishes a more intricate alternation pattern in which Piano I follows a sequence of 7, 6, 7, 6, 6, and 4 notes, while Piano II mirrors this with 6, 7, 6, 7, 6, and 3 notes, creating an alternating pattern in which the note groupings of the two pianos are inversely related: when Piano I plays a sequence of seven notes, Piano II plays six, and vice versa. In the second measure of B2, Piano II plays a retrograde of Piano I (see Fig. 5.6, marked in dotted lines in blue and red). This inversion of rhythmic groupings reveals Fang's deliberate contrapuntal design, creating a balanced yet constantly shifting dialogue between the two

instruments.

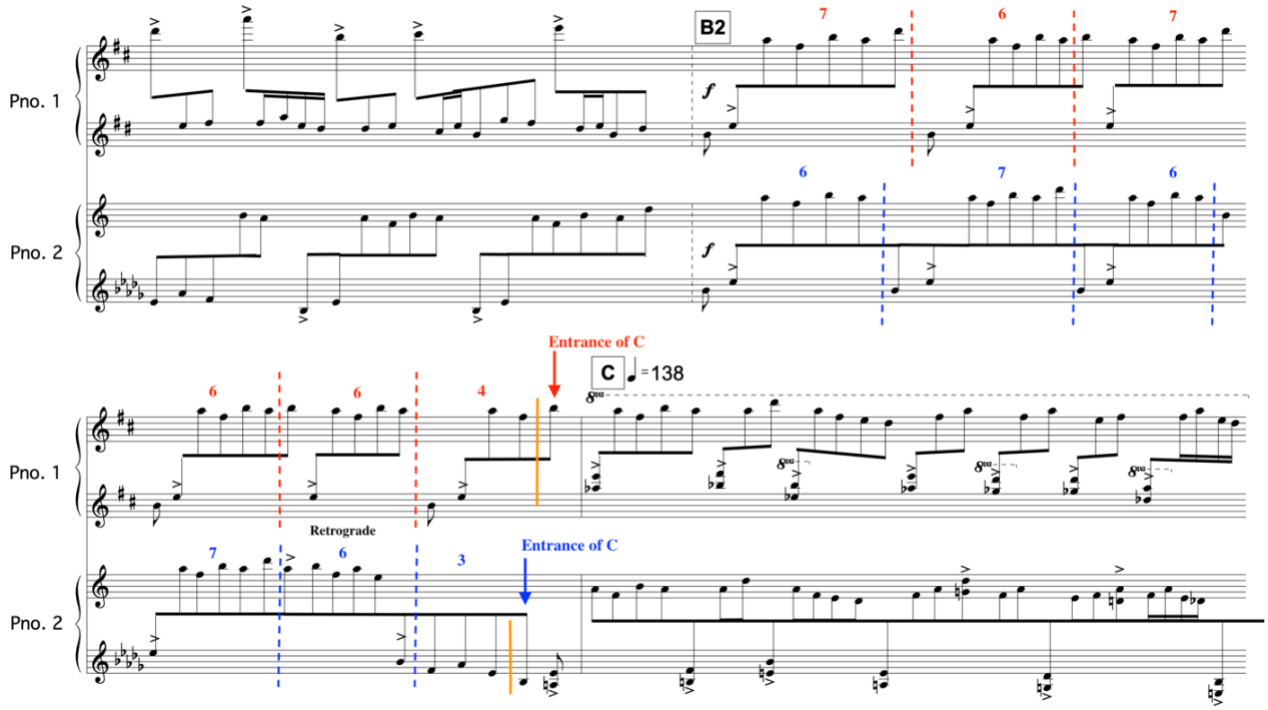


Figure 5.6. *Two Colors*, "Big Red," mm. 34–36, B2 and entrance of C section

The C section introduces textural changes in both pianos (see Fig. 5.6, marked in red and blue arrows). Each piano's theme is expanded by the addition of an interval of a fifth. Once again, Fang draws on the pattern from the A1 section, employing offset notes between the two pianos: in C, they are one note apart; in C1, two notes apart; and in C2, three notes apart. The D section begins with Piano II continuing the pattern established in the previous sections, while Piano I alters its entrance. Piano I now begins on E-flat, adopting the entrance pattern (E-flat–A-flat–D-flat–B-flat–E-flat–D-flat) previously associated with Piano II in the A1 section (see Fig. 5.3, Piano II). At the outset of section D, Piano II enters on B-flat (see Fig. 5.7, marked in blue), placing the two pianos three notes apart. This section introduces decorative sixteenth-note figures and octave textures, which add brightness and forward momentum. Midway through measure 39, both pianos align on B-flat (see Fig. 5.7, marked in red and blue), momentarily

synchronizing before continuing in independent lines. This brief alignment highlights the interaction between the two parts while preserving their independence. The D section concludes with a unison pause before transitioning into the final sections of the movement.

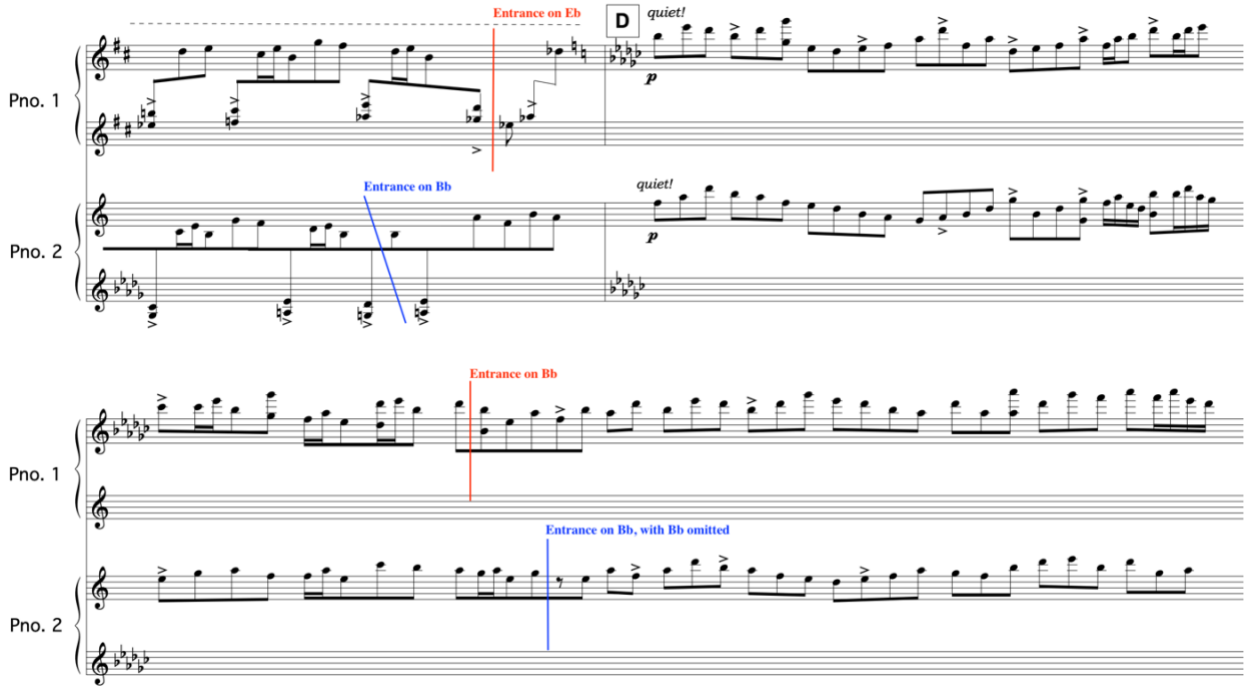


Figure 5.7. *Two Colors*, "Big Red," mm. 38–39, D section

In the E section, four measures recall the introduction material, serving as a buildup toward the climax and the closing section of the first movement (see Fig. 5.8, marked in red). The thematic material in this section is characterized by strong contrasts and heightened intensity, as accented octaves and fifths are juxtaposed against the earlier lyrical passages (see Fig. 5.9, marked in red). The rhythmic drive and increased dynamic energy create a sense of urgency and culmination, preparing the listener for the resolution that follows in the final section, which ends at *fff* with both pianists slamming their palms onto the final cluster chord (see Fig. 5.9, marked in blue).

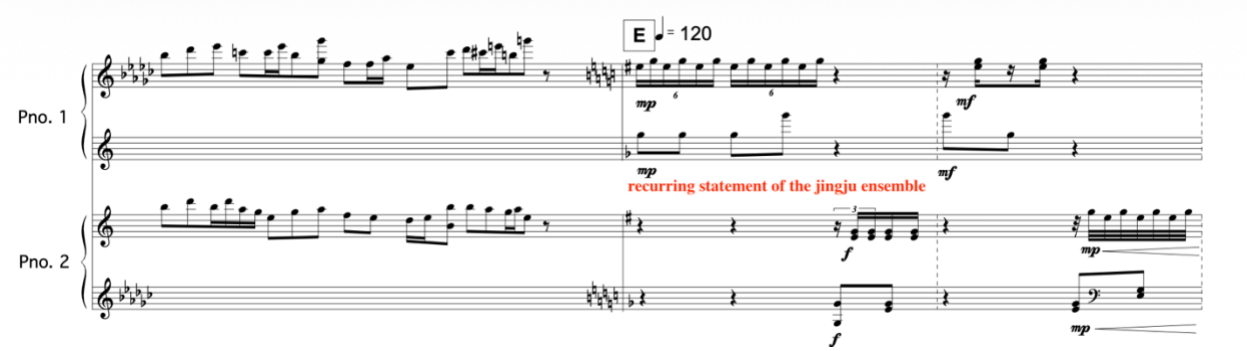


Figure 5.8. *Two Colors*, "Big Red," mm. 36, E section, recurring statement of the jingju percussion ensemble
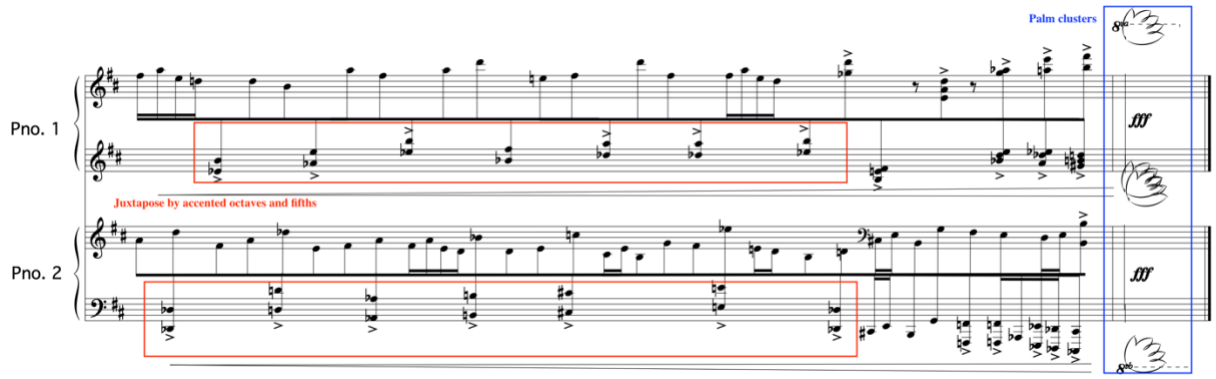


Figure 5.9. *Two Colors*, "Big Red," mm. 46–47, ending measures

"Pure White"

"Pure White," composed during Fang's time studying at Cornell University, was inspired by the image of a quiet lake under the moon.[114] Drawing on the waterfalls and Finger Lakes on campus, the work reflects an impressionistic sensibility and a broader tendency in her music to engage with natural imagery.[115] In contrast to the intensity of "Big Red," "Pure White" presents a more peaceful and lyrical sound world, with a greater emphasis on consonance and smooth textures. Although the piece is also built on pentatonic materials, the relationships between pitch collections are less striking and more seamlessly integrated into the overall texture. A key feature

[114] Fang Man, interviewed by author via Zoom, March 26, 2026.
[115] Fang Man Interview." YouTube video, 09:05. uploaded by Baldwin Wallace University, December 2, 2010. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4g0S_PZtuCM

of “Pure White” is the presence of a persistent ostinato-like texture. Fang describes this not as literal repetition, but as the continuous transformation of a small motif, inspired by Ligeti’s approach. The material is developed through transposition, register changes, and variation rather than exact repetition. Rather than following a traditional formal scheme, “Pure White” is organized through a gradual progression between consonance and dissonance. While a general trajectory may be planned, Fang relies heavily on intuition, with the climax arriving toward the end of the movement. Rhythmically, the piece shares features with “Big Red,” including the absence of stable downbeats and the use of shifting accents. The overall progression of the movement is outlined in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2 Formal Outline of “Pure White”

Section	Tempo/Character	Measures	Description
Intro	Very soft, flowing	mm. 1–2	Establishes four-note ostinato and polytonal interplay
A	Calm, continuous	mm. 3–4	Pianos exchange material; texture remains smooth and blended
B	Slightly expanding	m. 5	Melody enriched with parallel fifths
C	Transitional, fluid	m. 6	Shift toward new modal areas; continuation of fifth-based writing.
D	Rippling, more active	m. 7	Ostinato moves to right hand; left-hand arpeggios evoke water.
E	More animated	m. 8	Increased syncopation; closer alignment between the two pianos.
F	Intensifying	m. 9	Alternation of ostinato and melody between hands; thicker texture.
G	Climax, fast	m. 10	Rapid figurations (32nd notes); registral expansion and crescendo.
H	Calm, fading	m. 11–12	Return of ostinato texture; soft, dissolving close.

This broader sense of continuity is reflected in the detailed pitch organization and motivic interaction between the two pianos. Piano I is written in D *shang* mode (D–E–G–A–C), and Piano II is in C *gong* mode (C–D–E–G–A), creating subtle modal interplay throughout the work. Both pianos employ a four-note ostinato in the left hand, consisting of seconds and a third (see Fig. 5.10). Piano I plays D–E–G–A (see Fig. 5.10, marked in red), while Piano II plays C–D–E–G (see Fig. 5.10, marked in blue); this pattern continues throughout the movement with slight note variations, providing a stable and flowing foundation. In the A section, the pianos trade their material from the introduction, with Piano I taking on Piano II's previous lines and vice versa (see Fig. 5.11, marked in red and blue). In the B section, the melody is expanded by the addition of a note a fifth below, transforming the melodic material into sequences of perfect fifths, which enrich the harmonic texture (see Fig. 5.12, marked in red).
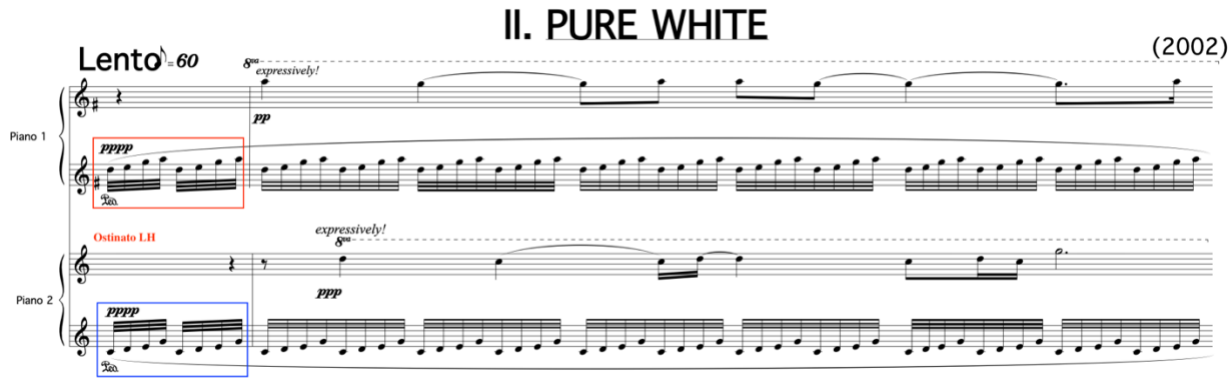


Figure 5.10. *Two Colors*, "Pure White," mm. 1–2, left hand ostinato-like texture

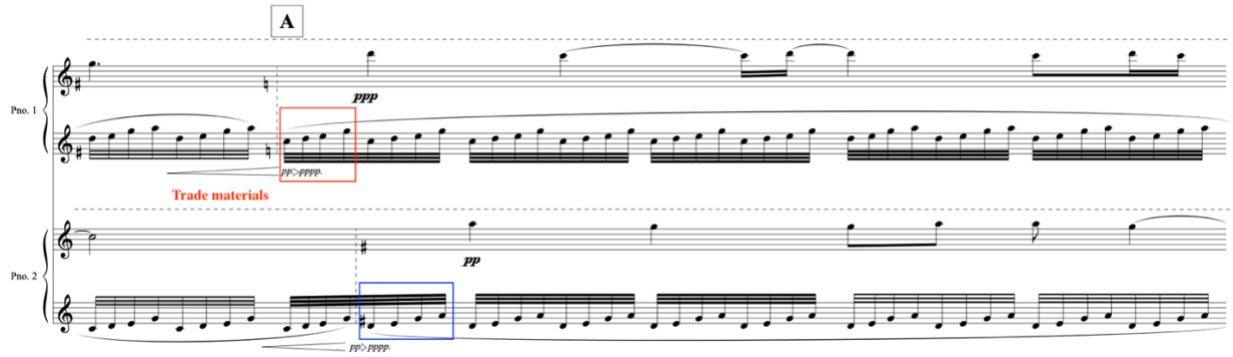


Figure 5.11. *Two Colors*, "Pure White," mm. 4, A section, Piano I and II trade left hand materials

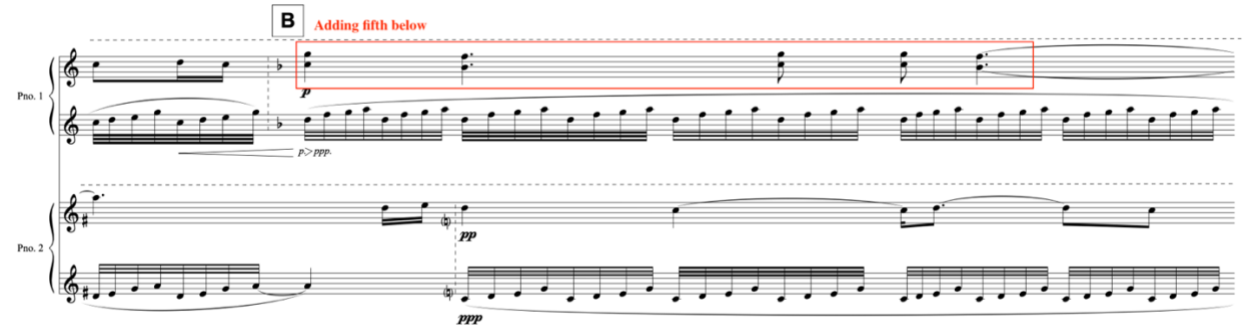


Figure 5.12. *Two Colors*, "Pure White," mm. 5, B section, adding fifth

In the C section, Piano II begins a transition to B-flat *zhi* mode (B-flat–C–D–F–G), while Piano I moves to C *zhi* mode (C–D–E–G–A). The melody continues to be presented in parallel fifths (see Fig. 5.13). In the D section, the ostinato shifts to the right hand in both pianos, while the left hand plays arpeggios moving up and down, evoking the rippling effect of water (see Fig. 5.14, marked in blue). The right hand ostinato is further ornamented with additional notes, including the incorporation of fifths (see Fig. 5.14, marked in red), which enriches the texture and adds more color. In the D section, Piano I features the left hand in C *yu* mode (C–E-flat–F–G–B-flat) and the right hand in D *yu* mode (D–F–G–A–C), whereas Piano II presents the right hand E-flat *yu* mode and the left hand in B-flat *zhi* mode (B-flat–C–D–F–G). In the E section, the right hand continues to play an ostinato while the left hand performs the parallel fifth melody in both pianos. The melody becomes more active in this section, incorporating continuous

syncopation, and the two pianos' melodies are more closely aligned in unison than in the earlier sections (see Fig. 5.15, E section).
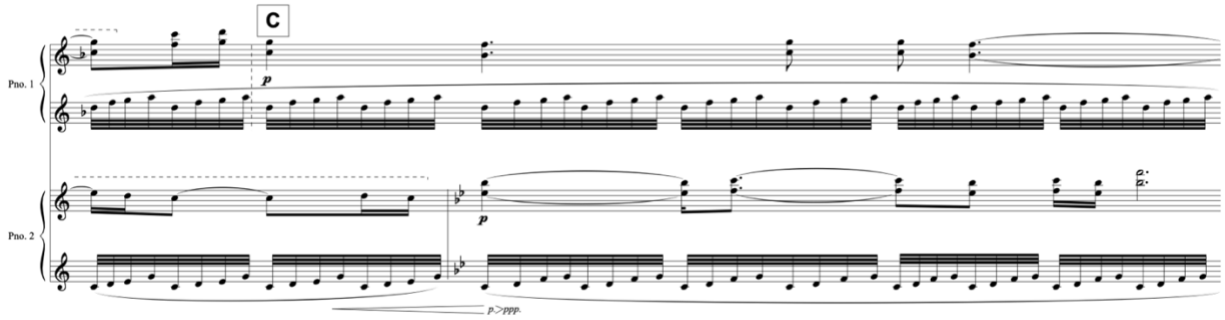


Figure 5.13. *Two Colors*, "Pure White," mm. 6, C section
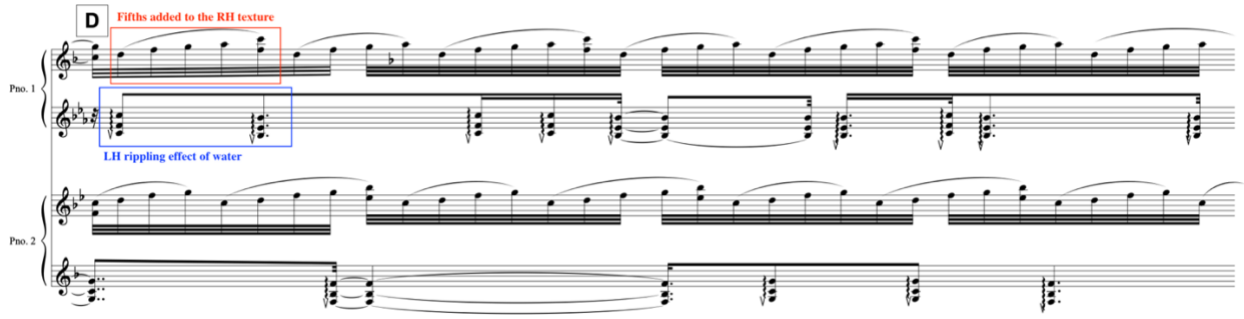


Figure 5.14. *Two Colors*, "Pure White," mm. 7, D section
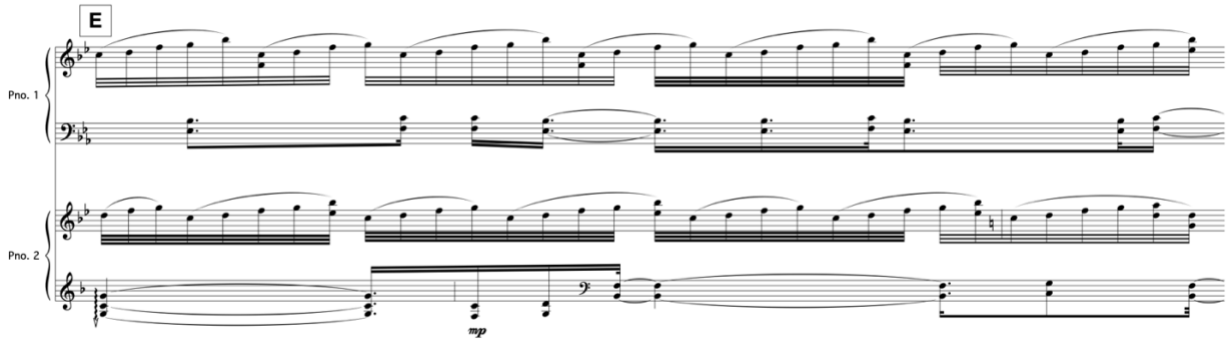


Figure 5.15. *Two Colors*, "Pure White," mm. 8, E section

In section F, the texture intensifies as both hands in each piano alternate between the ostinato and the melody. In Piano I, these roles frequently shift between the hands, while Piano II maintains the ostinato in the right hand and presents the parallel fifth melody in the lower

register with the left hand (see Fig. 5.16, marked in red). Toward the G section, both pianos increase the intensity through the use of thirty-second-note figurations, preparing for the climactic crescendo. The G section consists of Piano I playing rapid ascending arpeggios, while Piano II plays alternating fourths and fifths at a fast tempo (see Fig. 5.17, marked in red). Section H returns to the original ostinato texture and concludes softly at *ppp* (see Fig. 5.18).
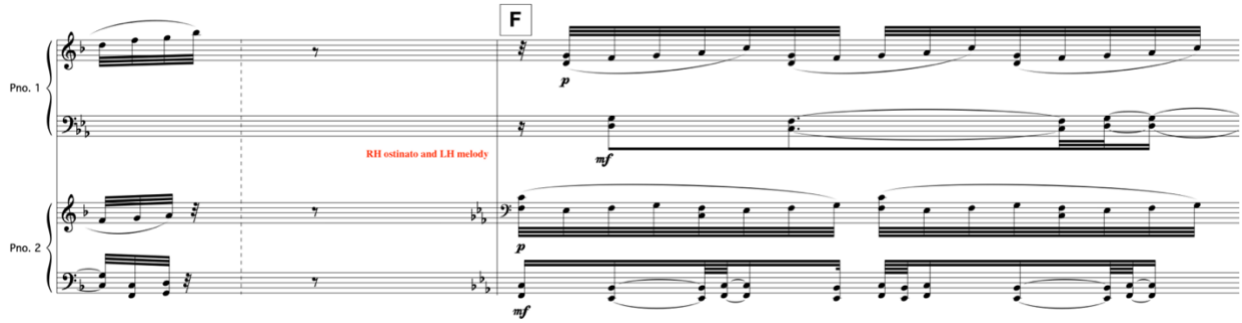


Figure 5.16. *Two Colors*, "Pure White," mm. 10, F section
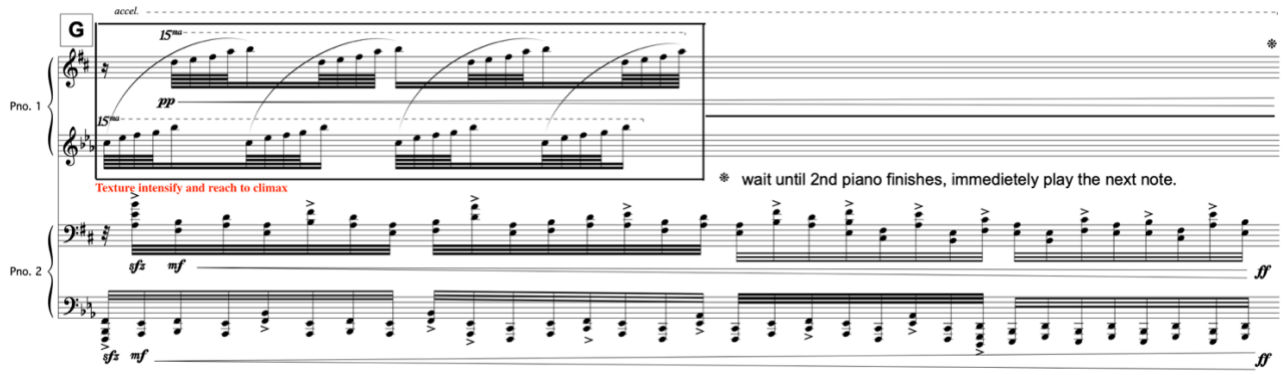


Figure 5.17. *Two Colors*, "Pure White," mm. 11, G section

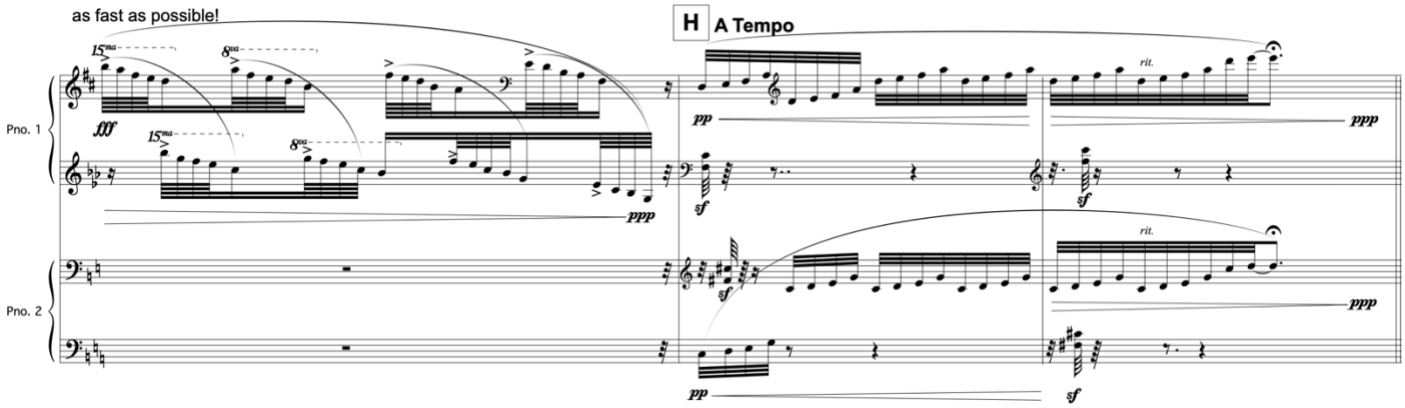


Figure 5.18. *Two Colors*, "Pure White," mm. 12, H section

Pedagogical and Performance Notes

Fang's *Two Colors* presents two contrasting movements, "Big Red" and "Pure White," each offering musical and pedagogical perspectives. While the work as a whole is unified by its use of pentatonic materials and its exploration of coloristic contrasts, the two movements differ in texture, character, and technical demands. For clarity, the following discussion will examine "Big Red" and "Pure White" separately, highlighting the pedagogical features of each movement.

"Big Red"

"Big Red" is an early-advanced work that offers valuable pedagogical opportunities in ensemble coordination and textural awareness. Each piano part is built primarily on a single melodic line in eighth and sixteenth notes, which gradually expands to include intervals such as fifths and octaves. Within each part, the hands generally move together in a homophonic texture, while polyphony emerges through the interaction between the two pianos. This design allows students to develop independence within a linear framework while cultivating listening skills, balance, and coordination in a polytonal setting.

Reading Demand

The reading demands in "Big Red" are shaped by its polytonal language and complex rhythmic structure. Each pianist must navigate an independent pentatonic collection while remaining aware of how the two parts combine. This requires not only confidence in reading within an individual pentatonic collection, but also the ability to hear how separate tonal layers interact in performance. During practice, pianists may benefit from playing both parts themselves to internalize the contrasting pentatonic collections before rehearsing with the other pianist.

Another approach is to play one part while singing the other, allowing the pianist to internalize both parts simultaneously and hear the polytonal interaction by engaging both the hands and the voice.

Rhythm presents an additional challenge. Frequent offbeat accents and irregular groupings weaken the sense of a stable pulse, making ensemble coordination less predictable. Rather than relying on downbeats, performers must internalize the shifting accents and maintain a flexible but precise sense of timing. Because both parts are rhythmically active, each pianist must balance independence with responsiveness, aligning their phrasing closely with that of their partner. Together, these demands encourage the development of ensemble listening and rhythmic control, as performers learn to coordinate two distinct pitch and rhythmic layers within a unified musical texture.

Technical Demand

One of the primary technical challenges in this movement lies in the frequent shifts of hand position combined with offbeat accents shared between the two pianos. In the introduction, the left hand provides a grounding bass while the right hand articulates major-second intervals that require precise finger placement and quick movement between registers. These constant adjustments demand control and flexibility, as clarity depends on the evenness and accuracy of motion. In a two-piano setting, this challenge is intensified by the need for precise coordination and rhythmic alignment between performers (see Fig. 5.19, marked in blue).
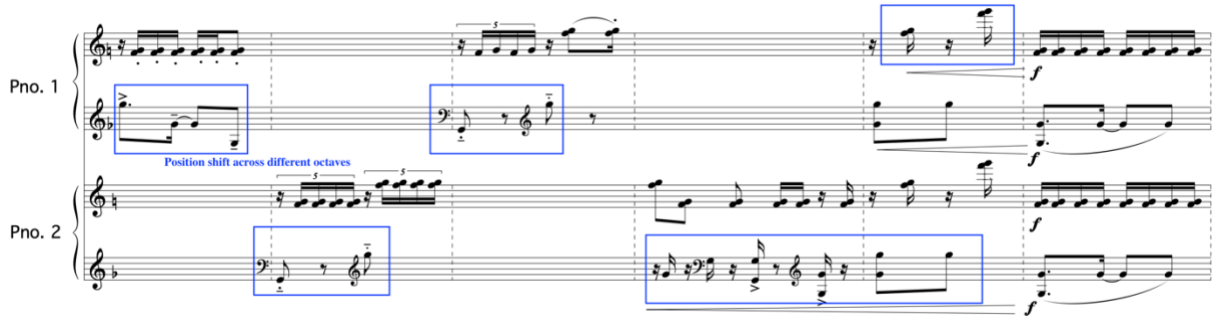


Figure 5.19. *Two Colors*, "Big Red," mm. 7–12, position of octaves

A further challenge lies in finger independence and articulation. Since Fang marks staccato throughout the movement, maintaining clarity requires not only dexterity but also sustained focus, as any lapse in coordination can disrupt the rhythmic texture. In the A1 section, a series of offbeat accents appear in the left hand (see Fig. 5.20, marked in blue). One effective approach is to assign these accents clearly to the left hand while allowing the right hand to maintain its staccato figures. This division helps preserve clarity and rhythmic stability, allowing the accents to project without disrupting the light, percussive character of the right hand.
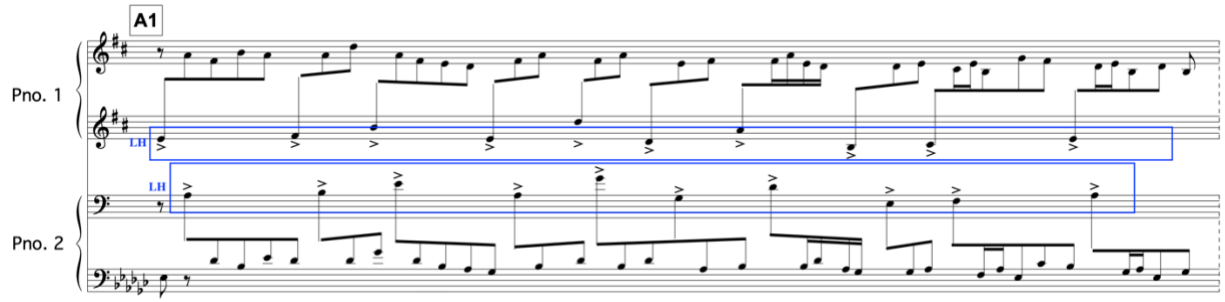


Figure 5.20. *Two Colors*, "Big Red," mm. 25, LH off-beat accents

Ensemble Collaboration

"Big Red" requires a high level of ensemble awareness, as performers navigate two simultaneously sounding pentatonic layers. Each pianist must keep their own mode clear while coordinating precise timing in staggered entrances. As the entrances shift across subsections, often by one, two, or three notes, the texture becomes increasingly layered, requiring both a steady internal pulse and flexible coordination. Balance is especially important so that neither

part covers the other. Strong ensemble playing also depends on clear communication and rhythmic precision. Studying the full score, rather than only one's own part, helps performers recognize imitation, offset entries, and how the two modal layers interact. Careful listening is essential, as pianists must continually adjust balance, tone color, and resonance to keep both lines audible. When the thematic material shifts between the two parts, the pianist should adjust dynamics to bring out the leading voice. Within this ensemble context, two elements require particular attention: offset accents and dynamic control. The displaced accents demand precise coordination and focused listening, while careful dynamic shaping ensures that both layers remain clear within the texture.

Offset accents run throughout the movement, with only brief moments of alignment between the two parts. Keeping track of how many notes the pianos are displaced from one another helps performers anticipate entrances and stay coordinated. This pattern is introduced clearly in the A sections, where the parts are one note apart in A1, two notes apart in A2, and three notes apart in A3, creating a gradual widening of the texture. In the B section, the two pianos come back into alignment, with accents synchronized. This unity is short-lived: in B1, the one-note displacement returns, and in B2, the relationship becomes more fluid, shifting between unequal groupings such as seven against six notes. The C section revisits the earlier pattern, again moving from one note apart in C to two in C1 and three in C2. In the D section, the two parts begin three notes apart, briefly align mid-section, and then separate again. By the E section, the texture becomes more driven and layered, with no fixed displacement pattern, as the focus shifts toward rhythmic intensity and registral expansion, leading to the final unison at the climax.

The dynamic scheme of "Big Red" unfolds as a process of gradual expansion and contrast across sections. The Introduction establishes an initial growth from *mf* to *f* to *ff*, setting a

broad dynamic trajectory. In the A1 sections, where no explicit markings are given in A1, a softer starting point around *p* is effective, followed by a gradual increase through A2 (*mp*) and A3 (*mf*), reinforcing the sense of buildup alongside the expanding textural displacement. This trajectory is interrupted in the B section by a sudden *subito f*, followed by *mf*, which remains consistent through B1 and B2, creating a more stable and assertive dynamic plane. The C sections, lacking specific dynamic indications, offer flexibility for the pianists to shape phrasing according to the material. In contrast, the D section introduces a clear reduction in intensity, marked *p* and "quiet", providing a moment of restraint before the final buildup. In the E section, dynamics expand once again, with Piano I progressing from *mp* to *mf* to *f* to *ff*, while Piano II follows a slightly varied trajectory, creating a layered dynamic relationship between the two parts. This culminates in the E1 section, where the dynamic level intensifies further to *ff* and *fff*, bringing the movement to a full, resonant climax.

"Pure White"

Reading Demand

The reading demands in "Pure White" arise primarily from its layered texture and subtle pitch organization. Each pianist must navigate an individual pentatonic collection while remaining aware of how the two parts combine within a more blended and consonant sound world. Because the pitch materials are closely related and smoothly integrated, the challenge lies less in distinguishing contrasting tonal centers and more in maintaining clarity within a continuously evolving texture. Although the work employs a polytonal design, the closely related pitch materials require performers to maintain clarity within their own tonal framework while remaining aware of how the two parts interact. This can be especially challenging when the textures are blended, as the boundaries between the two layers are less clearly defined than in

more sharply contrasted writing. Another challenge lies in tracking the interaction between the two parts. Entrances are often slightly offset, requiring performers to anticipate their partner's material while maintaining independence in their own part. This calls for strong pattern recognition and the ability to process both parts in relation to one another rather than reading in isolation. Additionally, the lack of clearly marked metric emphasis places greater responsibility on the performer to internally organize the pulse. Without relying on obvious visual cues such as downbeats, pianists must develop a steady internal sense of timing to ensure accuracy and continuity throughout the movement.

Technical Demand

The primary technical challenge in "Pure White" lies in maintaining an even and balanced ostinato-like texture throughout the movement without allowing it to overpower the melodic line. Because the dynamics are predominantly soft, with markings that extend to *pianissississimo* (*pppp*), the pianists must sustain a high level of control at a very low dynamic level. This requires careful management of finger weight, supported by a relaxed wrist and coordinated arm movement to avoid tension. Each note must be articulated evenly so that the ostinato remains smooth and transparent, while the melodic line is allowed to project naturally above the texture. Achieving this balance demands both physical control and a refined sensitivity to touch (see Fig. 5.20, marked in blue).

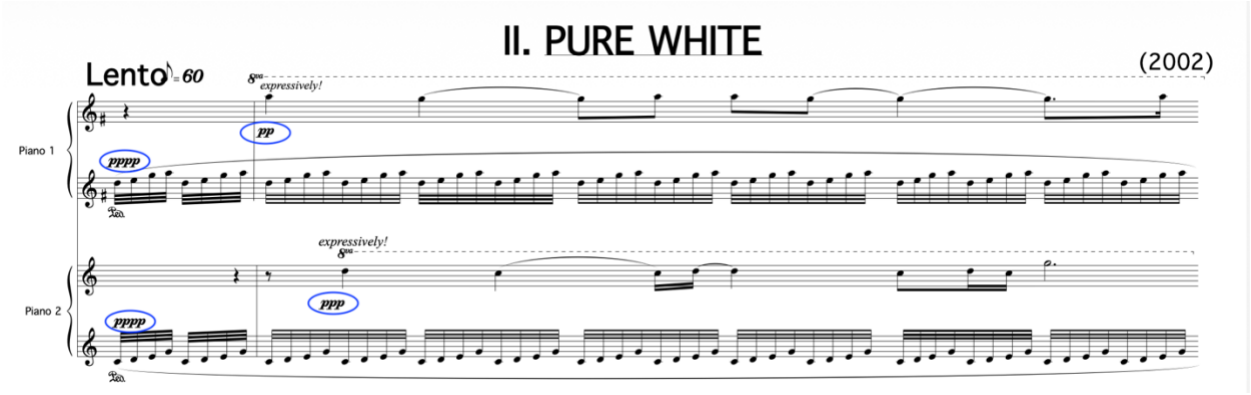


Figure 5.21, *Two Colors*, "Pure White," mm. 1–2, dynamic marking

Another technical demand lies in the use of pedal. Fang provides only one *sostenuto* pedal marking in the entire score, at the beginning of "Pure White," and offers no further pedal indications. With the dense, ostinato-like figures in the left hand for both piano parts, pedaling can easily become problematic, creating a blurred and overly saturated sound between the two instruments. The challenge becomes even more pronounced in passages marked *pppp*, where extreme softness must be achieved without losing clarity. In such cases, delicate finger control remains primary, while pedaling must be used with restraint. The *una corda* pedal may assist in softening the timbre and helping to achieve the desired dynamic, but it should be applied selectively and only when necessary for the intended color. In "Pure White," inspired by the image of water, the *pppp* marking suggests not only a low dynamic level but also a particular atmosphere. At the same time, both pianos share this dynamic, so pianists must remain aware of the combined sound. Even at these very soft levels, the accumulation of two instruments can quickly become excessive, requiring careful balance, controlled touch, and minimal pedaling to preserve transparency.

Ensemble Collaboration

Piano I and Piano II function as complementary voices that together form a complete melodic line; therefore, the two pianists must perform with the precision and unity of a single

player. Fang marked *pp* for Piano I and *ppp* for Piano II, with the indication *expressively* (see Fig. 5.22, marked in red). The writing is carefully constructed so that when one piano plays, the other rests, creating the illusion of a single melodic voice. The pianist who continues the melodic line must seamlessly carry over the sound from the previous note, ensuring a continuous and unified tone as if the entire passage were played by one performer.

In "Pure White," the balance between the two pianos is crucial, with Piano I marked *pianississimo* (ppp) and Piano II marked *pianissimo* (pp). Additionally, the left hand texture in both piano parts is marked *pianissississimo* (pppp) (see Fig. 5.22, marked in red). The softer dynamic of Piano I allows the melodic line to emerge delicately above the harmonic support of Piano II (see Fig. 5.22, marked in blue). Achieving this balance requires careful attention to touch, weight, and tone. Pianists should first practice their parts in isolation to internalize the intended dynamics, then combine the parts while listening closely to ensure that Piano II provides support without overpowering the melody. Emphasizing listening and sensitivity to relative volume is essential; the two pianos must maintain a singing, legato line and preserve clarity and transparency. Layered practice, alternating emphasis between the melodic line and the ostinato, can help students develop awareness of each part's role within the ensemble texture. Ultimately, success in this movement depends on cultivating control and subtlety, enabling the delicate interplay between the two pianos to be fully realized.

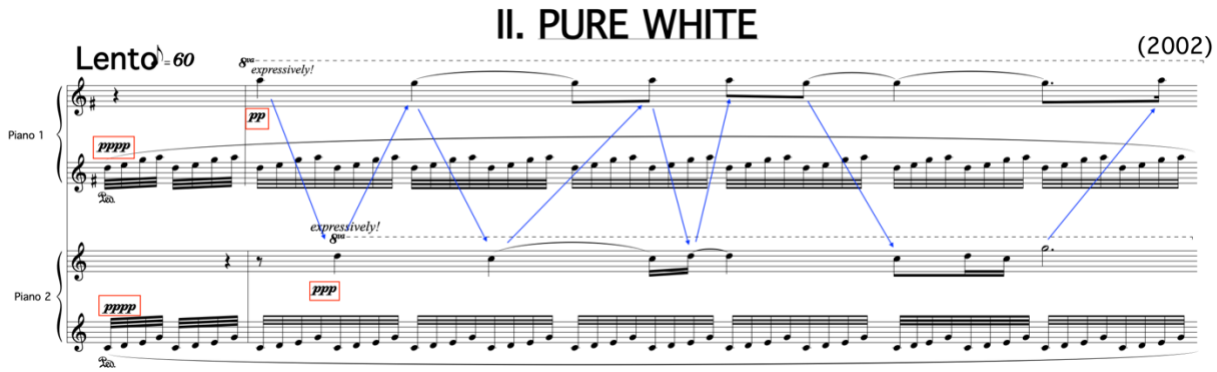


Figure 5.22. *Two Colors*, "Pure White," mm. 1–2, continuous theme

When the fifths are added to the melody in the B and C sections, the lower voice may be brought out more prominently to provide harmonic support and introduce an additional melodic layer (see Fig. 5.23). The decision of which voice to emphasize should be made collaboratively, allowing each pianist to balance their part in a way that best serves the ensemble's overall texture and musical intent. In the D section, the melodic texture in the left hand of both pianos changes to arpeggiated chords. These arpeggiated figures emulate the sound of the *zheng* (Chinese zither); the pianists can imagine them as plucked strings, evoking the image of ripples on the surface of water.
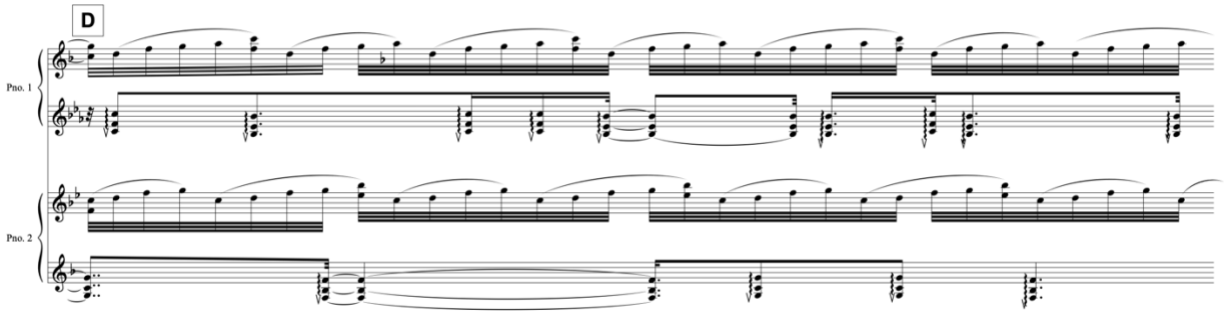


Figure 5.23. *Two Colors*, "Pure White," mm. 7, arpeggiated chords

The closing section of the second movement features a large *crescendo* leading to a climactic moment (see Fig. 5.24). Piano I plays rapid, oscillating pentatonic scales, while Piano II performs wide leaps in fourths and fifths. The music culminates at *fff* before quickly diminishing to *pp* and *ppp* in the final measures, creating a sense of release and resolution after the buildup of energy. Ensemble coordination in this passage is crucial. Fang indicates that Piano I should continue playing until Piano II completes its phrase, maintaining the dynamic intensity established by Piano II to sustain the climactic energy.[116] Simultaneously, Piano II must release

[116] Fang Man, *Two Colors* for two pianos (2001–2002), unpublished manuscript, PDF provided by the composer, "Pure White," measure 10.

the pedal immediately after completing its phrase to preserve clarity and balance. In terms of balance, Piano I must maintain dynamic control when Piano II is performing the chordal passages underneath, ensuring that the melodic line and harmonic support remain well-proportioned and cohesive. Before the final H section, both pianos pause briefly to prepare for the concluding statement, allowing a slight breath to signal the entrance (see Fig. 5.24, marked in blue).



Figure 5.24. *Two Colors*, "Pure White," mm. 11–12, balance

Conclusion

Fang's *Two Colors* is shaped by the contrast and connection between its two movements, "Big Red" and "Pure White," both built from pentatonic materials but treated in distinct ways. In "Big Red," Fang organizes the musical surface through the interaction of pentatonic modes such as B *yu* and E-flat *yu*, creating a polytonal texture in which the two pianos maintain separate

tonal identities. This relationship is articulated through staggered entrances, shifting groupings, and contrapuntal devices, including inversion and retrograde in the B section. Strong accents, staccato articulation, and asymmetrical rhythms evoke the percussive energy of *jingju*, especially in the introduction and E section, while increasing density, registral expansion, and the use of octaves, fifths, and cluster chords drive the movement toward its climax.

In contrast, "Pure White" presents a more continuous and blended texture while maintaining polytonal relationships between the two pianos. The interaction between D *shang* and C *gong* modes creates subtle modal interplay, supported by a four-note ostinato that undergoes gradual variation. The material is developed through transposition, register shifts, and intervallic expansion, including parallel fifths in the B and C sections. Textural changes, such as shifting the ostinato to the right hand and introducing arpeggiated figures in the left, contribute to a sense of fluid motion. The buildup toward the G section, followed by a return to the opening texture, shapes the movement's overall trajectory.

The technical demands also differ. "Big Red" requires precision in articulation, control in shifting hand positions, and clarity in offbeat accents. "Pure White" demands sustained control at very soft dynamic levels, particularly in maintaining an even ostinato while projecting the melodic line through careful balance and touch. Ensemble interaction is central to both movements. In "Big Red," the two pianos act as independent voices that must remain rhythmically aligned while preserving their distinct roles. In "Pure White," they combine to form a single continuous line, requiring seamless coordination, matched tone, and careful listening. Across both movements, the two-piano setting allows Fang to layer and redistribute musical material in ways that shape both texture and form. The contrast between the rhythmic drive of "Big Red" and the sustained flow of "Pure White" highlights how the relationship between the

two instruments defines the character of the work as a whole. Taken together, these contrasting approaches do not separate different musical identities but instead reveal how they can coexist within a single compositional language. In this way, *Two Colors* reflects Fang's broader aesthetic, described as a dwelling "in the in-between," where boundaries between traditions are less clearly defined and meaning emerges through sound, texture, and perception. The work as a whole thus embodies an intercultural approach not through direct juxtaposition, but through the integration of materials and gestures into a unified musical space.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The two-piano works of Chen, Ho, and Fang show that intercultural composition in contemporary music is not defined by a single approach, but by diverse and evolving strategies shaped by historical context and individual artistic voice. As established in Chapter 2, this study is grounded in the historical, cultural, and theoretical development of piano music in China, as well as the evolution of the two-piano medium within both Western and Chinese contexts. The introduction of the piano through missionary activity, followed by its institutionalization in modern music education, led to the emergence of a distinct Chinese pianistic tradition in the twentieth century. This tradition integrates Western compositional techniques with Chinese musical elements such as pentatonic systems, folk melodies, and instrumental idioms. At the same time, the two-piano medium expanded beyond its original pedagogical and domestic functions into a space for concert performance, experimentation, and contemporary composition. Together, these developments created a fertile environment for intercultural expression. Within this context, each composer draws on elements of Chinese musical traditions, including folk materials, philosophical concepts, and timbral associations, but reinterprets them through distinct compositional voices rather than treating them as fixed cultural markers.

Considered together, these works show that intercultural composition in the two-piano medium does not rely on a uniform blending of East and West, but instead unfolds through distinct compositional strategies. As discussed in Chapter 2, the two-piano format enables contrast, dialogue, and layered textures, allowing for the interaction of multiple musical ideas within a shared sonic space. The setting is central to the process, as its capacity for contrast and layering allows composers to juxtapose and integrate different musical languages, timbres, and

structural ideas within a shared sonic space, making it an especially effective medium for articulating multiple cultural perspectives simultaneously.

Chen's *China West Suite* engages directly with regional folk materials, preserving their melodic identity while reshaping them through contrapuntal textures, rhythmic vitality, and polytonal layering. As examined in Chapter 3, this approach is grounded in her broader solo piano output, which is organized into early, middle, and later periods and demonstrates the evolution of her methods for transforming traditional materials. Across these works, she adapts folk melodies, instrumental timbres, and vocal styles into pianistic textures through variation, rhythmic vitality, and timbral imitation. Over time, her writing expands in structural complexity and abstraction while maintaining a strong connection to cultural sources. Ho takes a contrasting approach. In *An Eastern Apparition*, cultural identity is not presented through recognizable materials, but is instead grounded in the philosophical concept of *yin* and *yang*, which shapes the interaction between the two pianos. In Chapter 4, her piano output, including solo, concerto, and two-piano works, is surveyed, highlighting a balance between lyricism and tonal color, and experimental approach shaped by extended techniques and conceptual design, along with an increasing integration of Chinese cultural elements. Her transnational background and interdisciplinary training inform this more abstract orientation. Through extended techniques, flexible notation, and shifting textures, the work unfolds as a balance of contrast and unity. Fang's *Two Colors* offers a third perspective. In "Big Red," polytonal pentatonic layers, displaced accents, and rhythmic instability create a highly energized and fragmented surface, while "Pure White" moves toward continuity through blended textures and evolving ostinato patterns. In Chapter 5, her piano output is also discussed, showing her emphasis on timbre,

gesture, and sonic perception, shaped by her cross-cultural training and her emphasis on existing "in between."

Across their broader piano output, including solo works, ensemble repertoire, and concertos, each composer develops a distinct yet evolving approach to intercultural composition. While all three draw on pentatonic materials, they engage with them in fundamentally different ways, a concept introduced in Chapter 2 through the discussion of Chinese pentatonic systems and their cultural significance. Chen maintains a clear connection to folk sources, Ho integrates pentatonic elements within a more flexible and often chromatic framework, and Fang transforms them into polytonal, color-driven textures. These differences also shape formal construction. Chen develops identifiable thematic materials, Ho structures her works through conceptual contrast and shifts in energy, and Fang emphasizes continuity and gradual transformation.

The demands placed on performers closely reflect these compositional approaches. In Chen's work, performers are required to coordinate independent layers and rhythmic vitality. In Ho's, they are expected to navigate complex notation, extended techniques, and flexible timing. In Fang's, they must refine control of touch, balance, and ensemble sensitivity across contrasting textures. These challenges are closely related to each composer's notational approach, which reflects broader twentieth-century developments in musical notation and performance practice. Chen extends traditional notation through rhythmic and textural complexity, Ho incorporates graphic and time-based indications, and Fang employs flexible structures that require performers to internalize pacing and form. The interviews conducted with Ho and Fang further deepen this perspective by offering insight into their compositional processes and clarifying how cultural identity, intuition, and artistic intention shape their work beyond what is immediately visible in the score.

Ultimately, this dissertation centers the works of three living Chinese female composers and expands the discussion of two-piano repertoire within an intercultural framework. It shows that cultural identity in these works extends beyond surface elements and is embedded in compositional structure, musical language, and performance practice. By situating these works within both their historical development and each composer's broader artistic trajectory, the study demonstrates that intercultural composition is not a fixed result but an evolving process shaped through the interaction of tradition, technique, sound, and performance. In this way, these compositions function both as artistic statements and as valuable pedagogical resources, inviting continued exploration of diverse repertoire in piano ensemble performance.

Recommendation for Future Research

The limited body of research on contemporary Chinese two-piano repertoire, particularly the works of Chen, Ho, and Fang, opens a range of possibilities for further study. Interested scholars may continue this research by examining any of the following topics:

1. Initiate an analytical study of other published solo works not included in this document, such as *Song of Spring Outing* (2022) by Chen, *Hong Kong Nostalgia* (2023) by Ho, and *Drunk in the Shade of Blossoms* (2017) by Fang.
2. Initiate an analytical study of Ho's piano duet and two-piano works in greater depth, such as *Glistening Pianos* for two pianos (2009) and *Heart to Heart* available for two pianos and piano duet (2012).
3. Study chamber music compositions involving piano with other instruments by Chen, Ho, and Fang, exploring how intercultural ideas are adapted across different ensemble settings.

4. Develop studies on Chinese composers who contribute to piano duet and two-piano repertoire, focusing on how intercultural perspectives are reflected in both composition and performance practice.

Summary

The two-piano works of Chen, Ho, and Fang represent significant contributions to contemporary piano repertoire and pedagogical practice. These works serve as valuable resources for developing ensemble coordination, technical control, interpretive awareness, and a nuanced understanding of intercultural musical expression. While grounded in Chinese musical traditions, their synthesis of multiple cultural and stylistic influences shaped through international training and performance contexts expands the artistic and educational possibilities of the two-piano medium. As demonstrated in this study, these compositions complement existing repertoire at the advanced level and merit greater scholarly and pedagogical attention. With continued research, performance, and teaching, these works have the potential to become more widely recognized within the piano ensemble canon. This study aims to serve as a point of departure for further research and to encourage musicians and educators to engage with this repertoire with a broader awareness of its cultural context.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter



Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Approval of Initial Submission – Exempt from IRB Review – AP01

Date: February 20, 2026 **IRB#:** 19522

Principal Investigator: Qishan Shi

Approval Date: 02/20/2026

Exempt Category: 2

Study Title: Intercultural Two-Piano Repertoire: An Analysis of the Works of Chinese Female Composers Chen Yi, Alice Ping Yee Ho, and Fang Man

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed the above-referenced research study and determined that it meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review. To view the documents approved for this submission, open this study from the *My Studies* option, go to *Submission History*, go to *Completed Submissions* tab and then click the *Details* icon.

As principal investigator of this research study, you are responsible to:

- Conduct the research study in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications as changes could affect the exempt status determination.
- Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the HRPP Quality Improvement Program and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
- Notify the IRB at the completion of the project.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB @ 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,

Eric Pennello, Ph.D.
Vice Chair, Institutional Review Board

Appendix B: Interview Guides

Interview Guide for Alice Ping Yee Ho

Part I. Biography and Music Education

A. Personal Information Verification
   1. Please provide your full birth date (month, day, year) and place of birth.
   2. Who are your parents, and what were their occupations?
   3. Please detail your pre-college education, including school names, locations, and dates attended.
   4. Please detail your college or university education, including institution names, locations, and dates attended.

B. Early Childhood Musical Experience.
   1. I watched an interview in which you mentioned that you began taking piano lessons around the time you were taking ballet lessons. Who was your first piano teacher?
   2. Can you describe your musical experiences during childhood?
   3. In what ways was music part of your family life?

C. Music Teachers and Musical Experiences from Elementary through Junior High School
   1. Who were your music teachers during this period?
   2. What lessons or skills did you gain from these teachers?
   3. How would you describe the influence these teachers had on your musical development?
   4. What were your most significant or memorable performances and musical experiences as a young student? How do these experience inform you as a composer?
   5. In an interview, you mentioned that you had initially planned to pursue a career in medicine, but after receiving a scholarship to study piano performance at Indiana University, you chose to dedicate yourself to music. Could you describe your experience of transitioning from aspiring to be a doctor to becoming a musician?

D. Describe your experience as an undergraduate student at Indiana University.
   1. Years of degree.
   2. Emphasis of study: when did you switch from piano performance major to composition major?
   3. You studied composition with John Eaton at Indiana University, could you describe his influence in your compositions?

E. Advanced Studies and International Experiences
   1. Describe your experiences studying at the Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik in Darmstadt and at the University of Toronto.
   2. How did your compositional style evolve as you moved from Indiana University to Germany and then to Canada?
   3. You studied with Brian Ferneyhough in Germany and John Beckwith in Canada. How did each of these teachers shape your approach to composition?

Part II. Compositional and Musical Influences

A. Compositional Career
   1. When did you begin composing, and what prompted you to start?
   2. What are the primary sources of inspiration for your compositions?
   3. How has your compositional style or approach developed over time? Have you noticed any significant changes in the way you compose?
   4. Do any specific pedagogical principles or teaching approaches influence your compositions? For instance, when composing piano works, do you intentionally incorporate pedagogical objectives?
   5. Considering your compositional journey, what do you see as the highlights or most significant contributions of your work?
   6. Do you offer workshops featuring your music? If yes, which works do you emphasize, and why?
   7. Are there any compositions that are not available in print?
   8. Are you writing any new piano music, solo or two-piano/four-hand?

B. Musical Influences
   1. What resources or influences have inspired you as a composer-such as visual art, literature, music, people, or the cultures of other countries?
   2. What are your perception of recreating the blending of Chinese music with Western techniques?

Part III. Questions regarding An Eastern Apparition selected for this project

1. How would you describe the pitch world of An Eastern Apparition?
2. What led to the creation of An Eastern Apparition?
3. How does the piece unfold structurally, and how do different sections relate to one another?
4. Yin and yang is often mentioned in connection with this work. How does that idea come across musically?
5. What kinds of melodic material appear in the piece, and how do they evolve over time?
6. Are there recurring musical ideas or gestures that listeners might notice throughout the work?
7. Pentatonic collections seem to play a role in the piece. How do they function within the overall sound world?
8. How would you describe the role of rhythm in An Eastern Apparition?
9. Extended techniques are an important part of the work. How do they contribute to the piece's character or atmosphere?
10. Beyond yin and yang, are there other cultural or aesthetic influences that shaped the piece?

Interview Guide for Fang Man

Part I. Biography and Music Education

A. Personal Information Verification
   1. Please provide your full birth date (month, day, year) and place of birth.

2. Who are your parents, and what were their occupations?
3. Please detail your pre-college education, including school names, locations, and dates attended.
4. Please detail your college or university education, including institution names, locations, and dates attended.

B. Early Childhood Musical Experience.
   1. Who was your first piano teacher?
   2. Can you describe your musical experiences during childhood?
   3. In what ways was music part of your family life?

C. Music Teachers and Musical Experiences from Elementary through Xinghai Conservatory of Music.
   1. Who were your music teachers during this period?
   2. What lessons or skills did you gain from these teachers?
   3. How would you describe the influence these teachers had on your musical development?
   4. What were your most significant or memorable performances and musical experiences as a young student? How do these experience inform you as a composer?
   5. What was your main study of instrument at the Xinghai Conservatory of Music?

D. Describe your experience during your undergraduate study at the Central Conservatory of Music
   1. Who were your primary teachers at this period?
   2. What was your experience studying at the Conservatory?
   3. How was the study in CCOM different than Xinghai Conservatory of Music?

E. Describe your experience as an Master's and Doctoral student at University of Colorado-Boulder and Cornell University
   1. Years of degree.
   2. What prompt your decision to transfer from Colorado to Cornell university?
   3. You studied composition with Steven Stucky and Roberto Sierra at the Cornell University, could you describe their influence in your compositions?

F. International Experiences
   1. Describe your experiences studying Computer Music at the IRCAM-Paris.
   2. In your biography, you mentioned during your one-year program at IRCAM-Paris, you studied with Brian Ferneyhough, Jonathan Harvey, Mikhail Malt, Yan Marez, and Tristan Murail. How did these composers inform your compositional style?
   3. How did your compositional style evolve as you moved from Guangzhou to Beijing, and later to Boulder, Cornell, and Paris?

Part II. Questions regarding Two Colors selected for this project

1. What ideas or circumstances surround the creation of "Big Red" and "Pure White"?
2. Are there moments in either movement where the sound world evokes instruments beyond the piano?

3. On your website, “Dark Blue” appears as a third movement. Could you discuss how that movement relates to *Two Colors* and why it is no longer included in the collection?
4. How do you think about *Two Colors* as a whole, and how might you describe the experience it creates for performers and listeners?
5. In “Big Red,” the interaction between the two pianos is quite contrapuntal. How do you hear or imagine the relationship between the two instruments in this movement?
6. How does the music in *Two Colors* unfold over time, and how do the different sections relate to one another?
7. In “Pure White,” an ostinato is present for much of the movement. How does that repeated material function within the texture?
8. How would you describe your compositional process for *Two Colors*?