

RESEARCH ON GUQIN COMPOSITION IN MAINLAND CHINA IN THE 1950s AND 1960s: SOME WORKS OF YU SHAOZE [喻绍泽]

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Abstract

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, a group of guqin players from the folk were integrated into official music research and educational institutions. Under the guidance of the cultural policies advocated by the new regime, they created a considerable number of new guqin compositions that reflected the characteristics of the times. This paper primarily focuses on the historical and morphological study of nine guqin pieces composed by Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽] (1903–1988), the earliest professional guqin music teacher in the west China, between 1956 and 1966. In the historical research section, the article examines the historical context of these works from two perspectives: the personal circumstances of the guqin player and the socio-political atmosphere in China. In the musicological research section, the article studies these works within the “author-work” relationship to investigate how the guqin player's performance experience shaped the forms of these compositions. Simultaneously, it explores how the author responded to the political demands and tastes of the Chinese authorities regarding music compositions during the 1950s and 1960s in his creative process.

Keywords

guqin; guqin composition; modern guqin history, Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽]

INTRODUCTION

This paper is the research on guqin compositions created by the officially recognized guqin player Yu Shaoze (喻绍泽, 1903-1988) between 1956 and 1966. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the new regime systematically increased the status of guqin. In the 1950s, a group of folk guqin players were incorporated into official research and education institutions, becoming the pioneers of modern professional guqin education in mainland China. Simultaneously, the policy of ‘culture and art serving the workers, farmers, and soldiers’ (文化艺术为工农兵服务) proposed by the authorities in the 1950s and 1960s consistently influenced the works created by these guqin players, reflecting communist ideological themes. In 1956, Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽] was recruited by the Southwest Music School (the predecessor of today's Sichuan Conservatory of Music) and became the school's earliest guqin professional teacher. Over the next decade, he created a total of nine original guqin compositions, the most among his contemporaries.

However, current research on 20th-century guqin history (Xu [许健], 2009; Lin [林晨], 2011; Wang Yong [王咏], 2009; Shi [施咏], 2011; Feng [冯光钰], 1999) and musicology studies (Yu & Zhu [喻文燕、朱铮], 2001) has not given sufficient attention to this kind of works. In 1966, ‘New Sounds of Guqin’, which was published by an official institution included guqin compositions from this period. In the preface, it was stated that:

‘The purpose of creating these works was an attempt to change the previous predominantly feudal

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and capitalist orientation and take a commendable first step towards serving socialism, workers, farmers, and soldiers' (New Sounds of Guqin, 1966: i).

While this official explanation provides a unified narrative on the genesis of these works, China, as a country with vast land and population, often witnesses varying individual experiences among those situated at the center or periphery of political movements. Additionally, the perspectives of central and local authorities regarding the same events or historical periods may differ. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a more in-depth historical investigation into Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽]'s personal experiences to clarify the context behind the creation of these works.

Furthermore, what are the morphological characteristics and causes of these works? As a folk guqin player, what connections do Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽]'s works exhibit with his long-term musical habits? As works born in a specific era, how did he respond to political requirements and artistic tastes? These questions lead this study, in the music analysis section, not only to analyze the morphometric but also to identify the manifestations of Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽]'s musical experience and prevailing artistic tastes of that time in these works. In addition, this paper also attempts to place them within the context of music production to explore their unique significance in 20th-century guqin history.

YU SHAOZE [喻绍泽] IN THE 1950s: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

A series of documentation indicates that the initiation of Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽]'s composition is directly linked to his circumstances and the social and political environment in China in the late 1950s. Firstly, shortly after the Communist Party regime took control of Chengdu in 1950, as he was born from a landlord family, he faced repercussions from the Party and was deprived of the majority of his property. Between 1950 and 1956, Yu went through a tough period, relying on odd jobs and the support of friends for survival. Therefore, teaching the guqin at a public music academy was, for him, primarily a stable source of income to ensure survival.

From a societal perspective, during a period when the state controlled everything, having an occupation in a public institution meant a certain status. In terms of political identity, it meant having a position in the new state. As one of the few “elderly new teachers” from the folk without any professional music background, Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽] transformed the guqin from entertainment into a means of offsetting the disadvantages of his social background. It served as a way to prove the legitimacy and value of his existence. Although the new state initially took from him before giving back, his subsequent actions showed a strong sense of gratitude toward this job. The gratitude gave rise to the consolidation of this new identity, leading to creative endeavors as a means of reinforcing this newfound sense of self.

Meanwhile, a series of political movements formed another crucial role. In 1956, witnessing the outbreak of the ‘Hungarian Revolution’, Mao Zedong (毛泽东 1893-1976), out of concern for the stability of the regime, in the spring of 1957, called non-party intellectuals to provide suggestions and help with the Party’s rectification campaign. However, a large influx of intense criticisms led Mao to perceive a challenge to the Communist Party’s leadership, eventually evolving into the ‘Anti-Rightist Campaign’ (反右运动) in 1957. And this movement had two chain reactions.

Firstly, it led to the initiation of the ‘Great Leap Forward’ [大跃进], a movement that attempted to achieve unprecedented results in industry and agriculture by relying on the enthusiasm of the masses. However, the movement disrupted the country’s economy and people’s lives over the next few years. However, before the destruction became evident in early 1958, the concept of *leap forward*, initially appearing in industrial and agricultural production, was also applied to the humanities. On 10th of March, 1958, Central Politburo member Chen Boda (陈伯达 1904-1989) stated that philosophy and social sciences also needed to leap forward through the method of ‘prioritizing the recent, disregarding the past and learning by doing’ (厚古薄今, 边干边学). Simultaneously, due to the deepening alienation of intellectuals caused by the ‘Anti-Rightist

Campaign’, Mao fostered the idea of cultivating a cadre of intellectuals among workers, farmers, and soldiers. Then, as an expression of this idea, a large-scale movement for the creation and collection of ‘folk songs’ was launched. These were poems created by the workers, farmers, and soldiers. This extensive ‘literary experiment’ was referred to as the ‘New Folk Song Movement’ (新民歌运动).

In the fall of 1957, the school where Yu worked was accused of being a place dominated by the bourgeoisie (Jiang & Zhu 江平、朱萸 1987), lacking emphasis on traditional folk music, which was considered dangerous at the time. Therefore, by the summer of 1958, when the movement was in full swing, the school keenly participated in this. In September, Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽], dispatched by the school, led students to a remote town in northeastern Sichuan. They worked alongside local farmers and steel factory workers, engaging in labor and documenting their poetry creation. During this time, Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽] began to compose melodies for the collected peasants’ poems, marking the starting point of his composition experience. Some of the melodic materials in his works can be traced back to drafts at this time. From the initiation of the *Anti-Rightist Campaign* in 1957 to the ‘Great Leap Forward’ and then the ‘New Folk Song Movement’, the top-level political life was transmitted down to individuals. The following is a speech given by Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽] in a meeting after his return to the school in 1959, demonstrating the profound influence of the prevalent political discourse on him:

‘I want to talk about the issue of prioritizing the recent and disregarding the past, which is most serious in the context of guqin. In guqin pieces, ancient works are prevalent, while new compositions and those reflecting reality are almost nonexistent, even if there are, only one or two. This is extremely inappropriate because when ancient pieces are played, the masses do not understand them. If there are new pieces reflecting reality, the masses will enjoy listening. Art and literature are meant to serve politics, to serve the workers, farmers, and soldiers. However, guqin has precisely fallen into this trap, with too many ancient pieces and too few new ones. In the future, I will place new and reality-reflecting elements prominently on the guqin. I will take matters into my own hands and boldly compose. In terms of the ratio between ancient and modern pieces, modern ones should account for two-thirds, and ancient ones should account for one-third’ (Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽], 1958).

Therefore, regarding the historical context, the emergence of these new works is a result of Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽] being entrusted with the task of constructing a ‘socialist’ guqin education. As an elite art, guqin conflicted with the Communist Party’s advocacy of a populist artistic view in terms of aesthetics. Therefore, as the responsible person for education in public institutions, he urgently needed a repertoire that exudes a new temperament. This mindset profoundly shaped the tone of his composition and explained why his output surpassed his peers. From a personal perspective, gaining recognition in the new nation as a “professional teacher” was crucial for an intellectual who grew up in the old era. This endorsement of legitimacy was beneficial for self-preservation in the uncertain political environment.

Yu’s positive attitude and substantial output bring him positive effects. Coupled with his consistent avoidance of political issues, and maintaining a harmonious and mutually beneficial relationship with the authorities, he remained unaffected by the political movements that occurred during this period until the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution in 1966.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS ON YU SHAOZE [喻绍泽]’S WORKS

Currently, apart from studies in the fields of history, aesthetics, and literature (Hu 2021, Jia 2014, Dang 2021), musicological research focuses on structural, modal, and tuning issues (Yang [杨荫浏], 1956; Cheng [成公亮], 1987; Lam, 1993; Liang [梁铭越], 1991; Wang [王震亚], 2002). Additionally, some studies on guqin music have expanded from one-dimensional textual analysis to multidimensional research incorporating performance techniques, auditory perception, and kinesthetic aspects (Yung, 1984; Huang [黄瓊慧], 2007; Du [杜达金], 1995; Hu [胡向阳], 2002). However, since the research objects are primarily ancient pieces, researchers face historical texts

created by obscured authors and continually adapted by later generations. This situation makes it challenging to discuss these works within the framework of the “author-work” relationship.

As modern compositions, Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽]’s nine works bring a new dimension to the discussion by providing insight into the “presence” of Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽]’s musical experience. His extensive collection of transcriptions, recorded performances, and personal descriptions of musical experiences allow us to examine the connection between his musical experience and the formal aspects of his compositions within the context of the “author-work” relationship. Therefore, the design of the analytical methods in this study is based on the assumption that Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽]’s compositional techniques stem from his experience with traditional musical pieces, and these experiences manifest in various forms in his compositions.

In a detailed note from his later years, Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽] listed 12 personal pieces he frequently performed. This listing serves as the basis for statistical analysis and comparison of formal indicators between his repertoire and the nine compositions in this study. The versions of the scores used for the analysis of both sets, except for ‘Leap Forward Song and Cherishing Springtime’, are handwritten versions by Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽], using simplified and abridged notation, derived from his publication ‘Guqin Textbooks.1’ in 1961.

Compositions	Repertoires
<i>Leaping Forward Song</i> (跃进歌声)	<i>Peilan</i> (佩兰, Wearing an Orchid)
<i>Singing for the Communist Party</i> (歌唱共产党)	<i>Liushui</i> (流水, The Floating Water)
<i>Remembering Bitterness and Cherishing Sweetness</i> (忆苦思甜)	<i>Xiaoxiangshuiyun</i> (潇湘水云, The Misty Scenery above the Xiao River and Xiang River)
<i>Singing Praises to the Three Red Banners</i> (歌颂三面红旗)	<i>Gusizhongsheng</i> (古寺钟声, The Toll of Bells in Ancient Temples)
<i>Song of Plowing the Fields</i> (耕田之歌)	<i>Pingshaluoyan</i> (平沙落雁, Wild Geese Descending on a Flat Sandy Plain)
<i>Joyful New Year's Eve</i> (欢乐的除夕)	<i>Yangchun</i> (阳春, Springtime)
<i>The joy of the countryside in Spring</i> (春天农村的欢乐)	<i>Wuyewuqiufeng</i> (梧叶舞秋风, The leaves of the Chinese parasol tree dancing in the autumn wind)
<i>Tea-Picking Song</i> (采茶歌)	<i>Meihuasannong</i> (梅花三弄, Three Variations of Plum Blossom)
<i>Cherishing Springtime</i> (留恋春光)	<i>Gaoshan</i> (高山, The High Mountain)
	<i>Chunshantingdujian</i> (春山听杜鹃, Listening to the Cuckoo's Calls in the Mountains in Spring)
	<i>Qiuishui</i> (秋水, The Water in Autumn)
	<i>Zuinyuchangwan</i> (醉渔晚唱, The Drunken Fisherman Singing at Dusk)

Figure 1: Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽]’s compositions and repertoires concerned in this paper.

SYSTEMATIC IMPACT OF THE TRADITION

The performance experience of traditional pieces has had a comprehensive impact on the new works. Various elements of traditional pieces constitute the “fundamental code” shaping Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽]’s expression.

All the nine pieces adopt a tuning mode called ‘Zhengdiao’ (正调). Among all the pieces in the repertoire, this tuning is the most prevalent, and, except ‘Chunshantingdujuan’, all of them utilize this tuning. Correspondingly, the melodies of all the works unfold on a pentatonic scale based on the pitches C and F.





Figure 2: The pitch for each string in Zhengdiao tuning



Figure 3: Two main pentatonic modes in Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽]’s work

Regarding the concluding notes of phrases, Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽] tends to conclude phrases on the Gong (宫, I) and Zhi (徵, V). This preference consistently runs through his works. For instance, in the second section of ‘Leaping Forward Song’, all the phrases conclude alternately on the Gong and Zhi. In ‘Tea-Picking Song’, a piece developed from the folk song Mengjiangnu (孟姜女), Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽] presents the original material by ornamenting it in the first section. While the concluding pitches of the four phrases—‘Shang Zhi’, ‘Yu’, ‘Zhi’—are consistent with the original material, in the subsequent development section, the concluding pitches revert to the ‘Gong’ and ‘Zhi’.

The melodic development techniques concerned in these works such as imitation, repetition, and ornamentation can be directly traced in his repertoire. In terms of rhythm, after categorizing the most and second-most frequently occurring rhythmic patterns, as well as the third to fifth most common patterns and others into three groups, it can be found that the most common patterns are  and . These two patterns account for 70% in both sets, while the ratios of the three groups consistently maintained at 7:2:1.

Upon these fundamental codes, fixed fingering-timbre-melodic combinations frequently utilized in ancient pieces have also appeared in new works. Firstly, there is a fixed fingering combination that appears, as the ‘qiyin’ (起音) tends towards its conclusion. In the initial stage of a piece, it is divided into two parts: the Qiyin (起音, sound starts) and the ‘rupai’ (入拍, enter the rhythm). The ‘qiyin’ serves as a prelude, while the ‘rupai’ indicates the beginning of the main melody. The opening section is commonly performed in harmonics, creating a contrast in tone and volume from the main sections. Meihuasannong, however, deviates slightly by starting with an open string and employing a fixed finger technique combination towards the end of the opening (highlighted in red). Such arrangement is also present in the ‘Joy of the Countryside in Spring’ as well as ‘Cherishing Springtime’



Figure 4: Fixed combination at the end of *Qiyin* in *Meihuasannong*. Reprint by courtesy of Prof. Zeng Chengwei.

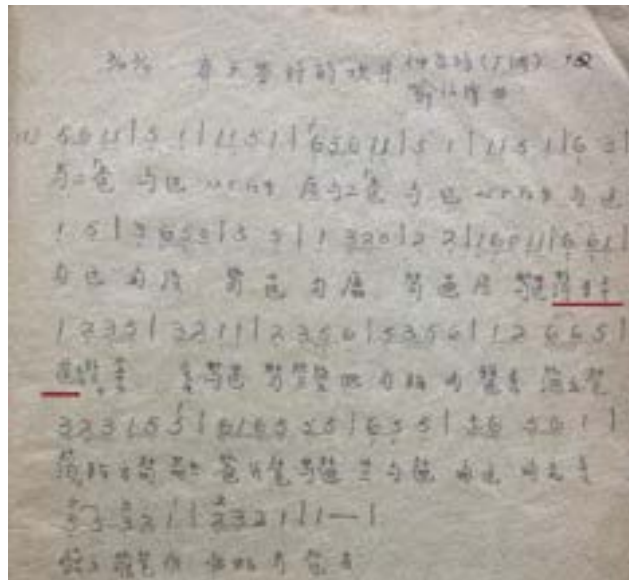


Figure 5: Fixed combination at the end of *Qiyin* in *Joy of Countryside in Spring*. Reprint by courtesy of Prof. Zeng Chengwei.

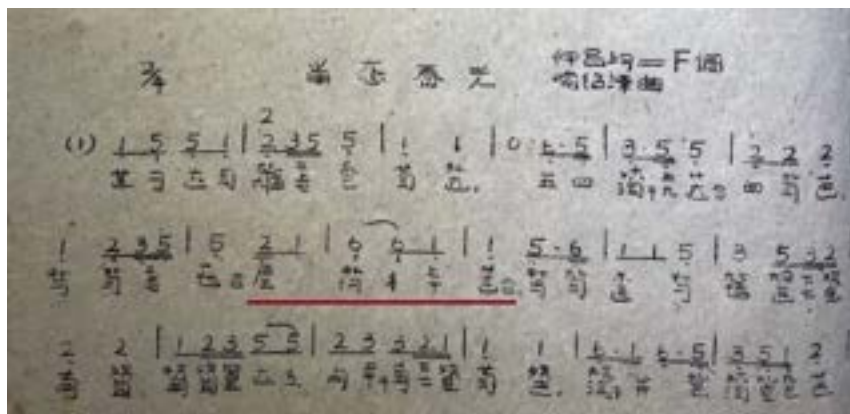


Figure 6: Fixed combination at the end of *Qiyin* in *Cherishing Springtime*. by courtesy of Prof. Zeng Chengwei.

In harmony with ‘qiyin’, at the end of ancient pieces, the fingering combination of 打圓 (Dayuan) often appears at the beginning of the final section, serving as an indication that the piece is approaching its conclusion. For example, in his representative piece, ‘Liushui’ consists of ten sections. ‘Dayuan’ appears at the beginning of the ninth section. In ‘Joyful New Year’s Eve’ (eight sections in total), the timing and performing positions remain similar to the traditional ones. In Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽]’s repertoire, six pieces exhibit this characteristic, accounting for half of them.



Figure 7: The occurrence of dayuan in Liushui. The performance note beside is: ‘Slow down the tempo and perform with a free rhythm to conclude the piece’. Zhang, H.X., Ye, Z. Y., Tang, S.X. (Eds.). (1876). Tian Wen Ge Collection of Qin Scores. Chengdu: Held and reprint by courtesy of Prof. Zeng Chengwei.

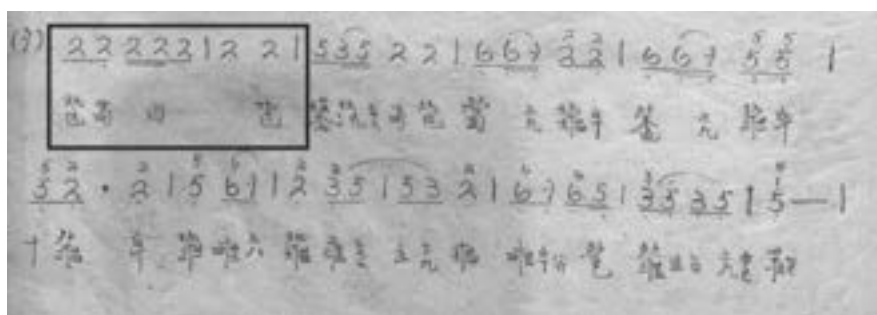


Figure 8: The occurrence of *dayuan* in *Joyful New Year's Eve*. Reprint by courtesy of Prof. Zeng Chengwei.




Furthermore, these works continue to use previously established fingering techniques, without inventing or borrowing techniques from other plucked instruments, indicating that the invention of new timbres has not become a part of his considerations.

YU SHAOZE [喻绍泽]'S CONSIDERATIONS AS A COMPOSER

The kinship between these new works and traditional ones is remarkably close. However, I don't consider them to be the same, because they emerged as a composer's explicit endeavor to accomplish a specific overarching task—the creation of “socialist” guqin works. Besides assigning titles with a communist flavor, Yu also needed to respond to the trend of “serving the workers, peasants, and soldiers with cultural art” in terms of content. How he responded can be categorized into the following three types: 1. Reinforcement or compromise; 2. Appropriation; 3. Integration.

REINFORCEMENT AND COMPROMISING

Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽]'s creative process is first reflected in his contemplation on “how to make the Guqin piece more direct, vibrant, and passionate.’ This led to his reinforcement of certain elements in his work.

Regarding the use of rhythmic patterns, among the second to fifth most frequent rhythmic patterns, there is an increased frequency of . This is the densest pattern used in all notations of Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽]'s works and repertoires. In the seven pieces,  appears in the second group. In the 14 traditional repertoires, only three pieces with  entered the second group.

Secondly, to achieve the loud and passionate qualities needed for the new qin piece, Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽] more frequently chose fingerings that could produce greater volume. Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽]'s choice was to use double stops more often, with six qin pieces having a double-sound fingerings usage rate ranging from 25% to 50%. In traditional repertoires, except for *Gusizhongsheng* and *Zuiyuwanchang*, the highest double-sound fingerings usage rate did not exceed 13.67%, with most below 8.84%.

Inspired by Yung's research, I divided the guqin into three performing areas from left to right. After analyzing the movement trends of the two sets of pieces in terms of performing areas per section, I found that over 80% of traditional pieces (except *Liu Shui* and *GaoShan*) presented a similar 'mountain-shaped distribution'—starting with harmonics or open strings, moving from the left low-pitched area to the right high-pitched area, and after stable performing in the high-pitched area for one or two sections, moving back to the low-pitched area and ending with harmonics. The high-pitched area mostly appeared in the middle or later part, with the pitch showing a low-high-low trend. The frequent occurrence of harmonics or entire paragraphs composed of harmonics at the end of qin pieces indicated changes in the volume of the piece. This constituted the characteristic of qin pieces as "gentle — passionate — gentle".

This program derived from Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽]'s bodily habitual memory influenced the layout of performing areas in new works. In 'Joy of Countryside in Spring', 'Singing for the Communist Party', 'Song of Plowing', 'Joyful New Year's Eve', and 'Recalling Bitterness and Appreciating Sweetness', which have no fewer than seven sections, the high-pitched part starts in the fifth, sixth, and seventh sections and is maintained. In 'Cherishing Springtime', 'Singing Praises to the Three Red Banner', and 'Leap Forward Song', shorter pieces, the high-pitched area is compressed into one or more phrases, but still appears in the middle or later parts. However, the degree of manifestation of this program in Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽]'s different works is not consistent. For some qin pieces that require a more intense atmosphere, Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽] chooses to compromise the 'mountain-shaped layout', shortening the process of brewing emotions. In 'Recalling Bitterness and Appreciating Sweetness', after the first harmonic paragraph, Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽] starts performing directly in the middle pitch area. 'Singing for the Communist Party' chooses not to start with harmonics, beginning with the press and open string sound combination in the middle pitch area, but both pieces contain a noticeably lengthy harmonic ending segment to replace the reduced non-harmonic descending paragraphs, serving a 'cooling down' function. This can be seen as a compromise result in the design of the layout of performing areas between Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽]'s 'experiential habit' and 'compose purpose'.

Although the influence of the mountain-shaped layout is significant, there are still works that completely discard that. In *Tea-Picking Song*, Yu directly uses a folk song theme for melodic development, and the overall performance is strictly limited to the middle and low-pitch areas. It is the narrowest performing area among all works and eliminates harmonic phrases. In the 'Leap Forward Song', the high-pitched area is significantly weakened, containing only one phrase. After the first harmonic paragraph, a series of string-brushing sound effects are used to transition into a passionate state, simultaneously concluding with brief harmonic performing. Overall, the qin piece hovers in the middle and low-pitch areas, along with a double-sound usage rate of nearly one-third, making the sound full and creating distance from the mountain-shaped layout. These two can be seen as Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽]'s 'subconscious resistance' against his experiential habits in his performing layout design.

found in Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽]'s compositions, where he adapts it to new themes. In the third section of 'Singing Praises to the Three Red Banners', the same segment appears three times with variations in both the high and low pitch ranges in accordance with the 'three red banners', a term popularized during that time to represent the three political concepts: 'The Masterplan of Socialism', 'The Great Leap Forward' and 'The People's Communes' (社会主义总路线, 大跃进, 人民公社). Although this work differs significantly in aesthetics from ancient pieces that have similar structures, Yu still finds inspiration for composing sections within this traditional concept.

The appropriation of ancient pieces is not an exception in Yu's works, as clearly demonstrated in 'Joy of Countryside in Spring', which prominently displays the influence of 'Meihuasansong'. The music commences with several phrases performing mainly on open strings, extending until the rupai, bearing a close resemblance to the same section of 'Meihuasansong'. In the subsequent fourth and fifth sections, the same harmonic melody is repeated twice in different pitch ranges, aligning with the performance areas of the harmonic sections in 'Meihuasansong'. This piece, being the only one among Yu's works with a specific title for each section, in its fifth and sixth sections, exhibits similarities in both textual titles and performance areas and techniques with the fifth and sixth sections of 'Meihuasansong'. For instance, the image of "flute sound" is mentioned in the subtitles of both pieces, and the highest pitch in the melody of both pieces appears in the sixth section.

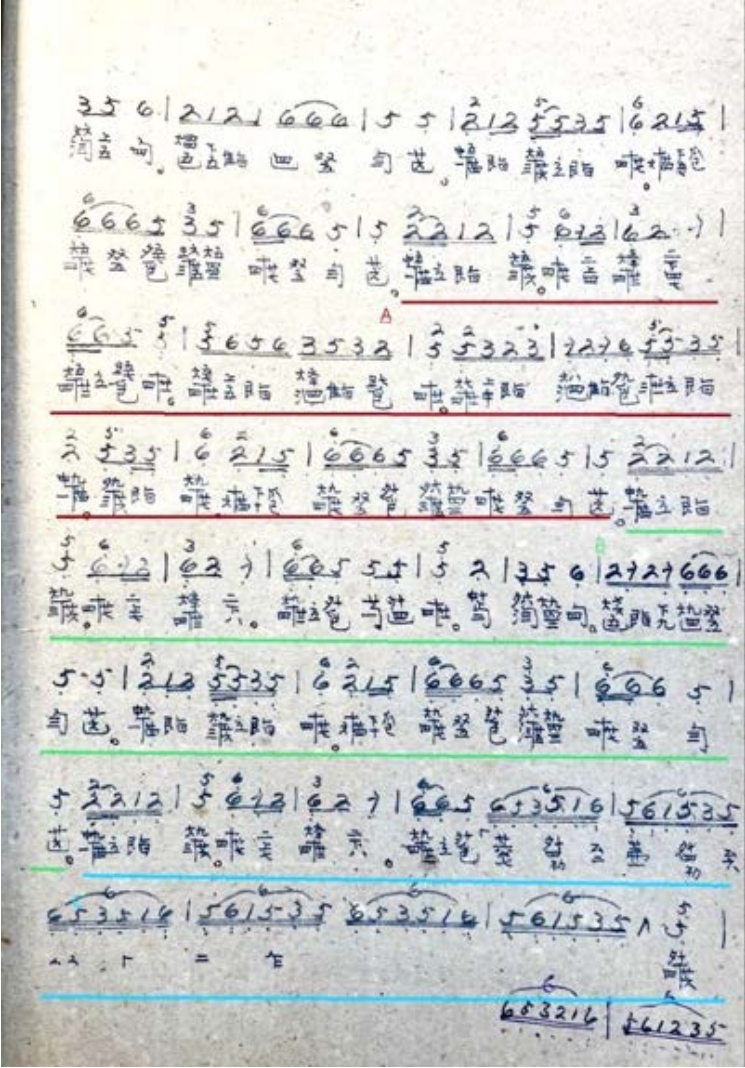


Figure 11: Repetition of the same theme in different areas in *Singing Praises to the Three Red Banners*.
By courtesy of Prof. Zeng Chengwei.

	<i>Meihuasannong</i>	<i>The joy of the countryside in Spring</i>
Title of fifth section	三弄横江，隔江长叹声 In the third variation, the aroma of the plum blossoms extends even beyond the river, prompting admiration from those on the opposite bank	村前村后，燕语莺啼 The calls of swallows and orioles spread throughout the surroundings of the village
Performing area and timbre	The harmonic theme fully repeated in the high-pitch area	The harmonic theme fully repeated in the high-pitch area
Title of the sixth section	玉箫声 The sound of jade flute	短笛声声，响彻云霄 The sound of the bamboo flute echoes through the sky.
Performing area and timbre	Combination of pressed sounds and open string in a high-pitch area	Combination of pressed sounds and open string in a high-pitch area

Figure 12: The comparison of the titles and performance situations between the fifth and sixth sections of the two pieces.

INTEGRATION

To give the work a more pronounced “revolutionary” character, Yu also chose to embed symbolic melodies into the composition. In the second section of ‘Leaping Forward Song,’ the concluding notes of the first three bars are F-A-c, precisely forming a major triad. These three notes represent the overtones that can be produced by a military bugle, coincidentally aligning with the first three notes of the Chinese national anthem, ‘March of the Volunteers’. This infusion imparts a dynamic atmosphere to the melody, consistent with the social sentiments during the ‘Great Leap Forward’. The subsequent melody consistently revolves around the notes F and c, and a significant amount of vertical octave harmonics technique, known as po (泼) in performing, is employed to increase the volume.

中华人民共和国国歌
(义勇军进行曲)

田 汉作词
聂 耳作曲

进行曲速度

起
来! 不 愿 做 奴 隶 的 人 们! 把 我 们 的 血 肉,
筑 成 我 们 新 的 长 城! 中 华 民 族

Figure 13: The introduction of the “March of the Volunteers”, with the fundamental tones G-B-d. Tian,

H., Nie, E. (1935). *National Anthem of the People's Republic of China (March of the Volunteers)* [Digital image]. Official Website of the Government of the People's Republic of China. https://www.gov.cn/test/2005-05/24/content_18249.htm, reused with permission.



Figure 14: The second section of the *Leaping Forward Song* with the fundamental tones F-A-c. By courtesy of Prof. Zeng Chengwei.

Another example is ‘Tea-Picking Song’, which is the only piece by Yu derived from a specific real-life event. During the Great Leap Forward period, in a state-owned tea plantation in Hubei Province, seven female tea pickers were renowned for their exceptional picking skills. They formed a labor group known as the ‘Seven Goddesses’ (七仙女). The tea they picked eventually made its way to Mao Zedong, and official newspaper reports made their deeds famous nationwide, making them a popular subject for artistic creation. In 1958, while working in the countryside, Yu recorded in his notebook the farmer’s poetry that praised these women.



Figure 15: The original melody of the folk song *Mengjiangnu*. (Jiang, M.D., 2004: 221). *Introduction to Han Ethnic Folk Songs* (). Shanghai: Shanghai Music Publishing House.

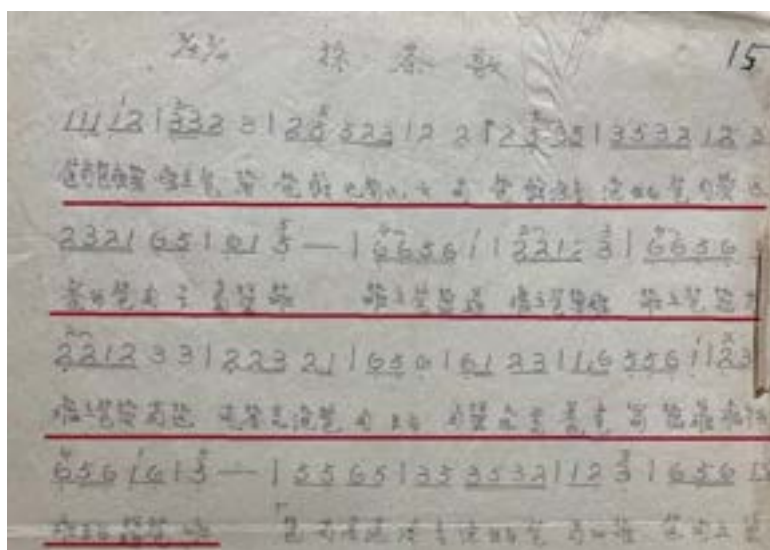


Figure 16: The theme presents part of the *Tea-picking song*. By courtesy of Prof. Zeng Chengwei

Therefore, Yu's choice of using 'Lady Meng Jiang' as the original material for this piece was not arbitrary. 'Lady Meng Jiang' represents an oppressed female figure in the original song. By incorporating the melody into the new work, Yu expressed that traditionally oppressed women could also become 'half of the sky' (半边天). A political term introduced by Mao Zedong, this expression emphasizes the equal and significant role of women alongside men in national development, social progress, and political participation with the arrival of a new era. In terms of technique, it was a reasonable choice to replace the original material, which was filled with sorrow, with a vibrant atmosphere by embellishing the melody. This kind of processing of ancient folk music to serve political propaganda was not uncommon at the time. For example, the folk song 'Qibaima' (骑白马) from northern Shaanxi underwent several adaptations to become the song 'Dongfanghong' (东方红), which praised the leaders, completing the transformation from folk to official contexts.

CONCLUSION: BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY

Yu's compositions that blend tradition and modernity reflect a transformative temperament, mirroring his personal music career and even the historical trajectory of the guqin industry in the 20th century.

While these works originated from the perspective of a professional teacher for professional education needs, they don't conform strictly to a 'so-called academic way'. The choice of string tuning, melodic development, finger techniques, and structure all showcase the composer's reliance on his old experiences and bodily habits during the production process. Meanwhile, Yu's approach to addressing the question of how to give new works a contemporary character is not a passive acceptance of his habits. His method can be summarized as 'shaping new spirit with the old way'. Apart from incorporating popular tones as embellishments, there is an increased use of more dense rhythmic patterns and double-string techniques. This reflects his attempt to transform the refined, intricate, and elegant traditional taste into a bold, straightforward, and enthusiastic endeavor. After titling his works with themes praising the communist party, the new nation, and one of its owners—the peasants' daily life, Yu ultimately made his response to the issue of how to be a socialized intellectual by constructing a new repertoire that belonged to socialism. The influence of both tradition and modernity exhibits flexibility depending on the theme. Works with country life themes share more commonality in form with ancient pieces due to their inherent connection to the natural tradition. On the other hand, works that celebrate contemporary politics show a more obvious attempt to break old paradigms.

Additionally, an interesting phenomenon is that during the 1950s to 1960s, when workers, farmers, and soldiers constituted the mainstream themes of literary and artistic creation, not a single piece among the works created by Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽] and his contemporaries depicted workers and soldiers. This suggests that Yu and his contemporaries, with thick traditional backgrounds, found it challenging to imagine using the guqin to glorify industry and military endeavors. Instead, they chose to transform rural landscapes, perceived as aesthetic scenes by the literati class, into depictions and praises of the lives of peasants. This approach allowed them to present a suitable and safe posture in a society dominated by a political atmosphere.

Stepping out of the works themselves, and observing the mechanism of music production, these pieces also hold unprecedented significance. Traditionally, guqin music has been continuously edited on both the textual and sound levels. As readable guqin scores, their content has been constantly modified, and as music, they are interpreted in performance based on the guqin scores as a 'framework'. For example, an ancient piece *Pingshaluoyan* (平沙落雁) has evolved through 69 versions since its first appearance in 1634, with significant changes in melodies, fingerings, and structures. However, there has been a consensus among generations of guqin players regarding the aesthetic themes. But in the modern perspective of copyright,

various studies argue that individual interpretations by different guqin players cannot take complete copyright.

However, Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽]'s legal relationship with his works is clear. After the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, the endless political movements were halted by his successors. China's national mission shifted from class struggle to reintegrating into the world economic system. Against this backdrop, in the late 1970s, Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽] began systematically modifying and reinterpreting the titles and themes of his works. Titles with a revolutionary flair were replaced with vague and mild names, demonstrating his exercise of the modification right within copyright. The shift from 'modifying the content but not the theme' to 'retaining the content but reinterpreting the theme' by Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽] reflects a transformation in the production of guqin music. In other words, in the past, guqin compositions were collaboratively created by guqin players from different eras. However, in Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽]'s hand, they have evolved into the unique creative expressions of specific authors, holding corresponding copyrights. This shift in the music production mechanism also constitutes the modernity of Yu Shaoze [喻绍泽]'s composition.

Original Title	Renamed Title
<i>Leaping Forward Song</i> (跃进歌声)	<i>March</i> (前进曲)
<i>Singing for the Communist Party</i> (歌唱共产党)	<i>Ode to Light</i> (光明颂)
<i>Remembering Bitterness and Cherishing Sweetness</i> (忆苦思甜)	<i>Yearning</i> (思念)
<i>The joy of the Countryside in Spring</i> (春天农村的欢乐)	<i>Springtime</i> (春天)

Figure 17: Yu's renamed works. Compilation by the authors.

Finally, this paper hopes to convey that analyzing the content of musical works as a method for constructing music history is still worth advocating. Although the emergence and subsidence of these compositions may be considered fleeting and minor compared to the extensive history of the guqin spanning over 2000 years, they precisely represent a phenomenon that emerged in the transformation of mainland Chinese guqin music in the 20th century. Wang Jianxin (王建欣, 2002) and Ye Ye Hongpei (叶鸿霏, 2010) both recognized in their research that musical works should occupy a more central position in the study of music history. The current academic deficiency in exploring how the history of Chinese guqin in the 20th century is manifested in the form of works has become a regrettable aspect of guqin historical research. Since the late 1980s, the theme of "rewriting Chinese music history" has garnered widespread attention and lively discussions in the mainland academic community. Among them, Chen (陈聆群, 2002) believes that exploring how Chinese ethnic music culture transitions from ancient towards modernization will be a breakthrough. Therefore, there is still a large number of issues about guqin composition during that period to be investigated in the near future.

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