The Past as a Window to Modernity

A Study of Chou Wen-Chung’s Musical Journey

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Introduction

The interaction of Western classical music with Asian cultures has a long history. Examples can be found in compositions from at least as early as the eighteenth century. These early encounters, however, were highly Orientalist as most Western composers never went further than the incorporation of exotic figures and caricatures into their compositions. It was not until the twentieth century that efforts had been made to understand Asian cultures more profoundly. After the Second World War, for instance, there was John Cage whose musical views were heavily influenced by Asian philosophy. However, it was only with the steady rise of Asian composers who, on one hand, were educated in Western music and, on the other hand, were in close reach with musical forms from their cultural heritage that the musical-cultural interaction started to intensify. In particular, these composers developed musical views that incorporated elements from both the Western and Asian cultures into their compositions. As a result, they have managed to infuse the contemporary music scene with many new ideas. Some famous participants in this development were the Japanese composer Tōru Takemitsu, the Filipino composer José Maceda, the Korean-German composer Isang Yun and, also the subject of this thesis, the Chinese-American composer Chou Wen-Chung.

Question

Chou Wen-Chung was born in China and went to the United States during his youth to pursue further studies. There, he majored in Western composition and spent several years studying Chinese culture on his own. He subsequently tried to incorporate elements from Chinese culture into his compositions and slowly began to develop his own ideas on music. In particular, he formulated the concept of ‘Re-Merger.’ In this concept, Chou expresses his belief that the Eastern and Western music cultures once shared the same musical sources. However, as time passed these musical cultures diverged and went their own separate ways. This path, however, has come to a dead end and according to Chou, it is time that the East and the West get into a dialogue again. To initiate this dialogue, Chou started to reach out to Asian composers and help them come in contact with Western contemporary music. Moreover, he urged these composers to learn more about Asia’s cultural past as in the eyes of Chou, a meaningful interaction between (musical) cultures is only possible when one has a good understanding of one’s own cultural heritage.

Chou’s compositions have been extensively analysed by various scholars and there have been a number of monographs and doctoral dissertations written on this subject. Most analyses have tried to make connections between Chou’s musical views and the musical structures in his works. In particular, they have focussed on investigating how the Chinese aesthetic and philosophic elements have been musically implemented. However, while there is a respectable amount of musicological and analytical research on Chou’s compositions available, culture-critical analyses on Chou’s development seem to be lacking. Chou’s ideas concerning China’s cultural past, for instance, are simply taken for granted. This oversight is quite remarkable when one realizes how often it has been the subject of discussion amongst Chinese intellectuals in the last century. Indeed, for a long time the Chinese cultural past was considered a hindrance to the modernization of China and it was not until the 1980s that this past was again appreciated. Much has been written on this development, and the works of Dirlik (1995, 1996, 2002), Ong (1997) and Yu (2008) have demon-
strated that this resurgence of the past has been intimately connected with the rise of Asian modernities. In particular, the past has been used by the Asian nations to narrate their own modernity as an alternative to Western modernity.

Consequently, China’s cultural past is not simply a historical source, but it also functions as a political tool. Therefore, Chou’s appropriation of the past is less innocent than it seems and it deserves more attention from scholars; one should not only ask how elements from China’s cultural past are manifested in Chou’s compositions, but one should also carefully investigate how Chou is (re)presenting the past, which pasts he selects, and to which goal the selected pasts serve. In particular, considering that contemporary classical music has largely been associated with the West and with Western modernity, how to position Chou’s musical views in this context becomes an important question. The academic literature seems to neglect these issues as they neither fit well into the area of sinology, musicology, Asian studies or cultural analysis. This thesis attempts to fill this gap and address these issues using the analytical tools from the mentioned academic areas.

The starting point of my investigation is to recognize that contemporary classical music is staged as ‘the music of the West’ and that the latter, at its turn, is strongly associated with Western modernity. From this context then, I will consider Chou’s musical activities and analyse how his musical views engage with these stagings and associations. As I will show, Chou’s interaction with Asia’s cultural past has led to a re-staging of the contemporary music discourse and to the establishment of a new musical modernity. To further demonstrate the importance of the past in the staging of modernity, I will also discuss the contemporary music development in China and show how the resurgence of China’s cultural past has played a crucial role in the making of China’s musical modernity. However, as modernity is a dominant discourse, I will end my thesis by suggesting that the true victor in all these developments may very well be modernity itself and not the people who stage modernity or employ its processes.

In a thesis which aims to uncover and analyse the constructedness of ideologies and discourses, careful attention must be paid to the use of certain ‘loaded’ words. Terms such as ‘the West,’ ‘Western,’ ‘Eastern,’ or ‘Oriental’ are highly ambiguous as they embody different socio-cultural and political meanings depending on the objectives of the writer and the context in which they are used. Raymond Williams (1983), Naoki Sakai and Maeghan Morris (2005), for instance, have demonstrated the constructedness of the word ‘West’ by pointing out its different meanings in different discourses. Although it is important to specify what exactly is meant each time any of these slippery words is used, in practice this is not always necessary or even possible. Instead, the reader should pay attention to the context in which the word is used as this context already shapes its discursive meaning for a large extent. For instance, when I write about the ‘Western’ knowledge that China tried to duplicate in the late nineteenth century, the ‘West’ refers to the colonial powers from Europe and the United States as those were the countries that managed to defeat China using modern technology. But when I write about ‘Western’ composers, it should be understood that the term refers to those composers who work within and who are part of the Western classical music tradition. In this thesis I will try to elaborate on these contexts as much as possible in order to minimize the ambiguity of these slippery, problematic words.

Organization

This thesis consists of two parts. In the first part I will present an overview of the life and musical ideas of Chou Wen-Chung. I will start off with Chou’s biography in chapter 1 and move on to Chou’s concept of ‘Re-Merger’ in chapter 2. To get an idea of how Chou realizes this ‘Re-Merger’ in his compositions, I will end the first part with a number of musical examples and a discussion of its public reception in chapter 3. After this overview, we will have obtained a basic insight into the discourse surrounding Chou’s music.

In the second part I will present my analyses on Chou’s engagement with the contemporary music discourse from the perspective of modernity. In chapter 4, I will first explain how I conceive the concept of
‘modernity’ by adopting Timothy Mitchell’s definition as he has stated in his essay The Stage of Modernity (2000). Subsequently, I will expand this definition with ideas from Partha Chatterjee’s theory of alternative modernities (1997), and end the chapter with some comments on ‘the past’ from historian David Lowenthal (2002).

In chapter 5, I will investigate how Chou’s musical views are re-staging the contemporary music discourse. As I will show, the particular way in which Chou engages with China’s cultural past has not only played an instrumental role in this re-staging, but it has also led to the establishment of a new musical modernity. In chapter 6, I will further demonstrate the intimate connection between the appropriation of cultural pasts and the staging of modernity. Through a discussion on the Chinese musical development, I will show how Chou’s ideas play a crucial role in the fulfilment of China’s desire for its own musical modernity.

In the final chapter, I will reconsider the discourse of modernity and discuss how modernity itself may actually be the true victor. Moreover, I will position Chou’s ideological views in the intellectual landscape of China and show its discrepancy with its present discourses. Finally, I will present my conclusions and suggests topics for future studies.

A Note on Romanization and Translation

In this thesis I will make minor use of the Chinese language, and it will be used in the following way. First of all, I will use the pinyin system for the romanization of Chinese words and I will use the traditional Chinese character-set to notate the characters. Secondly, when a Chinese word is used, I will write down both the pinyin and the Chinese characters at its first encounter. Moreover, if a suitable translation is possible, I will present this translation and continue to use it in the subsequent text. If no such translation is possible, I will just continue the text with the pinyin romanization. Note, however, that there are a number of Chinese words and Chinese names which are romanized using a different system but have become the standard romanization in many academic writings. In that case I have chosen to adopt these standard romanizations as these Chinese words would be unrecognisable if the pinyin romanization was used. For the reader’s convenience, I have included a glossary of the Chinese characters together with their pinyin and translation (if available) in appendix A.
Chapter 1

A Short Biography of Chou Wen-Chung

In this chapter I will give a brief biography of Chou Wen-Chung. In particular, the lives of Chou’s father and grandfather will be briefly sketched in order to get an impression of the historical setting in which Chou was brought up.

1.1 The Chou Family

Chou Wen-Chung (Zhōu Wénzhōng 周文中) was born on June 29, 1923 in Yántái 烟台 in the province of Shāndōng 山东. According to the family genealogical records, Chou is a descendant of the famous neo-Confucian philosopher Zhōu Dùnıyì 周敦頤 (1017–1073 CE) from the Sòng 宋 dynasty (960–1279 CE). In fact, the family lineage can be traced back to the youngest son of King Píng of Zhōu (Zhōu Píng Wáng 周平王) from the eighth century BCE. Thus, it is fair to say that Chou comes from a family with a long and rich history.

Chou’s grandfather, Chou Xue-Qiao, (1870–1910) was a bright scholar who was given the opportunity to take part in the highest civil servant examination organized by the Qīng 清 dynasty (1644–1911). However, as he was disappointed by the corruption and incompetence of the government, he decided to work for the local community. This disappointment, however, slowly turned into disbelief when China suffered huge losses in the first Sino-Japanese war (1894–1895). Parts of China came to be divided between Japan, Germany, Russia, France and England, and the traditional Chinese belief that Chinese culture was the most superior culture was shattered to pieces. Because of these losses, Chou’s grandfather became part of the first generation intelligentsia that started to study Western arts and sciences, and be critical of Chinese tradition. Nevertheless, Chou’s grandfather never planned to discard his own cultural heritage; on the contrary, he was actually one of the first people who promoted the synthesis of Chinese and Western culture.

Chou’s father, Chou Miao or Chou Zhong-Jie, (1891–1987), was also a bright scholar. He lived through a chaotic China and, being part of the second generation intelligentsia, was a supporter of reforming the Chinese society with Western ideas. Nonetheless, Chou’s father was well educated in Chinese literature and Chinese fine arts, and did not dismiss his cultural heritage. In this regard, he can be considered fairly conservative when compared to the radical intellectuals of that time.

1 The biographical information in this chapter is largely based on (Chew 1990), (Chang 2001, 2006) and (Lai 2009).

2 ‘周 文 中’ is the Chinese name and ‘Zhōu Wénzhōng’ is its romanization in the pinyin system while ‘Chou Wen-Chung’ is its romanization in the old Wade-Giles system. However, since ‘Chou Wen-Chung’ has become the standard romanization, I will continue to use this throughout this thesis.

3 Chang (2006, 12) has unfortunately not stated which romanization system is used and what the Chinese characters are.

4 Chang (2006, 14) has unfortunately not stated which romanization system is used and what the Chinese characters are.
1.2 Chou’s Early Life in China

After the Qing dynasty ended, Chou’s father went on to occupy important administrative posts. During this time the family travelled a lot; in 1927 they left Yantai for Qingdao 青岛, whereupon in 1929 they went to Hankou 汉口. In 1932 they moved to Nanjing 南京, the capital of the republic. Chou’s family was quite wealthy and they enjoyed the luxury of having many Western products in their reach; it was during their stay in Hankou that Chou and his brother got their first violin. When Chou attended middle school in Nanjing, he started to study the violin together with the 二胡.

In 1937, the second Sino-Japanese war broke out and the Chou family moved to Shanghai 上海. As Shanghai was a city with international settlements, Chou had many opportunities to get in contact with Western classical music. In particular, Chou spent more and more time practising his instrument as he managed to take violin and music theory lessons from members of the Shanghai Municipal Orchestra. Nonetheless, Chou was still dissatisfied with his musical progress, and he was thinking of studying music in Europe or the United States after he graduated from high school in 1941. However, such a plan was being discouraged since musicians had a low social status in Chinese society. Moreover, Chou’s father wanted him to study science and technology as it would help China in its rebuilding process. Thus, Chou went on to study engineering/architecture in Shanghai’s St. John’s University.

When the Japanese army entered Shanghai, Chou’s family fled to Guilin 桂林 in 1941. There, Chou continued to study engineering at the local university, but in his spare time he would practice the violin and immerse himself in books about Western culture that he found in the university library. During this period he also started to compose melodies and write Chinese poetry. However, as the Japanese army advanced to the south, Chou had to flee again and moved to Chongqing 重庆 in 1944. There, he finished his civil engineering bachelor’s degree in 1945 and obtained a scholarship to study architecture at Yale University in the United States.

1.3 Chou’s Music Studies in the United States

Chou arrived at Yale University in 1946. However, not long after he started his architecture study Chou was already thinking of switching his major to music. Shortly after, Chou received the news that his father had finally allowed him to pursue his dream. Consequently, Chou quit his architecture study and entered the New England Conservatory where he studied one semester of violin performance before he switched to composition. His early composition teachers were Carl McKinley and Nicolas Slonimsky. Especially Slonimsky would have a lasting influence on Chou as he encouraged Chou to develop a compositional style which incorporated Chinese and Western elements.

In 1949 Chou left the New England Conservatory and went to New York to study with Martinu. Although Chou had mastered a reasonable amount of composition techniques, his compositional style was still immature. When he showed Martinu a composition of Chinese flavoured fugues, Chou was dumbfounded when Martinu just asked ‘why?’ It was this moment which made Chou realize that he had just combined elements from different musical cultures without properly thinking about their nature and compatibility. Thus, Chou started to study Chinese music and Chinese culture as Slonimsky had suggested, and the first result of these studies was the composition Landscapes in 1949.

In that same year Chou would meet Varèse and become his private student. Their meeting was also the beginning of a lifelong friendship as both men shared common views and had similar interests. As a teacher, Varèse did not impart Chou with a lot of compositional techniques. Instead, he taught him to formulate an idea and to realize this idea with the available technical tools. Moreover, Chou would often be forced by Varèse to defend his compositional choices. It was this kind of training which would eventually

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5Chou has written about his relationship with Varèse in (Chou 1998).
lead Chou to achieve compositional independence; he would not be influenced by fashionable trends, but he would follow his own chosen path instead.

In the early 1950s Chou also studied with Otto Luening at Columbia University. After he graduated in 1954, Chou went on to study traditional Chinese arts on his own; not only did he study Chinese music, but he also studied Chinese painting, calligraphy, poetry, and philosophy. And it was through these studies that Chou began to develop his own style where he would incorporate elements from Chinese culture into his compositions. The traditional gúqín 古琴 music in particular, influenced his compositional style significantly.

1.4 Chou’s Professional Life

Chou’s early success came at a time when he was still a graduate student. Through his friendship with Colin McPhee, Chou got to know Leopold Stokowski to whom he submitted his composition Landscapes. Stokowski expressed interest in Chou’s piece whereupon it saw its première in 1953 in San Francisco with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra. This performance was a major stimulant for Chou and it helped him launch his career as a composer (Chang 2006, 159).

Interestingly, Chou’s breakthrough came at a time when there were major landslides taking place in the artistic landscape. It was a time where conventional aesthetic values were destabilized and where the art community became a scene in which the rise and fall of artistic movements became the normal practice. For contemporary classical music this was no exception; starting from the 1950s it saw compositional directions such as serialism, indeterminacy, textural music, quotation music, minimalism and neo-tonality come and go in a whim (Morgan 1991, 328). This development was further intensified by the growing dissatisfaction with the political establishment; as traditional conventional art was associated with the centralism of the political establishment, many artists and members of the younger generation sought to counter these traditional modes of thought by exploring alternative forms of art and life-style. One of these alternate life-styles was the exploration of Oriental mysticism and Oriental philosophies. Consequently, it can be said that Chou’s career as a composer started in a favourable period of the public’s growing curiosity for Oriental culture.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, after his graduation, Chou worked as a composer, researcher, lecturer and music teacher in various schools, colleges and music institutes. But from 1964 onwards, Chou became permanently affiliated with Columbia University and was subsequently appointed assistant professor and professor. It was also around this time that Chou began to gain public recognition for his works as they were performed throughout Europe and the United States. When Varèse died in 1965, Chou became Varèse’s executor and started to publish commemorative articles on him. Moreover, Chou also spent a considerable amount of time completing and editing Varèse’s works.

In the 1970s, Chou began to promote his musical views and warned Asian composers against the negligence of their own cultural heritages. He actively promoted new music and attended many festivals and conferences on contemporary music. Moreover, he frequently travelled to Asia where he met respected Asian composers such as Isang Yun and Toru Takemitsu to exchange ideas. In 1972 he managed to be the first composer from the West to visit China (Chang 1995, 89). His presence had a huge influence on young Chinese composers as he would talk about contemporary Western classical music and provide materials for them to study. Moreover, as an avid promoter of the ‘preservation’ of cultural heritages, he was also involved in setting up cultural exchanges between China and the United States (Chou 1991). However, because of these activities together with the administrative duties at Columbia University, his compositional output had slowed down massively in the 1970s. Although he started composing again in the 1980s, Chou continued to spend a lot of time promoting his musical views throughout the world.
Chapter 2

Chou’s Musical ‘Re-Merger’

From the 1960s onwards, Chou has tried to integrate elements from Western (contemporary) classical music and Chinese traditional culture into his compositions. At the same time, he developed an intriguing view on the future of music. According to Chou, the musical cultures of ‘the East’ and ‘the West’ should interact which each other. In particular, Chou sees common values between these two cultures and therefore calls this interaction a ‘Re-Merger.’ In this chapter I will elaborate on this concept by giving an extensive summary of a speech that Chou delivered in 2001. Even though it is a fairly recent speech, the main ideas in this speech date back to as early as the 1960s and have remained largely unchanged over the last decades.\(^1\) Subsequently, I will give a short overview of the central Asian concepts that Chou deems as fundamental to this ‘Re-Merger’ and which also play an important role in his compositions. Finally, the chapter will end with a short discussion on the thoughts of a number of past intellectuals who share ideological similarities with Chou.

As I have mentioned in the introduction, we need to be careful with the usage of words such ‘East’ and ‘West.’ Especially in the writings of Chou where these words are used without much explanation, we need to have a good understanding of the textual context in order to grasp its discursive meanings and the subtle shifts of it. For instance, the meaning of ‘the West’ in Chou’s writings shifts between the representation of Western modernity, the representation of the former colonial powers of the nineteenth and twentieth century, and the representation of the current Anglo-Saxon nations in the west. The term ‘East,’ or ‘Asian,’ is likewise constructed and its meaning is directly related to the definition of the West.\(^2\) More specifically, it shifts from being the West’s ‘other’ to representing the nations and (traditional) cultures in the east that have been dominated by the Western or former colonial powers of the last few hundred years. However, as the shifts are subtle and the discursive meanings overlap greatly with each other, it is difficult to determine the exact meaning of each appearance of these words. Therefore, the reader should pay attention to the context in which it is used, and in this chapter I will try to elaborate this context as much as possible.

2.1 Towards a Re-Merger in Music

In a speech delivered in 2001, Chou quotes cultural historian Jacques Barzun by saying that after a successful era of five hundred years, the West is beginning to decline. What comes after is not a revival or restoration, but a new beginning, a new rebirth. In music, this will also be the case. In particular, it will be ‘a “merger” or “re-merger” of legacies, not cultural “influence” but a “confluence”’ (Chou 2002a, 3). As Chou notes:

\[\text{In contrast to “borrowing” by the West from the East in the past, or the East from the West today,}\]

\(^1\text{Most of the ideas have appeared in (Chou 1968), (Chou 1977) and (Chou 1988).}\)

\(^2\text{See also the discussion by Sakai et al. (2005).}\)
“merger” means coming together, sharing each other’s heritage, complementing and revitalizing legacies (Chou 2002a, 3).

What is more important is the fact that Chou believes that the East and West shared the same sources:

The traditions of Eastern and Western music once shared the same sources and that, after a thousand years of divergence, they are now merging to form the mainstream of a new musical tradition (Chou 1968, 19).

Thus, he prefers to talk about ‘re-merger’ instead of ‘merger.’

Chou supports his vision by noting that musical cultures in the past have often reinvented themselves by assimilating other cultures. In particular, he sees a need for such a reinvention again today as the current music culture has reached the end of an era. There are several developments which prompted Chou to come to this conclusion.

One of these was the musical rebellion in the twentieth century against the European tradition which caused an inflow of non-Western ideas. This development together with the progresses made in science and technology has given the Western composer almost limitless compositional possibilities. However, although there are more compositional possibilities than before, Chou thinks that the contemporary composer is insufficiently aware of their potential.3 This unawareness is reflected in a couple of developments. First of all, there is the rapid rise and fall of trends. Chou notes that these trends ‘are characterized by surface alterations rather than fundamental change’ and that this may be a signifier of ‘the breaking down of an established order, in anticipation of the dawn of a new era’ (Chou 2002a, 8). Moreover, Chou thinks that most Western music lacks creativity as it is too commercialized and lacks conceptual ideas. As Chou notes:

That fine sense of distinction and quality that illuminates the purpose of every single thread in the great tapestry of the European Age has simply disintegrated. Today, it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish a newly commissioned symphony from a commercial jingle by a music hack . . . the Western and Westernized societies appear to have become ever more complex in procedures but simplistic in conception, as we are constantly reminded of on the television screen with its frenetic flipping of images . . . creativity has become irrelevant, realization formulaic, and the public brain-washed into acceptance. All-pervasive commercialization is the reincarnation of imperialism, an exact replica of the ruthless expansion of colonialism in the past centuries, except that the victims are now ourselves, and our cultures (8).

Thus, there is the need for reinvention, and such reinvention is coming as Chou sees a parallel between the year 2000 and the year 1500, a year that is generally considered to be the beginning of modern European civilization (5). Just as Europe had established cultural, social and economic exchanges by reaching out towards the East and towards America, nowadays there are similar exchanges as countries are opening up to each other again. According to Chou, this development will bring forth a new era of cultural exchange.

However, this new era does not come by itself and we need to prepare ourselves for it. According to Chou, a meaningful cultural exchange can only take place when cultural heritages are strong. Nowadays, unfortunately, this is not the case as ‘the state of heritage around the world is deteriorating’ (6). Thus, Chou urges the artist to actively seek connection with one’s past and one’s cultural legacy. Moreover, although cultural heritages are important, an artist should not try to imitate but remain independent. Two composers who managed to achieve this were Varèse and Bartók. Chou admires them greatly and sees them as examples:

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3See (Chou 1971) or (Chou 1974a) for a critical discussion on the way twentieth century Western composers make use of Asian concepts in their compositions. In this article, Chou praises composers such as Bartók and Messiaen for their knowledge of non-Western music cultures, but criticizes composers such as Lou Harrison and John Cage for misunderstanding Asian concepts.
Varèse taught us to be rooted in heritage, yet independent in creativity — which can only be achieved through knowledge and discipline. Bartók taught us to learn from legacies beyond our own, but only in the context of their legacies and not ours, and only if those legacies can be transformed into our own (7).

Chou further emphasizes the important role that Asian artists can play in establishing cultural exchanges. However, he notices that many young Asian artists are still trying to copy Western Anglo-Saxon trends and fashions, and are neglecting their own cultural heritage. Chou blames this situation to the struggles that Asia had to endure after the Second World War. Artistic creativity and cultural education were seen as luxuries in a time of war and chaos. As a result, cultural heritages were slowly getting lost. And as Asian artists had no role models to look up to any more, they massively went along with Western trends and fashions. Therefore, Chou urges Asian artists to reconnect with their own heritage, and develop their own independent view again.

The West on the other hand, should reach out to non-Western cultures and engage in partnership with them. Although there has been a long history of interaction with other cultures, the Western voice of modernity has always remained dominant. Thus, the West has to shift from ‘cultural imperialism to cultural partnership’ (10). Nonetheless, Western trends are still dominating and this has caused a reluctance of Asian artists to search for their own roots. Even when an artist is making use of his cultural heritage to produce a work of art, the end result is still unsatisfying as the cultural component is often reduced or sublimated (11). Therefore, Chou urges artists from both the East and the West to break free from this stranglehold. The way to achieve this is to perform in-depth studies into cultural heritages. Cultural policies have to be established to ‘preserve’ living heritages. Moreover, the role of the artist has to be redefined again; he must be willing to be independent, yet knowledgeable of the things around him. Thus, Chou sees the need for a ‘revival of the “artist” of the Renaissance, who dared to be independent and to search for artistic truth through science’ (13). Or a revival of the Chinese scholar-literate counterpart ‘wénrén’ 文人, ‘the person with ultimate knowledge of the arts’ and who ‘were regarded as the conscience of society and conveyor of its legacy’ (13).

2.2 The Lost Value of the West: The Single Tone

In the previous section, we have seen that Chou believes that the East and the West once shared the same sources. In particular, Chou believes that the East exhibits certain aesthetic concepts which the West lacks or has, over the course of Western modernity, forgotten about. As Chou notes:

It is now generally acknowledged that the West, in its preoccupation with polyphonic writing, has more or less forsaken those particular aspects in music of which the East has remained master (Chou 1968, 19).

The aspect that Chou writes about the most is the concept of the single tone as musical entity.

The concept of the single tone as musical entity is best exemplified by Chinese gǔqín music. There, the single tone plays an important role as it is the norm to change the pitch, timbre and intensity during the sounding of the tone. Thus, the single tone is a musical entity which has an independence in itself; it does not require extraneous compositional frameworks to achieve this.⁴

The importance of the single tone in gǔqín music is illustrated by the extensive literature devoted to the playing techniques of this instrument. For example, it makes a difference whether a string is struck with the thumb or the forefinger. Moreover, each finger technique has a certain symbolism and the expressive qualities of the music depend heavily on the used technique.⁵ Thus, the single tone is an important musical

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⁴See (Chou 1970) where Chou gives musical examples from various Asian cultures of how single tones can act as musical entities and form a structural element of the composition instead of just being a figuration.

⁵See chapter V of (Van Gulik 1940) for examples of symbolism in playing techniques.
Chou’s Musical ‘Re-Merger’

entity in Chinese music. As Chou notes,

The production and control of a single tone may create enough musical dimensions, such as modifications in pitch, timbre, and loudness, to evoke poetry or sonic beauty all by itself (Chou 1981, 28).

Because of the seemingly limitless possibilities of the single tone, there is also a certain terseness in the musical compositions. There is no need for large gestures and overwhelming techniques as subtle differences created by total control over microtonal inflections of pitch and tiny changes to timbre can already invoke a totally different mood.

It is interesting to note that this idea of ‘the single tone as a musical entity’ has a great resemblance with Varèse’s concept of ‘organized sound as music’ (Chou et al. 1966, 18). In his famous article The Liberation of Sound, Varèse expresses his views on the future of music composition and emphasizes the importance of sound. For Varèse, any kind of sound should be producible and usable in any music. In this article, Varèse also points out that the form and content of a musical piece are the same. For him, there is an idea which forms the basis of an internal structure, and which is subsequently ‘expanded and split into different shapes or groups of sound constantly changing in shape, direction, and speed, attracted and repulsed by various forces’ (16). The form of the piece then, is the result of this interaction.

One can easily recognize the similarities between Chou’s concept of ‘single tones’ and Varèse’s concept of ‘organized sound.’ Although the formulation is different, the central idea remains the same; both stress the importance of sound and identify the structural qualities in it. However, it is interesting to note that Varèse did not study Asian music and developed his idea of ‘organized sound’ independently. And it is because of these kinds of developments in which Western composers come up with aesthetic concepts that have great similarities with Asian aesthetic concepts, that made Chou believe that the East and West once shared the same sources and that a ‘Re-Merger’ is on its way.

2.3 The ‘Common Values’ of the East

Besides the single tone as musical entity concept, there are many other aesthetic concepts and values which Chou recognizes as distinctively Asian and which can possibly contribute to the musical ‘Re-Merger.’ In this section I will elaborate on those which also play an important role in Chou’s compositions.6

Man, Nature and Harmony

In Chinese aesthetics there is a strong emphasis on the relationship between man and nature, and the ‘harmony’ that resides in them and between them. This ‘harmony’ ( hé ) can be best described as the peace and order that arises from the interrelatedness and interaction between opposing forces (Zhou 1995, 205). As this concept is quite abstract and philosophical, it can be manifested in many different ways and it can almost be found anywhere; we can have harmony between heaven and earth, between body and mind, between man and society, between man and nature or between feeling and reason. What is more important, however, is that harmony has an aesthetic dimension attached to it; beauty arises when there is a sense of harmony. Thus, Chinese artists have always tried to invoke harmony in their artworks; especially the harmony in nature and the harmony between man and nature was an important source of inspiration.7 In Chinese music, such a harmony could be modelled in several ways. In gúqín music, for example, the sound of earth is represented

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6 See also (Chou 1981) where Chou has summarized a list of Asian aesthetic concepts that has contributed to Asian music in the past.

7 In fact, from the Confucian aesthetic viewpoint, one can even say that ‘harmony’ ( hé ) is the key principle of aesthetic judgement; see (Huang 1963, 54).
by the open strings, the sound of heaven by the harmonics, and the sound of man by the stopped tones. The combined sounds thus represent the harmony between earth, heaven and man (Chou 1981, 32).

**Interaction between Poetry, Painting, Calligraphy and Music**

In Chinese arts, there has always been a close relationship between poetry, painting, calligraphy and music. The various disciplines share many aesthetic principles and they regularly interact with each other. This interrelatedness can be comprehended through a consideration of the characteristics of the Chinese language.

Chinese language, to begin with, is a tonal language. Because of this, Chinese poetry possesses a lyrical element that is especially evident when a poem is recited on rhythm. Additionally, Chinese is also a language with a large grammatical freedom. Because of this, it is possible for the poet to write a poem with a highly pictorial character using a small number of words. To be more specific, because of ‘the morphological fluidity (the same word can be a noun or a verb or an adjective, according to the context) and, more importantly, syntactic flexibility (rules governing word order are reduced to a bare minimum; sentences can be without a verb; verbs can be without a subject; particles and grammatical trappings are practically non-existent)’ of classical Chinese, Chinese poets were able to produce ‘a series of perceptions without having to pass through the channels of grammatically organized discourse’ (Leys 1988, 21). Finally, the characters of the Chinese written language are essentially made up from ideograms, pictographs, phonograms, or a combination of these three (Chou 1981, 28). Therefore, the written character is already a ‘painting’ in itself and it should be no surprise that painting and calligraphy share certain aesthetic concepts with each other. In fact, it is quite normal for a painting and a poem that is written in calligraphy to share the same space in an artwork; this makes the interrelatedness of the Chinese arts all the more evident.

**2.4 Other Universal Histories**

Chou is not first person to put forth the idea of a universal origin of music and to lament on music’s decline in the modern times. A number of European intellectuals have expressed similar thoughts in the past. The English essayist John Brown (1715–1766), for instance, has argued in his *A Dissertation on the Rise, Union, and Power, the Progressions, Separations, and Corruptions, of Poetry and Music* (1763) that the performance arts were originally united. According to Brown, in the ancient past, ‘before Education and Art have cast their Veil over the human Mind,’ the savage men expressed their emotions through a combination of ‘action,’ ‘voice’ and ‘articulated sounds’ (26). However, as these savages came to form a civilization and the written word entered their lives, these three types of expressions gradually evolved into dance, music, and poetry (27). More specifically, in the early stages of civilization ‘the Chiefs or Legislators would often be the principal Musicians,’ as they are the ones ‘who most signalize themselves by Dance and Song’ (37). However, as society grew, these two characters would separate from each other and the practice of musical art would be delegated to a worthy magistrate (41). And in the course of time, the different types of the performing arts and the different branches of each discipline would separate and move away from each other.

Here, it is interesting to note that Brown sees a link between music and society. Music formed, together with morals and manners, an important part of education. As a result, when a society, and hence its morals, becomes corrupted, it would have a negative influence on music, and vice versa (45). What is interesting in this statement is that it very much echoes Chou’s remarks on the corruption of music. His plea for a return

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8 A stopped tone is a tone that is generated through the plucking of a string that has been tensioned by pressing it onto the surface board.

9 Up to the twentieth century, written Chinese was different from verbal Chinese. Written Chinese used different grammatical constructions and was called classical Chinese. It is comparable to the stature that Latin had in Europe.
of the wénrén can, in the context of Brown’s writing, almost be read as a plea for the re-union of the ‘chief’ or ‘legislator’ with the musician, and of music with morals and manners.

There are also similarities between Chou and Brown with regard to their views on the reunion of the arts. While Chou advocates for a ‘re-merger’ of the Asian and Western musical cultures, Brown advocates for the effectual reunion of the poetic and musical arts. For Brown, the

effectual Union of these two powerful Arts, directed to their proper Ends, would be productive of the noblest Consequences: It would renew and augment the Dignity of every elegant Accomplishment; would refine the Taste, inforce the Religion, purify the Morals, strengthen the Policy, of the most prosperous Kingdom; in a Word, would give a proper and salutary Direction to that Overflow of Wealth, which must either adorn or overwhelm it (Brown 1763, 242).

In particular, this union may be promoted by an authoritative institution who has the ability to prevent music from becoming corrupted. Again, this institution can be seen as an analogue of Chou’s educational programs that aim to increase an awareness of Asia’s cultural heritages.

Besides Brown, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) was another European that felt that the musical development of his time was heading the wrong way. For Rousseau, music originated from heightened articulated speech as a way to imitate and express the passions such a love, hatred, pity and anger (Rousseau 1998, 293-294). Melody is hereby a direct consequence of this development; it is the language of the passions (Scott 1998, 293) and is the essence of music (Taylor 1949, 237). He contrasts this with harmony, which reduces the purity of music as it moves away from melody (239). For Rousseau then, the dominance of harmonic musical language as promoted by Rameau signifies a decline in music and is the result of ‘man’s emergence as a moral and social being’ who also ‘carries with it the germ of corruption’ (Scott 1998, 303).

In particular,

[Rousseau] reformulates his dispute with Rameau as part of the quarrel between the ancients and modems, contrasting the expressive power of the melodic language and music of ancient Greece to the inexpressive modem music dominated by harmony (304).

Moreover, Scott notes that for Rousseau, ‘the effects of harmony are “purely physical” and produce a “pleasant sensation” but nothing more’ (304). Here, we see that Rousseau, just like Chou, feels that the music of his time is being corrupted by the modern age and that this corruption has made music shallow. And it is only by going back to the musical roots that this corruption can be stopped. Interestingly, it is this search for uncorrupted pure music that led Rousseau, and also many other adventurous European intellectuals of that time, to become interested in the ‘Orient’ (Bor 2008, 27).

Also in the more recent times there were scholars who shared Chou’s view of a global unified musical culture. The German musicologist Walter Wiora, for instance, sees a universal history of musical progress and identifies various universal elements in the different musical cultures of the world (Brandel 1968, 696). However, while Chou sees the unified culture as being created through the globalized interaction between the Asian and the Western music cultures, Wiora sees the unified culture as being created by the globalization of the Western music culture as Western music is, in his opinion, the latest phase in the universal music history. In particular, it is the West who has set the example and created the conditions in which this globalization is made possible:

The Europeanization of the globe, which began almost five centuries ago with the discovery and settlement of America, has led to mankind forming no longer a co-existing group of separate cultures but instead a richly intense concatenation of world trade, world politics, world civilization. . . .

. . . Part of the universal significance of the “national schools” of East Europe lies in their having created models for the nations of Asia and Africa striving towards a national expression of their own. (Wiora 1965, 152).
However, Wiora’s view is highly problematic as it denies the non-Western music cultures any agency. For Wiora, the music of the Orient has no further development and is nothing more than an early stage in the universal music history; it lacks historical evolution and only lives forth as an artefact of the past (Bor 2008, 36). Of course, as we have seen in this chapter, Chou is exactly against these kinds of Eurocentric views in which Western music, being both a product and a representative of Western modernity, is posited as the only path towards creative progress. Instead, it is a cultural ‘re-merger’ that will lead to progress.
Chapter 3

Examples of Chou’s Musical ‘Re-Merger’

Having obtained an understanding of Chou’s musical ideas, we can now consider the issue of how those ideas are manifested in Chou’s own compositions. Much has been written on this subject already; not only by musicologists, but also by Chou himself.\(^1\) In this chapter I will discuss Chou’s efforts to implement this ‘Re-Merger’ in his own compositions through a number of musical examples. Moreover, I will include a small discussion concerning the reception of Chou’s works and elaborate on the listener’s perception of the ‘Re-Merger.’ Since the cultural background of the listener plays an important role in this matter, the discussion will focus on the different perceptions between the Chinese and the Anglo-Saxon audiences.

3.1 Chou’s Compositional Re-Merger

Chou’s initial development has been described by Chou himself, and the starting point of his compositions was based on the philosophical concept of the ‘knowledge of things’ (Chou 1978). That is, it is important to know the potential and power of things. As Chou notes:

> To know the power inherent in any individual thing and to use things as things, is then the technique of a higher level that a composer should aspire to. But once the ultimate purpose of communication is achieved through the score, then, to paraphrase a fundamental Buddhist concept, “the material is immaterial, the immaterial material” (309).

In compositional terms, this means that one should be aware of the compositional choices and techniques that one makes and uses. Only when you know what you are doing can a composition be successful. Otherwise, you are just being ‘used’ by the technique instead of you ‘using’ the technique. Although Chou uses Chinese philosophy to explain his point, it is evident that his critical thinking has also been shaped by Varèse when Chou was still his student and in which he was constantly forced to defend his compositional choices. In this perspective, the quote ‘the material is immaterial, the immaterial material’ is equally interesting as it mirrors Varèse’s view that the form and the content of a composition are the same; the form *comes* from content (Chou et al. 1966, 17).

Inspired by this concept, Chou was rethinking the use of all musical parameters. ‘Knowing the power inherent in any individual thing’ meant that parameters such as articulation, duration, intensity, and timbre had to be reconsidered. By knowing the possibilities of each compositional element, Chou’s aim was to ‘express more with less.’ Interestingly, this idea has its origins in the aesthetics of Chinese fine arts. Especially

Examples of Chou’s Musical ‘Re-Merger’

Chinese poetry and painting were seen by Chou as the prime examples of achieving maximum expressiveness with a minimum of means (Chou 1978, 310). With his early work *Landscapes* (1949), Chou tried to compose music which could emulate these qualities.

*Landscapes* (1949)

*Landscapes* consists of three movements, each inspired by a Chinese poem (Chang 2006, 54-55). The first movement (mm. 1—43) is called *Under the Cliff in the Bay* and it is based on the poem *Old Fisherman* by Zhèng Xìè 郑燮2 (1693—1765):

Old fisherman, with a fishing rod,
Under the cliff, in the bay,
Sailing a small boat freely here and there;
Dots of sea gulls afar over the light waves,
Expanses of rustling reeds chilly under the bright sky;
Singing a song aloud with the sun setting low;
All of a sudden, the waves rock in golden light;
Looking up — the moon has climbed over the eastern hill.

The second movement (mm. 44—66) is called *The Sorrow of Parting* and is based on the poem *My Carriage Has Barely Paused* by Ding Peng4 (ca. 1661):

My carriage has barely paused,
yet he is already beyond the plains,
In no time, far away at the edge of the sky.
Pleasant dreams tonight — where can they be found?
Instead, only the sound of the temple bell,
the midnight rain, the ravens’ cry at the break of dawn,
Too grieved to face the fallen petals floating in the wind,
Too frightened to see the evening sunlight reflect in the clouds;
The sorrow of parting — I tell it to the lute.
Broken heart left at the river — into whose courtyard has it been blown?
Dreams are coming, the candle is flickering, pillows awry.

The final movement (mm. 67—101) is called *One Streak of Dying Light* and is based on the poem *Green, Green the Grass West of the Pavilion* by Liú Jí 劉基 (1311—1375):

Green, green the grass west of the pavilion,
The clouds low, the cries of the wild geese faint,
Two lines of sparse willows,
One streak of dying light,
Hundreds of homing ravens dotting the sky.

*Landscapes* uses a different traditional Chinese melody for each movement. The melody hereby plays an important role as it forms the structural element of each movement; unity in the movement is achieved through the constant repetition and variation of the theme. Moreover, as the melody is treated in a heterophonic way, tonal harmony and counterpoint are employed more as a decorative than as a structural element (53-54). The expressive quality of each movement is achieved by making subtle variations in the rhythm,

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2 Also better known as Zhèng Bǎnqiáo 郑板桥.
3 Translations of the poems are obtained from (Chou 1949).
4 Unfortunately, I have not been able find any information on this poet as the English language sources only give the romanization of the poet’s name and do not provide the Chinese characters.
Examples of Chou’s Musical ‘Re-Merger’

timbre and instrumentation. The programmatic description given by Chou is hereby ‘meant to create symbolic imageries related to the atmospheres the composer attempts to create in the music’ (Lai 2009, 27). It attempts to ‘invoke in the listener’s mind an aural equivalent of the mental response when one contemplates a Chinese painting’ (108).

**Metaphors (1960)**

Inspired by the Chinese traditional arts, Chou became very much interested in ‘the controlled flow of sound through organized complexity and ordered interplay of all of its properties’ (Chou 1978, 311). To model such a process, Chou made use of the *Book of Changes* (Yì Jìng 周易). The *Book of Changes* is an ancient Chinese book which explains the changes, invariability and the harmony of the universe. In particular, changes and transformations are caused by the interaction between two forces: yǐn 隱 and yáng 阳. Although these two forces are oppositional, they also complement each other and thus form a unity in opposition. Central to the *Book of Changes* are the 64 hexagrams. They are constructed as follows: first, the yáng element is represented by a straight line while the yǐn element is represented by a broken (into two parts) line. With these two elements eight trigrams can be created. From these eight trigrams we can subsequently construct 64 hexagrams by combining any two trigrams with each other. The notion of change and transformation is hereby modelled by the way the yīn and yáng elements form the trigrams and hexagrams (Feliciano 1983, 11-23).

Chou was very much interested in these structural concepts of the *Book of Changes* and this resulted in the composition *Metaphors* in 1960. In this work Chou constructed eight scales (or modes) which correspond with the eight trigrams from the *Book of Changes*. In particular, the scales have the same symmetry and reflection properties as the hexagrams. In this way, the development of the piece mirrors the transformations as described in the *Book of Changes*. On the aural level the yǐn and yáng concept is manifested in the harmonic, thematic, textual, and rhythmic structures of the piece; there is a constant interaction between oppositional forces such as different rhythms or timbres (Chang 2006, 89-93). This complex and intricate compositional strategy of using scales that are based on the trigrams from the *Book of Changes* would later be called ‘variable modes.’ In the subsequent decades Chou expanded this system and it would become the basis of many of his later works.

**Cursive (1963)**

Besides poetry and painting, Calligraphy is another art in which single gestures could achieve major expression. As Chou notes,

> The controlled flow of ink — through the interaction of movement and energy, the modulation of line and texture — creates a continuum of motion and tension in a spatial equilibrium (Chou 1978, 311).

In particular, it is a type of control which does not allow any concession afterwards. In Chou’s eyes, its execution must be confident and convincing:

> I feel that brush calligraphy is so relevant to a composer, because of the involvement of space and time, as well as movement, which is the reason many people believe calligraphy is different from Western

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5 More commonly known in the Wade-Giles romanization as *I Ching*.
6 A trigram is formed by drawing the combinations of yǐn and yáng elements underneath each other. For example, we can have yǐn-yǐn-yǐn, yǐn-yǐn-yáng, yǐn-yáng-yǐn and so forth.
7 A hexagram is formed by drawing two trigrams underneath each other.
painting or drawing. The difference is that in calligraphy, retouching or alteration after the fact is not tolerated. It is an art that requires detailed conception in the mind so that it can be executed instantaneously, instead of starting with a sketch and then gradually building it into a complete oil painting (Chou 2006).

Based on these principles, Chou would compose *Cursive* in 1963.

*Cursive* is a piece for flute and piano. Its name refers to the Chinese calligraphic style cǎoshū 草書, which is a ‘type of script in which the joined strokes and rounded angles result in expressive and contrasting curves and loops’ (Chou 1963). According to Lai, this visual effect can literally be seen in certain sections of the musical score. There, the melodic line moves between the flute and the piano and form the musical analogue of the continuous motion of the single brush (Lai 2009, 120). Another aesthetic principle of the cursive script which Chou has sought to emulate is the uninterrupted but dynamic motion of the flow of ink. This, according to Chang, is reflected in the flexibility of tempo; both the piano and flute are allowed to move at different rates (Chang 2006, 96).

There are many other aesthetic elements from calligraphy that Chou employs in his compositions. Uno Everett has researched this subject and has found many musical analogues of calligraphic techniques in Chou’s works (Everett 2007). For example, the change in speed and density of calligraphic strokes is paralleled in the sudden dynamical and pitch-duration changes. Another example is the invisible motion between the calligraphic strokes; that is, traces of the brush (between the strokes) that are barely visible on paper. Everett sees a musical analogue in Chou’s works and believes that Chou ‘equates the invisible movement between strokes to the extraneous or “filler” notes that connect the structural pitches from the underlying mode or modal complex’ (579).

**Yū Ko (1965)**

As we have already seen in the previous sections and chapters, Chou is also very interested in gǔqín music. The gǔqín has a long tradition and the music is deeply associated with Chinese philosophy and aesthetics. Inspired by its possibilities to invoke a variety of moods with subtle variations in its playing techniques, Chou composed *Yū Ko* in 1965. In this piece Chou adapted the gǔqín song *Song of the Fisherman* (Yúgē 魚歌) by the late Sòng dynasty gǔqín master Máo Mǐnzhòng 毛敏仲 for a chamber ensemble and tried to emulate the gǔqín sound in it. As Chou notes:

> In this adaptation, I have magnified, as closely to the original as possible, the inflections in pitch, articulation, timbre, dynamics, and rhythm to a more perceptible level, by expanding the articulations and timbres possible on each instrument used and by controlling the microtonal modifications in pitch according to the nature of each instrument (Chou 1978, 313).

Thus, the timbral effects of the gǔqín are emulated by altering the sound of the instruments. However, Chou only emulates the gǔqín sounds in order to create an atmosphere of solitude in which the fisherman is in harmony with nature (Chang 2006, 103):

> The fisherman is a symbol of man in communion with nature. Through the deciphering of the tablature notation, this work produces a modern adaptation that realizes the rich variety in tone production found in the precise ch‘in [gǔqín] finger technique, one that employs over a hundred symbols to achieve an elusive yet vital expression that is the essence of this art (Chou 1965).

Here, it is also important to realize that Chou tries to do justice to the gǔqín techniques by also incorporating its symbolisms instead of only its sounds.
Later Works

After Yu Ko, Chou would compose two more works (Pien in 1966 and Yün in 1969) before his increased administrative and organizational responsibilities would force him to enter a period of compositional hiatus. This period lasted until 1986 when he completed the work Beijing in the Mist. As his administrative duties had lessened by then, Chou found time to start composing again. In the 1990s he produced three pieces of music and his compositions continued to incorporate a wide range of aesthetic and philosophical concepts from traditional Chinese culture. In his Concerto for Violoncello and Orchestra (1992), for instance, Chou presents the cello and orchestra as the interaction between man and nature. The concerto, then, is like a painting in which the dialogue between the cello and the orchestra symbolizes the communion between man and nature (Chou 1992). Despite his age, Chou remains a prolific composer as he continues to produce new works in the new millennium.

3.2 The Reception of Chou’s Works

In the previous sections we have come to an understanding of Chou’s musical views and his compositional style. What we may have noticed from these discussions is that Chou’s usage of Chinese aesthetic and philosophic ideas in his music is quite conceptual. Especially in his later works there are few direct usages of Chinese musical materials. So how does the listener perceive his music and can he or she actually hear the Chinese concepts involved? Does the ‘Re-Merger’ that Chou so emphasizes reach the audience or is it merely a technical construct that stays hidden in the composition?

Peter Chang has done research in this area by comparing concert reviews from Chinese speaking countries with concert reviews from Western, Anglo-Saxon, countries. He comes to the conclusion that ‘pieces that evoke specified poetic images such as Landscapes (1949), Willows Are New (1957), and Yu ko (1963) are more in demand among both Chinese and Western audiences’ (Chang 2006, 157). However, when we consider the reception of individual pieces, there are differences in perception between Chinese and Western audiences. Western audiences on the one hand, tend to focus on originality, technicalities such as texture, sonority and structure, and associations with compositional styles of other contemporary composers. As Chang notes,

…most Western audiences thought that the attractiveness of Chou’s works was partly due to the composer’s ability to evoke oriental mysticism and mood by employing traditional Chinese aesthetic principles, such as the emphasis on timbre from the qin [gúqín] music, the emphasis on control of the flow of ink from calligraphy, and the emphasis on characterization by simplest mean from painting, and a Western fascination with oriental painting, poetry, and Debussyn orientalism (157).

The Chinese audiences on the other hand, were ‘more concerned with degrees in which Chou’s works resemble the sound tradition of Chinese instruments, particularly the gúqín, and the degree in which a traditional Chinese melody is recognizable’ (158). The more contemporary elements such as pointillism, serialism, Klangfarbenmelodie and dissonances were harder to comprehend as contemporary sounds were still foreign to Chinese audiences. Thus, the ‘Re-Merger’ is more intuitively felt than it can be exactly pinpointed in the music. The understanding of Chou’s compositions, then, is largely complemented by Chou’s program notes and his pre-concert lectures. This was especially the case for a number of Chinese reviewers who were struggling to understand the contemporary sounds of Chou’s pieces. As Chou’s fame was already established, these reviewers made use of Chou’s writings and, in some cases, even concert reviews from the United States for their writings (163). Nonetheless, even though Western and Chinese audiences have a different perception on Chou’s music, the general opinion seems to be positive and most critics tend to praise the well-balanced integration of Chinese arts and Chinese aesthetics in Chou’s works.
Chapter 4

The Issue of Modernity

In the previous chapters we have come to an understanding of the various aspects of Chou’s (musical) development. In the next chapter I will analyse these aspects critically. But before I proceed, I will first give an overview of the key concepts that will be used in those analyses. The first concept that we need to consider is ‘modernity’; what is it and how is it defined? For this, I will adopt Timothy Mitchell’s definition as he has put forth in his essay *The Stage of Modernity* (2000). Subsequently, I will expand this definition with ideas from Partha Chatterjee’s theory of alternative modernities (1997) in which a connection is established between the desires for one’s past and the desires for one’s own modernity. Finally, I will end this chapter with some insightful comments on ‘the past’ from historian David Lowenthal.

4.1 The Question of Modernity

In order to talk about ‘modernity’ we first need to know what it is. Unfortunately, ‘modernity’ has proven to be one of the most difficult concepts to grasp as every author has his or her own interpretation. Traditionally, there is, among others, the Marxist, the capitalist, and the Weberian view of modernity. However, as the world continues to change, approaches to modernity also alter. As a result, new interpretations continue to appear with each having a different focus. The traditional Eurocentric interpretation, for instance, took modernity as something that originated from Europe and which was intimately tied to its social-economic development. Under the post-colonial discourse, however, this Eurocentric view was deconstructed and the Euro-American exclusiveness to modernity was contested. One of the consequences of this development was the advancement of the so called ‘alternate’ or ‘multiple modernities’ in which Westernization and modernity were decoupled. In this interpretation, modernity was seen as the specific result of the ‘continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs’ of a given society (Eisenstadt 2000, 2; Eisenstadt et al. 2002, 27).

With this multitude of approaches to modernity, which one should we take? Considering the subject of this thesis, it would not be very helpful to make use of a social-economic approach in which modernity is defined as the (Western styled) economic development towards an industrial and urban society. Instead, we need a more abstract definition that is not tied to any spatial or temporal coordinates. Therefore, in this thesis I have decided to adopt Mitchell’s approach from *The Stage of Modernity* (2000).

In his essay, Mitchell attempts to find a description for the notion of ‘modernity’ through a consideration of its problems, assumptions and characteristics. The first issue that he addresses is the origin of modernity. According to Mitchell, the origin of modernity is not located in the West even though it has been associated

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1See (Harvey 1992) for instance.
The Issue of Modernity

with the West. Instead, modernity should be considered as a result from the interaction between the West and the non-West. As these interactions mostly took place in the latter, the origin of modernity is actually located outside the West. This, for instance, is illustrated by the fact that many forms of production and organization were first developed and implemented in places far abroad and only later transported back to Europe. The same is true for the binaries that have functioned to shape the world’s identities:

White and non-white, European and non-European, West and non-West, were identities often elaborated abroad and only later, like nationalism itself, brought to Europe (Mitchell 2000, 4).

Surprisingly, the importance of the periphery, the non-West, to the development of modernity has barely been mentioned in the critical writings of Western intellectuals. Therefore, a re-examination of the Euro-American writings and historiographies is needed in the consideration of the concept of modernity. However, this re-examination does not simply mean relocating the story of modernity to the non-West; this will only subject the history of the non-West to the genealogy of modernity instead of decentring the categories and certainties of the latter (6). Thus, the challenge then, is to find a way ‘to theorize the question of modernity that relocates it within a global context and, at the same time, enables that context to complicate, rather than simply reverse, the narrative logic of modernization’ (7).

In the discussion on modernity, not only geographical space but also historical time needs to be reconsidered. According to Mitchell,

The modern age presents a particular view of geography, in which the world has a single center, Europe . . . , that imagines itself a continent in reference to which all other regions are to be located; and an understanding of history in which there is only one unfolding of time, the history of the West, in reference to which all other histories must establish their significance and receive their meaning. These conceptions of history and geography are related. Historical time, the time of the West, is what gives modern geography its order, an order centred upon Europe. Accounts of the modern world that introduce a topsy-turvy view of this geography, by locating important developments outside the West, typically re-establish the order of modernity by removing these irregularities from any determining local context, or any non-European regional or global context, and repositioning them within the West’s uniform and singular history. The discipline of historical time reorganizes discordant geographies into a universal modernity (7-8).

In other words, (Western) modernity generates its own history by subjecting the histories of the non-West to its own. As a result, history becomes singular; that is, even though each nation or society has its own local history, this history is merely a variation of a more uniform, universal narrative in which the stages of progress are already fixed (9). As a result, many histories have been overlooked ‘in order to fit the non-West into the historical time of the West’ (11).

From the above, it may be noticed that the nature of modernity is to be dominant. Moreover, it upholds itself through the homogenization and singularization of time and space, and by relegating any threat to its periphery. This singularization, in particular, is manifested in the experience of contemporaneity or presence; society is organized in such a way that everyone shares the same space and the same time. Interestingly, it is exactly this process that has made the West become associated with modernity. As Mitchell notes,

We might rephrase things again now and suggest that modernity is produced as the West. The “now” of modernity, its culture of contemporaneity, the particular sense of simultaneity that is taken as modernity’s experience, depends upon the representation of an homogenous space. The inhabitants of this space, almost all of whom never meet one another, can be conceived as living the same empty moment, as occupying the same time-space. This effect of simultaneity makes it possible to construct the idea of historical time: history is the story of a civilization, culture, or people whose diverse lives are imagined to share a singular epoch and to progress as a unit from one contemporaneous moment to the next (15).
The non-West then, is considered as a potential disruption to this homogeneous space-time. As a result, they are relegated to the periphery and are designated as ‘the Other.’ They form the boundary of modernity and represent a timeless non-place (16).

Having come to an understanding of the complex workings of modernity, how can we come up with a description that addresses these processes of homogenization and singularization without being succumbed by them and without producing yet another homogeneous account of the modernization story? Mitchell attempts to solve this deadlock by considering modernity as the staging of representation. In particular, ‘the modern is staged as representation’ (16). Although this description remains somewhat abstract, its greatest advantage is that it allows both the before mentioned self-defining nature of modernity as well as the underlying tensions and resistances that are created during the act of staging, to exist alongside each other. Equally interesting to notice is that with this description, post-modernity is not the negation of the certainties and universalities of modernity, but simply the outburst of the instability that has always been present in the staging of modernity (17).

Here, the ‘staging’ and ‘representation’ are not limited to the creation of images and they should be interpreted more broadly. As Mitchell notes,

To claim that the modern is always staged as representation is not to argue that modernity is concerned more with image-making than with reality. It is to argue that the colonial-modern involves creating an effect we recognize as reality, by organizing the world endlessly to represent it. Representation does not refer here simply to the making of images or meanings. It refers to forms of social practice that set up in the social architecture and lived experience of the world what seems an absolute distinction between image (or meaning, or structure) and reality, and thus a distinctive imagination of the real (17).

One consequence of this obsession with staging is the rise of binaries, with the dualism of image and reality as one of the most significant. Indeed, the act of representation constantly reminds us of its difference with and the existence of the original. This contrast encourages the continued production of new representations in which different aspects of the original are being staged.

One of the important aspects of Mitchell’s description is that it provides an explanation for the colonial discourse of the West. The key argument is that the world is staged as a representation and that this staging demands a spectator. As a result, the world becomes subjugated to the spectator’s subjectivity:

Representation is the key, first of all, to how we imagine the construction of modern selfhood. On the one hand, the world-as-picture demands a spectator. It typically positions the person as the subject for whom the social world seems to exist as a view to be observed, an experience to be had, a set of meanings to be interpreted, or a code to be followed or deciphered. On the other hand . . . the modern individual came to be defined as the one who could occupy such a position of disembodied observer of the world. Freed in this way from the traditional constraints of habit or belief and transcending their localism, it was said, modern subjects could discover a universal faculty of reason and employ it to represent to themselves the experiences and feelings of others and to submit their own interior life to its pedagogy (20).

Colonialism is then motivated by the idea that the colonized were unable to produce abstract representations themselves and were ‘the prisoner of images from which it could not obtain a spectatorial distance and thereby establish itself as a subject’ (21).

Another important aspect of Mitchell’s description is that it leaves room for possible disturbances. Indeed, since the experience of modernity is characterized by representation, there is always the possibility of disrupting this experience because of the risk of misrepresentation. As Mitchell notes,

2 Italics have been provided by myself.
If modernity is not so much a stage of history but rather its staging, then it is a world particularly vulnerable to a certain kind of disruption or displacement. No representation can ever match its original, especially when the original exists only as something promised by a multiplicity of imitations and repetitions. Every act of staging or representation is open to the possibility of misrepresentation, or at least of parody or misreading. An image or simulation functions by its subtle difference from what it claims to simulate or portray, even if the difference is no more than the time lag between repetitions. Every performance of the modern is the producing of this difference, and each such difference represents the possibility of some shift, displacement, or contamination (Mitchell 2000, 23).

Thus, even though modernity is always staged as that which is singular, present, and authoritative, its dominant nature can still be disrupted through the instabilities that are inherent in its representations:

Modernity, like capitalism, is defined by its claim to universality, to a uniqueness, unity, and universality that represent the end (in every sense) of history. Yet this always remains an impossible unity, an incomplete universal. Each staging of the modern must be arranged to produce the unified, global history of modernity, yet each requires those forms of difference that introduce the possibility of a discrepancy, that return to undermine its unity and identity. Modernity then becomes the unsuitable yet unavoidable name for all these discrepant histories (24).

As we have seen throughout this section, modernity is not so much a concrete set of characteristics than a self-defining process with homogenization and singularisation as its prime strategies. Indeed, as the world changes, the perception and the presentation of what is to be considered modern also changes. However, even though the staging of modernity becomes different, its underlying goals and strategies remain the same. This is also the strength of Mitchell’s approach; by purely focussing on modernity’s dynamics and describing its nature instead of assigning a number of concrete properties to it, Mitchell’s framework becomes applicable to a wide range of historical developments in the world. Indeed, as I will consider the issue of modernity in relation to Chou’s musical development, it would be ineffective to use a definition of modernity that is grounded to a specific location or a specific time in history.

Even though I have spent a considerable amount of space to describe Mitchell’s approach, this framework will not explicitly return in the coming chapters. Instead, it will function as guidance for our thinking about modernity. More specifically, the analyses in the upcoming chapters should be seen as a spatio-temporal implementation of this framework. That is, the focal point will be on how modernity is staged within a given context. Thus, when I talk about the ‘creation of a Chinese musical modernity,’ its meaning within Mitchell’s framework would be: how can a Chinese musical modernity be staged within the social, historical and cultural context of China?

4.2 The Desire for an Own Modernity

In his lecture titled Our Modernity (1997), Chatterjee presents several examples of nineteenth century Indian authors who, like Chou, lament the past and condemn the present. Significantly, the pasts in all these examples were perceived by the authors as a time that was still unaffected by modernity. Chatterjee argues that such a yearning for the past is actually the yearning for a time that was still uncomplicated and controllable. Chatterjee starts his argument by going back to the ideas of Immanuel Kant. In Kant’s concept of enlightenment there are two spheres of reasoning. The first sphere is the ‘public’ sphere in which ‘matters of general concern are discussed and where reason is not mobilized for the pursuit of an individual interest or for the support of a particular group’ (11). The second sphere is the ‘private’ sphere in which the exercise of reason is invoked to pursue individual interests. The most important difference between these two spheres is that in the ‘public’ sphere, there is total freedom of speech and thought, while in the ‘private’ sphere, this freedom is absent or even undesirable. A soldier, for instance, cannot refuse an order when he ‘privately’
questions the decision of his superiors. On the other hand, when there is a ‘public’ debate regarding military affairs, he should have full freedom to express his views.

However, even though there is complete freedom of speech and thought in the ‘public’ sphere, this sphere is only accessible to those who are qualified. As Chatterjee notes,

When the individual in search of knowledge seeks to rise above his particular social location and participate in the universal domain of discourse, his right to freedom of thought and opinion must be unhindered. He must also have the full authority to form his own beliefs and opinions, just as he must bear the full responsibility for expressing them. There is no doubt that Kant is here claiming the right of free speech only for those who have the requisite qualifications for engaging in the exercise of reason and the pursuit of knowledge and those who can use that freedom in a responsible manner (12).

Thus, the rise of the ‘public’ sphere is accompanied by the rise of power structures consisting of experts and specialized authorities. As Chatterjee writes,

Just as we have meant by enlightenment an unrestricted and universal field for the exercise of reason, so have we built up an intricately differentiated structure of authorities which specifies who has the right to say what on which subjects (12-13).

This conflict between those who have the desire to exercise their freedom of speech and those who have the power to limit the access to the ‘public’ sphere was most evident in colonial countries. In those countries the local people were considered primitive, and the colonizers considered it their duty to provide education and to lead them into Western and supposedly universal modernity. As a consequence, the ‘public’ sphere became dominated by the colonizers, and the colonized had no illusion that they could ever enter this domain. As in the case of India, Chatterjee writes,

We have never quite been able to believe that there exists a universal domain of free discourse, unfettered by differences of race or nationality. Somehow, from the very beginning, we had a shrewd guess that given the close complicity between modern knowledges and modern regimes of power, we would forever remain consumers of universal modernity; never would be taken seriously as its producers. It is for this reason that we have tried, for over a hundred years, to take our eyes away from this chimera of universal modernity and clear up a space where we might become the creators of our own modernity (15).

This desire to express one’s own opinion and to take control of one’s own destiny is ultimately projected onto the past. The past becomes an idealized world in which ‘there was beauty, prosperity and a healthy sociability, and which was, above all, our own creation’ (20). It becomes an escape from the present. At the same time, the past also functions as a driving force to act against the passivities and injustices of this present. Knowing that there was once an ideal world, there is the urge to recreate this world again.

Even though Chatterjee uses different wordings to present his views, his arguments are nonetheless compatible with Mitchell’s more abstract approach. Indeed, the denial to the ‘public sphere’ is nothing else than the idea that the colonized were incapable of producing abstract representations. Moreover, the denial also functions to maintain the borders of Western modernity, as the admittance of the colonized to the ‘public sphere’ might cause a disruption by triggering the inherent instabilities underlying the staging of this modernity. However, the persisting wish of the colonized to represent themselves and their continued denial ultimately motivates them to search for a staging of their own modernity. The past is hereby a natural starting point as it was a time that was still uncorrupted by the colonizer’s modernity.

4.3 The Past as a Tool

As we have seen in the previous section, the past provides a motivation to act upon the present and turn it into a place in which one regains control. However, the past can also reach into the present and function as a
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tool in our quest for our own modernity. In order to comprehend this, I will present some findings regarding
the functions of the past from David Lowenthal’s *The Past is a Foreign Country* (2002).

In his book, Lowenthal notes that the past ‘validates present attitudes and actions by affirming their re-
semblance to former ones’ (40). This validation can be achieved in two different ways, through preservation
and through restoring. Preservation concerns the act of continuing a practice which supposedly remains
unchanged over the course of time. For practices in which the main mode of transmission is through oral
communication, the emphasis on the unchanging tradition is especially strong as there are few dated mate-
rials in which past practices can be compared with present ones. For practices in which there are written
materials available, this becomes more difficult as the historical records most likely will reveal differences
between the past and the present. In this case people tend to shift the emphasis to the assumed timeless
values and lineages (41). The second strategy for validating the present is restoration. It is a strategy that is
usually invoked in times of crisis. By going back to a successful past and restoring the values of that time,
it is reasoned that present problems will be solved.

Besides validating the present, the past also serves to construct our identities. As Lowenthal notes,
the past is ‘integral to our sense of identity’ and the ‘ability to recall and identify with our own past gives
existence meaning, purpose, and value’ (41). Interestingly, the past of a person is usually connected to the
past of a place. Therefore, people who have no connection to a place must find other means to create a past.
As Lowenthal writes,

Those who lack links with a place must forge an identity through other pasts. Immigrants cut off from
their roots remain dislocated; discontinuity impels many who grow up in pioneer lands either to exag-
gerate attachments to romanticized homelands or stridently to assert an adoptive belong (42).

However, such pasts can be created through ‘portable emblems of the past’ (42). Those are objects who are
tied to a certain history or a certain place and provides the owner a link to the lost past.

The past also provides a way for promoting national identity. By sharing and identifying with a common
national or communal past, individuals become groups with shared values. This is especially the case with
remote pasts; the older a past is, the more the past becomes essentialized and the easier the individual
becomes communal. As Lowenthal notes:

Remoteness purifies, shifting the older past from the personal to the communal realm, like Japanese
forebears who lose individuality some thirty-three years after death and merge indistinguishably with
the whole ancestral community. Distance purges the past of personal attachments and makes it an object
of universal veneration, lending the remote a majesty and dignity absent from the homely, intimate good
old days just gone (53).

The remoteness of the past has another interesting implication; it empowers the very ancient past with
a mythical aura. Thus, the past becomes a utopian world devoid of human failures. A world that precedes
history and is one with nature. In particular, it is a world which retained its innocence and a world in which
the origins of present phenomena can be traced back to (54-55).

From the above, it appears that the past is perceived as an autonomous unchangeable object. An object
which can be invoked at any place and any time according to the subject’s desire. Indeed, as Lowenthal
notes:

The past is appreciated because it is over; what happened in it has ended. Termination gives it a sense
of completion, of stability, of permanence lacking in the ongoing present. Nothing more can happen to
the past; it is safe from the unexpected and the untoward, from accident or betrayal. Because it is over,
the past can be ordered and domesticated, given a coherence foreign to the chaotic and shifting present.
Nothing in the past can now go wrong . . . (62).

It is no wonder then, that ‘the past’ is invoked in political conflicts and debates; because for its user, it is
considered a safe and effective tool.
Chapter 5

From China’s Cultural Past to Chou’s Modernity

Even though contemporary classical music is practised throughout the world and is widely accessible, its discourse is still largely made up in the West. Up to a certain degree, this is not surprising since the genre developed out of Western classical music and therefore has its roots in Western music theory. However, one must also be aware that as Western classical music has been part of Western modernity, the development of contemporary music is very much steered by modernity’s underlying processes of singularization and homogenization. Indeed, with the uniform curriculum at music institutes worldwide, music students across the world are equipped with almost the same knowledge on Western classical (contemporary) music. And since a person can almost only become a composer after attending one of such institutions, it is of no surprise that the contemporary music practice is still largely associated with the West. Using the language of the previous chapter, it could be said that contemporary music is staged as ‘the music from the West’ and that a musician can only enter its ‘public’ sphere after being educated at an institution that upholds its Western hegemony.

It is this context from which I will consider Chou’s musical development. And one of the main questions that I will address in this chapter is, how are we to position Chou’s views within the contemporary music discourse given its association with Western modernity? As I will demonstrate, Chou’s particular staging of Asia’s cultural past leads to a re-staging of this discourse.

5.1 Re-Staging the Contemporary Music Discourse

To start my analysis, let me first consider the following basic question: what does Chou want? For this, let us go back to §2.1 for a moment. There we can read that Chou is lamenting on the present state of music culture; according to him, it has run out of ideas. In Chou’s view there is a lack of true creativity in the arts as it becomes threatened by the increasing commercialization of the world. Therefore, there is the need for reinvention. And inspired by examples from the past, Chou believes that true creativity can only be restored through a dialogue between cultures; through a ‘Re-Merger.’ Thus, to answer the stated question, Chou’s goal is to (re)establish a multi-cultural musical climate where there is true creativity again. Interestingly, the language that Chou uses to express his views is quite modernist of tone. Indeed, his conviction that the East and West once shared the same values indicates a belief in the existence of a timeless universality. And his insistence on the cultural dialogue between the East and West as the only way to reinvention indicates a belief in singular progression. Within this modernist mode of thought, the present times are seen to be lacking both progress and universal values. Subsequently, as the world around him is deteriorating, Chou chooses to seek for the successful past; just as Chatterjee has described, the past becomes a driving force.
for him to act against the passivities and corruption of the present. From this perspective, Chou’s goal is to (re)establish a musical modernity in which there is true creativity and universality again.

Having (re)formulated Chou’s aims, I will now continue my analysis of his musical views with the following question: how are the East, Asia, and the West exactly (re)presented? The first thing to notice is that the West is presented as a culture in decline. Indeed, for Chou, the West has contributed heavily to the world with the Enlightenment as its greatest legacy. However, the creativity that Western modernity brought forth has now finally reached its limits; marred by all-pervasive commercialization, it has become corrupted and unable to produce new ideas anymore. Thus, there is an urgent need for reinvention. This reinvention, however, can, according to Chou, only be achieved with the active participation of the East. Consequently, the East becomes the cure for the problems of the West and, more importantly, is essential for its survival. However, here, ‘the East’ does not refer to the East of the present as this East is also slowly becoming corrupted because its members are massively adopting Western modernity. Instead, the East refers to ‘the East of the past,’ to its cultural heritage that has been forgotten and neglected through the passing of time. However, exactly because of this negligence, this cultural past is also a place that has been spared the flaws of Western modernity. Indeed, in Chou’s writings Asia’s cultural past is not only a source of inspiration, but, echoing Lowenthal’s remarks, it is also a source of timeless aesthetic values whose pureness and remoteness has endowed it with an aura of authority and authenticity. The concepts of ‘single tone’ and ‘harmony’ (hé) are examples of such values.

Asia’s cultural past is not only a source; it is also an example to follow. According to Chou, one of the main causes for the present lack of creativity is the lack of critical and independent artists; artists who were responsible for the cultural successes of a nation. Chou sees the Chinese scholar-literate ‘wénrén’ 文人 as the Chinese equivalent of such an artist, and advocates for a return of the wénrén spirit.¹ The wénrén were the scholar-literals from feudal China. They were trained in the Confucian classics and Chinese arts, and they were to become scholars, educators, philosophers or statesmen. However, in the hands of Chou the wénrén has also become a timeless intellectual who possesses the universal values needed for developing a creative and critical mind. Indeed, for Chou, the wénrén was ‘the person with ultimate knowledge of the arts’ and ‘were regarded as the conscience of society and conveyor of its legacy’ (Chou 2002a, 13). Additionally, Chou sees a direct relation between the successes of China and its intellectual climate; only in the presence of a wénrén spirit can there be cultural progress:

The wenren spirit is at once Chinese and universal – Chinese in that it is a unique institution responsible for more than two millennia of China’s cultural and social life, and universal in that it stands for commitment to true quality and deep sincerity, to independence, honesty, and courage. But, as in the case of any culture or society, wenren spirit has had also its ups and downs through the centuries. Faring badly during the Qing dynasty, its spirit collapsed along with society under the Manchurian rulers. Totally discredited by the early twentieth century, it took much of the blame for the failure of the Qing dynasty (Chou 2004, 218).

As a result, the wénrén has come to represent the successes of the past. However, since its values are universal, such successes can, according to Chou, be repeated as long as we adopt those values.

From the above analysis we can see that Chou is effectively presenting Western modernity as a development that has become corrupted. In fact, when we take a closer look at Chou’s wordings, Western modernity has been an incomplete process from the start. Indeed, when Chou introduces the concept of ‘Re-Merger,’ he notes that the East and West once shared the same musical sources. It is only with the passing of time that these two musics have diverged. Western music, in particular, managed to develop into a dominant genre as it became part of Western modernity. Nevertheless, it remained an incomplete development as, according to

¹See (Chou 2004) or (Chou 2002b); the former is a re-edited version of the latter.
Chou, it lacked the Asian values from which it was separated in ancient times. And this shortcoming, Chou argues, can only be rectified through a cultural ‘Re-Merger’ between the East and the West; only then can contemporary music be reinvented and its true universality be restored.

**Negotiating Modernity**

As I have mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, contemporary classical music is very much associated with Western modernity. Given this association and realizing its powerful discourse, we might start to wonder how Chou has been able to avoid opposition against his radical ideas. As we may remember from §4.1, modernity is a process that distributes universal values and marginalizes its threats to the periphery. Therefore, in the discourse of contemporary music the cultural histories of Asia have largely been relegated to the primitive past. However, with his radical views Chou is openly challenging its fundamentals and historiographies. In particular, he is seeking to re-establish the importance of Asia’s cultural past and aims to re-stage the universalities of contemporary music. To a certain degree, Chou’s project has been a success considering the critical acclaim he received from critics worldwide. So how did he manage to generate this success and find acceptance among his colleagues? One of the most important factors would be his extensive musical education and his lengthy stay in the West. Having spent years in the United States, Chou has befriended many composers and knows the contemporary music scene inside out. Moreover, thanks to his intimate connection to Varèse and his status as his official executor, Chou has established himself as a prominent figure in the musical world. Thus, one can safely say that Chou has gained access to the very core of the ‘public’ sphere of the contemporary music discourse. And it is exactly this privileged position that has allowed Chou to express his views and have his voice heard.

However, managing to be heard is only the first step. The important part is to also find acceptance from the members of the music community. This part may prove more difficult as the discourse of modernity might relegate the potential disruption to the periphery. However, Chou masterfully refutes this problem by always operating within the margins of the contemporary music discourse. Indeed, even though he addresses the flaws of the modern development, he never negates its contributions. And even though he questions the universalities of contemporary music, he never doubts the existence of one. Thus, in a sense, Chou never challenges modernity itself; he only challenges the subjects of modernity. That is, he only wishes to incorporate the values of Asian cultures into the contemporary music discourse; he has never intended to overthrow it. In fact, as Asian values are presented as crucial for the contemporary music’s survival, it can be argued that Chou is aiming to ensure its continuance. In other words, Chou’s ideas are more constructive than hostile; and this may well be the very reason that his views have found acceptance among his peers.

At this moment, it is interesting to make a small comparison between Chou’s strategy and Chatterjee’s theory. In Chatterjee’s theory it was the denial of access to the ‘public’ sphere that prompted the colonized to stage their own modernity. In Chou’s case, however, the ‘public’ sphere is freely accessible to Chou and because of this, it has never been in his interest to overthrow or to create an alternative discourse outside the existing contemporary music discourse. Instead, being conscious of his cultural heritage and also being aware that the contemporary music scene was staged as the ‘music of the West,’ Chou aimed to re-stage this scene into the ‘music of the East and the West.’

To a certain degree, Chou can be considered an outburst of the instabilities that are hidden underneath Western (musical) modernity. Indeed, the expansion of Western classical music has been a historical success as it managed to subject parts of Asia into its discourse. In the present age, however, the non-Western historiographies that Western modernity had suppressed are slowly re-emerging and are starting to demand their rightful place in history. Chou’s musical views can be considered a manifestation of this development; as he discovers his cultural heritage, Chou begins to question the values of the contemporary classical music discourse that has been imposed by the dominant West. For Chou, Asian aesthetics can, and should, also be
part of this discourse. In this perspective Chou’s musical views can be read as a strategy aimed to de-centre the Western hegemony in the contemporary music discourse by steering towards one in which both the East and the West have a fair share of influence.

5.2 The Forming of a Discourse

In the previous section I have argued that Chou is trying to re-stage and open up the contemporary music discourse for the inclusion of non-Western, Asian voices, through his musical views. This, however, is not the end of this story. Indeed, while on the one hand he is encouraging the inter-cultural dialogue, on the other hand, he is also actively shaping the borders of this dialogue. This development is most clearly seen in his critical writings. In his article *Asian Concepts and Twentieth-Century Western Composers* (1971), for instance, Chou criticizes various Western composers for incorrectly interpreting Asian cultural sources and for their shallow cultural interactions. Even John Cage, who has been considered the primary representative of introducing ‘Eastern wisdom’ into the contemporary music scene in the early period after the Second World War received harsh criticisms from Chou (211).

Chou is able to make these criticisms because of his status; not only is he considered a full member of the contemporary music discourse, but because of his cultural background, he is also considered knowledgeable on Asian cultures. The latter is manifested in his familiarity with academic discussions on Chinese cultural history; this is demonstrated, for instance, in his article on Chinese historiography (1976) and his critical review on Van Gulik’s seminal gúqún book *The Lore of the Lute* (1974b). As a result, Chou is seen as an authoritative figure on inter-cultural composing. And with this authority, Chou has been able to express his musical views and pose aesthetic criteria on which inter-cultural compositions are to be evaluated with. Thus, Chou’s activities have not only opened up the contemporary music discourse, but it has also led to the creation of a ‘public’ sphere that restricts the inter-cultural dialogue to those who are knowledgeable enough.

Interpreting Chou’s Music

With his musical views, Chou is not only contributing to the establishment of a ‘public’ sphere, but he is also creating a context which his compositions are to be evaluated in. As I have already demonstrated in the early chapters, Chou spends a considerable amount of energy expressing his aesthetic views and explaining his compositions. This is very much needed as the Chinese aesthetic elements in his compositions are difficult to recognize aurally. I have already touched upon this in §3.2 when I briefly discussed the reception of his works. One of the observations was indeed that both Western and Chinese audiences had to rely on the program notes and pre-concert lectures of Chou to understand his pieces. However, exactly because of this reliance on extra-musical information, it also becomes difficult for the listener to use a set of criteria to judge his compositions other than the criteria offered by Chou himself.

This reliance is also illustrated by the academic scholarship on Chou. In many articles, Chou’s compositions are almost exclusively evaluated and interpreted on the basis of his writings. Rarely do radical or subversive readings try to challenge his views or works. On the contrary, scholars seem to be fully engrossed by Chou’s musical views and are mostly concerned with identifying the Chinese aesthetic influences in his works. An example which illustrates this is Chen Chia-Chi’s analysis of Chou’s *Windswept Peaks* (1990). In one part of her analysis she attempts to find parallels between the aesthetics of Chinese gardens and the musical structures in the piece. Her main observation is that both are characterized by contrasts:

The Chinese garden, as opposed to the characteristics of the Western garden’s sweeping vistas and geometry, is particular about the ideas of zigzag and contrast. The contrast in height, density, speed, and layers, such as high and low rocks, flowing water and static objects, far and near scenery, and scarce and
abundant trees in the Chinese garden, creates the tempo and rhythm for the space, as well as forming a movement for nature (Chen 2006, 90).

To my knowledge, Chou has never mentioned the art of Chinese gardening in his writings. However, the manner in which Chen abstracts the aesthetics of Chinese gardens closely resembles the way in which Chou himself abstracts the aesthetics of Chinese traditional arts such as painting and calligraphy. This shows us that it is not only Chou’s musical views but also Chou’s mode of thought that influences the reader. Consequently, it is probably fair to say that Chou’s outspoken views have created an interpretive discourse for his compositions. The influence of this discourse becomes especially evident when we compare the academic scholarship on his works with the academic scholarship on the works of other Chinese composers. The compositions of Tán Dùn 譚盾, for instance, have been analysed not only for their musical but also for their post-modern and political elements. This stands in stark contrast with Chou, whose Windswept Peaks (1990), for example, has only been analysed for its musical elements despite its dedication to the fallen intellectuals during the infamous Tiān’ānmén 天安門 massacre that took place on June 4, 1989. With such an important historical event as an inspirational source, one would expect scholars to focus on and analyse the political aspects involved in this composition. Surprisingly, they have all refrained from doing this in favour of music theoretical analyses. It is as if there is a interpretative discourse present that meticulously confines and dictates all interpretations on Chou’s compositions.

5.3 Becoming wénrén

Throughout this whole chapter I have demonstrated how Chou’s musical views and musical activities are staging and re-staging the contemporary music discourse and Asia’s cultural past. In this last section I want to consider a question that is easily overlooked: how is Chou himself to be positioned within these stagings? For start, Chou cares very much about the Chinese cultural past and he emphatically promotes this past through his musical activities. Also, on a personal level, Chou himself is actively engaged with it as he is familiar with the Chinese classics and practices the traditional arts of poetry, calligraphy and gǔqín. Consequently, Chou seems very much like a modern day wénrén, and some scholars do indeed associate him with one; Chang for instance notes,

Chou’s traditional Chinese Wenren spirit can certainly be detected …the ultimate pleasure of a man of letter is to be identified with the Tao or the principle, the ultimate reality. Chou is the kind of cultural broker who upholds his principle and constantly confirms his values and beliefs through cultural and musical activities (Chang 1995, 34).

The intricateness of this identification cannot be underestimated. On the one hand, Chou has become associated with the wénrén because of his passion and enthusiasm for Chinese culture. On the other hand, this association is a constructed one as the wénrén notion gained recognition only after Chou himself promoted it in his writings. Therefore, one can say that with the staging of the wénrén Chou is actually also staging himself. The consequences of this staging are far-reaching. First of all, as the quote above demonstrates, Chou comes to be associated with, or even embody, the values of the past. As a result, he becomes a living link between the past and the present. And through him, the past can find continuity with the present again. At the same time, however, exactly because of this link with the past, Chou is also able to borrow its (staged) authority and authenticity. This, for instance, is reflected in his ability to establish the ‘public’ sphere and the interpretative arena that I have discussed in the previous sections.

Another important consequence of Chou’s association with the wénrén is that he has come to form a central node that links his music, his views and his activities with each other; it has all become one integral

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2 See (Young 2009) and (Sheppard 2009) for instance.

3 These are the ancient Chinese texts.
whole. This, for instance, means that his music is always considered in relation to his personal development and his musical activities. Indeed, as I have already mentioned before, many scholars rely heavily on his musical views for their analyses; and in fact, it may even be unwise to do it differently (Chang 1995, 282).

At the same time, this wholeness also means that Chou, the person, comes to be defined by his music and cultural views; the wénrén association is the prime example of this. As a result, all these different aspects come to narrate each other and it becomes hard to tell them apart. This development very much echoes Stuart Hall’s stance on identity forming:

…identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from,’ so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. Identities are therefore constituted within, not outside representation (Hall 1996, 4).

And in Chou’s case, his identity is constructed within the wénrén representation.

Interestingly, this intertwining of Chou’s personal life, his music and his activities has become an integral whole with its own internal logic. His views and his music have generated its own discourse within the contemporary music scene. And with his activities, Chou has also managed to create an institutional framework that supports this discourse and consolidates his authority. Thus, to a certain degree, we might say that Chou has staged his own musical modernity.
Chapter 6

Modernization through Tradition

In the previous chapter I have shown how the cultural past could be used to re-stage an existing discourse. In this chapter I will further illustrate this intricate process through a discussion of the historical development of contemporary classical music in China. As I will show, Chou’s engagement with the cultural past provided an example for the Chinese post-Cultural Revolution composers to follow. Through the revaluation of China’s cultural past, they were able to create their own musical modernity.

6.1 The Introduction of Western Classical Music to China

In the past few hundred years, China had faced enormous challenges on social, economical and cultural levels. These challenges were greatly intensified when Western colonial powers started to increase their interaction with China in the beginning of the nineteenth century. As cultural misunderstandings and conflicting economic interests increasingly occurred, the relationship between China and the foreign powers became quite hostile. In the subsequent conflicts that followed, China mostly came out as loser and was often forced to make economic concessions to Western powers. As this trend continued, Chinese officials and intellectuals became increasingly concerned with the situation of the country. Subsequently, in their quest to overturn the crisis they became more and more aware of the economic and technological advances of the West, even up to the point that they had to admit that the West was technologically superior to China. Under these circumstances, China started to import foreign technology as the country was convinced that it could gain the upper hand as soon as the technological gap was bridged. Unfortunately, this was not the case, and by the second half of the nineteenth century, more and more progressive intellectuals, of which some had enjoyed an education in Europe, were more and more convinced that it was also a cultural problem. For them, not only a technological change but also a cultural change was needed to catch up with the West. Under these circumstances, traditional Chinese culture became a hindrance to the modernization project.

These sentiments only increased at the beginning of the twentieth century as China was plagued by foreign imperialism and internal rebellions. The call to rebuild China was stronger than ever and an intellectual revolution, which would later be referred to as the May Fourth Movement (Wǔsì Yùndòng 五四運動), took off. For the May Fourth Movement, socio-political changes were needed to restore the nation. However, in order to achieve the desired changes, Chinese traditional culture had to be abolished. For the May Fourth Movement, ‘the basic precondition for meaningful political and social change is a wholesale transformation

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1 For an overview of China’s historical background the reader can consult (Schoppa 2000) and (Ter Haar 2009). For a thorough discussion on China’s musical development in the twentieth century and in particular on its interaction with politics, the reader is referred to (Jones 2001; Kraus 1989; Melvin et al. 2004; Mittler 1997).

2 Although its name is derived from a student protest that took place on May 4th, 1919, the movement is generally seen to have lasted from 1915 to 1921.
of the values and the spirit of the people.’ This transformation is hereby ‘assumed to require a radical rejection of the prevailing traditions of the Chinese past’ (Lin 1979, 4). Thus, to revitalize China, a ‘complete transformation of the traditional Chinese world view and a total reconstruction of the traditional Chinese mentality’ was necessary (26). This approach emphasized intellectual and cultural change over political, social, and economical change; the latter will follow from the former as Lin notes,

First, change of world view, which would then bring about a second basic level, change of the system of symbols, values, and beliefs — this cultural change, in turn, would precipitate other political, social, and economic changes (27).

The cultural ‘renewal’ occurred on many levels of society and the Chinese musical culture was no exception. For many radical reformers traditional music was seen as inferior and outdated, and it was to be modernized according to the models of Western classical music. Even if traditional Chinese music was to be retained, it should be ‘modernized’ through the use of Western music theory and Western classical instruments. Additionally, music education became institutionalized and in the late 1910s ‘music reform groups’ were set up to introduce Western music to the general public (Jones 2001, 36). At the same time, these institutes initiated discussions on the creation of a ‘national music.’ Indeed, even though many Chinese intellectuals adopted Western modernity, it was never their intention to remain consumers. They have always opted to use it as a means to rebuild China and create their own ‘Chinese modernity.’ In particular, this Chinese modernity was to be recognized internationally and able to share the stage with Western modernities. For Chinese music this was no different; the aim had always been to create a new type of ‘national music’ that could represent the new modern China and contribute to the international music community. However, with regard to what this ‘national music’ should sound like, the opinions were divided. While the general consensus leaned towards the ‘insertion of carefully selected elements of indigenous musical culture into European-derived harmonic structures’ (26), the more radical musicians opposed to this idea as they were guided by their aversion towards the ‘primitive’ Chinese traditional music.

The discussions surrounding the creation of a ‘national music’ became even more complex when political parties started to interfere. This was the case when the Japanese raided Shanghai in 1932 and massive protests against the attack began to occur. In order to unify the country, the nationalist government started to use music as a tool to mobilize the masses and stir up nationalist sentiments (44). As China became more and more chaotic through the increasing domestic and international conflicts, music became an important political instrument for the various parties. In the republican period in which the nationalist Kuomintang (國民黨) was in power, music was used to unify the masses and serve the government. After the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 in which the communist party came to power, music was required to serve the public and represent the people. It was only after the Cultural Revolution in 1976 that the Chinese government would slightly loosen its political grip on music. However, the damage was already done. Chinese composers have worked for years under an ideological and political burden. One the one hand, they were expected to produce a type of ‘national music’ which was both modern and distinctively Chinese. On the other hand, however, they could not make free use of Chinese traditional culture because there were always elements that were either seen as backwards by the early twentieth century radical intellectuals, or capitalistic by the communists. Moreover, because of the political function of music during Mao’s regime, the pieces that these composers produced were also required to serve and represent the masses. Thus, any complexities that could alienate the general public was forbidden. As a result, many compositions were written in a late romantic style in which Chinese sounding melodies were combined with Western harmony, counterpoint and instruments. Not surprisingly, these compositions were seen as old fashioned and kitsch

3 The Chinese historian Lin Yü-Sheng 林毓生 also calls this approach the “cultural-intellectualistic” approach (Lin 1979, 26).
4 During the republican period (1912–1949), the Kuomintang party ruled the country from 1928 to 1949.
by the international music community. Thus, before the 1980s Chinese composers have largely failed in creating their own ‘musical modernity’ as they have never really managed to transcend the ideological and political constraints on their music.

### 6.2 China’s Musical Modernity

As we have seen in the previous section, China’s modernization program was shaped by various parties; not only the musicians, but also the political authorities and the intelligentsia had an opinion of how a Chinese musical modernity was to be staged. Nonetheless, despite the large number of opinions, they all share the same characteristics; Chinese contemporary music was to be acknowledged as modern and recognized as Chinese, and it was to contribute to the international music community. Interestingly, while other Chinese composers were still struggling to achieve these goals, Chou, on the other side of the pacific, already gained a level of recognition his Chinese colleagues could only dream of. Indeed, his compositions were not only well received, but they were lauded, both by Western and Asian critics, for its skilful synthesis of Western and Chinese aesthetics. As a result, Chou had very much secured a place for himself in the international contemporary music community. Moreover, as I have shown in the previous chapter, Chou managed to open up the contemporary music discourse to allow for the participation and inclusion of different traditions and different voices. And with the rediscovery of his cultural heritage, Chou has also developed a very personal musical style that enriched the contemporary music practice. With these successes it was then no surprise that his musical ideas would inspire many Chinese composers to follow the same path. In this section I will elaborate on this development by asking in which way Chou’s success has influenced and functioned as an example for China’s musical modernization project.

Considering the failure of China’s musical modernization project and the musical success of Chou, the starting point for the analysis would be to trace the factors that caused this huge discrepancy. What exactly distinguished Chou from his Chinese colleagues? The most important factor would be that Chou was not tied to any ideological or political constraints. He could experiment freely and was only bounded by artistic considerations. As a result, he saw no problem in using Chinese traditional culture as a source for his compositions. Indeed, as we read in chapter 1, he was even encouraged and challenged by his composition teachers to make use of his cultural heritage. Unlike the then prevalent opinion in China, Chou saw no immediate contradiction between Chinese tradition and musical modernity. On the contrary, as Chou matured, he considered Chinese aesthetics as compatible with Western aesthetics and even a necessary ingredient to achieve universal modernity.

Chou came to his insights after years of active engagement and constant evaluation of China’s cultural past. And it was exactly this confrontation with the past, a confrontation which the Chinese intellectuals had neglected, that was needed to resolve the conflict between tradition and modernity. Indeed, as we have seen in the previous section, the radical intellectuals thought of Chinese tradition as hindrance to modernity and thus, aimed to radically break away from the past. However, such a radical act could never solve the problems of China; it merely ignored it (Lin 1979, 154-155). According to Lin, the breakdown of Chinese tradition had created two serious problems that would keep haunting China’s modernization project until it would get resolved. First of all, despite the radical intellectuals’ aim for a total rejection of old Chinese culture, certain elements still survived the breaking down of Chinese tradition. Since these elements could not be integrated into the world view of these intellectuals, they were simply ignored or fiercely contested. As a result, the real problem of ‘finding a new framework for integrating the intellectually meaningful parts from the old culture with the new ideas and values from the West’ was neglected (155). Secondly, there was a problem of national identity. Traditional Chinese culture provided a political and social framework for unity in China. In particular, echoing Lowenthal’s remarks, it provided a framework for creating a national
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identity for its citizens. Thus, when this framework was abolished, an important reference for national identity was also lost. As Lin notes:

The question of national identity could not be resolved by a militant negation of the nation’s past. On the contrary, national identity calls for some sort of positive relationship with that past (Lin 1979, 155).

Indeed, China never had the opportunity and the freedom to resolve these issues as the intellectual climate was constrained by political and ideological burdens. Chou, on the other hand, had the freedom to think extensively about this problem. In the end, this freedom allowed him to find a way to integrate, or better yet, stage the Chinese past into the global present.

In the 1960s, China was isolated from the rest of the world and had no awareness of the contemporary music scene outside China. Because of this, Chou’s ideas never managed to reach his Chinese colleagues even though he was already a prominent composer by that time. To restore the exchange of knowledge, China would need to open up and establish an intellectual climate devoid of any political or ideological constraints. But even then, it was still doubtful whether Chinese composers would accept Chou’s ideas since many of them had worked for decades under these constraints making it hard for them to accept something radically different. However, as progressive forces gained the upper hand after Mao’s death in 1976, China began to open up and contact with the outside world slowly restored. Under these favourable circumstances, a new generation of composers with members such as Tán Dùn 譚盾 (b. 1957), Zhōu lóng 周龍 (b. 1953), Chén Yì 陳怡 (b. 1953) and Guō Wénjǐng 郭文景 (b. 1956) emerged. They were radically different from their predecessors and were referred to as the New Wave (Xīncháo 新潮) composers. Inspired by the ideas of Chou, they would follow a path similar to his and integrate Chinese tradition into their music.

Even though Chou’s influence is significant, one should not overlook the historical influences that have made this mentality change possible. Firstly, it is important to realize that even though the communist authorities rejected Chinese tradition they were never able to remove all of its elements. Indeed, since a large proportion of the population was only familiar with traditional folk culture, music was allowed to contain a small amount of Chinese traditional elements in order to connect to the masses. However, this leads us back to the problem of deciding which Chinese traditional elements were to be retained, and how these elements could be combined with Western modernity to create something distinctively Chinese. The dilemma is neatly summarized by Mittler:

On the one hand, . . . emphasis on China’s tradition was founded on a knowledge of Chinese psychology: no government could afford to destroy the culture of such a proud people. On the other hand, these governments had to stress Western technique and knowledge since, in the Chinese mind, they stood (and stand) for modernity and progress. The dilemma of finding the right balance between these contrasting elements can be traced throughout a century of Chinese history now: it is the old question of how to preserve Chinese identity and pride even while importing the secrets of wealth and power from the West (Mittler 1997, 286).

Finding the right balance was such a complicated problem that even the central government experienced difficulties in providing a solution. This was reflected in their guidelines and policies which remained largely abstract and ideological; it never got beyond formulations that urged composers to combine Chinese and Western elements in such a way such that was modern but still contained Chinese characteristics. Although composers set out to follow these directives, the music they produced was mostly unsatisfactory. The reason for this, Mittler argues, was because most composers were not familiar with folk traditions and looked down on them. Thus, their selection of Chinese traditional elements was quite restricted and often conflicted with the Western elements (290).

5 This term is adopted from Barbara Mittler (1997, 165).
However, this changed once the Cultural Revolution started in 1966. During this period many youngsters were forced to go to the countryside to study from farmers. This was also required of members of the New Wave. Remarkably, because of their close contact with the farmers, these composers slowly became familiar with their folk music. As a result, they began to develop an understanding of traditional music that was fuller than any other generation of Chinese composers. As Mittler notes:

In music, Chinese tradition had not been destroyed by Communism: the Cultural Revolution, often seen as the worst point of disruption of traditional heritage in the arts has been unexpectedly beneficial to the traditional experience of a number of young composers . . . It is an older generation (and the youngest) of composers who had been (or are) cut off from their own roots since they first entered the conservatory and were trained according to Western standards. It is they who had a much shallower relationship to their folk tradition than their younger colleagues (296-297).

After the end of the Cultural Revolution, 邓小平 (1904—1997) came to power and started to open up the country to the outside world. At the same time, political control over the arts began to loosen and the intellectual climate became less constrained. Many schools resumed their normal practices and the New Wave composers enrolled into the reopened conservatories. As China’s foreign relations improved, Chinese musicians started to come in contact with foreign musicians and they would teach them about the musical developments of the West. Chou was one those foreign musicians and his influence has been profound. His lectures at Beijing’s Central Conservatory of Music in the late 1970s, for instance, have led to a revaluation of Chinese tradition among the New Wave composers. Helped by the folk knowledge they acquired during the Cultural Revolution, these composers began to discover many similarities between the musical techniques of contemporary music and traditional Chinese music. With this discovery and with Chou’s encouragements, the New Wave composers started to combine these two musics in all kinds of manners. As Mittler notes:

Having experienced their [Chinese] roots in living tradition, they re-discovered them in New Music from the West. And in turn, by using the Western medium of New Music, they were able to find a most authentic traditional voice . . . Their approach to tradition is radical compared to the eclecticist and reductionist attitude practised by composers stylizing or negotiating tradition: they now use all elements of their tradition, indiscriminately, almost ruthlessly, the “ugly sides” as well as those “sweet and mellow melodies” . . . The traditional heritage is used as if it were a kind of museum stacked with raw-material. Characteristic for this type of adaptation, then, is the (re-)discovery of techniques prevalent in traditional music in compositions of the Western avantgarde and their application in new compositions (324).

In order words, the New Wave composers no longer saw a contradiction between tradition and modernity; modernity could be found in Chinese traditional music as well as in Western contemporary music (297). In fact, compositions became increasingly perceived as modern exactly because Chinese elements were used. As Mittler notes:

Modernization . . . no longer means Westernization but rather Sinification . . . China’s composers are no longer “faced with the choice of being foreign, and progressive, or Chinese, and reactionary.” They can now be Chinese and progressive (301).

Thus, ‘no longer are Western principles used by Chinese trying to innovate China’s tradition, but Chinese principles are used by the West trying to innovate Western tradition. The Chinese are now able to use their own old music to create modern, New Music’ (325).
Chapter 7

Modernity and Beyond

In the previous chapters I have demonstrated how the resurgence and re-staging of China’s cultural past has come to open up the contemporary classical music discourse and establish a new musical modernity. From these developments, it seems that Chou’s goal of achieving universal creativity through inter-cultural dialogues has come closer in reach. But is this really the case?

7.1 The Victory of Modernity

As I have described in chapter 4, modernity is a hegemonic and powerful process that is able to realign spatial and temporal coordinates to conform to its universalities. And as I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, it is these processes that have helped Chou to promote the rediscovery of Asia’s cultural past. However, exactly because of the dominant nature of modernity, the revaluation of these forgotten pasts is simultaneously in danger because it becomes subjugated to the discourse of modernity. This development can, for instance, be detected in the academic scholarship on Chou. In §5.2 I have argued that Chou has created an interpretive discourse for his compositions. To a certain degree, this discourse takes on a life of its own as it starts to subjugate Chou’s ideas for the sake of its own survival. My example of Chen Chia-Chi’s interpretation of Chinese garden aesthetics in Chou’s Windswept Peaks, for instance, illustrates how the rich history of Chinese gardens becomes stripped of its historicity and locality in order to fit into the interpretive discourse of Chou’s compositions. Consequently, while Chou’s interpretive discourse promotes a deeper understanding of China’s cultural past, it also subjugates this past for its own interest; China’s cultural past becomes staged in such a way that it confirms the discourse. As a result, the true victor is not Chou, but is modernity itself. And since Chou’s thinking has always been rooted in a modernist mode of thought, this outcome was perhaps already determined from the start; as Dirlik notes,

This is what modernization discourse has been about all along: to enforce a cultural homogeneity that is consistent with a programme of modernization conceived, if not along EuroAmerican lines, then along their functional equivalents (Dirlik 2002, 20).

The biggest ‘loser’ in this whole development, ironically, may well be China’s cultural past. Indeed, for the New Wave composers this past has been a source of ‘raw’ musical material that is to be used freely. As their focus is to produce modern music they have little regard for its historicities or localities. As a result, history becomes defined by its usefulness to the staging of the modern. With such development, it is no wonder that Dirlik expresses the following thought:

The irony (…) is that the resurgence of history may also signal the end of history as we have known it. If history itself is ‘a sign of the modern,’ the conceptualization of the past as history, which has become integral to our very existence, is inseparable from the idea of the modern. Indeed, claims against the modern are often accompanied by challenges to historical ways of knowing (16).
At the same time, however, the suppression of temporalities by the discourse of modernity is never complete. As I have mentioned in §4.1, there will always remain instabilities underneath; instabilities that may explode at any given moment depending on the circumstances. This, for instance, happened in Tán Dùn’s *Symphony 1997: Heaven, Earth, Man*. This piece, which was performed during the official ceremony for the transfer of the sovereignty of Hong Kong in 1997, makes extensive use of ancient Chinese bell-chimes. However, because of the overwhelming historical connotation of these bells, its histories start to interfere greatly with the political and cultural contexts. As a result, the piece gets ideologically torn apart (Yu 2004).

With this outburst of instabilities, one may come to believe that history has finally managed to free itself from the discourse of modernity. However, as I have also mentioned in §4.1, such outburst can also be the manifestation of post-modernism. In that case, even if history has freed itself from modernity, it quickly becomes subjugated to the post-modern discourse. This is illustrated, for instance, by the celebration of the Cultural Revolution in Chinese pop-art.\(^1\) In China, the Cultural Revolution has never been properly addressed and the Chinese people never had the opportunity to reconcile with it. Instead, this piece of history was relegated to the background as China focussed on the country’s economy. However, as the negative effects of China’s modernization program increased, this forgotten past resurfaced again. And in the present times, the Cultural Revolution manifests itself in Chinese pop-art as a nostalgic re-imagining of the communist past; a post-modern re-imagining that critiques the negative effects of China’s modernity. This re-imagining, however, is a glorified one in which the horrors and malpractices of the Cultural Revolution have been done away with. And once again, we see that the past becomes the subject of a discourse.

### 7.2 China’s (Post-)Modernity

The situation as described in the last example of the previous section is not a standalone phenomenon but is very much a result from the tensions and conflicts between the various coexisting and competing ideologies in China. In this section I will devote a few paragraphs on discussing how the Chinese intellectual has shaped and has been shaped by these ideologies of which modernism and post-modernism are the main discourses. Through this discussion we will obtain a clearer picture of where to position Chou in China’s intellectual and ideological playing field.

As the before mentioned example has suggested, the economic reforms of the 1980s has moved China into the era of capitalist modernity. The social and cultural consequences of this development, however, have been enormous. For the Chinese intelligentsia, it meant that they slowly came under the control of the factor of ‘capital,’ and became more and more threatened with extinction. Consequently, they were forced to reposition themselves socially, culturally and ideologically (Lu 1997, 67).\(^2\) As Lu notes,

> The development of capitalism and the process of modernization have created a sharper division of labor and skills, transforming intellectuals into technical and professional specialists. Borrowing a heuristic distinction from Michel Foucault, we may describe this change in the function of Chinese intellectuals at the fin de siècle as a shift from the universal intellectual to the specific intellectual (68).

Indeed, for a long time the Chinese intelligentsia had a prominent position in Chinese society; they were seen as its conscience. However, as China entered the era of economic reforms, their status as public intellectuals with the ability to speak for the people and the nation started the wane. Consequently, these intellectuals retreated into academics or went overseas. At the same time, as these reforms brought many

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\(^1\) See (De Kloet 2010) and (Zhang 2000, 410) for instance.  
\(^2\) See also (Wang 1998) or (Yu 2008) for a discussion on the development of the Chinese intelligentsia in relation to the globalization and economic reforms in China.
new social problems with it, the Chinese intellectuals were also forced to reformulate their ideologies. This resulted, in particular, into the so-called ‘modernist-humanist’ paradigm of the 1980s (Zhang 2000, 412). In their desire to realize ‘the still unfulfilled Enlightenment universals on the Chinese soil,’ a large number of Chinese intellectuals reformulated the modernization project into a politics of difference in which the flaws of Western capitalist modernity was to be cured by so-called Chinese (or Asian) values.

However, these ideologies have not achieved the desired effects as the rapid commercialization and commodification continued to cause social inequalities. As a result, post-modern movements started to rise as a reaction against the humanistic discourse (400). Although these movements are heavily indebted to the Western ‘post-theory,’ the manifestations of post-modernism in China have been more radical than in the Anglo-Saxon countries. As Lu notes,

Contemporary China consists of the superimposition of multiple temporalities; the premodern, the modern, and the postmodern coexist in the same space and at the same moment. Paradoxically, postmodernism in China is even more spatial and more postmodern than its original Western model. Spatial coextension, rather than temporal succession, defines non-Western postmodernity. Hybridity, unevenness, nonsynchronicity, and pastiche are the main features of Chinese postmodern culture (Lu 1997, 66).

Supporters of this movement condemned the universalising nature of the humanist spirit. For these intellectuals,

the humanistic spirit is . . . yet another universalizing, essentializing discourse that is hollow and bankrupt in light of global capitalism, which is part of contemporary China. . .. China has become a new market for world trade and another locus in the network of transnational capital. Popular culture and mass media are therefore important phenomena to study. The return to a pristine humanist discourse unaffected by global changes is but an illusion (70).

Opponents of these Chinese post-modernists, however,

criticize post-ism for being just another form of conservatism in China. For them, Chinese postmodernism eclipses the critical, negating function of independent intellectuals, subjects them to the reign of popular culture, and ultimately dissolves the unfulfilled problematic of modernity (freedom, democracy, human rights, etc) (70).

If we now consider Chou in this whole discussion, it is clear that his musical views put him in the camp of the ‘humanist-modernists.’ What is interesting here is that this camp is largely represented by global diasporic intellectuals such to Chou. The post-modernists, on the other hand, are predominantly represented by Chinese intellectuals. As Lu notes,

While indigenous Chinese critics attempt to reexamine the object of China through the critical lens of recent Western theory (its various post-isms), overseas Chinese academics hold on to an earlier mode of humanism (71).

Thus, with his humanist-modernist approach, Chou has actually put himself into the (geographical) margins of the Chinese ideological playing field; in the eyes of the post-modern Chinese critic, Chou would be considered to be old-fashioned with his belief in universal values. Moreover, as globalization and post-modern developments continue to be the dominant discourses in China, and as popular culture continues to be celebrated, Chou’s humanist-modernist ideas will find difficulties in reaching a broad Chinese audience. This may very well be the second irony in Chou’s development; even though he has managed to start a dialogue with the Chinese past, his ‘elitist’ and ‘outmoded’ ideas have prevented him from establishing a dialogue with the Chinese present.
7.3 Beyond Modernity

In this thesis, I wanted to take a fresh approach to Chou’s musical development. Having read various studies on this subject, I felt that they were too much focussed on music-technical analyses. Therefore, I decided to expand the field and consider Chou’s musical ideas from the perspective of modernity. By recognizing that contemporary music itself was associated with the West and with Western modernity, I sought to investigate how Chou negotiated with this Euro-American centralism. As I have subsequently demonstrated, Chou’s activities and his glorification of China’s cultural past have led to a re-staging of the contemporary music discourse. Not only that, it has also contributed to the establishment of what I may call, Chou’s musical modernity.

To further illustrate the connection between the past and modernity, I have subsequently discussed China’s musical development and shown how Chou’s revaluation of the cultural past has helped Chinese composers fulfil their dream of creating their own musical modernity. By presenting this discussion in a historical context, I aimed to demonstrate that political developments and sentiments of nationalism have had a significant influence on the musical developments. Moreover, I hope that this discussion has also made clear how the differences between the musical views of Chou and the musical views of the early Chinese composers were shaped by their environments.

Finally, because modernity itself is a dominant discourse, history itself becomes very much subjugated to this discourse. As a result, modernity is the main victor and not the people who employ this discourse for their own goals. Thus, Chou’s attempt to reinvent true creativity through inter-cultural dialogues and historical revaluations is a flawed one, since only those dialogues and those pasts which contribute to Chou’s musical modernity will be considered. Whether there is a way to break free from this deadlock is difficult to say. As we have seen above, even if the past manages to free itself from the clutches of modernity, it may very well be subjugated to another discourse.

Future Studies

With this thesis, I hope that I have convinced the reader that academic areas such as sinology, Asian studies and cultural analysis provide interesting approaches to study Chou’s development. The framework of modernity is only one approach, but there are many others. However, although I have only emphasized the importance of other academic disciplines to musicological researches, the reverse is equally true. Take the discourse of Orientalism for instance. The concept of Orientalism has been popularized in literary and cultural studies by Edward Said through his book *Orientalism* (1978). In Said’s conception, Orientalism is a discourse that contains Europe’s strategies for knowing and dominating the ‘Orient’ (Ashcroft et al. 2001, 49). One of them is the ‘construction’ of the Orient and the Oriental through its objectification. An important aspect of this objectification is that it ‘entails the assumption that the Orient is essentially monolithic, with an unchanging history, while the Occident is dynamic, with an active history. In addition, the Orient and the Orientals are seen to be passive, non-participatory subjects of study’ (64). Dirlik nuances this description even more by arguing that the ‘construction’ and ‘objectification’ of the Orient is based on culturalist assumptions:

Orientalist epistemology as it emerges from Said’s analysis is also clearly culturalist, by which I mean a representation of societies in terms of essentialized cultural characteristics, more often than not enunciated in foundational texts. Culturalist essentialism is homogenizing both spatially and temporally. Spatially, it ignores differences within individual societies, and, in the case of orientalism, differences between Asian societies, which are endowed with common characteristics that mark them as “oriental.” It is homogenizing temporally in substituting a cultural essence that defies time for culture as lived experience that is subject to temporal production and reproduction (Dirlik 1996, 97).
In other words, ‘culturalism’ suppresses the dynamical nature of culture as an ongoing historical activity (Dirlik 1996, 98).

As we can see from these descriptions, Orientalism shares many characteristics with modernity and we may recognize the Orientalist aspects in Chou’s development. Indeed, Chou’s acts of essentializing and de-historicizing the aesthetic elements of Chinese traditional arts, and his staging of Asia’s cultural past as a forgotten place containing the timeless values which the West lacked or was unaware of, are the most obvious examples. However, identifying the Orientalist aspects in Chou’s development is not the most interesting thing to do. What is more interesting is to consider how Chou is problematizing this discourse. Indeed, Chou’s case exemplifies the development that nowadays it is not solely the West any more who is responsible for creating Orientalist images; the Orientals themselves are equally guilty. John Corbett has identified this type of Orientalism as ‘Asian neo-Orientalism’ (Corbett 2000, 178). This term however, is highly problematic. Rereading Chou’s biography in the first chapter, we will remember that even though Chou was born in China, he has lived and worked for most of his life in the United States. To which degree then, can we consider him an ‘Oriental’? Of course, Chou has been very much involved in the ‘rediscovery’ of China’s cultural past and for this, he is very much considered a Chinese composer. However, as I have argued in chapter 5, part of this identity is a staged identity. Consequently, with his glorification of China’s cultural past, should Chou then be considered an Asian ‘Oriental’ who orientalizes himself in the sense of Corbett’s neo-Orientalism, or should he be considered an ‘Orientalist’ who orientalizes himself to speak on behalf of the Orient? This question is hard to answer and the reason for this is that the current notions of Orientalism, or neo-Orientalism, are still based on the underlying assumptions of fixed identities and strict binaries such as East and West. However, Chou’s background clearly undermines these assumptions and demonstrates that the discourse of Orientalism needs to be re-conceptualized. Indeed, especially the notion of self/Asian neo-Orientalism is problematic as it implicitly assumes a fixed ethnic identity. However, as Stuart Hall has argued, identity is never fixed as the process of identification is never complete (Hall 1996, 2). In this context, can one still speak of ‘self-Orientalism’? And in particular, how is this ‘self-Orientalism’ connected with the process of ‘identification’? In Chou’s case, it seems that he is identifying himself with an Orientalized image of China’s historical past. However, the precise theoretical framework in which these processes are to be considered needs to be carefully rethought as Chou’s example demonstrates.

From this short discussion we can see that cultural critics can learn much from Chou’s case as it forces them to rethink about the fundamentals of Orientalism. With this last remark, I have also come to a full circle in this thesis. What began with my observation that musicologists can, and should, learn from disciplines such as sinology, Asian studies and cultural analysis, now ends with the reverse; the latter areas equally benefit from discussions in musicology as musicological examples can provide a testing ground for their theories.
Appendix A

Glossary of Chinese names

This glossary contains all the Chinese terms and names of persons used in this thesis. The third column contains the translation of the Chinese term, or the birth and/or death year of the person if available. Common terms such as city names have been left out.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese Term</th>
<th>Pinyin</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cǎoshū</td>
<td>草書</td>
<td>A type of calligraphic script</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chén Yí</td>
<td>陳怡</td>
<td>(b. 1953)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deng Xiāoping</td>
<td>邓小平</td>
<td>(1904—1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>èrhu</td>
<td>二胡</td>
<td>harmony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gǔqín</td>
<td>古琴</td>
<td>Kuomintang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guómíndǎng</td>
<td>國民黨</td>
<td>(b. 1956)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guō Wénjǐng</td>
<td>郭文景</td>
<td>harmony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hé</td>
<td>和</td>
<td>(1311—1375)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liú Jī</td>
<td>劉基</td>
<td>(b. 1957)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Máo Mǐnzhòng</td>
<td>毛敏仲</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tān Dùn</td>
<td>譚盾</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiānānmén</td>
<td>天安門</td>
<td>Gate of Heavenly Peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wénrén</td>
<td>文人</td>
<td>scholar-literate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wǔsì yùndòng</td>
<td>五四運動</td>
<td>May Fourth Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xīncháo</td>
<td>新潮</td>
<td>New Wave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yījīng</td>
<td>易經</td>
<td>'Book of Changes’. Also known as ‘I Ching’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yáng</td>
<td>陽</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yīn</td>
<td>陰</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yúgē</td>
<td>魚歌</td>
<td>'Song of the Fisherman’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhèng Xiè</td>
<td>鄭珙</td>
<td>Also known as Zhèng Bǎnqiáo 鄭板橋 (1693—1765)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhōu Dūnghí</td>
<td>周敦頤</td>
<td>(1017-1073)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhōu lóng</td>
<td>周龍</td>
<td>(b. 1953)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhōu Píng Wáng</td>
<td>周平王</td>
<td>King Píng of Zhōu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhōu Wénzhōng</td>
<td>周文仲</td>
<td>Chou Wen-Chung (b. 1923)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Appendix B

## Overview of Chinese Dynasties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dynasty</th>
<th>Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Xià</td>
<td>c.2100 — 1600 BCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shāng</td>
<td>c.1600 — c.1045 BCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhōu</td>
<td>c.1045 — 256 BCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Zhōu</td>
<td>c.1045 — 770 BCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Zhōu</td>
<td>770 — 256 BCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring and Autumn Period</td>
<td>c.770 — 475 BCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warring States Period</td>
<td>475 — 221 BCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qín</td>
<td>221 — 206 BCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hàn</td>
<td>206 BCE — 220 CE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Hàn</td>
<td>206 BCE — 9 CE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xin</td>
<td>9 — 23 CE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Hàn</td>
<td>25 — 220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Kingdoms Period</td>
<td>220 — 280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jin</td>
<td>265 — 420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Jin</td>
<td>265 — 316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Jin</td>
<td>317 — 420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixteen Kingdoms</td>
<td>304 — 439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suí</td>
<td>420 — 589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tāng</td>
<td>581 — 618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms</td>
<td>618 — 907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liáo</td>
<td>907 — 960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Xià</td>
<td>907 — 1125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sòng</td>
<td>1038 — 1227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Sòng</td>
<td>960 — 1279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Sòng</td>
<td>960 — 1127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jin</td>
<td>1127 — 1279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuán</td>
<td>1115 — 1234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Míng</td>
<td>1271 — 1368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qīng</td>
<td>1368 — 1644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic of China</td>
<td>1644 — 1911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People’s Republic of China</td>
<td>1912 — present (Taiwan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1949 — present (Mainland China)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix C

#### List of Chou Wen-Chung’s Compositions

This table provides an overview of Chou’s works listed by the year of completion.¹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Composition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td><em>Landscapes</em> for orchestra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td><em>Two Chinese Folk Songs</em> for harp solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td><em>Three Folk Songs</em> for flute and harp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td><em>Suite for Harp and Wind Quintet</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td><em>Seven Poems of the T’ang Dynasty</em> for tenor, wind instruments, piano, and percussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td><em>All in the Spring Wind</em> for orchestra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td><em>And the Fallen Petals</em> for orchestra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td><em>In the Mode of Shang</em> for chamber orchestra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td><em>Two Miniatures from T’ang</em> for chamber ensemble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td><em>The Willows are New</em> for piano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td><em>To a Wayfarer</em> for clarinet, strings, harp, and percussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td><em>Soliloquy of a Bhiksuni</em> for trumpet with brass and percussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td><em>Poems of White Stone</em> for mixed chorus and chamber ensemble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td><em>Metaphors</em> for wind ensemble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td><em>Cursive</em> for flute and piano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td><em>The Dark and the Light</em> for piano, percussion, and strings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td><em>Riding the Wind</em> for wind ensemble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td><em>Yi ko</em> for violin, winds, piano, and percussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td><em>Pien</em> for piano, winds, and percussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td><em>Yin</em> for piano, winds, and percussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td><em>Beijing in the Mist</em> for two saxophones, trumpet, trombone, electric guitar, electric bass, electric piano, piano, and percussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td><em>Echoes from the Gorge</em> for percussion quartet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td><em>Windswept Peaks</em> for clarinet, violin, cello, and piano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td><em>Concerto for Violoncello and Orchestra</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td><em>String Quartet No.1 “Clouds”</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td><em>String Quartet No.2 “Streams”</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td><em>Twilight Colors</em> for double trio woodwinds and strings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td><em>Eternal Pine</em> for gayageum and an ensemble of daegeum, piri, shaengwhang, and changgu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td><em>Ode to Eternal Pine</em> for an ensemble of traditional Korean instruments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹This overview is compiled from information in (Lai 2009, 24), (Chang 1995, 314-317), (Chew 1990, 217-219) and (Chou 2011).
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