

**ERHU AS VIOLIN: DEVELOPMENT OF CHINA'S REPRESENTATIVE MUSICAL
INSTRUMENT, c. 1990-2008**

by

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Erhu is known internationally as a symbol of Chinese music. While the instrument has a history of nearly a millennium, its solo repertory in concert performance developed only in the past 100 years or so, drawing upon traditional Chinese material. The enormous influence of Western culture arrived with the open door policy of China in the late 1970s gave rise to new trends of Westernization in the Chinese instrumental music. *Erhu*, due to its similarity to the violin, underwent great transformation, particularly in its playing technique and repertory on the concert stage. During the decade of 1980s, *erhu* musicians began to perform arranged violin repertoires. Pieces like *Zigeunerweisen* and *Carmen Fantasy* became standard *erhu* concert repertoires, and also as a symbol for the virtuoso of *erhu* playing. Other influences include an imitation of the violin to perform standing up, allowing greater bodily movement and stage presence. The violin repertory has become the major requirements for the students of the top national musical institutions training professional *erhu* musicians. Meanwhile, the composition of new works for *erhu* and Western symphony orchestra or *erhu* and piano is becoming a common practice.

This paper explores the new trends in Chinese instrumental music in relation to China's post-1990 modernity. What do the unprecedented changes in *erhu* music landscape indicate in this period? How do we view this phenomenon in the greater context of China in the 1990s and

in the new millennium? Through musical and contextual analysis, my findings illustrate how changes in the music sphere are tied to the greater cultural changes and social processes as China developed into a fast growing economic power in the global context today.

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PREFACE

I would like to first acknowledge my gratitude to my thesis advisor, Professor Bell Yung, who constantly criticized and encouraged my work through the process of writing, as well as the preparation for presenting this work at SEM 2008 national meeting. I would also like to thank my committee members Professor Andrew Weintraub and Roger Zahab for their generous dedication of time and energy to examine my writing, and for offering me their constructive advice for significantly improving my work. I am also grateful to scholars and colleagues who have expressed interest in my work and offered original insights into my writing, among whom are Dr.Emily Pinkerton, whose work I studied and constantly referred to in my writing process, as well as Prof. Lei Ouyang Bryant, Prof. Tong-Soon Lee, Benjamin Breuer, and Da Lin. Finally, I want to extend my gratitude to my father and grandfather, both prominent erhu masters and educators. Without their constant support and nourishing, my thesis could not have been come to shape.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Erhu, the two-string bowed fiddle, is probably one of the best known representative Chinese musical instruments in the world today. While American movies and TV shows often associate the sound of erhu with a general Chineseness with bits of colors of mystical and ancient Oriental wisdom, the instrument has gone through drastic changes in the 20th century in China, resulting in a largely altered musical style under the influence of Western music.

Erhu's development in the 20th century received attention from a few scholars in the West. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, prominent scholars in ethnomusicology who published on erhu include Jonathan Stock and Terence Liu, both of which carried out extensive fieldwork in China among the professional erhu musicians. Other studies are focused on the more traditional (pre-20th century) musical genres which involved erhu, such as Jiangnan Sizhu (Witzleben 1995; Thrasher 2008), and more general topics on Chinese music overall, in which erhu is addressed (Lau 2008). To my knowledge, there has been no comprehensive and detailed studies on most recent changes in erhu in the past decade.

1.1 OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

In this thesis, I focus on the post-1990 development of erhu under the strong influence of Western classical violin. In many respects I will follow the works done by Stock (1991;1992;1993) and Liu (1988) about two decades ago, to trace the development since then, and make comparisons between the newer phenomena I documented and the earlier ones in their account. I shall document, interpret and analyze the complex phenomena revolving around the adaptation of violin repertoires and changes in musical and social practices by erhu in this period.¹ While this thesis focuses on erhu, references are made to other Chinese musical genres such as the Chinese orchestra due to their relevance to the main topic.

In addressing both the musical and social dimensions of erhu's change, primary research questions include: what was the influence of violin to erhu's musical style and playing techniques in this period? To what degree? And on the other hand, how did the erhu musicians in this period construct their social identity? Finally, what was the reaction towards erhu's new development, domestically and internationally? How do these receptions relate to the broader context of China? These are major questions, each of which deserves full treatment. Thus, this thesis is a preliminary investigation that contributes a first step towards that goal.

While this thesis is primarily concerned with the changes, counter-change voices are present among the senior traditional musicians, established conductors and music scholars in China.

¹ Since there are no English language ethnomusicological literature concerning the period under discussion after 1993, the ethnographic documentations of erhu's development also contributes to the originality of the study.

These are briefly documented and discussed in the concluding chapter, and they deserve further elaborations in the future studies.

1.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This thesis takes the position that studies of musical instruments are pathways for the understanding of social processes. According to Nettl, “for ethnomusicologists, they [instruments] are part of the infrastructure that enables them to see music in society and culture” (Nettl 2005:376). The study of musical instruments for the past few decades have offered illuminating understandings of music and the many aspects of cultural and social forces, including issues such as music and gender (Qureshi 1997), social systems (Turino 1983, Berliner 1979), ambiguity of symbolic meanings (Pinkerton 2007), transformation of social values (Waksman 1999), relations of power (Weintraub 2001), to name a few.

In one of the latest dissertations, Pinkerton (2007) explores the social life of the Chilean guitarron: how a folk instrument embodies cultural meaning, becoming a site for the articulation of identities in tension. Focusing on the symbolic ambiguity of the instrument in social discourse, her research revealed that the guitarron’s relative national obscurity has allowed it less socio-political definition than other Chilean folk instruments: a symbolic ambiguity that has invited a convergence of contrasting ideological currents in the cultural spaces it occupies today, a symbolic territory where religious, academic, political and local entities compete to stake their musical and discursive claims (ibid.:1-2).

Qureshi (1997), investigating the role of Indian Sarangi in music, gender and society, is primarily concerned with one single question: how instruments can mean. Probing into the

physical, acoustic and visual dimensions of Sarangi's complex symbolic web in historic and contemporary India, Qureshi shows an "endangered" instrument that "means too much" that musicians need to remove some of these associations in order to regain its popularity among Indian people.

In light of these perspectives, adding to the body of literature, I consider the current study as an ethnography (for my use of the term see Chapter 1.3) and analysis of the contemporary erhu musical landscape linking closely to the context of China's modernity in the past decade or so. However, in contrast to the aforementioned studies, under the specific social context of China in the period under examination, the current study focuses on the change in the musical and social dimensions of erhu music and musicians, particularly the ways in which certain aesthetic forms become valorized while others are actively marginalized. Research questions of this kind is exemplified by Weintraub (2001) in his examination and analysis of the development and acceptance of the new musical instruments and the power relation represented in *wayang golek purwa*, the Sundanese rod-puppet theater accompanied by gamelan in New Order Indonesia.

The change of erhu music tradition since the 1990s is deeply rooted in the modern revolutionary history of China, which from 1920s onwards, marked the life of 20th century erhu with a distinctive break from the past. Since the open door policy in 1978, 1980s and 1990s saw the strong presence of economic development and political reformation in China, resulting in the strong presence of modernity that is decisively at large at the end of the 20th century. In relation to this large picture, I consider the changes in erhu in the past decade or so as the issue of "relevance" in relation to this modernity, a term mentioned by Stock (1993a: 106), whose effect is only seen to become stronger in the decade after his use of this term. This is further discussed in the international perception of the "traditional" Chinese music in China's modernity. Finally,

in the concluding chapter, I will also briefly address the disassociation of meanings from the past of erhu in reference to the aforementioned historical factor.

Two other theoretical perspectives are particularly influential to me. To fit the research questions in this thesis, I consider them in conjunction with each other to provide a framework of discussion on the question of tradition and modernity in Chapter Three.

In the introduction chapter of his book *Modernity at Large*, Appadurai contends that the globe now has a modernity that is “decisively at large, irregularly self-conscious, and unevenly experienced—surely involves a general break with all sorts of pasts” (Appadurai 1996:3). Taking media and migration as two major and interconnected diacritics, Appadurai explores their effect on the “work of the imagination” as a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity. As I carry out my discussion on the change of erhu music and China’s modernity, I consider (1) this kind of modernity at large and (2) the change in the “imagination” (see Chapter 3.0) in China, as seen in the development erhu music and musicians internationally. This latter point on the “imagination” is reflected in my discussion of the international careers of erhu musicians in Chapter 3.1.

Nettl (2005:272) argues that “change” and “continuity” are two concepts that cannot be separated in consideration of musical culture: “There have even been those who believed in the almost absolute stability of the musical cultures of non-Western societies, stability only occasionally disturbed by devastating and sweeping changes brought about by conquests and colonization. But this attitude has long been abandoned.” (Nettl 2005:272)

In Chapter 3.2, Nettl’s perspective on continuity and change parallels my extended discussion of “tradition” in modern China that stems from a 1981 article by Fang, Provine and Thrasher (Fang 1981). Meanwhile, regarding the establishment and perception of the “tradition”, Hobsbawm and Ranger, in *The Invention of Tradition*, offer insights into how people construct

“traditions” which appear or claim to be old but often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented. These include “traditions actually invented, constructed and formally instituted and those emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and dateable period—a matter of a few years perhaps—and establishing themselves with great rapidity” (Hobsbawm 1983:1). In light of this, the question of erhu’s modern “tradition” prevails the discussion of musical styles throughout this thesis.² Moreover, combined with Appadurai’s concept of modernity that is “at large”, I discuss the transformation of erhu’s “tradition” and the perceptions of such tradition in conjunction with China’s modernity, in which this framework applies to the process of a musical and social acculturation of the modern erhu “tradition” in the past decades.

1.3 METHODOLOGY

This paper is primarily the result of my interactions with erhu musicians in Beijing from 1993 to 2006, with additional interviews and other fieldwork tasks carried out in the summer of 2008 in Singapore and Beijing.

I grew up in a professional musical family in Beijing. Both my father and my grandfather are prominent erhu performers and teachers. Because of this firsthand experience, I was personally surrounded by the changes of the erhu musical landscape under the influence of the violin since

² For my use of the terms “tradition” and “traditional” in this thesis, see the notes to the last paragraph of Chapter 1.4.

the 1990s. I also had numerous opportunities interacting with professional erhu musicians in the conservatories and Chinese orchestras, ensembles, as well as individual musicians in Beijing (and visiting musicians from other cities), who are at the very frontier of this change. During those years, I played and studied music with them, attended their concerts, listened to and participated in their discussions, collected their recordings, and established personal communications with these musicians, through which I obtained a special privilege on both the overview and a detailed understanding of the current subject.

In the line of classifying researchers as from “insider”, “participant” to “observer”, as well as some other denominations, I occupy an unique place that I will not attempt to label. On the one hand, I am very much inside the circle of professional erhu sphere in China, as I grew up having many family members, teachers and friends who are the most prominent erhu musicians in China and worldwide. I myself have played the erhu since I was a teenager and experienced the musical and social changes I address in this paper by performing them first hand. On the other hand, however, I have never been trained or worked as a professional erhu musician in any context. Although I observed lessons and examinations in the conservatory where my grandfather has taught, I have never myself been enrolled as a conservatory student or music major before I entered the Ph.D program in ethnomusicology. And I have certainly not performed in any professional performing institutions or ensembles. Thus, my position keeps me close enough to being an “insider” but at the same time has always kept me at a distance from the circle, which allowed me to observe as an “outsider”.³

³ In regarding to my special position in researching and writing this thesis, the thesis committee members suggested that I should also clarify my use of the word “ethnography” to distinguish it from the common usage. First, in a sense, this thesis can be seen as a result of ethnography of myself growing up in the “field”, if you will, for which Dr. Andrew Weintraub has suggested the term “auto-ethnography”. Second, I also use the term “ethnography” in this thesis in the sense of “ethnographic”, meaning my research methodology involves those for producing a piece of

My experience of teaching and performing erhu abroad as well as my interactions with erhu musicians living in the West also contributed to the formation of the perspectives in this paper. These experiences gave me more opportunities to observe the violin's influence on erhu music, to compare violin with erhu, and to experience the perception of erhu's identity in an international setting, which is highly relevant to the change happened in China.

1.4 ERHU AS AN ESTABLISHED SOLO TRADITION IN THE 20TH CENTURY

Erhu is known internationally as a symbol of Chinese music today. While the instrument has a history of nearly a millennium – mainly as a folk instrument (Stock 1991, 1993a), its solo repertory in concert performance developed only in the past 100 years or so. As a prelude to the main theme of the thesis, this section summarizes the aspects that are important in the establishment of erhu solo tradition in the 20th century, with concentration on pre-1990s development.

The most prominent roles that erhu played in pre-20th century Chinese music have been: (1) as a tool in the hands of the typical begger, (2) as a member of various traditional instrumental ensemble genres such as Jiangnan Sizhu (Silk and Bamboo Music of Jiangnan), and (3) as an accompaniment instrument in many forms of Chinese regional drama (Stock 1992:57). In part

ethnography, such as conducting interviews, participating in the music making, and collecting audio-visual and printed materials.

because of these performance contexts, many people in China associate erhu with a low social status and vulgar taste (Chen 2007:182).⁴

The new social and musical environments in the early 20th century China encouraged the creation and transmission of the pieces for erhu solo. These pieces are similar to Western art music compositions in the sense that they are created by individual composers using musical notation and are performed in a concert hall by formally trained soloist from a score (Stock 1992: 60). Liu Tianhua (1895-1932) was the first musician to compose and teach such music on erhu, with his ten compositions dating to between 1918 and 1932 (Liu 1985:6). He is remembered as the pioneer composer who elevated the social status of erhu; his ten compositions are still widely performed today and are regarded as the classic repertoire of the modern erhu (Liu 1988: 159).

The cipher notation (or number notation), invented in France, was introduced into the erhu composition and publishing in the 1930s and 1940s (Stock 1992:66). When the cipher notation was first used, it appeared alongside the traditional Chinese notation called *gongchepu* (Stock 1992: 66). It has later become the standard notation of modern solo erhu composition and performance, as well as for many other kinds of Chinese music.

In the period from 1940 to 1965, the creation of erhu solo repertoire began to flourish. While politically reflecting the increasing dominance of Communist Party and the values of patriotism and proletarianism, the music in this period was characterized by the maintaining of the sectional character of earlier erhu recital pieces (such as those by Liu Tianhua, typically short and unaccompanied, in simple forms) and the conscious use of folk music extracts in the composition

⁴ This statement is documented in historical accounts of how people think of erhu in early 20th century, and is also verified by the story of Abing, a blind street musician whose music became the most widely performed erhu piece in post-1949 China. However, as seen in Chen's book, modern erhu musicians, such as himself, sometimes tend to deny the negative image of erhu in the past and dismiss it as a statement by someone who is ignorant about the history of the erhu. (Chen 2007: 135)

(Stock 1992:67). These repertoires, drawing musical materials from regional folk musical styles, became an important part of modern erhu tradition.

One of the most performed piece in the history of 20th century erhu concert stage, “The Moonlight Reflected on the Second Spring”, or “Second Spring”, came into existence in this period. A piece derived from the folk music materials in Jiangnan area of southeast China, this piece was created by a blind folk musician by the name of A-Bing, whose playing was recorded and transcribed by two musicologists from the Central Conservatory of Music in 1950 (Stock 1993c).

The erhu repertoire underwent further enrichment during the years of 1966-1990,⁵ marked by a further increase of virtuosity and technical display as well as substantial involvement of professional composers, including composer-performers (Stock 1992:73). Many large scale works for erhu and Chinese orchestra are created by drawing upon Chinese musical materials.⁶ Representative compositions of this period include Liu Wenjin’s four-movement concerto *The Great Wall Fantasy*, Zhang Xiaofeng and Zhu Xiaogu’s *Parting of the Newly-Weds*, and Wu Houyuan’s *Red Plum Fantasy*.⁷ Note that all three works have descriptive titles and themes that resonate with certain patriotic or historic emotions that spoke to the Chinese audience.

Two types of musical institutions are important to the development of erhu tradition in the 20th century, namely, the Chinese orchestras, and the music conservatories established across China.

⁵ The first ten years of this period did not see much development of erhu due to the Cultural Revolution.

⁶ Chinese orchestra is a modern creation of large scale Chinese ensemble as an imitation of the structure, aesthetics and acoustical ideals of the Western style symphony orchestra. The instruments of Chinese orchestra are divided into four parts: bowed string, plucked string, winds, and percussion. The repertoire is usually arranged or composed by professional composers. Chinese musical material is often employed but the texture is mostly homophonic or polyphonic, different from traditional heterophonic. The Chinese orchestra is the major type of government funded institution of Chinese instrumental music.

⁷ During this period the term ‘concerto’ is often used to refer to any work for erhu and Chinese orchestra without consideration of its form. Thus, some erhu concertos, such as the *Red Plum Fantasy*, often referred to as concerto, are in fact theme-and-variations for erhu and Chinese orchestra in the Western usage of the terminologies.

The Chinese orchestra, mentioned above, is a large scale Chinese ensemble modeled after the Western symphony orchestra. It is also the most important government sponsored performing institution, and has been promoted as the representation of traditional Chinese music. While its repertoire employs Chinese musical material in general, its manner of presentation under the direction of a professionally trained conductor, its instrumentation based on functional harmony, and the use of bass instruments such as cello and double bass, mark the Westernized traits of the orchestra.⁸ Correspondingly, the Western style conservatories were established all over China since 1950s, in which both Western and Chinese musical instruments are taught. The majority of the graduates usually play in the Chinese orchestras as a government hired musician, while a few top performers can have a career as a soloist.⁹

In a nutshell, the musical compositions of modern solo erhu have been flourishing for several decades since the initial establishment of the tradition in the 1920s. While the musical style of these repertoires has been influenced by Western composition techniques, the repertoires have maintained a close relationship with characteristics pertaining to traditional Chinese music that are familiar to the performers and audiences. Meanwhile, the level of technical difficulty is being raised by the emerging new compositions. By 1990, a body of canon repertoire for solo erhu has been established, being identified as “traditional” repertoire,¹⁰ as opposed to the post-1990s newer trend of erhu music that are heavily influenced by Western music and violin repertoires.

⁸ For a fuller account of the Chinese orchestras see Lau 2008:36-41.

⁹ For a fuller account of the conservatories in China see Lau 2008:34-36.

¹⁰ The term “traditional” repertoire in modern erhu discourse most commonly refers to the post-1920s modern solo repertoire utilizing Chinese musical material. It can also refer to the pre-20th century older traditions, such as Jiangnan Sizhu. Thus, in this thesis I use modifiers “modern” or “older” to distinguish between the two.

2.0 POST-1990S INFLUENCE OF CLASSICAL VIOLIN MUSIC ON ERHU'S DEVELOPMENT

Studies on erhu in ethnomusicological literature in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Liu 1988; Stock 1991, 1992, 1993a, 1993b) documented the trend among younger generations of erhu musicians and commented on the possible future development of the landscape of erhu music. For instance, Liu documented that “the present generation of erhu students concentrates on fast, difficult and long works, competes with each another in contests and worries about employment.” (Liu 1988: 150)

On the other hand, Liu also observed a strong conservatism among the erhu musicians:

“In spite of the continual hard work by ambitious and prolific Chinese composers to expand the repertory of the erhu, musicians still exhibit an unexplained, but evident inclination to perform many of the ten pieces of Liu Tianhua, two of A-Bing’s and a few other classic works by composers of the first and second generations...many briefly popular pieces of the modern repertory challenged erhu players to play brilliantly with new techniques, but only established repertory required them to play with a refined traditional reserve...they would not modernize the erhu at the expense of its cherished established repertory and its cultivated, early twentieth-century playing style.”¹¹ (Liu 1988: 159)

Stock (1993a:106) expressed the similar kind of prediction of the future:

“Of the future, many of my informants foresaw no great change...they talked of a need for a louder instrument with a wider range ‘like the violin’ but saw no immediate way of achieving this.”

¹¹ The first generation being the erhu pioneers such as Liu Tianhua, from 1915 to 1923; the second generation being those mainly of Liu’s students, from 1930 to 1949, as defined by the author.

These accounts suggested two different pictures as seen at the turn of the decade of 1990s: one is the increasing focus on erhu's instrumental techniques among the younger generation, in response to the demanding challenge of the erhu compositions; the other points to the fact that the modern traditional compositions for erhu, especially those classics of the early erhu pioneer composers, still holds the most important place in the core repertoire of solo erhu playing.

The social and economic condition of China in the 1990s turned out to be conducive to the influence of Western violin on erhu. Since China's open door policy in 1978, Western culture began to gradually flood into China. In the 1990s, as China's market opened much wider to the West, the new wave of Westernization in erhu began to take place, in a way no one would have foreseen. The four sections of this chapter address the musical and social aspect of violin's influence on erhu playing in the post-1990s China.

2.1 “YANGGUANG” AND THE POPULARITY OF VIOLIN REPERTOIRE IN ERHU PLAYING

Arrangements of violin pieces first appeared in erhu music textbooks and collections as early as 1980s (Zhang 1989). These scores are published in number notation (or cipher notation), often providing only one melodic line with no piano accompaniment or any other instrumentation. Initially, they were played largely for fun, but were not taken seriously as concert repertoires.¹²

In mid-1990s, the popularity of playing arranged violin repertoires began to spread among erhu performers. In 1995, after successfully launching several national competitions for Chinese instrumental music and the first international competition,¹³ the Fulitong International Competition for Chinese Instrumental Music was held in Beijing. One of the prize winners for the erhu competition, Liang Lingling from the China Conservatory of Music, was highly regarded for her performance of a piece called “Yangguang Zhaoshe Zai Tashikuergan” (The Sunshine Over Taxkorgan.), also known concisely as “Yangguang”.¹⁴ “Yangguang” is a piece originally composed for violin and piano by Chinese composer Chen Gang in 1976 (Liang 2008:80), and it became one of the well known Chinese compositions among violinists in China

¹² Stock (1992) referred to the inclusion of violin works by Bach and Schubert, Monti’s Czardas, as well as Indian film music for erhu in a erhu textbook by Zhang Shao (1989). These were included only as an enrichment of the potential erhu repertoire but were never taken seriously as part of the established erhu repertoire. The Indian piece that Stock mentioned was arranged and performed only by Zhang Yuming in his state-run ensemble called Dongfang Gewutuan (Oriental Song and Dance Troupe), and was never performed by anyone else. Thus, these foreign pieces largely remained on paper and were not actually performed at that time.

¹³ The first international competition of Chinese instrumental music is the ART International Competition held in Beijing, 1989. The documentation of this competition can be found in *Yinyue Zhoubao* [Music Weekly], Feb.24, 1989.

¹⁴ See Liang’s brief biographical information from her website at the China Conservatory of Music, <http://www.ccmusic.edu.cn/jxjg/yxsx/qyx/jsj/gyxlianglingling/>. Data obtained March 2009.

in the 1980s. Nonetheless, since 1995, its popularity among erhu performers has become much greater than among the violinists.¹⁵

“Yangguang” is considered technically challenging even for the violinists. “Taxkorgan” is the name of a region in Xinjiang province of western China, known as the region of the Uighur, one of the officially recognized fifty six ethnic minorities of China (also known as the Muslim Turkic ethnic minority living on the west border of China). The piece “Yangguang” thus draws musical materials from the Uighur musical style, featuring half step and minor third melodic intervals, complex rhythmic construction with alternation between even and odd meters, long melodic pizzicato passage imitating the sound of Uighur instrument *dombera* (plucked chordophone), and extensive sections of consecutive sixteenth notes played very fast. As it was the first time for this piece to be arranged for erhu and performed publicly in the competition, it received enormous attention from the erhu musicians all over China.

Originally a composition for the violin, many features of this piece are common to the musical language and techniques of violin, but unfamiliar to most erhu musicians. As an important piece that marked the beginning of erhu musicians’ widely spread enthusiasm of playing violin repertoire, I will give a brief portrait of “Yangguang” as it is played on erhu.

In terms of tempo, “Yangguang” can be roughly divided into two halves: a slower, more lyrical and melodic first half and a faster, more animated second half with dance rhythms, each half consisting of multiple sections. The piece starts with a long passage of piano introduction in A minor, in the mean time setting its distinctive Uighur mode:

¹⁵ This is confirmed by my personal communication with Zhang Yuming and Yu Hongmei, whom I learned this piece from in 1996 and 2002 respectively.



Figure 1. Scale extraction from piano introduction of “Yangguang”

The main melody of erhu in the first section in 7/8 meter continues the mode set by the piano: (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Uighur flavor melody in “Yangguang”

As shown in Figure 2, this melody has a strong Uighur flavor (minor second and minor thirds) in its interval patterns. It first appears in high register, imitating the female singing voice, followed by a repeat on the lower octave, imitating the male voice, before they join together and sing in the highest range of the instrument. After a long phrase of pizzicato that mirrors the main melody (Figure 2), the music enters the virtuosic Cadenza section, featuring fast long-range runs and rapid change of finger positions among different octaves (Figure 3).

The second half of the piece is energetic for its vibrant rhythms in compound meter, alternating between more staccato, vibrant dance rhythms and more legato, lyrical melodies. The piece ends in two continuous fast sixteen-note passages with the style comparable to that of Paganini’s “Moto Perpetuo”, showing off the dazzling technique of the soloist. The entire second

half depicts a festive scene where the Uighur people sing and dance and eventually reach the climax of the festival.

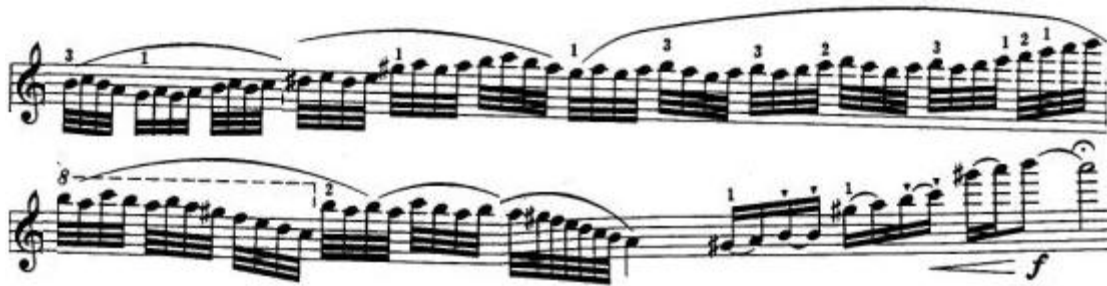


Figure 3. “Yangguang”: Cadenza

Several aspects of this work are considered unprecedented in the previous erhu compositions, and erhu musicians find them exciting and challenging to play. Meanwhile, these challenges seemed to fit the physical capacity and the musical language of erhu well. The following is a brief analysis of these characteristics, focusing on four aspects: rhythm, tempo, tonal scheme, and technical challenges.

First, the frequently alternating meters among even and odd meters. The majority of the “traditional” repertoire established in the 20th century for erhu solo employed duple meters, with 2/4 and 4/4 the most commonly seen, as exemplified by the ten compositions of Liu Tianhua. Triple meters, such as 3/4 and 6/8 are occasionally seen but not common.¹⁶ In these repertoires, the same meter is usually maintained throughout the entire piece without changing to other meters, let alone switching between duple and triple meters. These are in accordance with the aesthetics of the traditional Han Chinese music.

¹⁶ In the ten classic compositions of Liu Tianhua, which are regarded as the most essential erhu repertoire today, only one piece is in triple meter, and all other pieces are in duple meter.

“Yangguang”, on the other hand, features a variety of odd and even meters in compound forms typically found in Uighur music. Alternation between meters is not only employed in different passages but often occurs every few measures within the same section. Table 1 summarizes the overall rhythmic scheme for this piece, and Table 2 lists the detailed rhythmic scheme for the last two sections (Allegro and Presto).

Table 1. “Yangguang”: Overall Rhythmic Scheme

Section/Tempo	Introduction	Allegretto	Cadenza	Allegro	Presto
Meter	free rhythm	7/8	free rhythm	compound	2/4

Table 2. Rhythmic Scheme: Allegro (mm.1-79) and Presto (mm.80-end)

Measure	1-2	3-9	10	11-16	17-19	20-23
Meter	5/8	7/8,5/8	4/8	7/8, 5/8	3/8	5/8
Measure	24-27	28-35	36-39	40-71	72-79	80-end
Meter	3/8	4/8,5/8	4/8, 7/8	2/4	4/8, 7/8	2/4

Second, a variety of tempo is used throughout the piece. As shown in Table 1, the piece can be divided into five sections, each with a distinctive tempo, including a Cadenza section. In contrast to *Yanggyang*, the majority of the 20th century traditional compositions of erhu solo repertoire employ the simple ternary form of A-B-A’, B being the relatively slow section (Liang 2006:169). The inclusion of a technically challenging Cadenza is unusual for the erhu repertoire at the time.

Third, frequent tonal modulation is used, in contrast to the traditional erhu repertoire that usually has a simple tonality throughout a piece. First of all, in existing erhu repertoire, the majority of the pieces commonly employ the pentatonic scales or the heptatonic scale with scale degree number 4 and 7 being subsidiary tones or passing tones (see Example 2.3 in Chapter 2.2). Second, the tonal modulation in these repertoires is often achieved by shifting the emphasis of tonal center to another scale degree within the same scale,¹⁷ which is a different technique than the common understanding of modulation in Western music. This makes pitch tracking easy for the player since there is no actual change in pitch inventory involved. Third, many traditional pieces are written in one or two tonality(s) from the beginning to the end without much modulation.¹⁸

In contrast, “Yangguang” has a complex tonal scheme and frequent modulations among often distantly related keys, as shown in table 3 and 4. Moreover, the modulations in “Yangguang” are often designed to parallel the frequent alternations in the rhythmic construction, carrying the overall complexity of the piece to a higher level than the traditional repertoire.

Table 3. Tonal Scheme: Introduction-Allegretto-Cadenza

Section	Introduction	Allegretto	Cadenza
Key	a minor	a minor-c major	a minor

¹⁷ This method has been seen since the beginning of the 20th century erhu tradition, such as in the compositions of Liu Tianhua (Stock 1992:61).

¹⁸ For further discussion on a survey of the most common tonal schemes of traditional 20th century erhu repertoire, see Yuan 1987:107.

Table 4. Tonal Scheme: Allegro-Presto

Measure	10-Jan	27-Nov	28-39	40-55	56-71
Key	B-flat major	F major	d minor	g minor	G major
72-79	80-91	92-107	108-139	140-181	182-end
e minor-a minor	d minor	D major	G major	g minor	D major

Finally, the demanding left hand and right hand techniques in this piece exceed any previous erhu compositions, including long distance scale runs, octave leaps in finger positions, and fast sixteenth-note passages. These are typical advanced techniques that are distinctive to violin playing, and erhu performers see them as an expansion of erhu technique.¹⁹

After Liang's success, "Yangguang" soon became a major hit among erhu musicians, appearing as required repertoire for examinations in conservatories and became the most frequently performed showpiece in concerts.²⁰ It also became very much a symbol for the virtuosity of erhu playing. It was subsequently arranged for other Chinese instruments, such as *yangqin* (hammered dulcimer), *liuqin* (plucked lute) and *pipa* (plucked lute)²¹.

The success of "Yangguang" marked the beginning years of the wide-spread popularity of playing violin repertoire on erhu. In her graduating recital in 1998 in the China Conservatory of Music Auditorium, Liang Lingling played newly arranged Western violin repertoires on erhu, including the entire three movements of Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto in e minor.²² Regarded as the top erhu graduate of the conservatory, Liang was offered a teaching position at the school

¹⁹ As later compositions showed, they have indeed become an integral part of erhu's playing today.

²⁰ Personal communication with Zhang Xueqin, erhu student of China Conservatory of Music, 1995.

²¹ Personal communication with Peking University Chinese Orchestra musicians, 2002-2003.

²² A concert I attended personally in 1998.

she graduated from.²³ Several other erhu musicians in the conservatories in Beijing also became primary advocates of newly arranged violin repertoire.²⁴ Subsequently, playing violin repertoire became popular among the majority of conservatory faculties and students nationwide.

In fact, as early as late 1980s, erhu musicians in top national conservatories had already begun to show serious interest in performing Western classical violin repertoire.²⁵ However, from mid-1990s (around the same time as the success of Liang) the violin repertoire by Western composers became much more widely performed than before.²⁶ Several pieces of the violin repertoire arranged before or after the success of “Yangguang” soon became popular and gained important places in the erhu repertoire. These include Pablo Sarasate's *Carmen Fantasy*, *Zigeunerweisen*, and Camille Saint-Saens' *Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso*.²⁷ Other repertoires, such as J.S. Bach's violin concertos and Monti's *Czardas* also became trendy. Table 5 shows the commonly played violin pieces from the concerts and publications in recent years. The most popular pieces are marked with asterisks.

It is crucial to clarify here that the interest of erhu musicians in playing violin repertoire lies in the imitation of violin as accurate and detailed as possible. In other words, erhu is not borrowing

²³ Since China Conservatory of Music and Central Conservatory of Music are the most prestigious top national musical institutions in Beijing, usually only their best graduates will be offered a long term teaching position at the school. There is usually no more than one such graduate to get the teaching position in several years, thus it is considered the highest honor. Other graduates usually seek employment as a professional musician of the Chinese orchestras in Beijing and across China. (Pers.Comm. with Central Conservatory faculty members Zhang Shao, Zhao Hanyang, Tian Zaili, and former or current students Wang Ying, Yu Hongmei, in different years from 1996 to 2002).

²⁴ Two of such representative erhu musicians are Yan Jiemin of the Central Conservatory (pers.comm. with Yan, 2004), and Gao Shaoqing, a winner of several national erhu competitions in the 1980s and early 1990s before he moved to Canada for a new career as an erhu performer and composer (biographical data obtained from Gao's website www.ggao.com, obtained March.2009). Both of these erhu musicians have a relatively strong background in Western style composition, which played an important role in their interests and ability to arrange violin repertoire for erhu.

²⁵ Interview with Zhang Yuming, Singapore, 2008.

²⁶ Personal communication with Zhang Shao, 2002.

²⁷ Arrangements of some of these pieces for erhu have already appeared in the textbooks of 1980s and early 1990s but it was only until after mid-1990s did they gain the important place as part of the erhu repertoire among the majority of performers.

from violin to form a new musical genre;²⁸ instead, it is meant to be played exactly like a violin in this case. The only adjustments are pitch transpositions to fit the range of erhu, as well as certain changes made due to the physical difference of erhu and violin.²⁹

The popularity of playing arranged violin repertoire was initially mostly concentrated among the faculty and students in top national conservatories. Later the popularity spread to younger generation professional erhu performers nationwide³⁰. On the other hand, the older generation erhu musicians were usually more conservative and less influenced by the new trend. Their training in the previous decades made them stick to the more traditional repertoires; but because the borrowed violin techniques in erhu playing gained significance, their playing became marginalized.

²⁸The effort of Chinese composers in creating the new repertoires for erhu, such as erhu rhapsodies and concertos, can be seen as a genre that fuses Chinese and Western styles, with influence from violin.

²⁹ Some arranged violin repertoire did not become widely performed after their initial appearance because they cannot be appropriately transplanted to fit the physical possibility of erhu. Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto is one such example, performed exclusively by Liang (pers.comm. with Zhang Xueqin, erhu graduate of China Conservatory of Music in Beijing).

³⁰ Several erhu performers outside of China also perform violin repertoires enthusiastically. One representative example is Xu Ke, who moved to Japan after established himself as a successful erhu soloist in China. He also made several physical changes to erhu, including expanding the pitch range of erhu and inventing the method of playing double stops (two notes sounding simultaneously) on erhu, which was not practiced by any other performers in China (data obtained from Xu Ke's personal website www.xuke.net, March 2009).

Table 5. Selected Arranged Violin Repertoire on erhu³¹

Composer	Repertoire
P. Sarasate	Zigeunerweisen*
	Carmen Concert Fantasy*
C. Sain-Saens	Introduction et Rondo Cappricioso*
N. Paganini	Moto Perpetuo*
J.S.Bach	Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in E-Major,mvt.1
	Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in a-minor,mvt.1
	Air in G
Rimsky-Korsakov-- Heifetz	The Flight of the Bumble-bee*
J. Massenet	Meditation from "Thais"
C. Porumbescu	Ballad for violin and piano
Dinicu-Heifetz	Hora Staccato
V. Monti	Czardas*
Ma Sicong	Lullaby
Bach-Gounold	Ave Maria
Mozart-Heifetz	Menuet in D Major
Chen Gang	Sun Over Taxkorgan*

³¹ These are the pieces included in a publication of scores for erhu and piano (Yan 2004).

2.2 VIOLIN INFLUENCE ON ERHU'S INSTRUMENTAL TECHNIQUES AND MUSICAL PRACTICES: POST- 1990S

The previous section has described general tonal, rhythmic, and tempo innovations that the violin repertoires introduced to erhu, as seen in the many characteristics of “Yangguang” that did not exist in the earlier repertoire. This section traces the influence of violin repertoire to erhu playing in the expansion of instrumental techniques and the influence on musical practices.

Before going into the discussion of these topics, however, I would like to briefly remind the reader that the violin's influence to erhu playing is by no means a new trend that has just started in the 1990s. Rather, the beginning of erhu as a modern solo instrument to be played in a concert stage back in the 1920s already marked the beginning of influences from Western music in general, and violin in particular. For instance, Stock (1993a:102) traces the practice of using fingertips instead of the middle parts of the finger to press the strings to the influence from violin, as well as the standard vibrato on erhu that is similar to the vibrato of violin in Western classical music. The increasing importance of using notation to play pre-composed music is another example. As far as specific techniques are concerned, different generations of erhu musicians throughout the 20th century composed and arranged many challenging etudes for the exploration of new techniques that are inspired by those of violin. Liu (1989: 143) documented the erhu soloist Wang Guotong and his effort in introducing violin techniques to erhu playing by compiling teaching materials that stressed scales, fingerings, bowings and special techniques. Also contributed to the growth of potential technical vocabulary are the professional Chinese composers who composed for the erhu from the 1960s to the 1980s (Stock 1992:73). Examples of these expansions include more complex sixteenth-note passages played very fast, and the introduction of moderate amount of chromatic tones and arpeggiations. Nonetheless, all of these

improvements, as challenging as it once was, would not be considered as difficult today compared to the pieces that are directly taken from violin repertoire, such as the previously analyzed “Yangguang”.

2.2.1 Erhu as Violin: Instrumental Techniques

Erhu musicians’ technique was enriched in the 1990s after they learned to execute a number of technically demanding violin pieces. From the brief description of the piece “Yangguang” and the violin pieces given in Table 5, it is clear that among all the repertoires extant in classical violin music, erhu musicians are particularly attracted to violin pieces with strong virtuosic techniques (Table 6), more so than other formal and stylistic characteristics in the violin repertoire. This would explain why the works that hold the most important place in violin repertoire, such as Beethoven’s violin sonatas, are not of interest to the erhu performers. Scholars have speculated that this may be due to the fact that the violin repertoires are arranged by erhu performers instead of composers, thus their familiarity and interest in exploring the techniques are paramount (Qiao 2000). Some of the primary technical expansions after this period are introduced in Table 6.

Besides these additions of techniques directly borrowed, other aspects of violin techniques have influenced the playing style and conception of erhu musicians more systematically and fundamentally. In this section I will discuss two interrelated aspects of such influence: the expansion of pitch control skills and the change in finger positions that is related to the projection of musical style of erhu.

Table 6. Borrowed erhu techniques from violin repertoire since the 1990s

HAND	TECHNIQUE
L.H	artificial harmonics long-range arpeggiation long-range scale runs very fast chromatic sixteenth-note passage Pizzicato combined with arco. pitch control in uncommon keys/unconventional scales fingering pattern(inter/intra string hand position)
R.H	flying <i>staccato</i> <i>spiccato/sautille</i>

2.2.1.1 The Expansion of Scale Inventory and the Tracking of Pitch Accuracy

The complex tonal schemes of violin repertoires, especially the chromaticism, brought new musical language to erhu playing. While this seems to be a straightforward change (altering the musical mode), it also challenged the fundamental scale inventory used in extant erhu repertoires. Take violin for example, in order to meet the needs demanded by the repertoire, violinists must practice the diatonic scales in all major and minor keys amounting to the total number of twenty-four scales. Thus, in borrowing chromaticism, an erhu player also needs to practice those scales.

Scholars have long argued that it is an oversimplification to characterize Chinese traditional music as pentatonic (Stock 1993b: 283). In most older erhu repertoires, one or more heptatonic scales are often employed, but in each mode, only five pitches are the most important in the

music, leaving the other two as subsidiary tones (ornamentation or serving as the bridge to the temporary shift of tonal center, or “modulation”). Yuan (1987: 63) discussed the most commonly used three modes in traditional erhu music, seen in both pre-20th century folk music and 20th century compositions for erhu, namely, modes do-sol, sol-re', and la-mi' (the two pitches represent the relative pitches of the two open strings in each mode,³² while the actual tuning of the open strings in absolute pitch remain the same perfect fifth: D-A³³). Based on fixed tuning of D-A, these modes can be translated into staff notation as follows (Figure 4):

do-sol mode (D=do, A=sol) corresponding pentatonic scale: do-re-mi-so-la

sol-re' mode (D=sol, A=re) corresponding pentatonic scale: sol-la-do-re-mi

la-mi' mode (D=la, A=mi) corresponding pentatonic scale: la-do-re-mi-sol

Note: in these heptatonic scales, those five pitches with semibreves are principle notes, while the other two are subsidiary tones.

Figure 4. Three common modes in erhu music³⁴

While these three modes remain the most commonly used in modern repertoire, erhu compositions of the 20th century also frequently employ a variety of other modes, including re-la,

³² Because the number notation of erhu only denotes relative pitch, the modes thus are written in the form of relative pitch.

³³ The tuning of the two open strings of erhu has always been a perfect fifth. In modern practice it is fixed as D and A.

³⁴ This example is modeled on Stock 1993b:283.

mi-si, and fa-do (all of them indicating the relative pitches of the two open strings) (Yuan 1987: 105)

Table 7. Scales as practiced and used in traditional 20th century erhu repertoire

Mode (D-A tuning)	do= ³⁵	key (in Western major/minor equivalent)
do-sol	D	D major/b minor
re-la	C	C major/a minor
mi-si	B-flat	B-flat major/g minor
fa-do'	A	A major/f-sharp minor
sol-re'	G	G major/e minor
la-mi'	F	F major/d minor

Given these modes that are familiar to erhu musicians, we can in turn translate them into the major and minor scales in the equivalent of the Western keys: (Table 7)

As shown in Table 7, through modern traditional repertoire, erhu musicians are trained to play the scales as equivalent to in twelve of the twenty-four major/minor diatonic scales on violin. Close scrutiny reveals that in these twelve scales, the two open string pitches, D and A, are present. Vice versa, those scales not present (thus not used by erhu musicians) do not include any one of the two open string pitches D and A. Why are these two pitches so important?

In most of the traditional erhu repertoire, the open string pitches are not only included in all the modes used, but often are important tones in the music (such as acting as the tonal center). Their frequent presence in erhu music means the possibility of securing the accurate pitches played as stopped strings throughout the piece by often playing the two tones D and A on open strings. The higher octave counterpart d¹ and a¹, two harmonic tones in the place of ½ length of

³⁵ This refers to the relative pitch “do” in each mode, under fixed tuning of open strings D-A. In the Western major/minor system equivalent, one can consider them as the tonic of each key. Although they are typically not the tonal center in each mode of erhu music, when playing violin repertoires based on major/minor keys, the pitch control techniques remain the same as they are in erhu music.

the entire string, serve the same function. Given the fixed tuning of the instrument, the pitches in the whole piece can be constantly checked upon against the D-A pitches. This is an important skill that erhu musicians developed through playing the traditional repertoires.

For an erhu player who is used to the repertoire as a way to check pitch accuracy, it is a challenge to play the chromatic modulations of arranged violin repertoire. In the keys excluded in Table 7, therefore, D and A appear infrequently. This means that the player has almost nothing to check his pitch against should he perform or practice alone, leaving the pitch control solely to his ear, a skill acquired only through extensive trainings on scales of all keys. This calls for a different training system for erhu, and more importantly, it alters the traditional way of keeping track of pitch.³⁶

2.2.1.2 Finger Positions of Erhu and Ornamentation Style

Modern erhu playing has long formed its own hand positions consisting of the most commonly used three finger positions across its entire range. A terminology used in erhu with its root in Western concept,³⁷ finger position refers to the designated position for the placement of

³⁶ Two facts need to be taken into consideration though. First, many violin repertoires do show a consideration for the pitch control skill mentioned above, that is, to highlight the importance of the open string pitches in the piece. Examples are seen in the extensive use of D major in the most popular violin concertos, such as the violin concertos by Beethoven, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Korngold, Stravinsky, only to name a few. However, there are still numerous pieces written without such considerations. Second, arrangers of violin repertoire for erhu often transpose the keys to suit the range of erhu, at the same time catering to the pitch tracking skills of erhu players as much as they can. Overall, despite these effort, the challenge of chromaticism is always present in these pieces.

³⁷ Chen (2008) discussed the renovation and standardization of modern erhu finger positions by Liu Tianhua in the 1920s. In pre-20th century folk music practice, the majority of erhu music only used the first finger position, rarely moving to the second set of positions.

the first finger on the string (i.e. the index finger) in Western classical violin playing.³⁸ In this system, for instance, when the first finger is placed a whole step above the open string, it is the first position. The second position is derived then by moving the finger another half or whole step up, thus a third above the open string. The rest of the positions can be derived likewise.

Notably, in the classical violin playing, the change of finger positions is derived from the stepwise movement along the scale degrees of the first finger on the string. Thus, theoretically, there can be at least more than ten commonly used finger positions on each string (Figure 2.1b), and the index finger is free to move to any of these positions when playing a piece. Other fingers can also move freely according to the position of the first finger.

In contrast, the erhu only has three commonly used finger positions, as shown in figure 2.1a (finger positions are shown in this case in the most common [do-sol] mode).³⁹ Therefore, in this case, the first finger on the string can only be placed in the following three positions: (1) a whole step from the open string, (2) a fourth from the open string, and (3) an octave from the open string. Meanwhile, the rest of the notes would be covered by other fingers, and the first finger is not free to move to any place other than those indicated by the finger position rule. This restriction in turn is also in effect for other fingers, which can be placed only at certain limited positions on the string.⁴⁰

These restrictions posed by the finger positions are strictly performed in the majority of the traditional erhu repertoires throughout the 20th century. More importantly, the restricted movement of fingers is highly relevant to the projection of musical styles. Stock (1993b)

³⁸ I learned this from my violin teacher Roger Zahab. Ironically, in publications concerning the basic trainings of violin playing, the concept of finger positions or hand positions is often not discussed. This is probably due to the fact that violin players have a more free than restricted placement of fingers on the string so that there is not much necessity to theorize and number the finger positions.

³⁹ This figure is modeled after the illustration of erhu finger positions in Stock 1993b:284.

⁴⁰ One other feature of the traditional erhu finger position is that in the majority of modes, the same finger position is shared by both of the strings. This is also changed when playing the arranged violin repertoire.

discussed the relationship between the finger positions and the projection of musical styles on erhu:

“The significance of fingering and hand positions in the creation of fiddle style is that particular patterns of ornamentation, including slides, trills, mordents and various kinds of grace notes, tend to be associated with certain ergonomically convenient finger and hand movements. If the fingering used to perform, for example, d’ differs from one mode to another [which is true for the different finger positions for different modes on erhu], then the decorative possibilities which may be conveniently applied to this pitch will also differ in each mode.” (Stock 1993b: 285).

As suggested by Stock, the finger positions of erhu playing strictly limit and shape the ornamentation styles of the music. Even the smallest deviation from these positions can result in a different musical style, which would be identified as not only technically “wrong” but also a “non-Chinese erhu” way of playing. This is in contrast with the more free use of finger positions and the ornamentations thus produced on violin, which is more tolerant in this aspect than erhu.

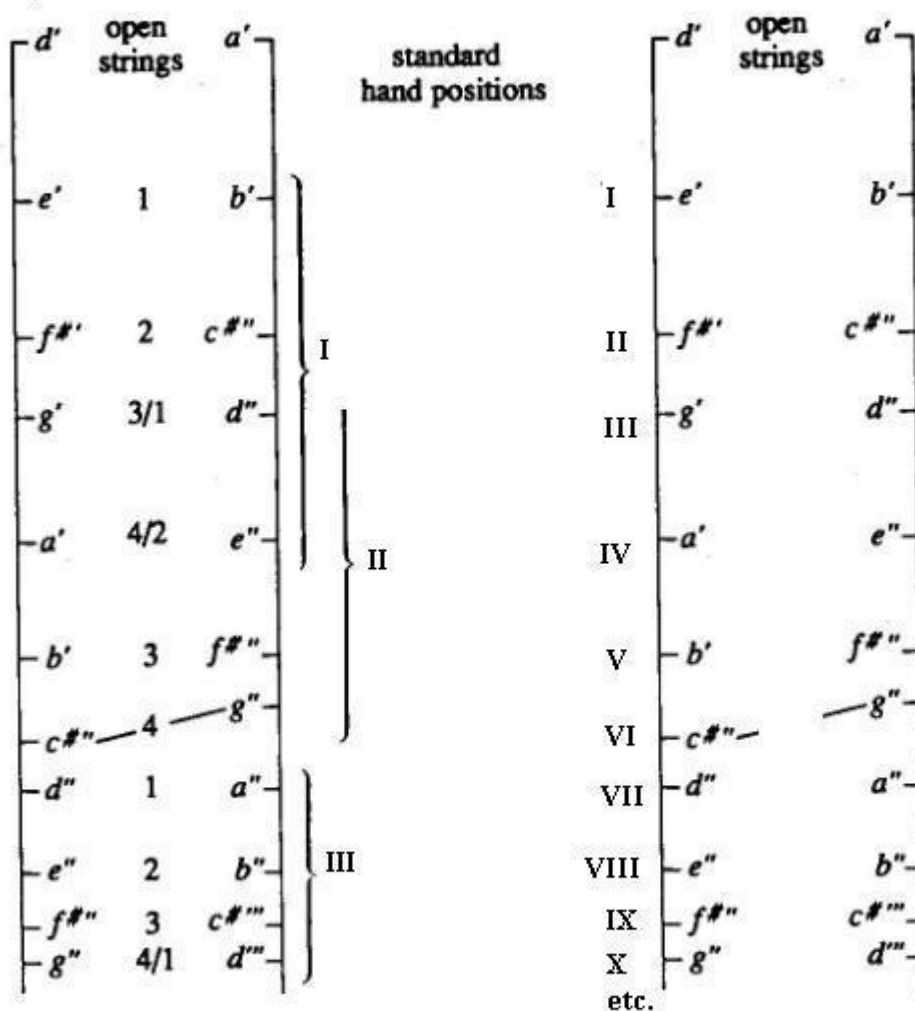
The change in finger position system has important consequences in altering the ornamentation and musical styles projected, when erhu musicians started to adopt violin finger positions. In fact, this change took place when the traditional erhu finger positions could not appropriately handle the challenging techniques of arranged violin repertoires. When violin-influenced playing becomes trendy in the conservatories, the use of traditional erhu finger position is downplayed, and the student is expected to be able to handle “any music that is possibly written” by using the free finger positions.⁴¹ At the same time, the ornamentation style of newly created erhu music also moved away from the tradition and increasingly resembled those on violin.⁴²

⁴¹ Interview with Zhang Yuming, Singapore, June 2008.

⁴² One interesting and unforgettable experience of mine related to this is my erhu lessons with one of my students in the US, Pepe. Pepe is professionally trained as a cellist and took up erhu only after he met me in 2008. Due to his familiarity with strings, he can play a few pieces well after only a few months of lessons. However, when I assigned him one of the Liu Tianhua’s classic pieces, *Pleasant Evening*, which involves extensive change of finger positions,

Erhu finger positions: 1-5 (dol-sol) mode (equivalent of D major on violin)

Violin finger positions on D and A string (D major scale)



Notes: 1-index finger 2-middle finger 3-ring finger 4-little finger } finger/hand position (I, II, III, etc.)
 3/1 overlap of finger positions (ring finger in one position, index finger in another)

Figure 5. (a) Erhu finger positions

(b) Violin finger positions

he played in an ornamentation style which I have never imagined possible on erhu and of course have never heard of. The reason, it turned out, is that he was unaware of the restriction of erhu finger positions and freely adopted the finger positions he used to play on the cello (which is similar to that of violin, with the index finger free to move to any notes). It then struck me as a direct experience on the possible alternation of musical style just by adopting a different finger position, and in which case erhu does not sound "Chinese" any more.

2.2.2 Erhu as Violin: Music Practices

Further influence of playing violin repertoire on erhu is seen through three kinds of musical practices: musical notation, the significance of absolute pitch, and the system of training.

First, the use of staff notation. Although training in Western music has been a conservatory requirement for students of Chinese music for many decades, professional erhu playing did not use Western staff notation extensively until recently. Staff notation is now widely used in both traditional repertoire and violin-based repertoire.⁴³ Meanwhile, this trend is also concurrent with the more Westernized professional composer's preference of creating works for erhu and piano, as well as erhu and symphony orchestra.

Second, the significance of the absolute pitch. The tuning of open strings to absolute pitches D and A was only introduced after the Western music in early to mid 20th century in China. However, before the 1990s, erhu musicians paid little attention to tuning to these pitches as long as it was a perfect fifth apart, except when they were playing with another instrument. Nowadays, professional erhu musicians always remember to tune their instrument to standard D-A, even if they are just practicing traditional pieces alone.

Finally, the system of training. This is directly required by the technical challenges of difficult violin pieces. These pieces require erhu students to go through vast amount of purely technical exercises, sometimes taken directly from etudes written for violin. At the same time, the traditional emphasis on the mastery of diverse regional Chinese musical styles is downplayed.

⁴³ The use of staff notation in place of number notation has important consequences in altering the conception of the modes and the musical style for erhu musicians. For a detailed account of the conception of modes and its relation to the number notation, see Stock 1993b.

Another aspect of training involves the emphasis of Western music and musicianship. One major challenge of playing violin pieces for the erhu musician, besides the difficulty with the instrumental techniques, is the understanding of and familiarity with the Western musical language on the whole. Many erhu students, used to Chinese music scales and melodies, may have difficulty switching among the fast changing harmonic languages in violin music and keeping up with the pace of changing accidentals. In one of the lessons I observed,⁴⁴ the student (not music or erhu major) playing Concerto for Violin and the Orchestra in E major by J. S. Bach on erhu almost completely mixed up her accidentals, not knowing where the sharps or the naturals should go for a long passage in the first movement, while appeared to be playing very fluently. The instructor seemed not particularly critical of her wrong notes either. This is clearly due to the confusion with the major and minor chords, as well as their movement in the chord progression, a basic distinction in the Western music theory and musicianship. In order to overcome this problem, erhu students are required to undergo more Western-style musicianship training in order to facilitate basic understanding of Western music theory.

2.3 ERHU AS VIOLIN: PROFESSIONALS AND AMATEURS

The establishment of arranged violin repertoire in the professional erhu playing has had an important effect in elevating the social status of professional erhu musicians in comparison to the

⁴⁴ This lesson is observed in Central Conservatory of Music, Beijing, 2008, with unidentified instructor and student.

amateur erhu players. It also became a significant standard to distinguish a first class professional erhu musician from a mediocre professional erhu musician.

There are two different groups of erhu players in China that can be labeled amateur musicians, or in Chinese, *yeyu* musicians. The first group consists of the high school or college students, who were trained in the modern solo erhu system and play in their school ensembles/orchestras. These student musicians usually study with a professional erhu musician. However, for a long time, the violin repertoire did not become popular among these amateurs,⁴⁵ because of the difficulty of the techniques on the one hand, and the familiarity and knowledge of Western art music on the other. Because of these two reasons, they often stay away from such repertoire but at the same time admire those who can play.⁴⁶ This is starting to change in the last two years though, due to the increasing popularity of violin repertoire.⁴⁷

The second type of amateur erhu musicians are those who play in the traditional folk ensembles in the parks or tea houses of southeast China. In his book *Music in China*, Fredrick Lau discussed the ironic division of *zhuanye* (professional) and *yeyu* (amateur, defined here as the second category) erhu musicians in the post-1949 modern China. On the one hand, professional musicians always look down upon the amateurs because they are not systematically trained in a “scientific” fashion (Lau 2008:25). It also has to do with the official status of professional musicians as the only government sponsored Chinese instrumental musicians, whereas the label “amateur” has been turned into “a code word for someone who is not hired by the government, is untrained, and lacks formal musical knowledge” (ibid.). On the other hand,

⁴⁵ This statement is based on my interactions with the amateur high school Chinese orchestra students in Beijing from 1996 to 2001, and my interaction with amateur college Chinese orchestra students from 2002 to 2006.

⁴⁶ This is observed during my college years as an amateur erhu player in China, as my ability to play some of these violin repertoires on erhu was highly regarded by other amateur erhu players and also impressed the head of the school orchestra very much.

⁴⁷ This statement is based on my personal communication with current Peking University Chinese Orchestra members from 2006 to 2008.

many amateur musicians are in fact “excellent musicians in their own rights” (ibid.), and they also make fun of the professionals, saying that they cannot play in a truly traditional way on a traditional instrument.⁴⁸

This situation is ironic in another sense because the professional erhu musicians used to learn regional musical styles extensively from amateur musicians in past decades.⁴⁹ These regional styles, as mentioned in Chapter 1.4, formed an important part of the modern erhu repertoire. In this sense, the professional erhu musicians, despite their status as government hired musicians, were also students of the amateurs, who are the carriers of older traditions.

In this context, the establishment of technically demanding violin repertoires in the post-1990s era indeed set the professional erhu musicians further apart from the amateurs. In fact, most amateur erhu players are neither familiar nor interested of playing such repertoires given their skills and the musical styles they are accustomed to. This also makes the professional erhu musicians feel that they are in a superior position as specialists in this instrument that no amateurs without a considerable amount of systematic training could possibly achieve.⁵⁰

The significance of the arranged violin repertoire in erhu playing is also reflected in the evaluation of younger generation of professional erhu musicians. Although the number of arranged violin repertoire works is much fewer than the traditional repertoire, because the violin-based pieces are technically more challenging, the musicians who perform violin-based repertoire are considered superior to those who play the traditional pieces. In other words, the ability to play violin repertoire is more highly valued.

⁴⁸ Original text from Lau: “ Even though professional musicians are commonly recognized as better trained, their knowledge of the traditional repertory, performance practice, and nuanced and proficient playing technique are regarded by many local musicians as inadequate and their musical taste and flexibility as inferior to those of the amateurs.” (Lau 2008:20)

⁴⁹ For a discussion on the relationship of regional musical styles and the Chinese “national” musical style, see Lau 2008:27-29.

⁵⁰ The professionals often explicitly express this attitude in the lessons I observed, both in Beijing and in Singapore.

One example of such measurement is one of the recent graduates of Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, Sun Huang. Sun, widely renowned as the most virtuosic erhu soloist in her generation, is recognized as having the most perfect technique in playing arranged violin repertoire on erhu. A native of Shanghai, Sun was born in 1981 and graduated from Shanghai Conservatory of Music before she was admitted into the Central Conservatory in Beijing. As a representative erhu player in the age when violin-based instrumental technique is highly valued, she has been a first-place winner of ten of the most important awards in major national and international Chinese instrumental music competitions since 1988, in almost every such competition she has ever participated. In her graduate recital in 2005, entitled *Paganini On Two Strings*, Sun performed a new arrangement of Nicolo Paganini's Capriccio No.24. Immediately after her graduation from the Central Conservatory she got a job offer from Singapore Chinese Orchestra with a one-year contract and considerable salary, before she went on to continue her Master's study at the Central Conservatory.

2.4 VIOLIN REPERTOIRE AND WESTERNIZED NEW COMPOSITIONS FOR ERHU

New instrumental techniques have become part of the training of the latest generations of professional erhu students, thus forming a significant part of core erhu performance skills and practices. The incorporation of these new vocabularies in new compositions for erhu in the 1990s and beyond is a notable evidence of such “acculturation” process.

Experimental works for erhu and a variety of other musical instruments (mostly Chinese and Western instruments) by conservatory trained Chinese composers first appeared in the 1980s. Many of these compositions seek to create a fusion style of erhu music, while also attempting to elevate the overall complexity and technical difficulty of erhu playing. While some of them drew from Chinese musical materials, others adopted avant-guard approach from the West, including the creation of atonal music for erhu, as well as the application of twelve-tone techniques in composition (Wang 2008:124).

The development of erhu repertoire by professional composers is only part of the large picture of the growing team of conservatory-trained composers in China who seeks to explore the potentiality of all the Chinese musical instruments and experiment to create new musical styles. This team also includes many internationally famous composers, such as Tan Dun, whose composition for erhu and yangqin named “Shuang Que” has become one of the very few avant-guard works that are frequently performed in erhu concerts today (Qiao 2000:41).

There have been at least 120 concertos produced for erhu since the 1980s (Wang 2008:123), while the total number of such fusion concertos produced for any Chinese instruments amount to more than 200 (unidentified source). While many of these are composed and premiered in the late 1980s, it was not until after the 1990s, when the arranged violin repertoire became popular,

that some of them gained wide popularity among erhu performers. In a way, therefore, these new compositions marked the beginning of erhu's transition to becoming musically close to violin within its own repertoire, composed for erhu by Chinese composers.

Of these new compositions, two works were among the most widely performed in the past decade, namely, Wang Jianmin's Rhapsody no.1 for erhu and piano, and Guan Naizhong's Concerto no.1 for erhu and symphony orchestra. Due to their enormous popularity, erhu performers usually refer to them in simplified name as *yikuang* (Rhapsody no.1) and *yixie* (Concerto no.1), without the need to point out the composer (there are surely other works called concerto no.1, but they are less popular). After the success of the two works, both composers composed two other works, Rhapsody no.2 and no.3 by Wang, and Concerto no.2 and no.3 by Guan, which are also gaining popularity among performers.

3.0 ERHU AS VIOLIN: IDENTITY, INTERNATIONAL IMAGE, AND CHINA'S MODERNITY

The influence of violin on erhu goes beyond musical change. In Chapter three, I shall investigate the social dimension of this change, and the phenomenal and whole-hearted embrace of the new direction of erhu music. In doing so I shall theorize on the broader issue of tradition and modernity that confronts the erhu community on the one hand, and how the issue bears significance to the understanding of China's modernity in general.

Chapter 3.1 provides an ethnographic documentation and analysis of erhu musicians' booming international career in the past decade or so, a phenomenon appeared only after 1990s, which I consider as parallel to erhu's musical imitation of violin. More importantly, this phenomenon is linked to the issue of modernity in Chapter 3.2. In his book *Modernity at Large*, Appadurai addresses the central concept of modernity by suggesting that "imagination", a term related to media and migration, plays a newly significant role in the world today. He writes:

"The imagination has broken out of the special expressive space of art, myth, and ritual and has now become a part of the quotidian mental work of ordinary people in many societies...More people than ever before seem to imagine routinely the possibility that they or their children will live and work in places other than where they were born: this is the wellspring of the increased rates of migration at every level of social, national, and global life. (Appadurai 1996:6)"

Thus, these new trends that I shall discuss in 3.1, including the international career and the migrations of erhu musicians in the last decades or so are indicative of China's social change—a

distinctive feature of modernity at large. This modernity, which I shall discuss in turn in 3.2, is one of the most important driving forces in the development of erhu playing addressed in this thesis, and on the other hand in a subtle continuity with the so called “tradition” in modern Chinese music.

3.1 ERHU MUSICIANS AS VIOLINISTS: INTERNATIONAL CAREER AND SOCIAL IDENTITY

At the beginning of 1990s, a decade after China’s economic reformation and the Open Door Policy, two Western music scholars doing research on the development of erhu music in China similarly documented the future career aspiration of the erhu performers, especially among younger generations (Stock 1992, 1993a; Liu, 1989). Stock commented that many erhu students in the conservatory were concerned with the lack of performance opportunities (Stock 1992:82) and many hoped “erhu might be their means to a more lucrative career outside of China or looked to singing in bars for a higher income than that resulting from employment in a state-run ensemble” (Stock 1993a:106).

Liu reported that, of the two “fourth generation” of erhu performers that he interviewed in the 1980s, ⁵¹ Jiang Jianhua, a top erhu soloist at the Central Conservatory, greatly impressed conductor Seiji Ozawa. Subsequently she had abundant opportunities to perform internationally with the conservatory ensemble, and was content with her professional career (1989:152-53).⁵² The second performer Liu interviewed, Zhou Wei, expressed his dissatisfaction with the current status because of “his desire to perform the erhu internationally as a soloist and the limitations of his position as a member of a lesser known ensemble” (Liu 1988: 154).

This kind of aspiration for an international career as an erhu soloist, as documented by Liu and Stock, was typical among the erhu performers in 1990s. This attitude is significant in the enthusiastic embrace of playing violin repertoire by erhu performers, which was perceived as a step towards international recognition.

Although with a relatively short tradition comparing to many other Chinese music genres, erhu has been supported and promoted by the Chinese government for decades as the representative musical instrument of China, and the second half of 20th century witnessed a dramatic increase in erhu composition as the instrument drew attention from more and more people domestically and internationally. Meanwhile, as China’s political and economic environment becomes more conducive to the international artistic exchange, many erhu musicians have successfully launched international careers. This change of social identity of erhu musicians thus parallels the change in their music: while erhu musically imitates violin, musicians today are more concerned about being able to have a career like many renowned violinists who perform in the concert halls around the globe all year round.

⁵¹ As defined by Liu, the fourth generation erhu performers typically beginning their career in the early 1980s.

⁵² A former student of my grandfather, Jiang moved to Japan in the early 1990s and lived there for more than ten years as an erhu performer and lecturer. She has just recently moved back to Beijing in 2007 and was hired as a faculty member by the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing.

Top erhu performers in China usually begin their international career as a frequent guest soloist of Chinese orchestras and ensembles that toured Europe, America, and elsewhere. As they become better known, other opportunities to perform internationally arose, including collaborations with experimental composers and invitations to musical festivals around the globe. Individual solo recitals abroad are relatively rare. Like other Chinese cultural products that flow into the West, erhu musicians also get more opportunities to reach a wider audience. One example is erhu soloist Ma Xiaohui of Shanghai Chinese Orchestra, who performed with Yo-Yo Ma in the film score *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* that won an Oscar Award for the original musical composition by Tan Dun⁵³.

Liu provided biographies of four generations of 20th century erhu performers and educators from the 1920s to the 1980s (1989: 105-120, 121-132, 133-146, 149-155). Following his example, I will briefly introduce some representative performers of the 1990s and beyond in relation to their diverse international careers, as a sketch of the erhu performers in the world today.

One of the most acclaimed younger generation erhu soloists today is Yu Hongmei.⁵⁴ Graduated in 1994, Yu is considered the finest erhu musician that the Central Conservatory of Music ever produced and so far one of the most successful erhu soloists internationally. As an erhu soloist, she has performed in many world renowned concert halls, including the Musikverein of Vienna, Avery Fischer Concert Hall at Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall in New York, Kennedy Center in Washington DC, Chicago Symphony Orchestra Concert Hall, San Francisco Symphony Concert Hall, Champs-Elysees Theatre in Paris, Lucerne Concert Hall in

⁵³ Tun Dun later composed a concerto with the same title for erhu and Chinese orchestra based on the film score.

⁵⁴ Since the careers of the “fourth generation” of erhu performers defined by Liu (1989) are already beginning in the 1980s, the “younger generation” that I refer to here is about another decade after that.

Switzerland, etc. She has given more than 20 recitals in Beijing, Hong Kong, as well as in Japan, the United States, and France. Several of her recordings have also won internationally acclaimed awards, including the Pro Musicis International Award and the Indie Award of the United States⁵⁵.

A former student of renowned erhu educators Zhang Shao and Zhang Yuming, as well as others, Yu has been identified as the best erhu performer among her peers since her days in the conservatory.⁵⁶ Highly regarded as a well-rounded interpreter of both traditional and newer compositions (such as the concertos by Guan),⁵⁷ Yu maintains a balance between the mastery of traditional musical style and the newer techniques borrowed from violin. She was among the first generation of Central Conservatory students who were trained to play arranged violin repertoire in the late 1980s and early 1990s (before they became popular), and the first generation of erhu soloists who won several awards of the international competitions for erhu in the 1990s. In the past few years Yu has taken a position to teach erhu in a Canadian college where her American husband works for a few months every year.⁵⁸

Since Yu performed as an internationally acclaimed Chinese musician after her graduation in 1994, more than ten years have passed, and another younger generation of erhu performers has now emerged. The previously mentioned Sun Huang (see Chapter 2.3), graduated from the Central Conservatory with a Master's degree in erhu performance, is so far the most highly regarded in her generation. Typically trained in the instrumental techniques of arranged violin repertoires and etudes, compared to the previous generations, the newer generation of top erhu

⁵⁵ Biographical information obtained from Yu Hongmei personal website <http://yuhongmei.com/?p=5>, 2009.

⁵⁶ Personal communication with Yu Hongmei, Zhang Shao and Zhang Yuming since 1996.

⁵⁷ Yu's performance of Guan's concerto No.1 was highly regarded by the composer, so that Guan dedicated his concerto no.2 to Yu, which she later premiered.

⁵⁸ Personal communication with Yu, 2007.

performers are especially distinguished by their virtuosic techniques to carry off arranged violin pieces such as Carmen Fantasy, and the more Westernized or avant-gard compositions by professional Chinese composers, such as Wang's rhapsodies for erhu and piano (see Chapter 2.4). In contrast to the previous generations, the traditional and regional folk musical styles are studied but not emphasized. The international career for Sun has flourished since she was hired by the Singapore Chinese Orchestra. She also performed with the Central Conservatory ensembles and as guest soloist for other Chinese orchestras in concert tours abroad.

A notable phenomenon in the erhu community since 1990s is that, a number of Chinese musicians have immigrated abroad where they continue their career after they established themselves as top performers in China. This marks the beginning of erhu becoming more and more widely accepted and taught throughout many parts of the world, among Chinese diaspora communities and also among an increasing number of non-Chinese. Examples of such prominent erhu musicians include Gao Shaoqing (also known as George Gao, who has taught and performed in Canada since 1991), Zhang Yuming (who has taught and performed in Singapore since 1997), Zhou Yaokun (who has taught in Japan since 2005), Zhang Liansheng (who has taught in Japan since 2006), Jiang Jianhua (who has performed and taught in Japan for more than ten years, currently a faculty member of erhu performance back in the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing), Xu Ke (who has taught and performed in Japan and American since 1988, also a former member of Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble), Han Huaqi (also known as Karen Han, who has taught and performed in United States since 1988), Shen Pangeng (who has taught and performed in Australia since 1989), Zhang Bin (who has taught and performed erhu in Japan since 1992), Guo Gan (who has studied and performed in France since 2001), etc.⁵⁹ While some

⁵⁹ Since Yu Hongmei married an American and is teaching part-time in Canada, she could be included in this group.

of them teach and perform regularly as erhu musicians, others have developed multifaceted careers as erhu soloist, composer, conductor, music producer, etc.⁶⁰ As they disseminate the modern tradition of erhu playing, they also develop new styles that enrich the music of erhu.⁶¹

One parallel phenomenon of erhu's popularity around the world is the Certification Examination Program launched by the Central Conservatory of Music worldwide. Today, students learning to play erhu can take the level tests and acquire their certificate in erhu performance at several times a year in countries like Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, the United States, and Canada, to name a few.

The international career of erhu musicians are closely linked to the international performances of the state-sponsored-ensembles, namely, the Chinese orchestras, as the last twelve years marked the great boom of Chinese orchestral concerts in the West, especially in Europe. For example, the number of concert by Chinese traditional musical institutions from China held in *one European venue alone*—the Musikverein in Vienna (also known as Goldener Saal, hence widely known in China as the “Golden Hall”)—amounts to more than thirty concerts in the past ten years. That leads to an average of about more than three concerts a year, with the peak of about six concerts per year in the same venue. These concerts are usually a part of a series of concert tours throughout major European cities, making the total number of European concerts even larger. Appendix B summarizes the selected major concerts held in Musikverein of Vienna in the past ten years by Chinese instrumentalists and Chinese orchestras.⁶²

⁶⁰ Example of such multifaceted careers include Shen and Zhang who became conductors of Chinese orchestras in Australia and Singapore respectively, and George Gao as a commercial composer and music producer for several Canadian and American TV shows.

⁶¹ Representative musician as such is George Gao, who also play erhu with other genres of world music and jazz music as a fusion genre.

⁶² The data here is collected individually by the author through personal communications with many Chinese musicians in Beijing and searching journals and newspapers (hard copy and online). An unsuccessful attempt was made to obtain data from the management staffs of the Musikverein in Vienna. Thus the data here can be

The Chinese Lunar New Year Concert in 1998 in Musikverein of Vienna was the most prominent event in the world of Chinese music at that time. Even eleven years later, musicians and Chinese orchestras all over China still aspire to perform at Musikverein. Meanwhile, the media coverage of Chinese music being performed in Musikverein and across Europe has been overwhelming in major newspapers, journals and online. Most of these reports have an positive tone over every aspect of the success of the concerts and try to create a holy image of the concert and the grand concert hall, as the following passage shows:

“As the ‘musical capital of the world’, and ‘the city of music in Europe’, Vienna, the capital city of Austria, is a holy place that everyone in the music world dream of. On this holy soil, fairy tales of musical events are being written by first class orchestras and artists from all around the globe. Being able to come here to perform, and to show the world our excellence in musical performance is the greatest honor for our orchestra. The Golden Hall of Vienna has been the venue for the Chinese Lunar New Year Concert series by Wu Promotion for eight years now. It has become the single most significant and exciting annual event for the Chinese orchestral music on the international concert stage. The concerts have had impact beyond music, for it demonstrates to the world the great progress and success that China has achieved in the realm of politics, economy, and culture. The Zhejiang Gewujuyuan Chinese Orchestra is therefore very much honored to be the orchestra presenting the new year’s concert in the Golden Hall this year [2006]. We will present to the world a great and unique musical feast featuring the regional musical style of south China, and carve the beauty of our music on the walls of the Golden Hall.”⁶³

This is what I call the “Golden hall effect”. Those orchestras and individual musicians who performed at the Golden Hall can usually secure a domestic success in concert sales when they return to China,⁶⁴ and also launch new opportunities for international concert tours. For instance,

incomplete, meaning there might be more concert concerning the subject held in the Musikverein in the past ten years.

⁶³ Data obtained from Zhejiang Cultural Bureau Online

http://www.zjwh.gov.cn/dynamic/magzine/yk_detail.php?article_id=757&article_type=10, July, 2008. Translation by the author.

⁶⁴ Due to the large number of Chinese concert tours in Europe in recent years, this effect has been weakened.

Tianjin Chinese Orchestra also toured Australia in 2005 after they performed in the Golden Hall concert in Vienna.⁶⁵ Not surprisingly, besides the image of the “holy land” for musicians that Golden Hall projects to Chinese people, this effect also keeps motivating more and more Chinese orchestras and individual artists to make an effort to perform in the Golden Hall year after year.

The aspiration to perform Chinese music abroad continues to grow. One can scan through the news reports for domestic Chinese orchestra concerts, and find this kind of typical narrative:

“The Anhui Province Gewujuyuan Chinese Orchestra has only been established for a short time, and it has a long way to go to achieve the level of the first class Chinese orchestra. In order to achieve that status, we have to call on the support of our provincial government, and to improve our Chinese orchestra in terms of composition, musician training, regulation and propaganda... This being said, we will make every effort to get the opportunity to hold a concert in the Golden Hall of Vienna as soon as possible, presenting our best music.”⁶⁶

Despite the huge financial demands for the European concert tours, Chinese orchestras around the country still see them as the most important milestone for success. While most media portraits usually maintain a positive image of the tours, recent critics also criticized the unprofessional operation of many such tours.⁶⁷

From the account above, it is clear that while erhu musicians imitate violin to develop their instrumental capacity, they have also begun to maintain thriving international careers, which parallel those of many successful violin virtuosos. This is closely linked to the new trend of Chinese instrumental music on the whole. In the particular case of erhu, when musicians bring

⁶⁵ Data obtained from Chinese national newspaper *People's Daily*, Mar.4, 2005.

⁶⁶ Data obtained from China Xinhua News Agency online http://www.ah.xinhuanet.com/news2005/2006-12/08/content_8735443.htm, July, 2008. Translation by the author.

⁶⁷ One representative criticism is the article by Lun Bing, published in the China national newspaper *People's Daily*, Feb.19, 2003.

Chinese music to the world, they also develop and adapt their instrument to a diverse range of musical genres. In this sense, erhu's popularity also parallels violin as it becomes more present in the creation of new genres of world music.^{68 69} Through these developments, further changes in both musical and social identity of erhu are taking place.

3.2 "TRADITIONAL" MUSIC AND CHINA'S MODERNITY

Erhu's development in the last ten years or so shows the long-standing controversy over the issue of tradition and modernity in Chinese culture and value in the 20th century. As an ancient civilization which has undergone tremendous social changes in the last one hundred years, China's modernization since the 1980s has been the center of discussions for Chinese and Westerners alike, and music is no exception.

In August 1979, a Chinese music ensemble from the Central Conservatory of Music performed at the second Durham Oriental Music Festival in England.⁷⁰ While the ensemble, consisting of the best musicians from the top conservatory in China, successfully delivered what they thought to represent the best of the traditional Chinese music, it nevertheless received some

⁶⁸ This is in the sense that violin is already used in a much wider genres of music in many different parts of the world, such as violin in jazz music, violin in Indian Carnatic music, violin in klezmer music, etc. It's widely present in a variety of genres, and erhu is also developing in such a direction.

⁶⁹ Such efforts include fusion musical genres of erhu with jazz, rock, Indian, Middle Eastern, Latin American, Country music, etc, by George Gao in Canada(see Gao's personal website <http://www.ggao.com/erhu-master-georgegao-gao.html>), and also experimental works for erhu and Western classical instruments such as cello and piano, by Jiang Jianhua with Japanese composers.

⁷⁰ This particular kind of ensemble, consist of only about ten musicians, is essentially in the form of the chamber music type ensemble that resembles the traditional Chinese folk ensemble such as the Jiangnan Sizhu. However, musically, it is very much a miniature version of the modern Chinese orchestra, given its arrangement based on functional harmony instead of the traditional heterophony found in Jiangnan Sizhu, as well as the modern conservatory trained musicians who perform music strictly from reading a thoroughly composed score.

of the most controversial debate and criticisms by the Western scholars, journalists and musicians, primarily in regarding to the authenticity of the presentation and the understanding of the “traditional music” (Fang 1981: 1). These skeptical criticisms include comments such as “the playing by the group from the Chinese Central Conservatory isn’t really compatible with what they claim to be presenting: traditional music”; “Obviously they have been influenced by Western music”; “They have modernized tradition”; and questions like “Traditional Chinese music is slow, so where does such violent and complicated music as ‘Ambush on All Sides’ come from?”⁷¹, and so on (ibid:3). On the one hand, Mr. Fang, the head of the ensemble, was delighted at the strength of his own response to these questions, and on the other, rather taken aback at its occasional vehemence (ibid:1).

Two years later, Fang articulated his position and response to what he called the “sudden spread of some incredible criticism and doubt” during the Festival in an article entitled “A Discussion on Chinese National Musical Traditions” in the 1981 issue of *Asian Music*.⁷² In this article, Fang centered his arguments on five questions, namely, “What do we mean by tradition?”, “The classification of traditional music cannot be made on the basis of age”, “Traditional music has developed, it has great vitality, it is not static”, “How should we handle traditional music?”, and “Do we need to study Western music, and how should we study it?” While many of his points evidently came from the Marxist viewpoint of history and music, he made a strong point on the relativity of “tradition” and argued that the so called “Chinese music

⁷¹ “Ambush on All Sides” is a well known traditional piece for *pipa*, the four string pear-shape Chinese lute. This piece depicts the battle scene from ancient China and thus contains many “violent” passages featuring virtuosic right hand skills that is comparable to (or beyond) the most complicated skills used on guitar.

⁷² This article is originally written by Fang Kun and published in the Chinese journal *Renmin Yinyue* [People’s Music], 178, (Beijing, Jan.1980), 38-40. It was translated by K.Pratt in England and published in *Asian Music* with an Introduction by R. Provine and responses by R. Provine and A. Thrasher.

tradition” is the result of continuous change throughout history and borrowing from other cultures.

Following the article by Fang are the responses by two Western scholars, R. Provine and A. Thrasher. As polite as he was to applaud the success of the performance, Provine agreed with many of Fang’s points but eventually maintained his criticism on the ensemble by arguing that it is perfectly fine that there is a “modernized” traditional Chinese music as long as the “authentic” traditional music can continue to co-exist with it.⁷³ Thrasher also expressed his disagreement with Fang’s understanding of “tradition” and pointed out the many aspects of distinctions between “traditional” (or pre-20th century tradition) and “modern” Chinese music socially and musically.⁷⁴

Today, almost three decades later, the modernized Chinese music flourishes as erhu performers arrange and perform violin repertoire and newly composed concertos, and numerous Chinese orchestras, ensembles and soloists tour Europe every year. Although the selection of repertoire of such tours tend to be “traditional”, it’s only possible that the presentation of the concerts have been more westernized than that of the 1979 ensemble performance in Durham, in regard to many aspects such as the manner of presentation, composition and instrumentation that resemble the large scale Western symphony orchestras under the baton of a maestro conductor, with music composed by Western trained, internationally famous Chinese composers. In the

⁷³ The original text by Provine is stronger: “But the authentic, unwesternized styles of Chinese music must be nourished and protected”.(Fang 1981: 14)

⁷⁴ The different positions by Fang and the Western scholars seen here illustrate the idea of Orientalism, as articulated by Edward Said (1979). While Fang (representing the Chinese) defended himself by adopting a view of “tradition” as in motion and ever-changing, as Nettl argued in his point of continuity and change (see Chapter 1.2), Provine here may be viewed by some as being an Orientalist---that Chinese music is to be “protected”---an authority of the West over the Orient. It should be noted that such an attitude is by no means exclusive of Westerners; many Chinese musicians and the intellectual class equally advocated the resistance of “change”, and felt that the existent Chinese musical practice should be protected from “contamination” by Western influences. This topic deserves more treatment, but it is not to be elaborated here.

mean time, the kind of debate and doubt on the authenticity of tradition is rarely raised today, and the modernized Chinese music has been very well received in the West as the representation of Chinese “traditional” music.⁷⁵ From this change of the Western reception of Chinese music, I argue the change of China’s international image as a whole in the past three decades: while Westerners in the 1970s typically expected an old China that was mysteriously Oriental and distant, today people have a different image of China as a modernized nation, one that they can relate to.⁷⁶⁷⁷

As a rising economic power, China’s modernity has been present internationally in many aspects especially in the last decade, as the successful Olympic Games 2008 in Beijing evidenced. In regard to music, in the past two decades, many Chinese musicians of Western music, including violinists, cellists, pianists and composers have become renowned in the classical music world, including most recently the enormously popular Chinese superstar pianist Lang Lang. The images of these musicians all contributed to the construction of a modernized Chinese identity for outsiders, which many Chinese “traditional” instrumentalists, including erhu soloists, enjoyed and in turn caught up.

⁷⁵ One example of this kind of “take-for-granted” Western newspaper report of such concert that I found in the Swiss *Panorama Journal Online* reads like this: “The China Traditional Orchestra Zhejiang will be in Switzerland for the Chinese New Year 2006 on January 22, 2006 for the first time ...The «Great Chinese New Year concert» is presented, like every year, by one of the top traditional orchestras of China. A great variety of sounds, musical instruments, which are unknown in the western world and the magnificent, traditional costumes of the musicians create a very special atmosphere for this event. The compositions and the traditional folk music come from the great Chinese musical tradition. Some famous, contemporary composers like Tan Dun and Zhao Jiping, who have also written a lot of film music, add to the repertory with additional music for traditional orchestras. Small ensembles, where the sound of some solo instruments is in the foreground as well as big orchestras will contribute to the concert... The «Great Chinese New Year Concert» has become an outstanding social event in China and Europe.” (<http://www.panoramajournal.ch/china/chinesenewyear/newyearconcert/chinaconcert2006/index.html>, obtained July 2008.)

⁷⁶ “More open minded” is a phrase frequently used by some of the erhu students in the West to describe the Western listeners they encounter today (personal communication).

⁷⁷ This change encompasses an enormous amount of complicated factors, which is not to be elaborated here.

In the domestic sphere, China's modernity is even more evident. Conducting fieldwork on erhu in the early 1990s, scholar Jonathan Stock wrote:

“Having achieved the status of an art instrument, it [erhu] now may be losing the bastion of popular support that sustained it for many hundreds of years, and is being implicitly redefined by many of China's youth as an instrument more suitable for the portrayal of old Chinese culture and the addition of pastoral character to film scores than for the musical expression of their personalities. The debate amongst them is no longer whether the erhu is respectable or not but whether it is relevant or not” (Stock 1993a:106).

This account is quite accurately in accordance with my observation of my peers' perception of erhu and Chinese traditional music (“traditional” in the sense of both relatively older and newer Chinese musical traditions) overall as I was growing up. One can only speculate that in the past decade or so, the change in Chinese instrumental music can be an effective way to make it more “relevant” to the modern China so that it will not fade out from the younger generations who grew up eating McDonald's and listening to the Backstreet Boys. Music listeners are no different from other cultural consumers who evolve in the larger environment when everything is becoming “modernized”.

Following my proposal of the change of China's international image as reflected in the international reception of Chinese music, I argue here that China's modernity, which is decisively at large now, is one of the major determinants in shaping the development of erhu musical landscape in the past decade or so. This is evidenced by the two aforementioned facts: first, the question of erhu being “relevant” to the modernity of China; and second, the “work of imagination” according to Appadurai (1996:3), as mentioned in chapter 3.0 and discussed in 3.1 through the international careers of erhu soloists, one of the main evidences of the strong presence of modernity among erhu musicians.

Thrasher pointed out an important fact in the process of acculturation in the modern Chinese music (Fang 1981:45). He quoted Jacques Maquet (1972:10), who argues that “In any culture, the origin of a trait matters little; it is its integration in the social heritage of a group that makes it an authentic element of its culture”. Hobsbawn (1983) also speaks of this as what he calls the “invented tradition”: “...we should expect it [invented tradition] to occur more frequently when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which ‘old’ traditions had been designed, producing new ones to which they were not applicable, or when such old traditions and their institutional carriers and promulgators no longer prove sufficiently adaptive and flexible, or are otherwise eliminated: in short, when there are sufficiently large and rapid changes on the demand of the supply side...such formalizations are not confined to so-called ‘traditional’ societies, but also have their place, in one form or another, in ‘modern’ ones” (Hobsbawn 1983:5).

Maquet and Hobsbawn’s perspectives combined with Appadurai’s comment on “modernity at large”, shed lights on how we look at the change occurred in the erhu tradition. First, it is evident that the transformation of tradition from an older one (predating 20th century China) to a newly “invented” one (as practiced today) often occur overtly to the cultural insiders, rendering them partially unaware of such change. Such case is seen in the 1979 Chinese ensemble at the Durham, who was criticized for presenting “modernized” Chinese music when claiming to present something “traditional”. In a similar manner, many conservatory-trained erhu performers today do not have the experience performing in a traditional ensemble such as Jiangnan Sizhu, and consider their westernized Chinese instrumental music to be “traditional”, as it is indeed so

labeled in China.⁷⁸ In America, I have also encountered erhu musicians who claimed that their music has a long history of a thousand years, not realizing that the traditional erhu repertoire that they grew up with can be dated to less than a hundred years ago. Also, such notion of “traditional” music is often taken for granted abroad, as few Americans I encountered are aware of the fact that any erhu music they hear today has such a short history with a strong Western influence. One may say that the concept of “traditional” Chinese music has been redefined in the “modernized” setting, and that the modernized Chinese music has been successfully acculturated.

Second, as Hobsbawn suggested, the “invention” of such newer traditions is often linked to social changes where the old ones are not “applicable” any more. This is in accordance with my argument of the “relevance” of erhu to China’s modernity. In this case, the driving force of modernity at large in China has propelled erhu musicians to change, resulting in an altered “modern” tradition of music and the musician behaviors representative of the strong presence of modernity.

⁷⁸ This situation is also confirmed by Lau’s fieldwork in China (Lau 2008:17). Upon visiting the city of Chaozhou in south China, he was taken by the local officials to hear “traditional” music whereas what was actually presented to him was very much Westernized.

4.0 CONCLUSION

This thesis documented and interpreted the development of erhu in the last two decades or so as yet another phase in its short history as a concert instrument in the past century. Like other kinds of music, the development of erhu as a concert instrument and its identity has been closely connected with the social changes in China. As articulated in Chapter 3.2, two interconnected aspects stand out as illuminating for the conclusion of the thesis: first, the successful “acculturation” of the recreated “invented tradition” (Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983) of modern Chinese instrumental music, as accepted both domestically and internationally; second, the definite modernity “at large” (Appadurai 1996) in China today, as witnessed by the changes in reference to the “relevance” to modernity of erhu playing in the past decade or so.

In proposing such a theoretical resolution to the topic in question, I conclude that the drastic change in erhu is the result of the social change through the modernity that is present among the musicians, a driving force from social to musical. However, we must acknowledge the presence of other factors that contributed to this phenomenon, of which I will selectively discuss three. The first factor is the relatively short history of erhu as a solo instrument in the 20th century. The short history of this tradition implies fewer constraints in development (comparing to a tradition with a repertoire of thousand years old such as *qin*, which is more resistant to radical innovations) resulting from a distinctive break from the past and disassociation with its other historical symbolic meanings. Another possible effect resulted from the shortness of tradition is

the need to always seek for more potentialities of the instrument by musicians. This impetus comes from the nature of the instrument itself, and can be seen in the excitement and desire for a technical virtuosity among erhu musicians.⁷⁹

Second, in conjunction to the “relevance” to modernity, I consider another factor in this change: the power relations among Western classical music, modern traditional Chinese instrumental music, and pre-20th century traditional Chinese music in China today. Since the mass introduction of Western classical music to China in the early 20th century, China has not only produced composers, musicians, conductors, and scholars that are Western trained, but the Western style musical system also becomes the model to the setup of the musical education systems and performing institutions in China. More importantly, this is not confined in the sphere of Western music in China. Its power reached over the Chinese instrumental music. In sum, the decades of domination by the Western trained Chinese composers and conductors has directed the change over the Chinese instrumental music, because the powerful position they occupy as the leader and creator of new music in the field.

Third, the issue of social status of erhu musicians is also relevant to the change. This is tied to two phenomena. In the first place, erhu’s low social status in pre-1949 context is continued to be constantly reminded in the media of post-1949 New China, as demonstrated by the representative case of street beggar musician A-Bing(See Chapter 1.4). Thus, erhu musicians developing their new solo tradition in the New China do not want to be associated with the old image, as seen also in the strong division of professional erhu musicians from the amateur musicians (See Chapter 2.3). This leads to my second point: the image of the high social status of professional musicians in the Western society and its impact on how Chinese instrumental musicians have been

⁷⁹ Also comparing to qin, another important factor in the change of erhu is the change from a low social status to a higher social status musical instrument, as addressed briefly in Chapter 1.4.

constructing their social image (See Chapter 3.1), which has resulted in a higher social status. These are closely connected to the phenomenon discussed in this thesis up to this point.

In his article “A Musical Instrument and A Century: The Last One Hundred Years of Erhu” (Qiao 2000), the highly respected Chinese musicologist Qiao Jianzhong commented: “Speaking impartially, we should acknowledge that, [no matter whether people like it or dislike it], an instrument [such as erhu] can have so much glamorous achievements; so many enrichments; such diverse creation [of different musical styles]; such a large team [of composers, performers, and educators], this is fortunate, and those who contributed to it [the last a hundred years of erhu] deserve to be proud of their achievements” (Qiao 2000:44).

Despite this kind of positive appraisal of the development of erhu, many musicians, conductors, music critics and music scholars are concerned with the future direction of erhu and Chinese instrumental music on the whole.⁸⁰ The debate, very much like those between Fang and Provine, centers around the question of tradition and modernity.

Senior erhu musicians that I spoke with, especially those of the third and fourth generations defined by Liu (1989), who are in their eighties and their fifties respectively now, commonly express their dissatisfaction with the predominance of instrumental techniques that resemble those of violin, and the lack of mastery by young performers of the more traditional regional Chinese folk music styles. Since most of the third generation erhu musicians have already retired by the time of mid-1990s, they do not attempt to play either arranged violin repertoires or the

⁸⁰ One conductor I'm referring to particularly is Peng Jiapeng, the principal conductor of China Broadcasting Chinese Orchestra. Although Peng has conducted several Chinese orchestral concerts in the Musikverein of Vienna, he criticizes the westernization in Chinese instrumental music and contends that “the future of Chinese instrumental music is not in the Golden Hall”. Data obtained from China Cultural Market website <http://www.ccm.gov.cn/show.php?aid=35154&cid=48><http://www.ccm.gov.cn/show.php?aid=35154&cid=48>, July, 2008.

newly composed concertos for erhu, which left them feeling more and more disconnected from the mainstream of new erhu performance and the new identity of erhu soloist.

The fourth generation musicians, on the other hand, are respected as the teachers and masters of the younger erhu musicians today, and many of them do keep up with the newly arranged violin repertoires and composed concertos. However, their training in the more traditional musical styles and their responsibilities as the leading figures in the field often make them worry about the future. Many stress the significance of mastering the diverse regional musical styles of fiddle playing on erhu (Zhou 2008), while others argue that the violin techniques can be only used to enrich the erhu playing but should not be taken as the main trend of future development.⁸¹

Music scholars often express their concerns for the loss of tradition in a variety of contexts, including the musicological, compositional and educational spheres. Some of them hold a neutral stance, while others express a strong opinion:

“...the development of erhu in recent years has significantly changed the notions of many erhu performers today. Many people consider the techniques to be the most important. As a result, even among the high school erhu students,⁸² only those who can play the Rhapsody No.1 (by Wang) and Concerto No.1) (by Guan) can stand out as the best performers. Those who perform the classic pieces by Liu Tianhua are considered as rare cases [and only mediocre playing]...if this situation continues, I see no future of the erhu music. We all know that each era has its own favored music styles, and music is marked by the distinctive characteristics that belong to each era. However, we should never forget that today’s music comes from yesterday’s tradition, and remind ourselves that there would be no rhapsodies or concertos of today had there been no Liu Tianhua and his ten compositions. Moreover, who knows that those who are good at playing these rhapsodies and concertos today do not play well the works of Liu Tianhua and Abing at all. We should be reminded that there is the heart and the mind besides those

⁸¹ In my interview with Zhang Yuming in Singapore, 2008, he often makes this point by arguing that the erhu should not dwell on the showoff of the techniques and compete with the violin, since many techniques considered very difficult on erhu are in fact much easier to play on violin, due to the physical difference of the two. Thus, he contends that erhu musicians should take what it is good at and root in the traditional folk musical styles of China and the world and only in this way it can show its best side.

⁸² Here the “high school” is particularly referring to the specialized preparatory high schools of the conservatories in China.

fingers. This heart and mind can not only control the fingers but also knows how to respect the tradition and how to deal with the relationship between the new and the old, the past and present...” (Qiao 2005: 393).

It is hard to predict how the future of erhu is going to be, given the dramatic speed of change of things in China in the current situation. It is possible that by “modernization”, erhu is regaining some of its popular support among the Chinese people. One thing is for sure: it will continue to interact with the social, political and economic context of China, while possibly reflecting an increasing influence resulted from the international musical activities.

APPENDIX A

Table 8. Concerts of traditional Chinese music in Musikverein, Vienna, 1998-2008

Year	Artist	Notes
1998	China Central Chinese Orchestra	Chinese Lunar New Year Concert by Wu Promotion
1999	China Central Chinese Orchestra	Chinese Lunar New Year Concert by Wu Promotion
2000	China Broadcasting Chinese Orchestra	Chinese Lunar New Year Concert by Wu Promotion
2001	China Broadcasting Chinese Orchestra	Chinese Lunar New Year Concert by Wu Promotion
	China Shanghai Chinese Orchestra	Chinese Lunar New Year Concert
2002	Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra	Chinese Lunar New Year Concert by Wu Promotion
	Jinan Qianwei Chinese Orchestra	Chinese Lunar New Year Concert
	Hongxing Chinese Orchestra	
	Beijing Jinfan Chinese Orchestra	Amateur orchestra
	Shandong School of arts Chinese Orchestra	Professional Student orchestra
	China Children's Chorus	
2003	China Shanghai Chinese Orchestra	Chinese Lunar New Year Concert by Wu Promotion
	Jiangyin School of Arts Tianhua Chinese Orchestra	Professional Student orchestra
2004	Nanjing Chinese Orchestra	Chinese Lunar New Year Concert by Wu Promotion
2005	Tianjin Chinese Orchestra	Chinese Lunar New Year Concert by Wu Promotion
	Huludao Zheng Ensemble	
	Qibaoligaoyema Horsehead Fiddle Ensemble	

	Zhejiang Chinese Orchestra	Chinese Lunar New Year Concert
2006	Zhejiang Gewujuyuan Chinese Orchestra	Chinese Lunar New Year Concert by Wu Promotion
	Xiong Manling, vocalist	
	Dong Fang Chinese Orchestra	
	Shimen Shiyuan School Chinese Chorus	Amateur Chorus
2007	Weifang Academy of Art Chinese Orchestra	
	China Pugongying Youth Chinese Orchestra	Amateur Student Orchestra
	Tianjin Youth Chinese Orchestra	Amateur Student Orchestra
	<i>Graz. Symphony</i> Orchestra/China Shiyuan Chorus/Chinese Mongolian vocalists Peng Jiapeng, conductor	
	Huaxia Chinese Orchestra (China Conservatory of Music Chinese Orchestra)	Chinese Lunar New Year Concert by Wu Promotion
2008	Deng Jiandong, erhu soloist/Czech National Symphony Orchestra	
	China Guangdong Chinese Orchestra	Chinese Lunar New Year Concert by Wu Promotion
	Guangdong Gewujuyuan Chinese Orchestra	
	CCTV China Record Corporation	

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