



Artistic Research Report

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Title of the research: A Dialogue of Music between East and West

Artistic Research Question: How can I, as a Chinese zither (古筝) player and a classical singer, create new interpretations to 20th-century art songs based on ancient Chinese poems?

Keywords: Chinese zither, classical singing, 20th-century song cycles, Chinese poetry, ornamentation, arrangement, language analysis, Charles Griffes, Zhongrong Luo (罗忠镕)

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1 Abstract

This research aims to incorporate my perspectives as a Chinese zither (古筝) player and as a classical singer. After researching, interpreting and analyzing two art song cycles from the 20th century, *5 Poems of Ancient China and Japan* by Charles Griffes and *Songs of Autumn* (秋之歌) by Zhongrong Luo (罗忠镕), I incorporate Chinese traditional music forms, ornamentation and instrumentation into my singing and creative performing. The methodology includes literature review, expert interview, internet media review, score analysis and experiment. The outcomes present my approach of taking inspiration from zither music and folk singing style into the art song cycles and the intercultural discussion that was brought up during the research .

2 Introduction

2.1 Motivation and goal

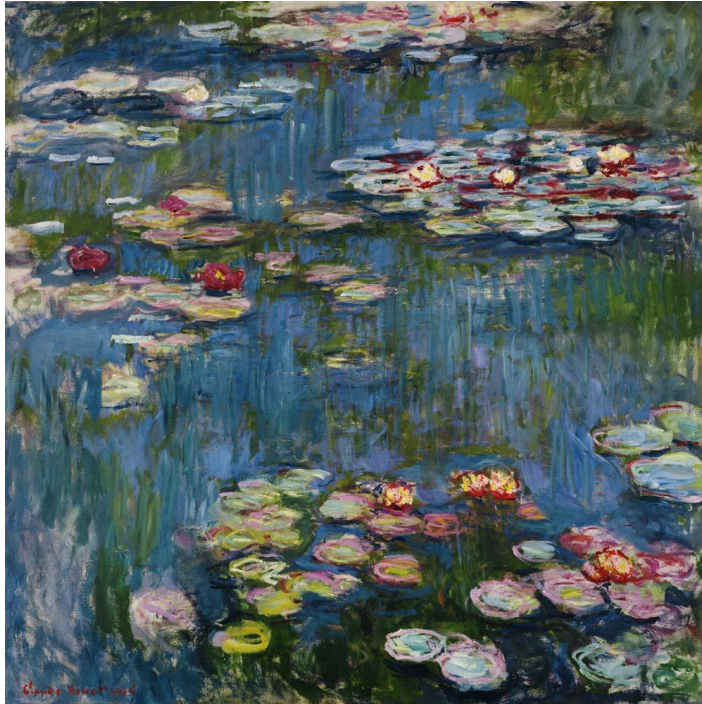
As a musician who started music education at an early age as a Chinese-zither player and now studying classical singing as a profession, I always noticed that my ways of listening to music and feeling music are sometimes very different from the others. During these years of studying in Europe, I met so many people with different cultural backgrounds, and I realized the ways that people connect themselves with their music are usually very much influenced by the music that they grew up with. Compared to the fellow students who grew up with classical music, I realized that I very often have a unique perspective to recognize tonality, style and emotion in music. In my case, traditional Han-Chinese folk music is my inspiration, as well as classical singing is my tool. Both of them play very important roles in my music-making.

Making music, especially singing, is in my opinion a delivery of personal emotions. The music needs to talk in a similar way that I talk, and singing should feel as natural as speaking the mother tongue. As a storyteller, I always need to find a way to connect ourselves to what I sing. Therefore in my research, I would like to combine the two sides of me as classical musician and folk musician, explore the possibility of my music performing form which involves my own cultural identity, show my unique perspective of how I see western composition and find a way to recreate the music with high artistry.

2.2 Contextualization

From the middle to the late 17th century, “chinoiserie” started in Europe. Chinoiserie designs were started when the first ship returned to France from China in 1698. It came with many porcelain and decorations

with delicate exotic patterns and styles that the Europeans have never seen¹. It became immediately popular and many European craftsmen started to reproduce the product and copy the oriental look on everything. Delft Blue was also born in this time, the color and style was strongly influenced by Chinese blue-pattern porcelain (青花瓷). At the beginning of this trend, it was more an imagination of Chinese and other east Asian artistic traditions since they had very limited resources to base on. In music, some Chinese characters also started to appear in operas, such as in the opera *The Fairy Queen* by Henry Purcell (1659-1695), the Chinese woman character was named “Xansi”, which was also an imaginary sound or a bad romanization of the Mandarin Chinese pronunciation, and the dance music of the Chinese characters sound nothing like Chinese music at all.



Painting of Claude Monet (1840-1926) and Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890)

In the end of the 19th century, artists seemed to really start to understand more the concept and theory of oriental music and art due to a more frequent communication between the eastern and western world. Such in the paintings of *Van Gogh* and *Monet*, we could all see a strong oriental influence with a much more authentic approach. The composers at that time also started to explore the possibilities of tonality and try to break the rules of tonal music. Therefore getting inspiration from Asian traditional music was also a necessary move. French composers such as Debussy started this incorporation at the end of the 19th century and introduced impressionism to music.

Later at the beginning of the 20th century, Asian poetry was used in western music too. French composer *Albert Roussel* (1869-1937) composed a few art song cycles based on the ancient Chinese poems translated by *Herbert Allen Giles* (1845-1935), a British diplomat and sinologist who was the professor of Chinese at the University of Cambridge. Then later American composer *Charles Griffes* (1884-1920) composed one song cycle with Chinese and Japanese poems too, who was one of the first American composers that incorporated Asian music and poems at the beginning of 20th century. In academic

¹ Schopp, Susan E. “Sino-French Trade at Canton”, 1698-1842. Hong Kong University Press, 2020.

music, American composers mainly followed their European colleagues, mastering oriental themes and their means of implementation with some delay². In my research cycle No.1 and No. 3, I chose the song cycle by Charles Griffes, *5 Poems of Ancient China and Japan, Op.10*, and I explore the possibilities of performing the pieces with folk instruments, since they are originally inspired by Chinese zither (古筝)³ and folk tunes. But due to the lack of communication between the eastern and western world compared to nowadays, Charles Griffes's approach can now seem to be a bit childish and culturally insensitive. But at the beginning of the 20th century, his work could be considered very experimental and it added some new and fresh color to the music world of America.

In my past experiences, I also realized that the ways to apply ornaments in singing differ from languages. Since there are already melodic tones in Chinese languages, the ornaments and accents in singing are supposed to make the language more understandable. I would also like to research the connection of ornament styles and language, then try to apply these ornaments in singing Chinese-influenced music in different languages. This is one of my focus points on my research cycle No.2.

Chinese folk music is a very broad topic. There are 56 officially recognized ethnic groups and each of them has their own culture and music. In my research, I do not include the music culture of the 55 minority ethnic groups. My main focus is the connection between Han-Chinese folk traditions and western music, which is the style that influenced most of the western composers such as Charles Griffes. At the end of the 20th century, Chinese musicians also took steps to introduce traditional music to the world. Some traditional opera repertoires were translated and performed in English with hardly understandable accents. China National Traditional Orchestra (中央民族管弦乐团) performed traditional folk music as well as classical orchestra music such as Radetzky March at Wiener Musikverein in 1998, which gave a strong impression of how western classical music sounds like on Chinese folk instruments.

At the moment in China, there are more and more folk musician groups and influencers that are doing creative performances based on traditional folk music or western music, such as Zide Guqin Studio (自得琴社) and Huaxia Ancient Orchestra of Henan Museum (河南博物馆华夏古乐团). But the main focus of the academic field especially in the folk music departments in the main Chinese conservatories is innovation and creativity. There are a lot of new contemporary compositions composed for traditional folk instruments with difficult extended techniques, new tuning settings and westernized tonality. The main reason is that the approach like Early Music Revival of Europe can be very challenging in Chinese folk music, since China has a very long history and most of the old folk tunes were lost in the past because of the limited methods of documentation and notation in the ancient time. By doing this research, I also try to collect some more traces of Chinese folk music in the western music world and find as much information from the past as I can.

² Anna Krom, "The East in the Works of Charles Griffes". Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University. Arts 10, no. 1 (2020): 3–16. <https://doi.org/10.21638/spbu15.2020.101>

³ Ti-Fei Hsu, "Chinese influence in four twentieth century song cycles by Roussel, Carpenter, Griffes and Britten", American Conservatory of Music ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1988. 8826349.

2.3 Research question

How can I, as a Chinese zither player and a classical singer, create new interpretations to 20th-century art songs based on ancient Chinese poems?

In my research, I focus on western and eastern art song cycles of the 20th-century that were influenced by Chinese traditional music and literature. By using traditional folk instruments, traditional music styles and ornamentation, I will explore the possibilities of giving these art songs a new interpretation and new ways of performing that contribute to the topic of western and eastern music communication.

2.4 Specific audiences and readers addressed

This research will contribute to all musicians who are interested in researching the relationship between eastern and western music or working in an intercultural environment.

3 Research Process

3.1 First research cycle

3.1.1 Overview of first research cycle

In the first research cycle, I chose the piece *So-fei gathering flowers* from song cycle *5 Poems of Ancient China and Japan, Op. 10* by Charles Griffes. I did some literature research and media research about the interaction between eastern and western musical worlds, how music influences and cooperates with each other between east and west and what kind of experiments have been done. I interviewed some musicians and musicologists about this topic and gathered their opinions about the cooperation of folk music and classical music. Then I did my intervention of combining Chinese folk instrument and music style together with the song of Charles Griffes, which presents a new interpretation of the piece with my own culturally learned recognition of his music style and gives the audience a new way of listening. This music form is not aimed to prove authenticity but a translation of musical language.

This song cycle is composed after the first time that Charles Griffes heard Chinese zither music in Chinatown⁴. He got immediately inspired and decided to compose a song cycle with pentatonic scales as a main characteristic using ancient Chinese and Japanese poems. In the first piece *So-fei gathering flowers*, he also inserted a traditional melody which I could not find out what it originally was. The lyrics is an English-translated poem by Charles Budd from his book *Chinese Poems*, which is a poem-translating collection of his. The poem *So-fei gathering flowers* was originally an ancient poem by famous poet Changling Wang (698-765) from Tang Dynasty. In Charles Budd's book *Chinese Poems*, many of the translations are nearly literal, except adaptations to meet the exigencies of rhyme⁵.

3.1.2 Reference recording

Charles Griffes: 5 Poems of Ancient China and Japan, Op.10 (Published in 1917)
No.1 So-fei gathering flowers

[01 Reference Recording 01 \(Zijing Meng\) \(So-fei gathering flowers\).mp4](#)

⁴ Maisel, Edward. "Charles T. Griffes: the life of an American composer". New York: Knopf, Distributed by Random House, 1984.

⁵ Budd, Charles. "Chinese Poems", Published by Oxford University Press, London, 1912.

Recorded on October 20th 2022, duration: 1'44"

Soprano: Zijing Meng

Pianist: Maarten Hillenius

3.1.3 Feedback and reflection

In general, the feedback about the topic is quite positive. People show a lot of interest in it and are excited to hear music with certain cultural backgrounds or personal identities of the performers. The repertoire choice of the reference recording suits me very well, but the piece is much more about the artistry and style than singing techniques.

Feedback from Ned McGowan (research coach of Codarts):

Do you have sufficient arranging and composing skills to handle it? It'll be good to ask a composer for help.

Feedback from Christiaan van Hemert (research coach of Codarts):

Arranging can be sometimes very tricky for performers if they don't have enough knowledge or experience about it. Your arranging skill should be shown in the coming preference recording so that people can judge and give feedback about it.

When performing these pieces, you should also think about what's the difference between you singing the pieces and other western singers singing the pieces, what makes you special and what are the artistic possibilities.

Feedback from Marcel Reijans (Classical singing teacher at Codarts):

The tessitura of the piece doesn't seem like it shows the best range of your voice. The singing in general doesn't have so many technical problems, but more dictation and clarity of the text should be delivered.

Feedback from Zheng Sun (Erhu player, alumni of Codarts):

I can imagine myself accompanying you in these pieces with Erhu. But the high range of Erhu can be very weak. This needs to be taken into consideration in your arrangement.

Self-reflection:

Singing and playing at the same time might be very tricky while performing these pieces and can take a lot of time for practicing. Artistic expression can be a challenge in performing. The singing and the volume of zither might not blend very well in a concert hall.

In addition to these technical things, how many folk style ornaments can I make, how many notes can I change in the arrangement and what is the reason to arrange this piece like this? Am I trying to prove some authenticity or a “right way” to perform this piece?

3.1.4 Data collection & data analysis: my findings

In order to understand these questions around authenticity and cross-culture influences in music, it is necessary to get more knowledge about both the traditions and the ways of the eastern and western music combination that have been done by various practitioners. Therefore, I decided to carry out literature research, media research and interviews, and make an arrangement of the song by Griffes in the intervention with all the information that I gathered.

Literature research

1. Hsu, Ti-Fei. “Chinese influence in four twentieth century song cycles by Roussel, Carpenter, Griffes and Britten”, American Conservatory of Music, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, May 1988. 8826349.

This thesis gave a lot of background information about this song cycle of Charles Griffes: On April 18th, Charles Griffes visited a Chinese methodist minister in Chinatown. He met a Chinese singer Mrs. Annie Wang and she performed a song for him with Chinese zither accompaniment. Then he copied the scores of that song and one week later he composed a song cycle *5 Poems of Ancient China and Japan, Op. 10*. The song cycle premiered on November 1st at Aeolian Concert Hall in New York. It was a solo recital of Eva Gauthier and Charles Griffes was the piano accompanist. Later the song cycle has also been performed a few times and proved the success of Charles Griffes. The melody in bar 40-47 is marked on the scores as a traditional folk melody, but it didn't give clear information about its origin and it could be from the song that Griffes heard from Mrs. Annie Wang.

The writer indicated that the piano accompaniment pattern reflects also the sound of Chinese folk instrument Yangqin⁶. In my intervention, I also recorded a piece in which I played Chinese zither using Yangqin scores, which proves that these two instruments can easily replace each other without a lot of effect in arranging.

⁶ Yangqin, an instrument that is originally from the Middle East and was introduced and adapted to Chinese during the end of Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). In Chinese folk ensembles, Yangqin usually functions like piano and plays a role as an accompaniment.



Yangqin and the piano pattern from So-fei gathering flowers

The character “So-fei” is a made-up person which was not mentioned in the original poem, because Chinese ancient poems were often composed grammatically without a subject. The writer also gave a guess that “So-fei” might represent one of the four famous beauties of ancient China, Xishi (西施, Chunqiu Period, 770-476 B.C.), because there are a lot of “lotus-picking” themed ancient poems about her. But I do not agree with this because lotus-picking was a very common working activity of females, which can be proved by the *Book of Odes*, the oldest existing collection of Chinese poetry compiled by Confucius (孔子, 551-479 B.C.), comprising 305 works dating from the 11th to 7th centuries B.C.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the system of transcribing Chinese names into English letters was a bit different, which made it very difficult to recognize the Chinese poets' names mentioned on the compositions. The writer listed all the song texts and the original Chinese poems which offered a great help for my interpretation. The background story of how Griffes got inspired to compose this song cycle also stands behind my idea of re-arranging the song with Chinese zither as accompaniment.

2. Hsieh, Chinghsuan Lily. “Chinese poetry of Li Po set by four twentieth century British Composers: Bantock, Warlock, Bliss and Lambert”, The Degree Doctor of Musical Arts in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University, 2004.

Tonal Sketch

月 明 白 露 飞
Yue Ming Bai Lu Fei

Musical setting

ad lib.
In the moonlight the white he-rons are fly-ing

Figure 3.4 “Nocturne” by Lambert

This thesis focuses mainly on the connection of Chinese ancient poems and the styles of translations, and the ways that the composers put music together with the text. The earliest Chinese poem translations that were composed by western composers were the ones by Herbert Giles (1845-1935), a British diplomat and sinologist who was the professor of Chinese at the University of Cambridge for 35 years. The translations play a very important role in cross-cultural communication, the central problem being that none of these composers have a working knowledge of Chinese

language in these poems. They were very dependent on the translations of the poems, which might cause a missing of aesthetic senses. The writer explains the relations between the poems, translations and music, and the ways that the translators and composers deal with the rhymes and accents of the phrases. The writer also inspires me with her method of “language melody” analysis. It gives a very clear image of how the rhymes of language connect to music.

The thesis also collected a lot of interesting opinions of other researchers. One concept that I agree very much is “Oriental music is not a poor imagination of another culture practice: its purpose is not to imitate but to represent. Representations rely upon culturally learned recognition”⁷. In my outcome of research cycle 1, I try to represent Charles Griffes’s piece with my own culturally learned recognition.

3. Krom, Anna. “The East in the Works of Charles Griffes”. Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University. Arts 10, no. 1 (2020): 3–16. <https://doi.org/10.21638/spbu15.2020.101>

This thesis focuses on the explanation of eastern music theory and color and how Charles Griffes applied them into his pieces. It indicates that Griffes’s works show some common features — intimacy, laconism, fragility of sound, ostinato, ingenious onomatopoeic effects, imitation of the tone qualities of national instruments, and completeness (In “Five Ancient Poems”, the agile end parts connected with the images of spring-time encase the middle ones, which are restrained and contemplative). The first miniature of the cycle “So-Fei Gathering Flowers” evokes associations with the iconography of Art Nouveau.

Internet media research

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnG5J5Zxb78>
Classical-trained counter-tenor sings Rolling In The Deep in Hunan local opera style with local accent

This is an example of what singers can do to bring an unforgettable performance with their own identity instead of performing in a “standard” way. In this comedy show, the singer applies Chinese local opera ornaments and accents in singing *Rolling in the Deep*. The approach is very creative and mind-blowing, it shows that the singer has a very strong understanding of the Hunan local opera style and an ability to perform this piece in such a difficult setting. Since Chinese opera style and this song are totally non-related, this performance gives an “incorrect” feeling that makes it hilarious and comic. In China, there are also a lot of pop songs that incorporate Chinese folk opera singing, but usually the folk influence is already applied to the songs during composing and song producing into the melody, tonality and instrumentation, which gives a context in the music and makes the folk opera singing incorporate in these pop songs smoothly.

Therefore in my research cycle 1, I try to avoid choosing western art song pieces that are totally unrelated to Chinese folk music in tonality or style. Then I apply the ornaments in a more proper way according to the melody and the natural flow of the language.

2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JtJdy0AhFEE>
Chinese bamboo flute and lute play Air on the G string by Bach

This recording is a result of Chinese and western instrument combinations. The bamboo flute and lute cooperate very well with each other and both manage to retain their own styles while emerging with the other instrument. The bamboo flute uses baroque ornaments in cadences, and uses folk style ornaments

⁷ Derek B. Scott. “Orientalism and Musical Style”. Musical Quarterly. Spring 1998 Vol. 82, no.1.326

when the melody appears to have a bit of pentatonic taste in a few instant moments or for technical reasons when playing some semitones. This is a very good example of when and how to apply folk ornaments in playing western music, which gives me a lot of inspiration for ornament choices.

3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZRKhtglsW8&t=238s>
Beijing Opera "Karma of a watermelon fight (打瓜缘)" at Chinese Central Television New Year Gala of 1991

This is a scene from a Beijing Opera comedy sung in English. The actors abandoned Beijing Opera ornament styles in the recitativo to adapt to English and kept the original taste in the aria, which clearly makes the text very hard to understand due to the big difference of rhythm and accent in Chinese and English languages. It is also very obvious that the actors don't speak English very well which means they also don't have a clear sense of the melody and flow in English language.

It is a very brave experiment which I also thought of trying with the song cycle of Charles Griffes. But since there are original Chinese poems that the song lyrics were based on, it gives a very big limitation to this experiment. Chinese already has tone changes in the language which requires the music to follow, and the ancient poems have very strong regulations in tone accents and amount of words, which makes it even more difficult than applying English text to Chinese music. Therefore I decided to keep the English lyrics as written during my intervention.

4. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M13e1M7>
Chinese Central Traditional Orchestra plays Radetzky-Marsch, op. 228

This recording demonstrates very well how western compositions sound when transcribed to Chinese traditional instruments without so much adaptation in styles. This arrangement shows that sometimes the change in instrumentation already gives a different effect in the color and characteristic of the music. The music already speaks for itself on these instruments even without any intention, because the music reflects the mind of the players that were trained for folk music from a young age. This inspires me to follow my natural instincts as a folk musician in arranging and playing during the intervention and cooperate with other folk musicians.

5. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MO7tnPhhf98&list=LL4PFqRa6Spzw-4d1w2CghdA>
Interview of Marta Halldórsdóttir and Örn Magnússon from Icelandic folk ensemble Spilmenn Ríkinís

Marta Halldórsdóttir (Classical singer / folk musician): When we perform with the traditional instruments, folk music finally returns home. And we immediately feel that we have found something which we need to do more. It feels good to look back to your roots. What we are doing now also influences the other forms of our music-making. We look at them differently now, we think differently about the music and there is a closer relationship with the audience. I think that's very important.

Örn Magnússon (Pianist / folk musician): I grew up with folk music and it has always been a part of my youth and my existence. The simplicity of it is good for our hearts.

This interview video makes me understand more of the reasons why folk music making is very important for some classical trained musicians. For some audiences in some cultures, folk music has a closer relation to them than classical music; and for the people who grew up with folk music, it is a root and base of all other forms of our music making, it is a comfort area where we can feel safe to make music with our instinct and shows our artistry.

Summaries of Expert Interviews

1. Discussion about “necessity of folk-classical music cooperation” with **Zheng Sun** (Erhu player, alumni of Codarts Rotterdam)

Since people haven’t done this so much in the past. It’s very innovative and special. The real traditional folk music in this world has not been preserved a lot compared to other music forms, that’s the case in many countries. So we have to continue making these music and introduce them to the world.

2. Discussion about “authenticity in playing folk music and baroque music” with **Halldór Bjarki Arnarson** (Harpsichordist and Icelandic folk musician):

Authenticity should not be a goal in music making, even in early music or historical performances. The aim of researching is always to get more knowledge that opens up our inspirations instead of trying to make music in a “correct” way. In the end, music making is always a reflection of our mind and feelings. We use the current sources to discover more things about the music and get more information. Then we can choose if we use it or not. Maybe the music will make more sense with it, or maybe not. But of course we cannot be totally authentic, otherwise our performances will be like museum exhibitions.

3. Discussion about “performing Griffes’s song with folk instrument” with **Mingfei Li** (PhD student in Musicology at Indiana University Jacobs School of Music):

Mingfei questions about the reason for me to perform Charles Griffes’ song like a folk piece. In my opinion, my arrangement is a continuation of Griffes’s move of connecting western and eastern music together. It continues building the bridge that introduces Chinese music to the western world and western music to Chinese folk musicians. The reason for choosing Chinese zither has been approved in my literature research. Using Erhu to play the melody in my intervention is just a tool of opening up ideas of the ornaments.

3.1.5 Interventions / practical application

In my intervention progress, I split my thoughts into three roles as singer, arranger and zither player to be able to think more individually from these three perspectives. I also incorporate the feedback from the first recording and the experiment result of the Erhu player. At the end I documented this procedure as an inner dialogue.

Inner dialogue

Singer Zijing Meng

Zither-player Zijing Meng

Arranger Zijing Meng

Erhu-player Zheng Sun

Singing teacher Marcel Reijans

Research coach Ned McGowan

Singing teacher Marcel: The tessitura of the piece doesn't seem like it shows the best range of your voice.

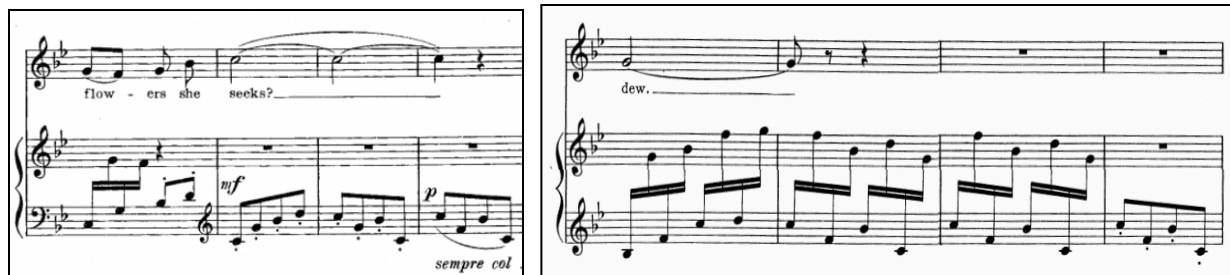
Erhu-player Zheng: Erhu music is often in D, G or F. But other keys are no problem either.

Singer Zijing: C major would be a good option for this song, so I could sing comfortably without being super loud to cover the sound of zither.

Research coach Ned: Do you have sufficient arranging and composing skills to handle it? It'll be good to ask a composer for help.

Arranger Zijing: I have had one year of arranging classes. I should be able to do it by myself, and I guess no composers in my network would know my voice and zither better than myself.

Arranger Zijing: I tried to keep the original notes and harmonies as much as I could. Some of the bridges seem tricky for zither. Therefore I try to adjust the notes here to make it logical to play. But there are also moments of lots of dissonance intervals that need to be tried out on zither.



Samples of original score (bar 36-39 and bar 19-22)



*Samples of Arrangement first edition in comparison (bar 37-39 and bar 19-22)
The notes without harmonic functions are simplified to adapt to Chinese zither*

■ First Edition "So-fei Gathering Flowers" (Arr. Zijing Meng).pdf

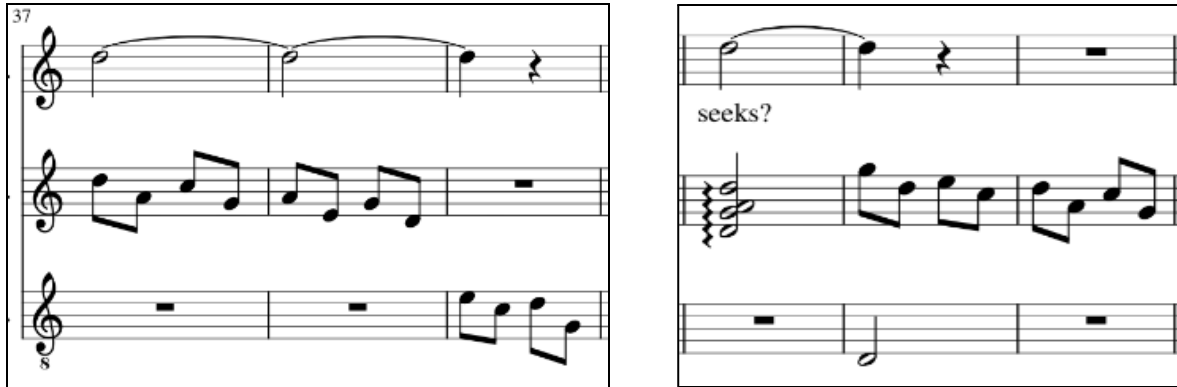
Zither-player Zijing: It looks playable. But some notes still feel uncomfortable and too complicated. Folk music should always be simple and uncomplicated.

Arranger Zijing: What about you try to play it based on these scores and add some improvisation? Just trust your instinct as a zither player and let's see what will happen.



[First edition "So-fei gathering flowers" try-out with improvisation.mp4](#)

Arranger Zijing: It sounds very good already! The dissonant intervals don't seem to be a problem in this music! I will incorporate the improvisation and change some details of the arrangement.



*Samples of Arrangement first edition and improvisation in comparison (bar 37-39)
The improvised version of accompaniment has a better flow and cooperation with the singing part*

Final edition "So-fei_Gathering_Flowers" (Arr. Zijing Meng). pdf

Singer Zijing: I feel that my style of singing is very limited. At the moment, my mind is very preoccupied by the ways that people sing it in other recordings I hear, and I cannot feel a connection with the melody singing in English text. Therefore I find it hard to incorporate Chinese folk ornaments and styles at the moment. I want to try to ask another folk instrument player to play the melody without the text and see how she would play it with Chinese ornaments.

Arranger Zijing: Maybe a string instrument or a wind instrument would be nice, since they are very close to the human voice. Meeting and playing with other musicians will for sure give you new inspirations.

Singer Zijing: Zheng, Can you please first show me some traditional Erhu pieces that show some traditional Erhu ornament styles?

Erhu-player Zheng: Sure! Let's play a traditional folk piece! You'll hear a lot of interesting characteristics of erhu ornaments in this fragment.



[一枝花 \(fragment\) for Erhu and Guzheng.mp4](#)

一枝花 for Erhu and Yangqin (traditional notation).pdf

Singer Zijing: That sounds very nice! Can you please try some of the ornaments in Griffes's piece?

Erhu-player Zheng: No problem! Let's try a few versions and record!



[Final edition "So-fei gathering flowers" try-out with Erhu ornamentation.mp4](#)

Singer Zijing: Brilliant! I will write down these ornaments with the symbols and mark them on the scores.

~~~~~ vibrato  
↗ slide up  
↘ slide down  
▽ make the note shorter with bowing  
↶ slide down and then back (for a half tone or whole tone)  
J hit the higher next tone of the scale very quickly

24

Vo.

Guzheng R.

Guzheng L.

[Final edition "So-fei gathering flowers" with Erhu ornament indication.pdf](#)



**Singer** Zijing: It is amazing to see how these ornaments are accidentally matching the melody and text in most of the phrases such as on the words “blossoms” or “too”. And Now I need to make decisions about which ornaments to erase according to the English text, such as on the less important word “are”. I’ll use the “slide up” and “slide down” techniques as “extra legato”, and use the “slide down/up and then back” ornaments on the important words of the phrases which I want to stress more.

### 3.1.6 Outcomes

**Charles Griffes: 5 Poems of Ancient China and Japan, Op.10** (Published in 1917)  
**No.1 So-fei gathering flowers (Arr. Zijing Meng)**

[02 Reference Recording 02 \(Zijing Meng\) \(So-fei gathering flowers\).mp4](#)

Recorded on October 20th 2022, duration: 1’44”

Soprano / Chinese zither : Zijing Meng



[Final edition "So-fei\\_Gathering\\_Flowers" \(Arr. Zijing Meng\). Pdf](#)

### 3.1.7 Feedback, reflection and conclusion

**Feedback from Mingfei Li** (PhD student in Musicology at Indiana University Jacobs School of Music):

You can of course perform your arrangement, but you cannot perform it as if it is the only way to perform Griffes’s composition. This song cycle can generate much discussion on cultural appropriation in musicological research. But in other contexts, it may cause you trouble. Griffes’s



appropriation of the text and a reductionist setting of it using the pentatonic scale are problematic, but you cannot prove that what you do with your arranging is unproblematic either. His composition disrespects the poet, and your way of performing disrespects him. From a cultural-communication perspective, what do you expect the audience to hear and learn from you and your performance?

**Feedback from Rikki Wolpowitz** (PhD student at The University of Sheffield, Graduate Teaching Associate at The University of Sheffield):

Well done! I think it was a very respectful act of Charles Griffes to embrace Chinese culture and disseminate it to an American audience that maybe wasn't fully aware of Chinese culture in that way. I can imagine Griffes would have been honored to know that Chinese musicians in the future are inspired by his work and I can imagine would have loved to have heard his composition played on the zither.

The whole point of academia is to stimulate discussion and expand our perceptions of what we currently know, and we can only do that through the presentation and discussion of diverse views and practices. Music isn't created to be studied like a museum exhibition. Music is temporal art and reflects the human spirit and mind.

**Feedback from Ned McGowan** (research coach at Codarts):

While there are some assumptions I don't think are given in Mingfei's feedback, these are indeed good questions that you should be familiar with, and reflect upon.

Through your experience and insights you will have a unique interpretation of the piece... You don't claim to be authentic (which is a very problematic concept), but rather to make your version of the piece. People have played composer's works on other instruments throughout history. Think of all the instruments that Bach's music has been played on.

You can reflect on the issue as a related topic, but don't try to claim it. I agree that in the climate of today's discussions the piece quickly releases those issues. But you can definitely add new perspectives to the discussion with your approach.

**Self-reflection and Conclusion:**

During my progress of trying to bring the music back to a folk music setting, I also asked myself, why is it necessary to do this? Am I trying to be authentic or bring the music back to its root? But then how deep should I dig into it? And is it really possible to go back to the deepest authentic root of this piece of music using this amount of information that I can find? I think the answer is no.

Then I realize, what I am doing is more like a translating work, just like how the ancient Chinese poems were translated. Most usually, people judge if the translating work is well-done by how much it adapts to the culture and language habits of the aimed language. In Griffes's song cycle, it is very easy to hear that

the original “language habit” of Chinese folk music was well-kept, therefore I can easily abstract the “folk music language” from this song cycle and represent it with folk music. However, in the work of Debussy and Ravel, it is much harder to do the same approach because they emerge their composition techniques very well with the eastern music elements. But since the approach of emerging eastern music and impressionism was spreaded much later in America than in France, the work of Griffes was still considered very advanced in America at the beginning of 20th century.

There is also a saying that “translating is deceiving”, because it loses the original tastes and aesthetic values. But in my opinion, the aim of translation is always to communicate and attract a big audience in other cultures, therefore the work itself has a bigger chance to be valued and preserved through history. Of course translation has both advantages and disadvantages. But my “translation” of Griffes’s music is just an extra option for the audience to choose in which “language” they would like to hear the piece. In cross-cultural communication, we should not focus on authenticity and competition, we should make bridges instead of making walls.

## 3.2 Second Research Cycle

### 3.2.1 Overview of second research cycle

In the first research cycle, I realized that applying folk singing ornaments into the songs of Charles Griffes has a lot of limitations. The composition is a very nice example of western composers trying to imitate and re-create Chinese music style. But in many of the cases, the composers rely very much on the translation of the poetry since most of them are not familiar with Chinese language at all. Therefore, it is quite difficult for me as a performer to emerge Chinese folk ornaments into the songs when they are written in foreign languages. Even though the method of arranging the folk instrumental version of the piece and playing with Erhu gave me a lot of inspiration, I still noticed that my approach relied very much on the melody of the song instead of the melody of the language. Plus, the first cycle has generated cultural-appropriation related discussion which I need more time to reflect and research about.

Therefore, in the second research cycle, I would like to look into the song cycle of Chinese composer Zhongrong Luo (罗忠镕, 1924-2021). Luo is a composer in residence at China Central Symphony Orchestra and a composition teacher at China Conservatory of Music. His contribution is very important in the music academia of China and he has been seen as “the father of Chinese modern music”<sup>8</sup>. His composition technique is very much influenced by the western theory and he developed his own style of composing with Chinese cultural characteristics, such as the pentatonic mode of twelve-tone technique. His music theme is also strongly related to Chinese traditional culture and poetry. The song cycle *Songs of Autumn - poems by Mu Du* was one of his early works of art song composition, in which he has not

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<sup>8</sup> Rao, Nancy Yunhwa. “Hearing Pentatonicism Through Serialism: Integrating Different Traditions in Chinese Contemporary Music”. *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol.40(2), pp.190-232, 2002

involved the pentatonic mode of twelve-tone technique yet. The style of the song cycle is still tonal and quite traditional.

I will choose the first song *Mountain Hiking* (山行) from Luo's song cycle *Songs of Autumn - poems by Mu Du* (composed in 1962), analyze his composing method especially the use of melody-lyrics relation as a native Chinese speaker, use folk instrument as a help of the ornament study and experiment, compare his approach to Griffes's approach of the reciprocal influence between the eastern and western music.

### 3.2.2 Reference recording

**Zhongrong Luo: Songs of autumn (three poems of Mu Du)** (Published in 1962)  
**No.1 Mountain Hiking** (山行)

[03 Reference Recording 03 \(Zijing Meng\) \(山行 Mountain Hiking\).mp4](#)

Recorded on 7th, June, 2023

Soprano: Zijing Meng

Pianist: Maarten Hillenius

*Mountain Hiking* (山行) is the first song from Luo's song cycle *Songs of Autumn*. The melody of the song is composed with pentatonic scales but the harmony is very western and creative. This approach is very similar to Puccini's opera *Turandot* when he adapted the Chinese traditional folk song *Jasmine Flower* as a theme melody but reharmonized it with various chord progressions.

The lyrics is a poem by a very well-known poet Mu Du (杜牧, 803-852) from Tang Dynasty. The form of this poetry is one of the most common forms of classical Chinese poems "seven-word short poem (七言绝句)", which has strict rules of rhymes and use of intonation patterns. In this form of poetry, there are always seven characters in each of the four phrases that form a "xx/xx/xxx" structure. The four phrases functions as introduction phrase (起句), elucidation phrase (承句), turning phrase (转句), conclusion phrase (合句).

### 3.2.3 Feedback and reflection

**Feedback from Xiangji Zeng** (Violinist, alumni of China Central Conservatory and Koninklijk Conservatorium Den Haag):

In this recording, it seems that the diction of Chinese stopped your progression of melody sometimes. The song should sound very smooth and legato, but now it is a bit disturbed. The

characteristics of the Chinese language are not emphasized and you seem to not dare to pronounce the words so much. The composition itself is quite unique and special, but the singing should amplify the specialty even more. But I cannot suggest how to improve the diction in singing Chinese, you might need to ask for some specialists for that. The way you speak and the way you sing should unify, it is not about changing your singing technique, but using the language in a better way.

**Feedback from Hessel Vredevelde** (Classical singer, Chinese language student, alumni of Koninklijk Conservatorium Den Haag):

What kind of singing style were you trying to use here? To me, it sounded quite folk and traditional because the positions of the vowels are very much to the front. In classical singing, maybe you need a lower larynx and higher soft palate.

What was the expression that you were going for? Did you try to perform with very engaged emotions or treat it like a very abstract and distanced poetry? Speaking from my experience of performing Tan Dun's *Requiem for Nature*, I saw that all the performers are very personally engaged with the music, therefore the music was full of meanings. I would like to hear more passion, more personality and engagement from you. I want to see that going for the abstract atmosphere is a clear and conscious choice that you made, and you are convinced with this choice, so that the abstractness is not something that randomly happens when you perform.

**Feedback from Ned McGowan (research coach):**

The style of the piece is certainly very interesting. Have you ever thought about, what's the main difference when you sing this piece compared to singing a bel canto piece? For example, how do you use the vibratos differently? What I felt after hearing your recording of Chinese zither and Erhu was that all the ornaments and vibratos seem to be very composed and you both had clear ideas about when to use them. Is it possible to maybe use this approach in your singing too?

**Self-reflection:**

With this kind of repertoire that is very new and creative in the composition approach, it seems that the style is much more important than the singing technique itself. Especially when the composition has such a close relationship with the language, then as a native speaker, the language should be a tool to use to make a better artistic expression. When I play the Chinese zither, the use of ornaments and vibratos are normally very well-planned at the beginning and then it becomes a natural flow of the habit. For singing, I could also use this method to organize all the emphasis, ornaments and vibratos.

### 3.2.4 Data collection & data analysis: my findings

In order to better understand the music style, explore the technical possibilities of performing the piece and get more knowledge about the composition background in the 20th century of China, I did literature research about the composition analysis and interpretation of the song cycle, as well as internet media research and interview about the possibilities of the singing style and techniques.

#### Literature research

1. SHI, Yuan. “Zhongrong Luo’s Song Cycle *Songs of Autumn* - Artistic Characteristics and Singing Exploration (罗忠镕声乐套曲《秋之歌》艺术特征及演唱探索)”, Master thesis of Inner Mongolia University, 2019. <https://www.docin.com/p-2357551489.html>

This thesis listed nearly all the well-known vocal pieces of Luo, which makes it easy to see that *Songs of Autumn* was one of his earliest song compositions. At that time, he still didn’t develop his atonal composition techniques and was still composing with a quite traditional approach. The writer indicated that Luo followed the “introduction, elucidation, turning and conclusion (起承转合)” structure of traditional Chinese poetry and clearly showed this approach also in the melody. For example, the highest note in the song is written on the third phrase, which is the most dramatic “transition” phrase.



The third phrase (“turning phrase”) of *Mountain Hiking* (山行)

He also used very frequent time signature change that adds freshness, motions, flexibility and active flow to the “seven-word short poem (七言绝句)”. The bar lines also more or less follow the “xx/xx/xxx” structure of each phrase.

The writer also wrote extremely precisely her interpretation of every phrase according to the melody. But some analyses of the ending note choices and rest notes seem to be overly interpreting without purpose. Her suggestions to the performer are also very specific, such as “look up during the piano introduction” or “act surprised on the third phrase”<sup>9</sup>. I think it is very unnecessary and it neglects the natural body language of the performer. Each person should feel free in performing and use their own interpretation and imagination.

<sup>9</sup> Shi, Yuan, “Zhongrong Luo’s Song Cycle *Songs of Autumn* - Artistic Characteristics and Singing Exploration (罗忠镕声乐套曲《秋之歌》艺术特征及演唱探索)”, Master thesis of Inner Mongolia University, 2019. <https://www.docin.com/p-2357551489.html>

2. Li, Wenjuan. "A Study on the Singing Zhongrong Luo's Song Cycle *Songs of Autumn* (罗忠镭声乐套曲《秋之歌》的演唱研究)", Master thesis of Shandong Normal University, 2019.  
<https://www.docin.com/p-2317191190.html?docfrom=rrela>

This thesis analyzes very technically the dictation of the Chinese language: The diphthong such as "yuan" should start with "yu", then stretch to "a" and end later with "n"; In nasal word such as "shang", we should shorten the "sh" and "ng", in order to sing a good "a" to avoid narrowing the space for the nasal sound; When singing "che" on the highest note of the song, we need to avoid bite the "ch" sound too much and keep a inner space in the mouth for the "e" vowel.

The writer also mentioned a book<sup>10</sup> about singing by a famous singing teacher and educator Tielin Jin, in which Tielin Jin mentioned that when singing in Chinese, dictation-wise we should use the same technique as in Chinese traditional operas, we should "use the word to bring the sound", "use well-pronounced word and full vocal cavities"<sup>11</sup>. Reciting the poem will also help to improve the dictation of singing.

3. Xu, Jing. "The application of harmony in art songs of Zhongrong Luo (罗忠镭艺术歌曲的和声应用)", Master thesis of Henan University, 2001. <https://www.doc88.com/p-691923233920.html>

This thesis analyzed Luo's use of harmony in different stages of his compositions. At the first stage in the fifties and sixties of the 20th century, Luo mainly combined folk tunes with traditional major and minor harmonies, the theme of songs were mainly about the lives of the people at that time. From the 1960s to 1970s, Luo explored and experimented differently with his harmonic language from the traditional functional harmonic system, and these innovations provided valuable experience for the development of modern Chinese music. *Songs of Autumn* was also composed during this period. Then after the 1980s, Luo applied various western modern composition techniques to classical Chinese poems. In *Songs of Autumn*, he used parallel triads, parallel fourth and parallel second as a main harmonic element of each song, which is very common in the western compositions in the 20th century during the impressionism period too.



*Songs of Autumn, No.1 Mountain Hiking*  
The use of parallel triads



*Songs of Autumn, No.2 On the Way to Nanling*  
The use of parallel fourth

<sup>10</sup> Jin, Tielin. "Anthology of Jin Tielin's Vocal Teaching (金铁霖声乐教学文集)", People's Music Publishing House Ltd., 2008

<sup>11</sup> Jin, Tielin, "Anthology of Jin Tielin's Vocal Teaching (金铁霖声乐教学文集)", People's Music Publishing House Ltd., 2008



*Songs of Autumn, No.3 To Judge Chuo Han of Yangzhou*  
The use of parallel second

4. Ding, Yan. "Survey and Analysis of the Survival Status of Chinese Folk Music (中国民族器乐生存现状调查与分析), 华音网.  
<https://www.huain.com/article/other/2023/0213/1644.html>

This is a statistics report and analysis of the current situation of Chinese traditional folk music. Chinese folk music is a very broad topic. There are 56 officially recognized ethnic groups and each of them has their own culture and music. In this report, the survey focuses on the folk music of Han-Chinese, which is the music style of the biggest and the major ethnic groups that influenced most of the western composers such as Charles Griffes.

The article indicates that at the moment in China, the popularity of learning folk instruments is much lower than that of Western instruments, the promotion of Chinese folk music in modern media such as radio and television and video disk is very little, the education of traditional folk music is mainly in music colleges so it slowly loses the general public, the new works of folk music are basically only disseminated among professional learners, the rich store of Chinese folk music repertoire resources is not well-developed, the current repertoires do not adapt to the contemporary audience's aesthetic habits and tastes anymore. Therefore, we need to involve Chinese folk music in the world performance market, explore new applications of Chinese folk music such as in movies or video games, develop a new folk music genre that combines better with the current popular trends in the society.

5. Wu, Fusheng, Translations of Chinese Poetry by Herbert A. Giles and Arthur Waley, *Comparative Literature: East & West*, 21:1, 55-70.

This thesis explains the poem translating method of the two important translators Herbert A. Giles and Arthur Waley. In their translation of Chinese ancient poems, we can see that they all tried to find a way to adapt these poems according to the English language habit and poem forms. The translations are very well-made for English readers, but it certainly lost a lot of the taste and logic of the Chinese language, and they became very important materials for western composers such as Charles Griffes to depend on.

### **Internet media research**

1. [https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1AP41147Eu/?vd\\_source=6ffe201043b7f484666a6a3727d03a5d](https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1AP41147Eu/?vd_source=6ffe201043b7f484666a6a3727d03a5d)  
Zhongrong Luo's Song Cycle *Songs of Autumn*, soprano: Liping Zhang, piano: Jialin Zhang

This is the only professional recording that I can find of this song cycle. Liping Zhang is the current head of the vocal department in Central Conservatory of Music in China. She has studied both in Central Conservatory of Music in China and Vancouver Academy of Music in Canada. In this recording, she treated these pieces as if they were western compositions. She sang them with western classical techniques and tried to modify the shapes of vowels closer to the clear Italian vowels. The tones have very good airflow and evenness, but then it also lacks the nuance and the taste of the poetry. Technically it sounds very mature and solid, but in my opinion, it didn't really show the characteristics of the Chinese language and style. This will be explained later more precisely in the next chapter.

2. [Wu Bixia 吴碧霞 - Plum Blossom Introduction 梅花引](#)

Chinese classical-folk song *Plum Blossom* (梅花引), soprano: Wu Bixia (吴碧霞)

This is a recording that demonstrates Chinese classical-folk singing. The expected sound color, resonance places and the use of consonants and vowels are very different compared to the western classical singing. The shape of the vowels are usually flatter but lies higher in the mouth, the larynx position is also relatively higher than classical singing. Since nowadays the performance locations have been moved to bigger concert halls and the singers are normally accompanied by bigger orchestras, microphones for the folk singers are very often necessary.

3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y57gcc3B-os>

*Cuckoo calling for spring*, Chorus of the minor Chinese ethnic group “Dong” (侗族大歌)

This is a kind of specially choral music from the the minor Chinese ethnic group “Dong” (侗族) which has been listed as UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage. The technique is very different from what we used to hear. The development of this style and singing technique is strongly related to the nature of their habitation and the acoustics of their traditional architecture built fully with wood. The performance usually takes place in front of this kind of traditional wooden architecture during traditional festivals or when hosting important guests.



### Summary of Expert Interview

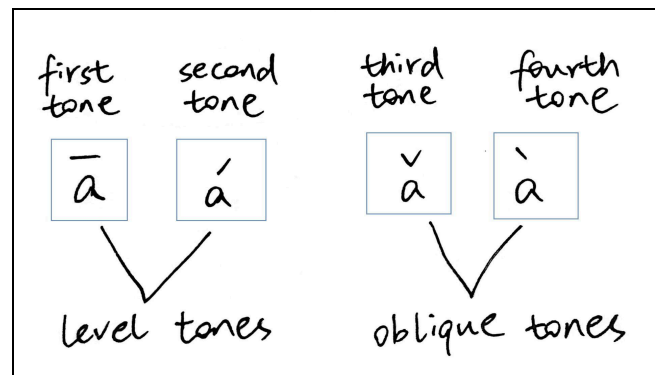
1. Discussion about “the music style and performing style of *Songs of Autumn*” with **Jan Willen Passchier** (Coach-pianist of classical singing department at Codart)

The melody of the song is pentatonic, and then there are chords that sound very western and romantic. With this kind of repertoire, there are many ways and styles to do it. The most important thing is to make a clear choice and then go for it. The singing style can be a combination of western and eastern style.



### General tone analysis of Chinese poem

The Chinese language can be very difficult for singers and composers since it is already a melodic language itself. When setting the text to music, the melody of the language can easily be disturbed by the musical melody and become not understandable. In Chinese, there are four tones and they are categorized into level (平) tones and oblique (仄) tones. The level (平) tones are the first tone and second tone, the oblique (仄) tones are the third tone and the fourth tone. When tone patterns are used in “seven-word short poem (七言绝句)”, the pattern has to follow some certain rules such as the first, second and fourth phrases must end with level (平) tones and the third phrase which is the turning phrase must end with the oblique (仄) tones.



### 3.2.5 Interventions / practical application

#### The tone analysis of *Mountain Hiking* (山行)

I made two kinds of tone analysis of the poem *Mountain Hiking* (山行) according to the phonetic transcription Pinyin (拼音). The first one is a indication of level (平) tones and oblique (仄) tones. The second one shows the pitch changes of the four tones in every sentence. The upper line and lower line are the highest and lowest pitch range in the sentence. For the second tone analysis, I used a pitch visualizer to analyze the pitch changes of my speaking.

yuǎn shàng hán shān shí jīng xiá  
远 上 寒 山 石 径 斜

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 仄 | 仄 | 平 | 平 | 平 | 仄 | 平 |
| O | O | L | L | L | O | L |

bái yún shēng chù yǒu rén jiā  
白 云 生 处 有 人 家

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 平 | 平 | 平 | 仄 | 仄 | 平 | 平 |
| L | L | L | O | O | L | L |

tíng chē zuò ài fēng lín wǎn  
停 车 坐 爱 枫 林 晚

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 平 | 平 | 仄 | 仄 | 平 | 平 | 仄 |
| L | L | O | O | L | L | O |

shuāng yè hóng yú èr yuè huā  
霜 叶 红 于 二 月 花

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 平 | 仄 | 平 | 平 | 仄 | 仄 | 平 |
| L | O | L | L | O | O | L |

Indication of level tones (L) and oblique tones (O)

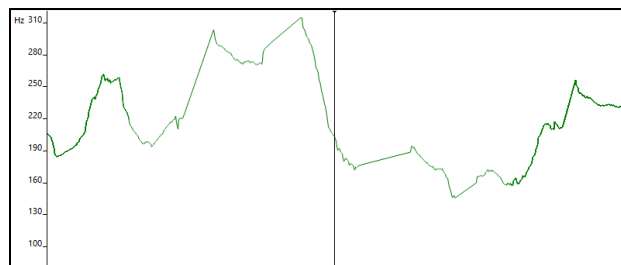
yuǎn shàng hán shān shí jīng xiá  
远 上 寒 山 石 径 斜

bái yún shēng chù yǒu rén jiā  
白 云 生 处 有 人 家

tíng chē zuò ài fēng lín wǎn  
停 车 坐 爱 枫 林 晚

shuāng yè hóng yú èr yuè huā  
霜 叶 红 于 二 月 花

Indication of the pitch changes in speaking



pitch visualizer visualizing the second phrase of the poem

### The use of emphasis and vibratos in singing

I took out the four phrases in the song and marked the level tones (L) and oblique tones (O) underneath. We can see very clearly that the half note is the longest note in this piece, and all of them were composed on a word with a level tone (marked in circles), which are more stable tones to land on. Then there are two words with oblique tones that also have the length of a half note, but the half note is divided by a

dotted quarter note and an eighth note (marked in squares), which help emphasize the tone of the words and make them more understandable in singing.

According to the rules of "seven-word short poem (七言绝句)", the four phrases functions as introduction phrase (起句), elucidation phrase (承句), turning phrase (转句), conclusion phrase (合句). The first, second and fourth phrases must end with level tones and the third phrase which is the turning phrase must end with the oblique tones. In this song, all the phrases finish with a half note except the third phrase (turning phrase). The third phrase also has the highest note and the fastest notes of the whole piece, which fits perfectly its poetic function as the turning phrase.

In singing practice, all the words with oblique tones should not be given too much weight, and when the word is put with more than one note, the dynamic of the second and third note should be much lighter than the first one, extra ornaments can be added to create the "oblique" and unstable feeling of the language; all the words with level tones should be sang with a more grounded color, especially the long notes can be given more airflow or vibratos.

The musical score consists of four lines of music in 3/4 time, each with Chinese lyrics and tone markers (L for level, O for oblique) in a box below. Circles highlight words with half-note length, and squares highlight words with level tones.

Line 1: *p* 远 上 寒 山 石 径 斜, (O O L L L O L)

Line 2: 白 云 生 处 有 人 家。 (L L L O O L L)

Line 3: *mf* 停 车 坐 爱 枫 林 晚, (L L O O L L O) *p*

Line 4: *p* 霜 叶 红 于 二 月 花。 (L O L L O O L)

*words with half-note length, level tones in circles and oblique tones in squares*

### The use of “sliding (滑音)” in singing

I combined the melody with the pitch changes in speaking and recorded myself. In the picture, the vertical lines are the separation of word groups in the poem according to the meaning: the red vertical lines indicate where the flow of pitch changes in the sentence are disturbed by the melody, the yellow vertical lines indicate where the melody still goes with the pitch change even though it is moving to another word group. Here we can clearly see that within all the blocks of the word groups, the melody follows exactly the same pattern as the pitch change of the words, and there are only two spots where the melody goes to a different direction when moving to the next word group. In the recording, we can hear how melodic the poem is, and Zhongrong Luo made this melody so close to the language with the pentatonic scale that all the words can be clearly understood by the listeners. This is a kind of special approach that doesn't work for western languages. For singers, it also makes the text delivery much easier. It helps the singers who know the language very well to feel more comfortable with singing, get more personal connection with the song and more freedom with their further artistic choices.

The image displays a musical score for the poem "Mountain Hiking" (山行) in 3/4 time, featuring four staves of music. Each staff includes Chinese lyrics, English translations, and pitch contour arrows. Vertical lines separate word groups: red lines indicate where the melody's pitch flow is disturbed, and yellow lines indicate where it follows the natural pitch change of the words.

**Staff 1:** *p* 远 上 寒 山 石 径 斜  
far-up cold mountain stone path oblique

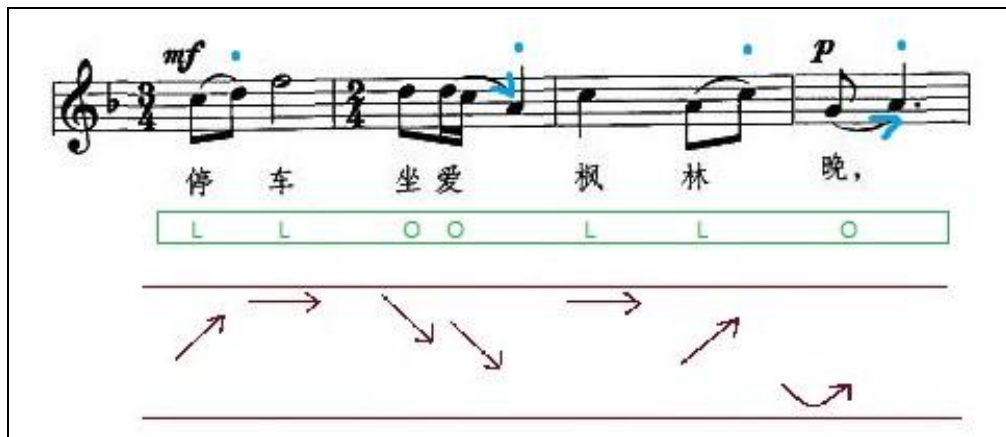
**Staff 2:** 白 云 生 处 有 人 家。  
where the clouds appear there are families

**Staff 3:** *mf* 停 车 坐 爱 枫 林 晚, *p*  
stop the car cause (I) love maple forest in the night

**Staff 4:** *p* 霜 叶 红 于 二 月 花。  
frosted leaves redder than February flowers

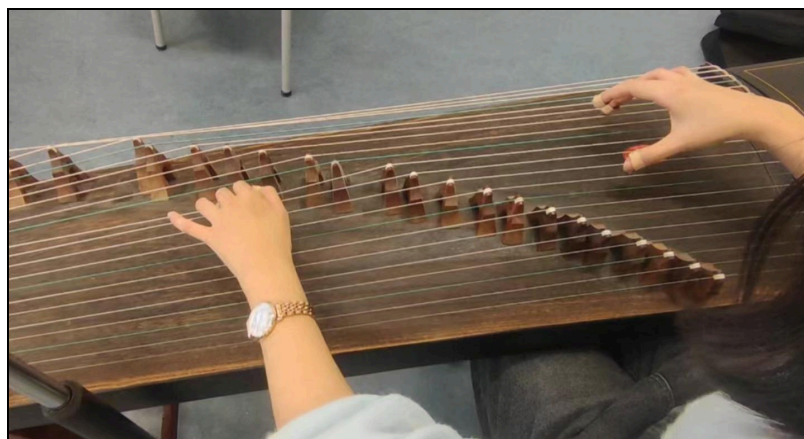
[Mountain Hiking \(山行\) - poem reading.mp4](#)

In the recording of Liping Zhang<sup>12</sup> I sensed that she treated the notes as only musical symbols, but not as a pitch pattern of the language. She sang everything very properly as written, but the direction of the pitch change in each word is not very audible. In my opinion, all the tones with a pitch change, especially the third tone and fourth tone as oblique tones should be sung with clear directions. When a word is composed with more than one note, the late note should be put much less weight compared to the first note. When singing an oblique tone, some “sliding (滑音)” can be added to strengthen the “oblique” atmosphere too.



*Indication of notes with less weight and slidings on oblique tones*

The “sliding (滑音)” technique is a very common technique in Chinese folk music and it adds a lot of unique flavor to the style. In the recording from the first research cycle<sup>13</sup>, we can hear this technique a lot both on Chinese zither and Erhu, which is one of the most recognizable differences in style compared to western music. I made a recording of the melody on Chinese zither which demonstrates the sliding technique.



[Mountain Hiking - melody on Chinese zither with sliding technique.mp4](#)

<sup>12</sup> 3.2.4 Data collection, Internet media research

[https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1AP41147Eu/?vd\\_source=6ffe201043b7f484666a6a3727d03a5d](https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1AP41147Eu/?vd_source=6ffe201043b7f484666a6a3727d03a5d)

<sup>13</sup> 3.1.5 Intervention [一枝花 \(fragment\) for Erhu and Guzheng.mp4](#)

### The placement of vowels and consonants in singing

In Chinese traditional singing technique such as in folk song and traditional operas, there is a saying “developing the space according to the word (以字行腔)” which is another proof of the importance of language in singing. It suggests that the shape of the oral space has to be used in the same way as we speak, meanwhile the western singing techniques suggest that the oral space of each vowel has to be well-opened and unified first before the articulation. The bel-canto technique suggests that singers should have more space in the mouth in order to maintain the beauty and evenness of every tone and every vowel, as well as constant air flow and legato phrasing. Compared to the western singing technique, especially the bel-canto singing technique, the delivery and dictation of the text seems to be in a much more important position in Chinese singing since the consonants and vowels are in much more difficult shapes. The result of these two techniques can be well-heard in the recordings of the internet media review.<sup>14</sup> Nowadays, there are also academic discussions in China about the healthiness of Chinese traditional singing techniques since the performance locations are moving to much bigger spaces compared to the old times, such as theater and concert halls which have very different acoustics. Therefore, I try to find a method to be able to produce the sound without using the Chinese traditional techniques, but articulate the words better without disturbing the inner space in the mouth to make sure there is good airflow. So instead of “developing the space according to the word (以字行腔)”, I change it to “developing the diphthongs and place the consonants systematically according to the word”. So I made a precise plan of the placement of them.

The image displays a musical score for a Chinese song, consisting of four staves of music. Each staff includes a melody line in treble clef, lyrics in Chinese characters, and pinyin with tone marks. The first staff begins with a *p* dynamic marking. The second staff has a *mf* dynamic marking. The third staff has a *p* dynamic marking. The fourth staff also begins with a *p* dynamic marking. The lyrics are: 远上寒山石径斜, 白云生处有人家, 停车坐爱枫林晚, 霜叶红于二月花。 The pinyin is: yu--a-n sha-----ng ha--an sha-n shi-- ji-ing xia-----, bai yun sheng chu----- yo--ou re---e-n jia-----, ti-i-ng che--- zuo a----ai fe--ng li---i--n wa---an, shuang ye hong yu er yu---ue hua-----.

<sup>14</sup> 3.2.4 Data collection. Internet media review.



## The result and notation of the melody

远 上 寒 山 石 径 斜  
yu--a-n sha-----ng ha--an sha-n shi-- ji-ing xia-----

白 云 生 处 有 人 家。  
bai yun sheng chu--- yo--ou re---e-n jia-----

停 车 坐 爱 枫 林 晚，  
ti-i-ng che--- zuo a----ai fe--ng li---i--n wa---an

霜 叶 红 于 二 月 花。  
shuang ye hong yu er yu---ue hua-----

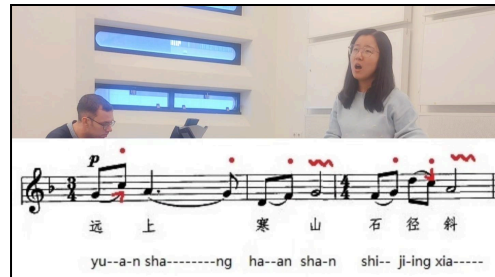
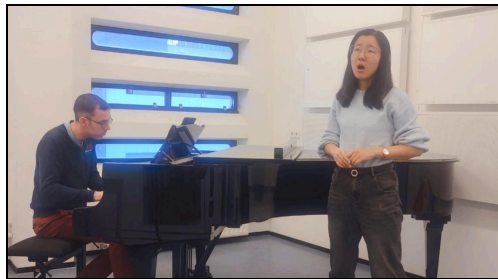
- sing with less weight (on second, third and fourth tones with multiple notes)
- 〰 vibrato on level tones (on all first tones and second tones with long notes)
- \* ornament (when two neighboring oblique tones are composed on the same pitch)
- ↪ sliding (when oblique tones are composed with multiple note)

## 3.2.6 Outcomes

**Zhongrong Luo: Songs of autumn (three poems of Mu Du) (Published in 1962)**  
**No.1 Mountain Hiking (山行)**

[04 Reference Recording 04 \(Zijing Meng\) \(山行 Mountain Hiking\).mp4](#)

[04 Reference Recording 04 \(Zijing Meng\) \(山行 Mountain Hiking with scores\).mp4](#)



Recorded on November 25th, 2024

Pianist: Hessel Vredeveltdt

Soprano: Zijing Meng

秋之歌  
(绝句三首)  
(1) 山行 [唐] 杜牧 词 罗忠颖 曲

Adagio 清幽地

Legend:

- first tone (level tone)
- second tone (level tone)
- third tone (oblique tone)
- fourth tone (oblique tone)

• sing with less weight (on second, third and fourth tones with multiple notes)

— vibrato on level tones (all first tones and second tones with long notes)

\* ornament (when two neighboring oblique tones are set on same pitch)

~ sliding technique (when oblique tones are set with multiple notes)

[Mountain Hiking \(山行\) scores with notes.pdf](#)



### 3.2.7 Feedback, reflection and conclusion

**Feedback from Hessel Vredeveltdt** (Classical singer, Chinese language student, Alumni of Koninklijk Conservatorium Den Haag):

In this recording, it is very easy to hear that you have made clearer decisions of what you want to do. It sounds like you chose the more folk style approach instead of classical singing, which can be a result of your different way of placing the vowels. But still, I think you can add more body support on top of this kind of style of singing. Folk singing doesn't mean less support, and you can definitely involve more of your body to add more expressiveness.

**Feedback from Juncai Zhang** (Classical singer, student of Koninklijk Conservatorium Den Haag):

In my opinion, the style of the music is very eastern, your singing technique is very classical, but your approach and interpretation is folk. When I hear this music, I think about some Chinese folk singers' voices in my head.

**Feedback from Xiangji Zeng** (Violinist, alumni of China Central Conservatory and Koninklijk Conservatorium Den Haag):

With this type of music, it is very normal that you could receive completely different feedback from different people. So you need to think about, who is your audience? When you sing this piece in Europe, then take the feedback from Hessel Vredeveltdt seriously because it is very representative for your audience group. Because when performing for people who don't know so much about Chinese music, they will only recognize it as something foreign and unfamiliar. So in this case, the only way that they get to know Chinese music is through your performance. Therefore, you are responsible for making the music impressive, interesting and appealing. When you have a very good technical base, you will have a lot of freedom and flexibility to adjust to the style and audience's taste.

**Feedback from Job ter Haar** (research coach at Codarts):

For the next cycle, it would be nice to combine all the precise analysis work you did in this cycle with the zither-playing and do something creative again.

#### **Self-reflection and Conclusion :**

The precise planning of ornaments, vibratos, sliding technique and placement of vowels and consonants helped a lot in improving the style. But in practice, some of them might feel a bit unnatural, and I have a tendency to do something different (especially the vibratos) which can be heard in the reference recording

No.4 in comparison with the scores. All the analysis and planning should be a tool to use, but at the end, I should also trust my artistic instinct as a singer instead of totally depending on the theory.

In reference recording No.4, I also noticed that the voice color was a bit different from the reference recording No.3 as a result of intervention. That made me wonder, is sound color also part of the style too? For example, the baroque musicians not only have a good understanding of the style, they also play the music on baroque instruments which have different sound colors to support the style. But as a singer, I only have one “instrument” that we own, so should I adjust my “instrument” to another color to support the style? When I decide to adjust, is it still possible to make sure that it is still a full and healthy sound of my “instrument”?

Most kinds of music style and specific singing techniques especially in folk music are strongly related to where they were developed, including where the people used to live, where the performance used to take place and who were the audience group. Nowadays, there have been big discussions about whether to change the singing technique to a healthier approach instead of looking for a certain sound, and this kind of discussions are not only between Chinese folk singers but also western classical and baroque singers. In my current research cycle, I aim to offer more tools to present a certain musical style and artistic choices. The discussion that has been brought out in the feedback session about singing technique will be continued.

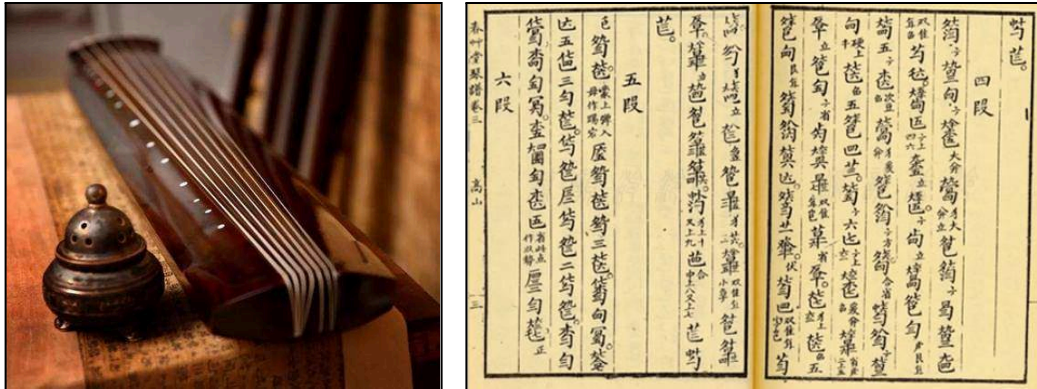
## 3.3 Third Research Cycle

### 3.3.1 Overview of third research cycle

In the second cycle, I chose a Chinese art song piece by Zhongrong Luo which gave me a lot of inspiration on how to use the rhymes and tones of the language to improve the singing technique and enhance the ornaments within the musical style. For the third cycle, I would like to come back to the song cycle *5 Poems of Ancient China and Japan* by Charles Griffes, and make a creative performance combining the results from both of the first and second cycles which combine my knowledge as a classical singer and my insight as a Chinese folk musician.

In China, there is also another type of ancient zither (古琴) which has 7 strings. It has a much longer history and a different kind of notation system which does not show any rhythm and tempo. The musicians learn the pieces usually by listening to their teachers' playing and then play with their own interpretation of the music with some improvisation, therefore there were many different schools. Compared to the impressionist period of classical music, the composers such as Debussy or Griffes have a rather extremely precise style of notating. They use a lot of slurs and complicated rhythms in order to create a very dreamy and “free” feeling.

In the third cycle, I want to become inspired from zither music and use my classical singing knowledge as a tool. First, I will leave out the complicity of impressionist music and try an approach that is freer in rhythms, tempo and timing as most of the Chinese ancient music before the modern notation systems were invented. Then, I will use an opera-recitativo-like style to rearrange the English text and accompaniment in this song using the score-marking method that I developed in the second song cycle.



Ancient zither (古琴) and shorthand-character notation(减字谱)

### 3.3.2 Reference recording

**Charles Griffes: 5 Poems of Ancient China and Japan, Op.10** (Published in 1917)  
**No.4 Tears**

[05 Reference Recording 05 \(Zijing Meng\) \(Tears\).mp4](#)

Recorded on February 29th 2024, duration: 1'30"

Soprano: Zijing Meng

Pianist: David Bollen

The fourth piece *Tears* was composed with pentatonic scale plus one foreign tone which appears only in the piano accompaniment. The 6-tone scale added a bit of late-romantic atmosphere to the piece. The lyrics is originally a poem by Wang Seng-Ju (or Sengru Wang, 王僧孺, 465-522). Griffes used the English version of the poem translated by Launcelot Cranmer-Byng from his poem collection *Songs from the Chinese Poets, Series V*.

## Tears

6-tone scale, with one foreign note

Wang Seng-Ju  
(6th Century)



Charles T. Griffes. Op.10, No.4

### 3.3.3 Feedback and reflection

**Feedback from David Bollen** (Coach-pianist of classical singing department at Codart) :

Even though this piece seems very slow and all the phrases are long, you need to make sure to vibrate on every note and make the notes alive. Remember that there is always the ongoing tension and direction throughout the piece, that's how you make a piece interesting.

Plus, is there a higher version of the song or you can transpose it? It would fit your voice better.

**Feedback from Rachel Beckles Willson** (Professor of Intercultural Performing Arts at the Academy of Creative and Performing Arts, Leiden University) :

It could indeed be problematic not to consider and discuss the history of cultural appropriation in which you are entangled. At the same time, you have a great opportunity to address it in your work. Doing research is about going with, but also beyond, what we 'like' and don't like. We need to be self-reflexive, self-critical, to get to a level beyond only our subjective tastes.

The world has substantially changed now, because so much is available to us, but the legal and ethical matters are discussed more. So, you need to be aware of the circumstances of Griffes' work, in order to use it ethically. And then you can decide how you wish to arrange his work.

#### **Self reflection:**

According to David Bollen's feedback, the ongoing tension and direction of the phrasing are what make the music interesting. I want to use a different creative method to achieve the goal, which is to rearrange the rhythms and make the rhythms based on the flow of the language. This approach is similar to opera recitativo and most of the music in ancient China before the notation system was invented.

But coming back to this song cycle and rearranging the piece is bringing up the cultural appropriation issue again. Is my approach a kind of re-appropriation? How should I see my arrangement at this culturally more sensitive time compared to the 20th century? This needs to be further explained and discussed.

### 3.3.4 Data collection & data analysis: my findings

#### Literature research

1. Hsu, Ti-Fei. "Chinese influence in four twentieth century song cycles by Roussel, Carpenter, Griffes and Britten", American Conservatory of Music, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, May 1988. 8826349.

This thesis gives very precise and detailed information about the song cycle *5 Poems of Ancient China and Japan* by Charles Griffes. But unlike the first piece *So-fei gathering flowers*, the writer didn't give any information about the composition background of the piece *Tears* but mainly theoretical analysis: The melody was composed with 5 tones, but in the accompaniment there was one foreign tone that gave the music some very special and rather dramatic taste on the word "tears". The most important information that was given in this thesis about this piece was that the writer found the original ancient poem of the song text: 斜光隱西壁，暮雀上南枝。風來秋扇屏，月出夜燈吹。深心起百際，遙淚非一垂。徒勞妾辛苦，終言君不知。

2. Bellman, Jonathan D. "Musical Voyages and Their Baggage: Orientalism in Music and Critical Musicology" (2011). School of Music Faculty Publications. 5.  
<https://digscholarship.unco.edu/musicfacpub/5>

This thesis helped me to better understand the culture appropriation discussion that my topic brought up in the first cycle and why orientalism can be seen as a problematic term.

This thesis talks about orientalism in music and the historical background of it. It indicates that "orientalism" is now most often seen as a postcolonial phenomena. In the view of someone in the West, Asia can be seen as exotic, mysterious and irrational. The work of musical exotism is also very often about borrowing and using the materials. Igor Stravinsky was seeing 'oriental music', 'Russian music,' or 'Hungarian' or 'Spanish,' or any other of the national nineteenth-century kind, as a thin and boring local color.<sup>15</sup> The critic Joseph Kerman also commented on Puccini's *Turandot*: "There is no organic reason for the bogus orientalism lacquered over every page of the score; it provides local color or exoticism for its own sake, but also, more deeply, a chance for the artist to wriggle out of his irresponsibility."<sup>16</sup>

Works that use musical gestures to suggest specific people, places, or cultures are often put in a separate, problematic critical category: separate because of the unstated, unproven, yet (seemingly) widely held assumption that there exists some kind of standard, definable, more normative style that does not evoke identity or place so specifically; problematic because of the longstanding tradition, already observed in the Stravinsky and Kerman quotes above, that local color automatically implies cheapness, ephemerality, and compositional weakness.

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<sup>15</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, "Memories and Commentaries", New York: Doubleday & Company, 1960), 59.

<sup>16</sup> Joseph Kerman, "Opera as Drama [1952]", 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 206.

## Internet media research

1. [Five Poems of Ancient China and Japan, Op. 10: 4. Tears](#)

### [Charles Griffes - Five Poems of Ancient China and Japan \(Audio+Score\)](#)

The first recording is a rendition of *Tears* from *Charles Griffes's* song cycle *Five Poems of Ancient China and Japan* performed by Irene Gubrud and Margo Garrett. The singing is very legato with constant air flow. Both the singer and the pianist really take time in between the phrasing.

The second recording is an arrangement for baritone and orchestra of *Charles Griffes's* song cycle *Five Poems of Ancient China and Japan*. The arrangement enhances very much the impressionistic characteristics of the piece and gives a very flowing but precise atmosphere.

Both of the approaches of the rendition and the arrangement are rather western in singing technique and style. In my arrangement, I would like to try a different approach that is closer to the Chinese tradition. It's not about proving authenticity, but simply giving a different perspective and option.

2. [https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1NM411h7oH/?spm\\_id\\_from=333.788.recommend\\_more\\_video.18&vd\\_source=6ffe201043b7f484666a6a3727d03a5d](https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1NM411h7oH/?spm_id_from=333.788.recommend_more_video.18&vd_source=6ffe201043b7f484666a6a3727d03a5d)

*Water and cloud of Xiao River and Xiang River*, ancient scores (shorthand tablature notation, 减字谱) demonstration

### [龔一古琴獨奏《瀟湘水雲》](#)

*Water and cloud of Xiao River and Xiang River* played by Yi Gong

### [古琴 瀟湘水云 吳景略](#)

*Water and cloud of Xiao River and Xiang River* played by Jinglue Wu

### [古琴大師管平湖先生演奏《瀟湘水雲》](#)

*Water and cloud of Xiao River and Xiang River* played by Pinghu Guan

These are three recordings of three famous Chinese ancient zither (古琴) players playing the same piece. The ancient notating system for this instrument uses shorthand Chinese characters which indicate only the fingering, technique and which string to play, but indicates no rhythm, tempo and pitch. Therefore, there were many different schools and styles since the players mainly learn the piece by listening to their teachers' playing. This is a kind of performing style that I want to try with Charles Griffes' piece.

In the first recording, Yi Gong plays with a very slow tempo with a lot of rubato. He takes quite a lot of time not only between all the phrases but also within each phrase. It sounds very calm, careless and free. In the second recording, Jinglue Wu plays with much faster tempo and a lot of variations of rhythm so that it sounds a bit more structured and disciplined compared to the first one. The third recording sounds very different from the previous recordings because Pinghu Guan takes a very steady and equal rhythm. All of

these three players are from different schools and the ways they play can make the piece sound very different.

These recordings inspired me to search for a free, unique and unrestricted way of performing Charles Griffes' piece. Even though it seems to be a bit over the border, I still want to make an experiment.

### 3. 潇湘水云(虞山吴氏琴谱)-古琴

*Water and cloud of Xiao River and Xiang River* notated on the staff based on the playing style of Jinglue Wu's family from the "Yushan school (Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644)"

#### 潇湘水云古琴谱

*Water and cloud of Xiao River and Xiang River* notated with numbered musical notation and ancient shorthand notation

The image displays two pages of musical notation for the piece 'Xiao Xiang Shui Yun' (潇湘水云). The left page features a Western staff notation with numbered musical notation and ancient shorthand notation. The right page shows a Western staff notation with numbered musical notation and ancient shorthand notation. The notation is complex, combining Western musical notation with traditional Chinese notation systems.

In the 20th century, the different notation systems were also applied in Chinese folk music. In the first link, the notation is based on the playing of Jinglue Wu and his family. Even though the scores now indicate pitches, the bar lines and rhythms don't make a lot of sense even when compared to Jinglue Wu's playing. In the second link, the ancient shorthand notation is combined with the numbered musical notation which is usually used in Chinese folk music. It makes it much easier for the beginners to study and also to learn a common notation system which is not exclusively used for ancient zither (古琴).

When comparing these two scores, it is very obvious to see that the rhythms are very different. So at a later stage of studying, the players need to learn not to rely on this kind of musical notation anymore and

develop their own style of playing. So in a way, the musical notation needs to be treated like an opera-recit, which only gives a suggestion but should not be exactly followed.

In my arrangement, I want to give space to the performer's own creativity, so I decide not to use this kind of rhythmic notation that is based on one specific version of a rendition.

4. [琴歌《关山月》乔珊 演唱](#)

Ancient zither song (琴歌) *The Moon At The Fortified Pass* (关山月) played and sung by Shan Qiao

The Ancient Zither Song (琴歌) is a very typical art form of poem-singing. The zither part usually doubles the song melody and gives some extra decoration or harmony to the melody. This inspires me a lot during my arranging of Griffes' piece in this cycle.

In my arrangement, I will keep the original harmony and small melodic decorations in Griffes' composition and free up the rest.

5. [Ecco Dorinda il giorno: II. Recitativo - "Ecco Dorinda il giorno"](#)

This is an example of a recitativo. In operas and oratorios, the recitativo is never performed strictly as the written rhythm. Compared to the scores, it is possible to hear that the rhythms are usually only a suggestion of emphases and expressions. The singers have to sing it with their own understanding and connect the melody to their speaking.



In my intervention, in order to create the new language-based rhythm, I will first create a recitative-like score as the base for my final performance. The accompaniment will be mainly chords that follow the text.

### Summary of Expert Interview

1. Discussion about “cultural appropriation” with **Dr. Qian Huang** (Assistant Professor of Comparative Media & Cultural Studies at University of Groningen)

What has already happened in history cannot be changed. Many works in the past may have more or less some kind of historical problems. There were many music pieces that were composed with asian music influence, but if reenactment and rearrangement for this kind of music are restricted, it is losing the point



of cultural appropriation criticism. Cultural appropriation criticism is aimed to give back the cultural power and authority to the local people, but not setting a rule of who can use these cultural elements.

One big standard of judging cultural appropriation is not acknowledging or giving credits to the cultural elements. But sometimes although this work is done, the benefit of reputation or profits can still go to the western composers instead of the local artists. This has something to do with the whole social structure and authority system behind it, the personal artist should not be blamed.

### 3.3.5 Interventions / practical application

#### The rearrangement of Rhythm

**Tears**  
6-tone scale, with one foreign note  
Charles T. Griffes, Op. 10, No. 4

Wang Feng-Ju  
(6th Century)

*Lento (in M. J. circa 66)*

Voice  
High o'er the hill the moon - barquesteers.  
The lan - tern lights de - part.

Piano  
*pp*  
*f*  
*dim.*  
*mf*  
Dead springs are stir - ring in my heart;

*f*  
*dim.*  
*mf*  
*pp*  
And there are tears.  
But that which makes my grief more deep, Is that you know not when I weep.

*Poco più mosso*  
*mf*  
*dim.*  
*pp*  
But that which makes my grief more deep, Is that you know not when I weep.

*Tempo 1°*  
*mf*  
*dim.*  
*pp*  
But that which makes my grief more deep, Is that you know not when I weep.

Copyright, 1917, by G. Schirmer, Inc.  
Printed in the U. S. A.

1918

1918

[Charles Griffes - 5 poems of ancient China and Japan.pdf](#)

First of all, I decided to take away all the rhythm and treat it like a free melody just like the ancient zither music. The fermata indicates the end of every phrase.

High o'er the hill the moon - barquesteers. The lan - tern lights de - part.

Dead springs are stir - ring in my heart; And there are tears.

But that which makes my grief more deep, Is that you know not when I weep.

[Tears \(melody without rhythm\).pdf](#)

Then I transposed it to a higher key which fits my voice better. I decided to use the e minor pentatonic scales which also works well for zither.

High o'er the hill the moon - barquesteers. The lan - tern lights de - part.

Dead springs are stir - ring in my heart; And there are tears.

But that which makes my grief more deep, Is that you know not when I weep.

Secondly, in order to erase the first impression of the rhythm that Griffes wrote and rebuild a new recitativo-like rhythm according to the flow of the English language, I consulted two native speakers, Ned McGowan from America and James Hewitt from the UK. I made two recordings of them reciting the same poem.

Tears - James Hewitt reciting.mp4

Tears - Ned McGowan reciting.mp4

**High o'er the hill the moon-barque steers.  
The lantern lights depart.  
Dead springs are stirring in my heart;  
And there are tears.**

**But that which makes my grief more deep,  
Is that you know not when I weep.**

**WANG SENG-JU (6th century)**

Then I tried to write down their reciting rhythms on the staff and put them together with the melody that Griffes wrote. Here are the two versions.

**Tears**  
(melody with reciting rhythm of Ned McGowan)

Charles Griffes

Tempo Rubato

High o'er the hill the moon - barquesteers. The lan - tern lights de-part. Dead

springs are stir - ring in my heart; And there are tears. But

that which makes my grief more deep, Is that you know not when I weep.

Tears (melody with Ned McGowan's rhythm).pdf

**Tears**  
(melody with reciting rhythm of James Hewitt)

Charles Griffes

Tempo Rubato

High o'er the hill the moon-barque steers. The lan-tern lights de-part.

Dead spring are stir-ring in my heart; And there are tear. But that which

makes my grief more deep, Is that you know not when I weep.

■ Tear (melody with James Hewitt's rhythm).pdf

Comparing these two scores, we can see that there are sentences that have quite similar rhythms, such as “high o’er the hill the moonbarque steers” or “dead springs are stirring in my heart”. For the words such as “the”, “are”, “is”, “which” or the unstressed syllables of the words are always with very short rhythms. But there are also sentences in which the two speakers make very different word emphasis, such as “lights”, “there”, “grief”, “more” and “not”. These are words that have neither very strong nor very weak meanings in the sentences, so that there are possibilities to make personal choices.

High o'er the hill the moon-barquesteers. The lan-tern lights de-part. Dead

springs are stir-ring in my heart; And there are tears. But

that which makes my grief more deep, Is that you know not when I weep.

High o'er the hill the moon-barque steers. The lan-tern lights de-part.

Dead spring are stir-ring in my heart; And there are tear. But that which

makes my grief more deep, Is that you know not when I weep.

James's and Ned's rhythms in comparison

In the following step, I applied the score-marking system that I developed in the second cycle<sup>17</sup>. “~~~” indicates all the words that were spoken with emphasis or longer rhythms by the both speakers, which should be sung with a constant air flow with vibratos. “•” indicated all the words that were spoken with short rhythms by both speakers, which should remain with short rhythms in the improvisation.

~~~~ • ~~~~ ~~~~~

High o'er the hill the moon-barque steers.

~~~~ • ~~~~~

The lantern lights depart.

~~~~ ~~~~~

Dead springs are stirring in my heart;

~~~~ ~~~~~

And there are tears.

~~~~ • ~~~~~ ~~~~~

But that which makes my grief more deep,

• ~~~~~

Is that you know not when I weep.

After marking the common emphasized words and the light words, the rest are mainly words that could be rhythmically shaped according to personal tastes. In the following scores, I chose phrases from both speakers that I preferred as my inspiration. The performance practice will be based on these choices but performed recitativo-like.

~~~~ • ~~~~ • ~~~~~

High o'er the hill the moon-barque steers. The lan - tern lights de-parts.

~~~~ ~~~~~

Dead spring are stir - ring in my heart; And there are tears. But

~~~~ • ~~~~~

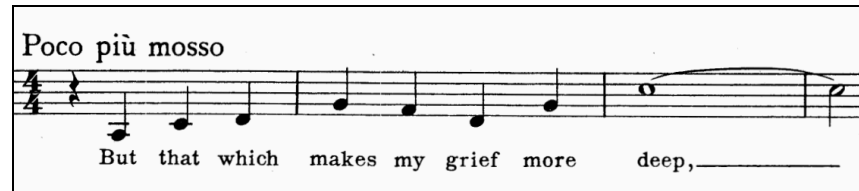
that which makes my grief more deep, Is that you know not when I weep.

*Tears*, melody with James's (in blue) and Ned's (in green) speaking rhythms

<sup>17</sup> 3.2.5 Interventions / practical application, The result and notation

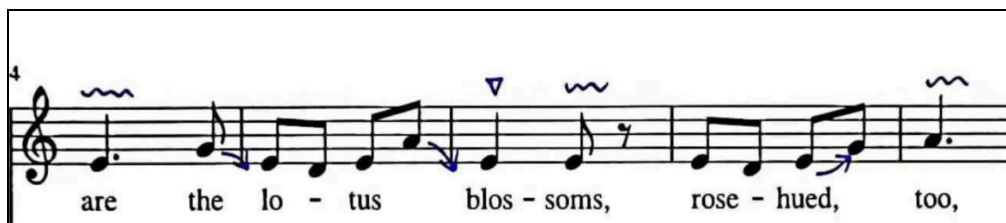
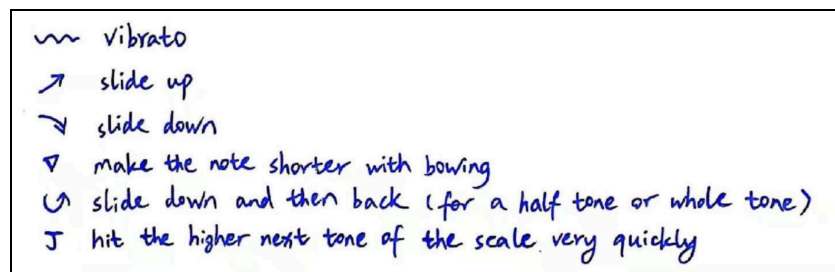
## The ornamentation

I also considered applying Chinese-style ornamentation in this piece like I did in the first and second research, but it didn't really work. The piece in the first research cycle, *So-fei gathering flowers*, was inspired and based on a Chinese folk tune; the piece in the second research cycle was sung in Chinese and has already tone and melodies in the language. In this piece, it feels more like an experiment of imitating Chinese music. We can see in the melody that it has many jumps and big ranges in one sentence, sometimes even two jumps in a row.



*Tears* by Charles Griffes

In Chinese traditional folk songs, the melody is composed mainly by steps in the pentatonic scales and very few jumps (only once or twice per sentence), the range of every sentence is hardly more than 6th. Therefore, it gives many more possibilities to apply ornaments. In the other songs by Griffes, *So-fei gathering flowers*, which was inspired and based on a Chinese folk tune, it is possible to see this characteristic too.

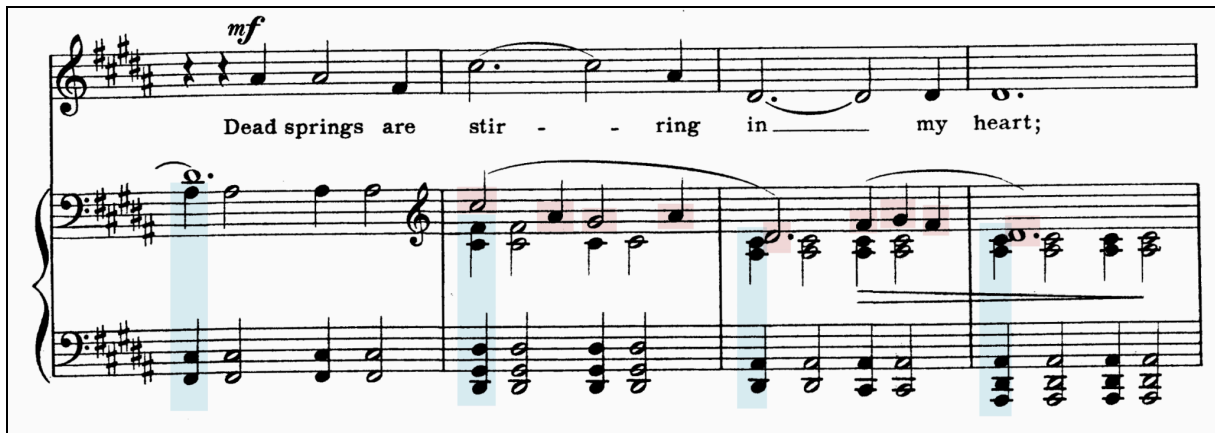


*So-fei Gathering Flowers* by Charles Griffes, Ornament chart and noted fragment

The ornaments I used in the two pieces from the first and second cycle rely very much on the melody, especially the sliding technique that needs to be done almost always on steps of the pentatonic scales. In *So-fei gathering flowers*, there are only 7 jumps of the pentatonic scale in the 8 sentences; but in *Tears*, there are 11 jumps of the pentatonic scale in the 6 even shorter sentences. Therefore, I decided not to apply these ornaments in the piece *Tears*, since it does not have this fundamental characteristic in its melody for the ornament application.

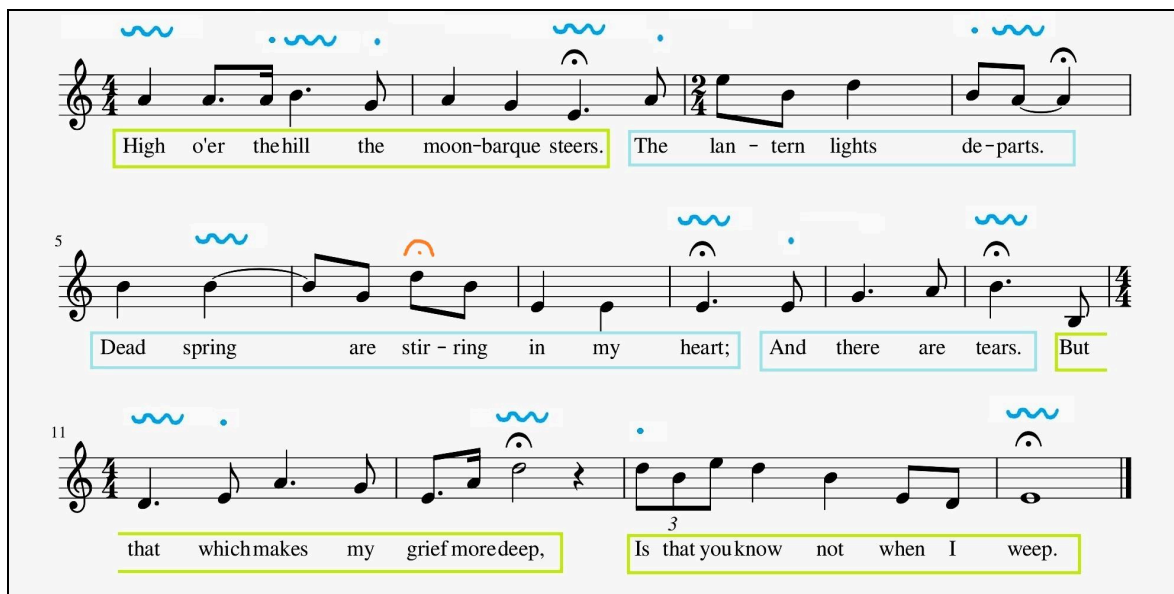
## The rearrangement of the accompaniment

In the rearranging process of the zither accompaniment, in order to give enough free improvisation space to the song rhythm, I decided to make the accompaniment simple and keep only the chord and the small melodies in the piano parts. All the repeating chords are deleted.



*Tears* by Charles Griffes (bar 9-12), remaining chords in blue and melody in pink

In the rhythm improvisation practice, it is also important to consider and cooperate with these small melodies in the accompaniment. Therefore, it is possible to foresee that some words such as “stirring” will be longer than the originally planned rhythm.



[Tears - recitativo version.pdf](#)

## The notating method

For the notation of the arrangement I made, I got inspiration from the chant notation. The scores of chants are usually without any word placement, the singers have to make their own choices of the stresses in the sentences and depend on their natural speaking rhythms of the language.

PSALM 32

1. Blessed is he whose un - righteousness is for - given: - - - and whose sin is covered.  
3. For while I held my tongue: my bones consumed a - way through my daily com - plaining.

2. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord im - putheth no day and sin: and in whose spirits there is no guile.  
4. For thy hand is heavy up - on me night: and many and moisture is like the drought in summer.

[Chant 32 W Russell .pdf](#)

This kind of notation is perfect for the arrangement that I made, because it contains mainly melody and words, which also gives improvisation space to other performers. Just like the shorthand notation of ancient zither (古琴减字谱), it has no rhythm indication and the performer can only depend on their own understanding of music, and in this case also the interpretation of the lyrics.

*Tears* Charles Griffes  
(Arr. Zijiang Meng)

Voice  
High o'er the hill the moon-barge steers  
The lan - tern lightes de - parts  
Dead spring are stir - ring in my heart  
and there are tears

zither

But that which makes my grief more deep  
Is that you know not when I weep

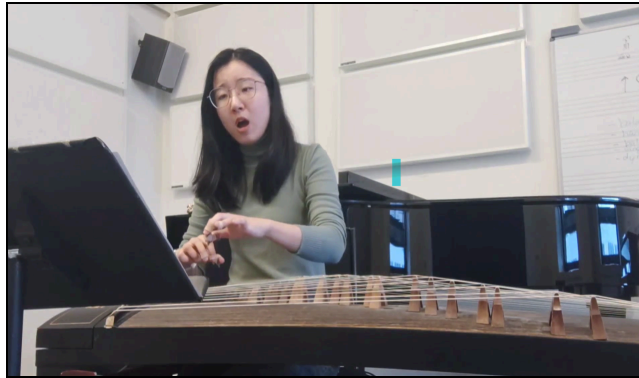
[Tears \(Arr. Zijiang Meng\).pdf](#)



### 3.3.6 Outcomes

#### Charles Griffes: 5 Poems of Ancient China and Japan, Op.10 (Published in 1917) No.4 Tears

[06 Reference Recording 06 \(Zijing Meng\) \(Tears\).mp4](#)



[Tears \(Arr. Zijing Meng\).pdf](#)

A handwritten musical score for the piece 'Tears' by Charles Griffes, arranged by Zijing Meng. The score is written on multiple staves, including a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are in Chinese characters. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The title 'Tears' and the composer 'Charles Griffes (Arr. Zijing Meng)' are written at the top.

Recorded on February 22nd, 2024, duration: 1'00"  
Soprano / zitherist : Zijing Meng

### 3.3.7 Feedback, reflection and conclusion

#### Feedback from Juncai Zhang (Classical singer, student of Koninklijk Conservatorium):

The arrangement is very suitable for the music style, it gives the music some more Chinese taste and the singing melody also becomes more natural compared to the original version. But the original version has a strong intensity because of the chord progression, so it has much more dramatic effects. The arrangement reminds me of some secular music of the Renaissance period, it is simple and pure without complicity.

The arrangement sounds like a young girl who just experienced love, and the original version sounds more like a mature woman who has gone through all the passion, sorrow and pain of love.

#### Feedback from David Bollen (Coach-pianist of classical singing department at Codart) :

I actually like both of them, but in the one you arranged you sound a bit different, a bit more free.



You move a little more in the sounds; you blossom the sound and sometimes diminish it very nicely. I think one of the reasons might be that your inspired impulse of the playing of the broken chords leads immediately to a very nice inspired in-breath, or the other way around; your in-breath becomes the upbeat for another beautiful arpeggio. This makes the performance of the arrangement very organic.

And, the fact that you are less restricted by the prescribed barlines of the original song, seems to help you to take more charge of your own creativity; the expression comes more freely out of the voice (like the voice is the expression). If you recognize this as well, it would be interesting to try to put a bit of the freedom of the second version into the first.

**Feedback from Zhenqi Gao** (Music theorist, Former headmaster at Conservatory of Jiamusi University):

The focus point of your research is very good and really shows your unique perspective. In my opinion, the song cycle of Charles Griffes, if we look at it from a bigger perspective, was a culture infiltration phenomena that happens throughout history. In the 20th century, there were also a lot of Chinese composers that studied abroad and later composed music based on western composition theory. There were always windows for different cultures to influence and emerge with each other, it could be revolution, or it could be colonization. As researchers, we just have to look at it rationally and deal with the historical issues, but I wouldn't accuse his music or your arrangements of cultural appropriation and reappropriation.

**Self-reflection:**

In this cycle, I tried to combine what I established in the first two cycles and go over the border to do something more creative. But I also wanted the creativity to be reasonable and based on something that existed in music history, this is why I used the ancient zither music as inspiration.

Comparing the two reference recordings, it is possible to hear that the singing style and color have also changed a bit. I guess this has something to do with blending with the accompanying instrument. The voice color changed without me thinking about it, it was a very simple hearing and adjusting reaction, it happened very naturally and unconsciously.

Coming back to this song cycle also brings up the cultural appropriation discussion from the first research cycle again. Orientalism can be seen nowadays as postcolonial, and Charles Griffes' work can indeed be accused because of its borrowed musical elements and simple generalization of Chinese music. The work has been published and performed in concerts, so it very possibly involves fame and profit making. He named the title "5 poems of ancient China and Japan", in which the word "ancient" can be also seen nowadays as unconscious condescending or a synonym of "undeveloped" based on the historical background at the time. But in the scores, Griffes did mark where he used the original Chinese folk tune and mentioned all the poets who wrote the original poems of the English text he used, this is already a big improvement in cultural awareness compared to Puccini's Turandot. Now we live in a culturally much more sensitive world, so it is important to address everything properly in a respectful way. But building a wall that puts western and eastern music into opposite positions that goes against each other is also what I want to avoid. The critics make sense due to historical reasons, but it can also be discouraging in the musical exploration and communication between the eastern and western world.

## 4 Research findings and outcomes

### 4.1 Documentation and explanation of the research outcomes

#### **Research Cycle 1**

[01 Reference Recording 01 \(Zijing Meng\) \(So-fei gathering flowers\).mp4](#)

In the first research cycle, my focus was to bring the music back to a traditional music setting and apply Chinese-style ornaments on it.

[First Edition "So-fei Gathering Flowers" \(Arr. Zijing Meng\).pdf](#)

[First edition "So-fei gathering flowers" try-out with improvisation.mp4](#)

[Final edition "So-fei Gathering Flowers" \(Arr. Zijing Meng\). Pdf](#)

I first made one edition of the arrangement and used improvisation to adjust it.

[一枝花 \(fragment\) for Erhu and Guzheng.mp4](#)

[Final edition "So-fei gathering flowers" try-out with Erhu ornamentation.mp4](#)

[Final edition "So-fei gathering flowers" with Erhu ornament indication.pdf](#)

Then with the Erhu player, I experimented with the ornamentation in Chinese instrumental pieces and *So-fei Gathering Flowers*. Then I marked the singing melody with Erhu ornament notation.

[02 Reference Recording 02 \(Zijing Meng\) \(So-fei gathering flowers\).mp4](#)

At the end I made choices to apply some of the ornaments in singing according to the emphasis and meaning of the song text. Since the song was composed based on a folk tune and pentatonic scale, the melody worked naturally with the Chinese-style ornament, the transcription to folk instruments are also very smooth, so it was relatively easy to achieve the goal.

#### **Research Cycle 2**

[03 Reference Recording 03 \(Zijing Meng\) \(山行 Mountain Hiking\).mp4](#)

In the second research cycle, I continued researching singing ornamentation but on Chinese language.

[Mountain Hiking - Text analysis charts.pdf](#)

Since the Chinese language already has 4 tones, I used a language-based method to apply ornaments. I did the tone and melody analysis of the song. The ornaments have to cooperate with the oblique tones and level tones, in order to make the text more understandable in singing.

[Mountain Hiking - melody on Chinese zither with sliding technique.mp4](#)

I used zither as an inspiration to play and demonstrate some of the ornaments and techniques.

[Mountain Hiking \(山行\) scores with notes.pdf](#)

[04 Reference Recording 04 \(Zijing Meng\) \(山行 Mountain Hiking with scores\).mp4](#)

In the end, I applied these ornaments in singing and made a video together with the marked scores. Compared to composers such as Charles Griffes who relied very much on the translated Chinese poems, Zhongrong Luo is clearly an expert in combining poem text and song melody.

### **Research Cycle 3**

[05 Reference Recording 05 \(Zijing Meng\) \(Tears\).mp4](#)

In the third research cycle, I aimed to combine the creative performance of the first cycle and the language-based singing method of the second cycle.

[Tears \(melody without rhythm\).pdf](#)

I got inspired by ancient zither shorthand notation (古琴减字谱) and took away the rhythms in the song. The melody becomes free and needs to be interpreted differently by every performer as if it is a reciting poem, just like how ancient Chinese music used to be before the current notation systems were invented.

[Tears - James Hewitt reciting.mp4](#)

[Tears - Ned McGowan reciting.mp4](#)

Then I asked two native speakers to recite the poem.

[Tears - recitativo version.pdf](#)

I made an opera-recitativo-like notation for myself based on the rhythms, timing and emphasis of two speakers.

[Tears \(Arr. Zijing Meng\).pdf](#)

Then I made a final version with the zither accompaniment but without any rhythm indication, in order to give free space to the other performers.

[06 Reference Recording 06 \(Zijing Meng\) \(Tears\).mp4](#)

In the end, I perform my arrangement with the recitativo version in mind as my improvisation inspiration.

## 4.2 Self-assessment of the research outcomes and expert feedback

Looking back to these two years of research, I learned a lot from the discussions with experts and collected a lot of knowledge especially from the data collection process. I improved my skills, discovered many new perspectives and deepened my knowledge in the field.

In general, I liked my ideas of the arrangements of Charles Griffes' pieces very much. I was trained as a zither player at the beginning of my musical education, therefore I always had a different way of listening when dealing with music that is inspired by Asian music. So with *So-fei gathering flowers* and *Tears*, I always knew immediately what I wanted to achieve with my instinct as a zitherist. But the tricky thing is that during the data collection process, I found it hard to find sources that are directly related to my intervention plans, therefore the intervention sometimes can seem a bit spontaneous. I guess this is also because this kind of approach has not been done so much, especially in classical music. I guess the reason is that most of the Chinese folk musicians don't really go abroad for education, therefore also don't involve themselves very deeply in western classical music either.

During the Chinese language analysis process in the second cycle, I found it very nice to analyze and reflect on my own language. As a native speaker, I usually don't notice the language characteristics so much during daily life, therefore I used to find Chinese a very difficult language to sing in. After the research, it improved my understanding and awareness of my own language very much and made a lot of development in my Chinese singing. In addition, it also generated my thoughts of how the different mother tongues influence the sound colors of singers, but this I decided not to further discuss in my research because sound color is too much related to personal taste. This can be reflected in the feedback session of the second research cycle, people that grew up with different cultures or different music styles can have very different ways of listening. Therefore the topic can be too subjective and difficult to judge.

Chinese style ornamentation was one of the biggest focus points of my research. The intervention worked the best with the Chinese piece by Zhongrong Luo, but with the English pieces, it was a bit difficult and tricky. This was also one of the reasons that I decided to move to a Chinese song cycle in my second research cycle. Then in the third cycle when I wanted to make a combination of the tools and methods that I developed in the previous cycles, the ornamentation tool box also could not be applied very smoothly, therefore I gave up at the end and made an explanation. This also made me realize the limitation of this approach: it only works well with Chinese-folk-tune-like melody or with Chinese language.

My intercultural performance style also brought up a huge discussion. This is something that I did not expect. Personally I didn't have a lot of experience about it at the beginning of my research, so some feedback was very shocking and overwhelming and made me doubt if I was doing a politically correct research. But after some further investment, I managed to find my way out, recognize my role in the research field and discovered the value of my research, which is to create a dialogue between eastern and western music and break down the wall of isolation and prejudice.

Most importantly, I learned that researching and music-making are never about looking for the only correct path that leads to truth. At this stage of being a master student, it is crucial to think independently and find out what is the best for myself.

## 4.3 Conclusion

Due to the stronger connection between the eastern and western world in the 20th century, the eastern and western music also had a tendency to involve and emerge with each other. With the kind of music such as *5 poems of ancient China and Japan* by Charles Griffes that is inspired by Chinese traditional music and literature, I always find it nice to go back to the deeper roots and the cultural background. In these research cycles, I got inspired from Chinese zither (古筝), Erhu (二胡), Yangqin (扬琴) and the ancient zither (古琴). I used my insight as a folk musician to analyze the music and find new creative ways to perform the pieces. I believe that this is a kind of very special approach to perform western classical music.

The ornamentation, I believe, is one of the most characteristic and essential elements when expressing one musical style. Therefore, ornamentation is a big part of my research. In the first cycle, *So-fei gathering flowers* was inspired by a traditional Chinese tune, so that I used a melody-based approach for the ornamentation; in the second cycle, *Mountain Hiking* (山行) was composed in Chinese which already has tones and melody in the language, so that I used tone analysis which is a language-based approach for the ornamentation; in the third cycle, I decided to be more creative and go over the border, so that I combined the language-based approach together with the free-rhythm ancient zither music style.

In the two Charles Griffes' pieces, I involved folk instruments. Since they were inspired by Chinese music and composed in pentatonic scales, it was very easy to do so. A transcription from western classical music to folk instruments is normally not an easy thing to do due to the limited tonalities and ranges of folk instruments. Therefore, we hear more folk-influenced classical music instead of classical-influenced folk music. But it also increases the chances of this song cycle being accused of cultural appropriation due to the generalization and "borrowed" musical materials. The composer could also be accused of being irresponsible and lacking compositional skills.

Now we live in a time where the legal and ethical matters are discussed more, it is very good to see improvement in cultural sensitivity through the time, therefore it is also important for us musicians to deal with music with better cultural awareness. But in my opinion, relating orientalism immediately to post-colonialism can also automatically put all related music into an immoral position. This kind of over-sensitivity can also be very discouraging for musicians who want to work in this field. It might keep people away to avoid this kind of argumentative topic instead of making more constructive discussion and exploration to the eastern and western musical communication. Therefore, it might continue building the separation between eastern and western music. This is not what we want to see. With my research, I wish to break down the wall between eastern and western music and promote an idea of diversity and equality in music. History should stay in the past, while we work and explore for the future.

## **Research question**

How can I, as a Chinese zither player and classical singer, create new interpretations to 20th-century art songs based on ancient Chinese poems?

## **Research outcomes**

The outcomes of my research are not so far from what I imagined, only when in the performing practice, sometimes the research results cannot be fully and clearly shown (such as some planned ornaments or use of vibratos). But it is totally acceptable that we usually cannot show 100% in performance as we wanted to. So in my opinion, the outcomes are satisfying enough. In further research, I would like to take more consideration from a performer's perspective and give more space and trust to the natural performing instinct.

Compared to my start point, my final outcomes have much deeper layers in the intervention process. In the end, I could use all the tools that I collected and developed during the three research cycles, such as the ornamentation method, score making method, language analysis and arranging method. Therefore the problems and obstacles that I encountered could be solved in the end.

## **Skills and knowledges acquired**

During the research, I developed my arranging skill and ornamentation skill, improved my singing in Chinese and English language after the language analysis, deepened my understanding of the music styles. But most importantly, I learned how to deal with authenticity and cultural awareness while dealing with compositions that were inspired by other cultures. Research is about opening discussion, not looking for the only truth. It made me a more open-minded person.

## **Research process**

In the three research cycles, I chose to focus on the language, ornamentation and instrumentation in order to incorporate my insight as a Chinese zitherist in singing. I believe that there can be more options such as folk singing technique, text translation etc. But I decided to choose the three focuses that give space to combine my two sides as a Chinese zitherist and a classical singer.

During the data collection process, sometimes it is hard to find sources that are very directly related to my intervention, therefore the intervention can seem a bit unconnected. But the analysis of Chinese language and the music transcription to Chinese zither always worked very well in these cycles, since it is about my mother tongue and the instrument that I have been playing since my childhood. Applying ornaments and Chinese singing style in Charles Griffes' English songs was a bit tricky.

## **Research impact**

Researching develops my problem solving skills and inspires me to see things from a bigger perspective. For the future career, researching not only gives deeper knowledge, but also an open mind that knows

how to look for tools and possibilities. The result from my current research will help me a lot in my future life as a professional singer and zitherist. It not only developed my musical skills, but also a lot of methods of dealing with music from both the eastern and western world.

The outcome can give some new approaches or inspirations for people who are working with classical and folk music crossover. The ornamentation and language analysis charts can help singers who are interested in singing Chinese language.

### **Discussion, further questions and next steps**

The question about whether changing the sound color of singing is necessary in different music styles or instrumentation settings was left open. The related questions will be, what is healthy singing? How do we make sure that we still produce a healthy sound when adjusting to the style or acoustic? Or is there only one way of healthy singing that we should stick to? In my opinion, it is good that the sound is flexible and adjustable, it is a choice as long as the sound production is healthy. But this does not represent all singers.

The research could lead to ethnomusicology or comparative musicology. The future steps could be discussion about how eastern and western music connected and influenced each other through history and what kind of future in music or in society we are leading to by emerging eastern and western music.



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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnG5J5Zxb78>

Irene Gubrud and Margo Garrett. "Five Poems of Ancient China and Japan, Op. 10: 4. Tears".  
[https://youtu.be/aG5HVGNe\\_Y?si=HKw-tP0\\_Xxxa2hwB](https://youtu.be/aG5HVGNe_Y?si=HKw-tP0_Xxxa2hwB)

Patrick Mason and Odense Symphony Orchestra. Five Poems of Ancient China and Japan.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YCEqCHAapNI>

Cyril Auvity. Ecco Dorinda il giorno: II. Recitativo.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQasF5lf\\_QU&list=OLAK5uy\\_nWNEWqK8QHhFO8TSsr8q5LbJXY\\_3Ro2ws&index=26](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQasF5lf_QU&list=OLAK5uy_nWNEWqK8QHhFO8TSsr8q5LbJXY_3Ro2ws&index=26)

Virginia Theological Seminary. Psalm singing demonstration.  
<https://youtu.be/TKw4CduQ8O8?si=qfwuhiJUz3o8hvVi>

Fuxi Zha. *Water and cloud of Xiao River and Xiang River*, ancient scores (shorthand tablature notation, 减字谱) video demonstration.  
[https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1NM411h7oH/?spm\\_id\\_from=333.788.recommend\\_more\\_video.18&vd\\_source=6ffe201043b7f484666a6a3727d03a5d](https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1NM411h7oH/?spm_id_from=333.788.recommend_more_video.18&vd_source=6ffe201043b7f484666a6a3727d03a5d)

Yi Gong. Ancient zither piece *Water and clouds of Xiao River and Xiang River*.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mkY9z21BDP4>

Jinglue Wu. Ancient zither piece *Water and clouds of Xiao River and Xiang River*.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jiy0vZNalmM>

Pinghu Guan. Ancient zither piece *Water and clouds of Xiao River and Xiang River*.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gzQy5gf1a-A>

Music scores of *Water and clouds of Xiao River and Xiang River*, notated on the staff based on the playing style of Jinglue Wu's family from the "Yushan school (Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644)".  
<https://www.qinnashouapp.com/guoqin/pu/407.html>

Fuxi Zha and Yi Gong (arranger). *Water and clouds of Xiao River and Xiang River*, notated with numbered musical notation and ancient shorthand notation. <https://m.guoqinwang.com/pu/802.html>

Shan Qiao. Ancient zither song (琴歌) *The Moon At The Fortified Pass* (关山月).  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=on9hgRqgsoA>

## 6 Network

**Marcel Reijans:** Classical singing teacher at Codarts

**Ned McGowan:** Intercultural specialist, research coach of Codarts Rotterdam

**Charlotte Riedijk:** Classical singing teacher at Codarts

**David Bollen:** Coach-pianist of classical singing department at Codart

**Jan Willem Passchier:** Coach-pianist of classical singing department at Codart

**Zhenqi Gao:** Music theorist, Former headmaster at Conservatory of Jiamusi University

**Qin Guo:** Chinese zither professor, student of the modern zither designer and composer Yuzhai Zhao

**Dr. Rachel Beckles Willson:** Professor of Intercultural Performing Arts at the Academy of Creative and Performing Arts, Leiden University

**Dr. Qian Huang:** Assistant Professor of Comparative Media & Cultural Studies at University of Groningen

**Dr. Rebecca stewarts:** Musicologist specialized in Indian music

**Mingfei Li:** PhD student in Musicology at Indiana University Jacobs School of Music whose interests include twentieth-century East Asian music Chinese poetic chanting.

**Rikki Wolpowitz:** PhD student at The University of Sheffield, Graduate Teaching Associate at The University of Sheffield

**Zheng Sun:** Chinese string instrument “Erhu” player, alumni of Codarts Rotterdam

**Halldór Bjarki Arnarson:** Harpsichordist and Icelandic folk musician

**Maarten Bauer:** Dutch composer studying in Singapore with many experiences in composing with folk music styles and composing for Asian instruments

**Hessel Vredeveltdt:** Classical singer, Chinese language student, alumni of Koninklijk Conservatorium Den Haag

**Xiangji Zeng:** Violinist, alumni of China Central Conservatory and Koninklijk Conservatorium Den Haag

**Juncai Zhang:** Classical singer, student of Koninklijk Conservatorium Den Haag

## 7 Appendices

### Appendix 1: List of all self-produced AV media included in report

[01 Reference Recording 01 \(Zijing Meng\) \(So-fei gathering flowers\).mp4](#)

[一枝花 \(fragment\) for Erhu and Guzheng.mp4](#)

[First edition "So-fei gathering flowers" try-out with improvisation.mp4](#)

[Final edition "So-fei gathering flowers" try-out with Erhu ornamentation.mp4](#)

[02 Reference Recording 02 \(Zijing Meng\) \(So-fei gathering flowers\).mp4](#)

[03 Reference Recording 03 \(Zijing Meng\) \(山行 Mountain Hiking\).mp4](#)

[Mountain Hiking \(山行\) - poem reading.mp4](#)

[Mountain Hiking - melody on Chinese zither with sliding technique.mp4](#)

[04 Reference Recording 04 \(Zijing Meng\) \(山行 Mountain Hiking\).mp4](#)

[04 Reference Recording 04 \(Zijing Meng\) \(山行 Mountain Hiking with scores\).mp4](#)

[05 Reference Recording 05 \(Zijing Meng\) \(Tears\).mp4](#)

[Tears - James Hewitt reciting.mp4](#)

[Tears - Ned McGowan reciting.mp4](#)

[06 Reference Recording 06 \(Zijing Meng\) \(Tears\).mp4](#)

## Appendix 2: Critical media review

1. Hsu, Ti-Fei. "Chinese influence in four twentieth century song cycles by Roussel, Carpenter, Griffes and Britten", American Conservatory of Music, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, May 1988. 8826349.

This thesis gives very precise and detailed information about the song cycle *5 Poems of Ancient China and Japan* by Charles Griffes. But unlike the first piece *So-fei gathering flowers*, the writer didn't give any information about the composition background of the piece *Tears* but mainly theoretical analysis: The melody was composed with 5 tones, but in the accompaniment there was one foreign tone that gave the music some very special and rather dramatic taste on the word "tears". The most important information that was given in this thesis about this piece was that the writer found the original ancient poem of the song text: 斜光隱西壁，暮雀上南枝。風來秋扇屏，月出夜燈吹。深心起百際，遙淚非一垂。徒勞妾辛苦，終言君不知。

2. Bellman, Jonathan D., "Musical Voyages and Their Baggage: Orientalism in Music and Critical Musicology" (2011). School of Music Faculty Publications. 5.  
<https://digscholarship.unco.edu/musicfacpub/5>

This thesis talks about orientalism in music and the historical background of it. It indicates that "orientalism" is now most often seen as a postcolonial phenomena. In the view of someone in the West, Asia can be seen as exotic, mysterious and irrational. The work of musical exotism is also very often about borrowing and using the materials. Igor Stravinsky was seeing 'oriental music', 'Russian music,' or 'Hungarian' or 'Spanish,' or any other of the national nineteenth-century kind, as a thin and boring local color.<sup>18</sup> The critic Joseph Kerman also commented on Puccini's *Turandot*: "There is no organic reason for the bogus orientalism lacquered over every page of the score; it provides local color or exoticism for its own sake, but also, more deeply, a chance for the artist to wriggle out of his irresponsibility."<sup>19</sup>

Works that use musical gestures to suggest specific people, places, or cultures are often put in a separate, problematic critical category: separate because of the unstated, unproven, yet (seemingly) widely held assumption that there exists some kind of standard, definable, more normative style that does not evoke identity or place so specifically; problematic because of the longstanding tradition, already observed in the Stravinsky and Kerman quotes above, that local color automatically implies cheapness, ephemerality, and compositional weakness.

3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnG5J5Zxb78>  
*Classical-trained counter-tenor sings Rolling In The Deep in Hunan local opera style with local accent*

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<sup>18</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Memories and Commentaries* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1960), 59.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph Kerman, *Opera as Drama* [1952], 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 206.

This is an example of what singers can do to bring an unforgettable performance with their own identity instead of performing in a “standard” way. In this performance, the singer applies Chinese local opera ornaments and accents in singing a pop song. It is done in a very extreme and funny way and very mind-blowing, but indeed very memorable and well-done. In my research cycle 1, I try the same approach but applying the ornaments in a more proper way.

4. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JtJdy0AhFEE>  
*Chinese bamboo flute and lute play Air on the G string by Bach*

This recording is a result of Chinese and western instrument combinations. The bamboo flute and lute cooperate very well with each other and both manage to retain their own styles and ornaments while emerging with the other instrument.

5. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZRKhtqlsW8&t=238s>  
*Beijing Opera “Karma of a watermelon fight (打瓜缘)” at Chinese Central Television New Year Gala of 1991*

This is a scene from a Beijing Opera comedy sung in English. The actors abandoned Beijing Opera ornament styles in the recitativo to adapt to English and kept the original taste in the aria, which clearly makes the text much harder to understand due to the big difference of rhythm and accent in Chinese and English languages. In the recording, it is also very obvious that the actors don’t speak English very well which means they also don’t have a clear sense of the melody and flow in English language. It’s a very brave experiment which I also wanted to try with the song cycle of Charles Griffes, but since I speak both Chinese and English and Chinese already has tone changes in the language which requires the music to follow, I realize that there is a lot of limitation in this experiment while keeping the original melody of Griffes and the Chinese poem.

6. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M13e1M7>  
*Chinese Central Traditional Orchestra plays Radetzky-Marsch, op. 228*

This recording demonstrates very well how western compositions sound when transcribed to Chinese traditional instruments without any adaptation in styles.

7. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MO7tnPhhf98&list=LL4PFqRa6Spzw-4d1w2CghdA>  
*Interview of Marta Halldórsdóttir and Örn Magnússon from Icelandic folk ensemble Spilmenn Ríkinís*

Marta Halldórsdóttir: When we perform with the traditional instruments, folk music finally returns home. And we immediately feel that we have found something which we need to do more. It feels good to look back to your roots. What we are doing now also influences the other forms of our music-making. We look at them differently now, we think differently about the music and there is a closer relationship with the audience. I think that’s very important.

Örn Magnússon: I grew up with folk music and it has always been a part of my youth and my existence. The simplicity of it is good for our hearts.

8. Lam, Joseph. "Chinese Music and its Globalized Past and Present", in *Macalester International*, Volume 21, Article 9, 2008.

This thesis presents a summary of Chinese music globalization from a more historical point of view. It is more about music in general and it includes folk music, pop music and traditional opera etc. The thesis doesn't zoom in the field of classical music so much, which gives me a bigger perspective of the globalization background but does not give a lot of contribution to my research.

9. SHI, Yuan, "Zhongrong Luo's Song Cycle *Songs of Autumn* - Artistic Characteristics and Singing Exploration (罗忠镭声乐套曲《秋之歌》艺术特征及演唱探索)", Master thesis of Inner Mongolia University, 2019. <https://www.docin.com/p-2357551489.html>

This thesis listed nearly all the well-known vocal pieces of Luo, which makes it easy to see that *Songs of Autumn* was one of his earliest song compositions. At that time, he still didn't develop his atonal composition techniques and was still composing with a quite traditional approach. The writer indicated that Luo followed the "introduction, elucidation, turning and conclusion (起承转合)" structure of traditional Chinese poetry and clearly showed this approach also in the melody. For example, the highest note in the song is written on the third phrase, which is the most dramatic "transition" phrase.

He also used very frequent time signature change that adds freshness, motions, flexibility and active flow to the "seven-word short poem (七言绝句)". The bar lines also more or less follow the "xx/xx/xxx" structure of each phrase.

The writer also wrote extremely precisely her interpretation of every phrase according to the melody. But some analyses of the ending note choices and rest notes seem to be overly interpreting without purpose. Her suggestions to the performer are also very specific, such as "look up during the piano introduction" or "act surprised on the third phrase". I think it is very unnecessary and it neglects the natural body language of the performer. Each person should feel free in performing and use their own interpretation and imagination.

10. Li, Wenjuan, "A Study on the Singing Zhongrong Luo's Song Cycle *Songs of Autumn* (罗忠镭声乐套曲《秋之歌》的演唱研究)", Master thesis of Shandong Normal University, 2019. <https://www.docin.com/p-2317191190.html?docfrom=rrela>

This thesis analyzes very technically the dictation of the Chinese language: The diphthong such as "yuan" should start with "yu", then stretch to "a" and end later with "n"; In nasal word such as "shang", we should shorten the "sh" and "ng", in order to sing a good "a" to avoid narrowing the space for the nasal sound; When singing "che" on the highest note of the song, we need to avoid bite the "ch" sound too much and keep a inner space in the mouth for the "e" vowel.



The writer also mentioned a book<sup>20</sup> about singing by a famous singing teacher and educator Tielin Jin, in which Tielin Jin mentioned that when singing in Chinese, dictation-wise we should use the same technique as in Chinese traditional operas, we should “use the word to bring the sound”, “use well-pronounced word and full vocal cavities”. Reciting the poem will also help to improve the dictation of singing.

11. Xu, Jing, “The application of harmony in art songs of Zhongrong Luo (罗忠镕艺术歌曲的和声应用)”, Master thesis of Henan University, 2001.  
<https://www.doc88.com/p-691923233920.html>

This thesis analyzed Luo’s use of harmony in different stages of his compositions. At the first stage in the fifties and sixties of the 20th century, Luo mainly combined folk tunes with traditional major and minor harmonies, the theme of songs were mainly about the lives of the people at that time. From the 1960s to 1970s, Luo explored and experimented differently with his harmonic language from the traditional functional harmonic system, and these innovations provided valuable experience for the development of modern Chinese music. *Songs of Autumn* was also composed during this period. Then after the 1980s, Luo applied various western modern composition techniques to classical Chinese poems. In *Songs of Autumn*, he used parallel triads, parallel fourth and parallel second as a main harmonic element of each song, which is very common in the western compositions in the 20th century during the impressionism period too.

12. Ding, Yan, “Survey and Analysis of the Survival Status of Chinese Folk Music (中国民族器乐生存现状调查与分析)”, 华音网, <https://www.huain.com/article/other/2023/0213/1644.html>

This is a statistics report and analysis of the current situation of Chinese traditional folk music. Chinese folk music is a very broad topic. There are 56 officially recognized ethnic groups and each of them has their own culture and music. In this report, the survey focuses on the folk music of Han-Chinese, which is the music style of the biggest and the major ethnic groups that influenced most of the western composers such as Charles Griffes.

The article indicates that at the moment in China, the popularity of learning folk instruments is much lower than that of Western instruments, the promotion of Chinese folk music in modern media such as radio and television and video disk is very little, the education of traditional folk music is mainly in music colleges so it slowly loses the general public, the new works of folk music are basically only disseminated among professional learners, the rich store of Chinese folk music repertoire resources is not well-developed, the current repertoires do not adapt to the contemporary audience's aesthetic habits and tastes anymore. Therefore, we need to involve Chinese folk music in the world performance market, explore new applications of Chinese folk music such as in movies or video games, develop a new folk music genre that combines better with the current popular trends in the society.

13. Rao, Nancy Yunhwa, *Hearing Pentatonicism Through Serialism: Integrating Different Traditions in Chinese Contemporary Music. Perspectives of New Music*, Vol.40(2), pp.190-232, 2002

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<sup>20</sup> Jin, Tielin, “Anthology of Jin Tielin's Vocal Teaching (金铁霖声乐教学文集)”, People's Music Publishing House Ltd., 2008

This thesis introduced many Chinese contemporary composers and Zhonglong Luo is one of them. But it focuses very much on serialism, which is not very relevant to the piece I chose for this research cycle.

14. Wu, Fusheng, *Translations of Chinese Poetry* by Herbert A. Giles and Arthur Waley, *Comparative Literature: East & West*, 21:1, 55-70, DOI: 10.1080/25723618.2014.12015476

This thesis explains the poem translating method of the two important translators Herbert A. Giles and Arthur Waley. In their translation of Chinese ancient poems, we can see that they all tried to find a way to adapt these poems according to the English language habit and poem forms. The translations are very well-made for English readers, but it certainly lost a lot of the taste and logic of the Chinese language, and they became very important materials for western composers such as Charles Griffes to depend on.

15. [https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1AP41147Eu/?vd\\_source=6ffe201043b7f484666a6a3727d03a5d](https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1AP41147Eu/?vd_source=6ffe201043b7f484666a6a3727d03a5d) Zhongrong Luo's Song Cycle *Songs of Autumn*, soprano: Liping Zhang, piano: Jialin Zhang

This is the only professional recording that I can find of this song cycle. Liping Zhang is the current head of the vocal department in Central Conservatory of Music in China. She has studied both in Central Conservatory of Music in China and Vancouver Academy of Music in Canada. In this recording, she treated these pieces as if they were western compositions. She sang them with western classical techniques and tried to modify the shapes of vowels closer to the clear Italian vowels. The tones have very good airflow and evenness, but then it also lacks the nuance and the taste of the poetry. Technically it sounds very mature and solid, but in my opinion, it didn't really emphasize the characteristics of the Chinese language and Chinese music style. This will be explained later more precisely in the next chapter.

16. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zIQa3bj60pl>  
Chinese classical-folk song *Plum Blossom* (梅花引), soprano: Wu Bixia (吴碧霞)

This is a recording that demonstrates Chinese classical-folk singing. The expected sound color, resonance places and the use of consonants and vowels are very different compared to the western classical singing. Since nowadays the performance locations have been moved to bigger concert halls and the singers are normally accompanied by bigger orchestras, microphones for the folk singers are very often necessary.

17. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y57gcc3B-os>  
*Cuckoo calling for spring*, Chorus of the minor Chinese ethnic group "Dong" (侗族大歌)

This is a kind of specially choral music from the the minor Chinese ethnic group "Dong" (侗族) which has been listed as UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage. The technique is very different from what we used to hear. The development of this style and singing technique is strongly related to the nature of their habitation and the acoustics of their traditional architecture built fully with wood. The performance usually

takes place in front of this kind of traditional wooden architecture during traditional festivals or when hosting important guests.

18. [Five Poems of Ancient China and Japan, Op. 10: 4. Tears](#)  
[Charles Griffes - Five Poems of Ancient China and Japan \(Audio+Score\)](#)

The first recording is a rendition of *Tears* from *Charles Griffes's* song cycle *Five Poems of Ancient China and Japan* performed by Irene Gubrud and Margo Garrett. The singing is very legato with constant air flow. Both the singer and the pianist really take time in between the phrasing.

The second recording is an arrangement for baritone and orchestra of *Charles Griffes's* song cycle *Five Poems of Ancient China and Japan*. The arrangement enhances very much the impressionistic characteristics of the piece and gives a very flowing but precise atmosphere.

Both of the approaches of the rendition and the arrangement are rather western in singing technique and style. In my arrangement, I would like to try a different approach that is closer to the Chinese tradition. It's not about proving authenticity, but simply giving a different perspective and option.

19. [Ecco Dorinda il giorno: II. Recitativo - "Ecco Dorinda il giorno"](#)  
[Simplified Anglican Chant](#)  
[Debussy - Reflets dans l'eau \(Nelson Freire, piano\)](#)

These are three examples of the types of western music that are always performed with free rhythms or timing.

The first one is an example of a recitativo. In operas and oratorios, the recitativo is never performed strictly as the written rhythm. The rhythms are usually only a suggestion of emphases and expressions. But the singers have to sing it with their own understanding and connect the melody to their speaking.

The second type is the chant music in church. The scores are usually without word placement so that the singers have to depend only on the natural flow of the language to create some kind of rhythm.

The third example is music by Debussy, one of the most important impressionist composers. In his music, he used very precise notation such as triplets, slurs and rubato to create a very free and unrhythmic feeling. Even though most of the pianists would not play Debussy's music as rhythmic as it is written, but compared to the ancient shorthand notation of ancient Chinese zither (减字谱) or the chant notation, Debussy's notation is of course more developed and more controlled.

20. [https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1NM411h7oH/?spm\\_id\\_from=333.788.recommend\\_more\\_video.18&vd\\_source=6ffe201043b7f484666a6a3727d03a5d](https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1NM411h7oH/?spm_id_from=333.788.recommend_more_video.18&vd_source=6ffe201043b7f484666a6a3727d03a5d)  
*Water and cloud of Xiao River and Xiang River*, ancient scores (shorthand tablature notation, 减字谱) demonstration

[龔一古琴獨奏《瀟湘水雲》](#)

*Water and cloud of Xiao River and Xiang River* played by Yi Gong

[古琴 潇湘水云 吴景略](#)

*Water and cloud of Xiao River and Xiang River* played by Jinglue Wu

[古琴大師管平湖先生演奏《瀟湘水雲》](#)

*Water and cloud of Xiao River and Xiang River* played by Pinghu Guan

These are three recordings of three famous Chinese ancient zither (古琴) players playing the same piece. The ancient notating system for this instrument uses shorthand Chinese characters which indicate only the fingering, technique and which string to play, but indicates no rhythm, tempo and pitch. Therefore, there were many different schools and styles since the players mainly learn the piece by listening to their teachers' playing.

In the first recording, Yi Gong plays with a very slow tempo with a lot of rubato. He takes quite a lot of time not only between all the phrases but also within each phrase. It sounds very calm, careless and free. In the second recording, Jinglue Wu plays with much faster tempo and a lot of variations of rhythm so that it sounds a bit more structured and disciplined compared to the first one. The third recording sounds very different from the previous recordings because Pinghu Guan takes a very steady and equal rhythm. All of these three players are from different schools and the ways they play can make the piece sound very different.

21. [瀟湘水云\(虞山吳氏琴譜\) - 古琴](#)

*Water and cloud of Xiao River and Xiang River* notated on the staff based on the playing style of Jinglue Wu's family from the "Yushan school (Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644)"

[瀟湘水云古琴譜](#)

*Water and cloud of Xiao River and Xiang River* notated with numbered musical notation and ancient shorthand notation

In the 20th century, the different notation systems were also applied in Chinese folk music. In the first link, the notation is based on the playing of Jinglue Wu and his family. Even though the scores now indicate pitches, the bar lines and rhythms don't make a lot of sense even when compared to Jinglue Wu's playing. In the second link, the ancient shorthand notation is combined with the numbered musical notation which is usually used in Chinese folk music. It makes it much easier for the beginners to study and also to learn a common notation system which is not exclusively used for ancient zither (古琴). When comparing these two scores, it is very obvious to see that the rhythms are very different. So at a later stage of studying, the players need to learn not to rely on this kind of musical notation anymore and develop their own style of playing. So in a way, the musical notation needs to be treated like an opera-recit, which only gives a suggestion but should not be exactly followed.

22. [琴歌《关山月》乔珊 演唱](#)

Ancient zither song (琴歌) *The Moon At The Fortified Pass* (关山月) played and sung by Shan Qiao

The Ancient Zither Song (琴歌) is a very typical art form of poem-singing. The zither part usually doubles the song melody and gives some extra decoration or harmony to the melody. This also inspired me a lot during my arranging of Griffes' piece in this cycle.

## Appendix 3: Full feedback on reference recordings

### Reference Recording No. 1

#### **Feedback from Ned McGowan:**

Do you have sufficient arranging and composing skills to handle it? It'll be good to ask a composer for help.

#### **Feedback from Christiaan van Hemert:**

Arranging can be sometimes very tricky for performers if they don't have enough knowledge or experience about it. Your arranging skill should be shown in the coming preference recording so that people can judge and give feedback about it.

When performing these pieces, you should also think about what's the difference between you singing the pieces and other western singers singing the pieces, what makes you special and what are the artistic possibilities.

#### **Feedback from Marcel Reijans:**

The tessitura of the piece doesn't seem like it shows the best range of your voice. The singing in general doesn't have so many technical problems, but more dictation and clarity of the text should be delivered.

#### **Feedback from Zheng Sun:**

I can imagine myself accompanying you in these pieces with Erhu. But the high range of Erhu can be very weak. This needs to be taken into consideration in your arrangement.

#### **Self-reflection:**

Singing and playing at the same time might be very tricky while performing these pieces and can take a lot of time for practicing. Artistic expression can be a challenge in performing. The singing and the volume of zither might not blend very well in a concert hall.

In addition to these technical things, how many folk style ornaments can I make, how many notes can I change in the arrangement and what is the reason to arrange this piece like this? Am I trying to prove some authenticity or a “right way” to perform this piece? And in this case, would it be possible to find enough resources to prove my point?

### **Reference Recording No. 2**

**Feedback from Mingfei Li** (PhD student in Musicology at Indiana University Jacobs School of Music):

What you need to think about is whether it is necessary to perform Griffes’s piece in a traditional folk style, and if so, why that is.

If you incorporate Chinese folk singing ornaments into this piece, is it appropriate for this composition itself? In this case, how much change to the music do you think that you can make in your arrangement?

And why do you think your interpretation as a folk musician would be authentic? Because Griffes incorporated his compositional methods as an American composer, do you think it is appropriate to arrange it back as if it were a folk piece?

Why do you choose Guzheng and Erhu? Is it because those are the only instruments to which you currently have access, or because they can imitate the sound of the piano and voice? In addition, you cannot assume that Griffes knew the tuning system of the Guzheng, unless there was evidence of his mentioning of it in his writing.

You can of course perform your arrangement, but you cannot perform it as if it is the only way to perform Griffes’s composition. This song cycle can generate much discussion on cultural appropriation in musicological research. But in other contexts, it may cause you trouble. Griffes’s appropriation of the text and a reductionist setting of it using the pentatonic scale are problematic, but you cannot prove that what you do with your arranging is unproblematic either. His composition disrespects the poet, and your way of performing disrespects him.

From a cultural-communication perspective, what do you expect the audience to hear and learn from you and your performance?

**Feedback from Rikki Wolpowitz** (PhD student at The University of Sheffield, Graduate Teaching Associate at The University of Sheffield):

Well done! I think it was a very respectful act of Charles Griffes to embrace Chinese culture and disseminate it to an American audience that maybe wasn’t fully aware of Chinese culture in that way. I can imagine Griffes would have been honored to know that Chinese musicians in the future are inspired by his work and I can imagine would have loved to have heard his composition played on the zither.

The whole point of academia is to stimulate discussion and expand our perceptions of what we currently know, and we can only do that through the presentation and discussion of diverse views and practices. Music isn't created to be studied like a museum exhibition. Music is temporal art and reflects the human spirit and mind.

**Feedback from Ned McGowan:**

While there are some assumptions I don't think are given in Mingfei's feedback, these are indeed good questions that you should be familiar with, and reflect upon.

Through your experience and insights you will have a unique interpretation of the piece. Plus, where does it say that this piece is impressionistic? And I don't remember you claiming to be authentic (which is a very problematic concept), but rather to make your version of the piece. People have played composer's works on other instruments throughout history. Think of all the instruments that Bach's music has been played on.

You can reflect on the issue as a related topic, but don't try to claim it. I agree that in the climate of today's discussions the piece quickly releases those issues. But you can definitely add new perspectives to the discussion with your approach.

**Reference Recording No. 3**

**Feedback from Xiangji Zeng (Colleague, Chinese violinist):**

In this recording, it seems that the diction of Chinese stopped your progression of melody sometimes. The song should sound very smooth and legato, but now it is a bit disturbed. The characteristics of the Chinese language are not emphasized and you seem to not dare to pronounce the words so much. The composition itself is quite unique and special, but the singing should amplify the specialty even more. But I cannot suggest how to improve the diction in singing Chinese, you might need to ask for some specialists for that. The way you speak and the way you sing should unify, it is not about changing your singing technique, but using the language in a better way.

**Feedback from Hessel Vredevelt (Colleague, Dutch singer):**

What kind of singing style were you trying to use here? To me, it sounded quite folk and traditional because the positions of the vowels are very much to the front. In classical singing, maybe you need a lower larynx and higher soft palate.

What was the expression that you were going for? Did you try to perform with very engaged emotions or treat it like a very abstract and distanced poetry? Speaking from my experience of performing Tan Dun's *Requiem for Nature*, I saw that all the performers are very personally engaged with the music, therefore the music was full of meanings. I would like to hear more

passion, more personality and engagement from you. I want to see that going for the abstract atmosphere is a clear and conscious choice that you made, and you are convinced with this choice, so that the abstractness is not something that randomly happens when you perform.

**Feedback from Ned McGowan** (research coach of Codarts University of the Arts):

The style of the piece is certainly very interesting. Have you ever thought about, what's the main difference when you sing this piece compared to singing a bel canto piece? For example, how do you use the vibratos differently? What I felt after hearing your recording of Chinese zither and Erhu was that all the ornaments and vibratos seem to be very composed and you both had clear ideas about when to use them. Is it possible to maybe use this approach in your singing too?

**Reference Recording No. 4**

**Feedback from Hessel Vredeveltdt** (Colleague, Dutch singer):

In this recording, it is very easy to hear that you have made clearer decisions of what you want to do. It sounds like you chose the more folk style approach instead of classical singing, which can be a result of your different way of placing the vowels. But still, I think you can add more body support on top of this kind of style of singing. Compared to the second recording from your data collection which proves that folk singing doesn't mean less support, and you can definitely involve more of your body to add more expressiveness.

**Feedback from Juncai Zhang** (Colleague, Chinese singer):

In my opinion, the style of the music is very eastern, your singing technique is very classical, but your approach and interpretation is folk. When I hear this music, I think about some Chinese folk singers' voices in my head.

**Feedback from Xiangji Zeng** (Colleague, Chinese violinist):

With this type of music, it is very normal that you could receive completely different feedback from different people. So you need to think about, who is your audience? When you sing this piece in Europe, then take the feedback from Hessel Vredeveltdt seriously because it is very representative for your audience group. Because when performing for people who don't know so much about Chinese music, they will only recognize it as something foreign and unfamiliar. So in this case, the only way that they get to know Chinese music is through your performance. Therefore, you are responsible for making the music impressive, interesting and appealing. When you have a very good technical base, you will have a lot of freedom and flexibility to adjust to the style and audience's taste.

**Reference Recording No. 5**



**Feedback from David Bollen** (pianist, repetiteur of Codarts) :

Even though this piece seems very slow and all the phrases are long, you need to make sure to vibrate on every note and make the notes alive. Remember that there is always the ongoing tension and direction throughout the piece, that's how you make a piece interesting.

Plus, is there a higher version of the song or you can transpose it? It would fit your voice better.

**Feedback from Rachel Beckles Willson** (Professor of Intercultural Performing Arts at the Academy of Creative and Performing Arts, Leiden University) :

It could indeed be problematic not to consider and discuss the history of cultural appropriation in which you are entangled. At the same time, you have a great opportunity to address it in your work. Doing research is about going with, but also beyond, what we 'like' and don't like. We need to be self-reflexive, self-critical, to get to a level beyond only our subjective tastes.

What do you understand about cultural appropriation? Have you read anything? In order to help you, I need to know more about what you know. Do you agree that Griffes could be accused of cultural appropriation? Was he in a position of power? How did he use his power to collect music? What kind of relationship did he have with the people providing him with information and music? Was there any profit sharing, or public acknowledgement of the input of Chinese experts? (What would have happened if Hollywood had used Griffes' work in a blockbuster, and made him 1 million dollars? Would the Chinese musicians you helped him have benefitted?)

The world has substantially changed now, because so much is available to us, but the legal and ethical matters are discussed more. So, you need to be aware of the circumstances of Griffes' work, in order to use it ethically. And then you can decide how you wish to arrange his work.

**Reference Recording No. 6**

**Feedback from Juncai Zhang** (Classical singer, student of Koninklijk Conservatorium):

The arrangement is very suitable for the music style, it gives the music some more Chinese taste and the singing melody also becomes more natural compared to the original version. But the original version has a strong intensity because of the chord progression, so it has much more dramatic effects. The arrangement reminds me of some secular music of the Renaissance period, it is simple and pure without complicity.

The arrangement sounds like a young girl who just experienced love, and the original version sounds more like a mature woman who has gone through all the passion, sorrow and pain of love.

**Feedback from David Bollen** (Coach-pianist of classical singing department at Codart) :

I actually like both of them, but in the one you arranged you sound a bit different, a bit more free. You move a little more in the sounds; you blossom the sound and sometimes diminish it very nicely. I think one of the reasons might be that your inspired impulse of the playing of the broken chords leads immediately to a very nice inspired in-breath, or the other way around; your in-breath becomes the upbeat for another beautiful arpeggio. This makes the performance of the arrangement very organic.

And, the fact that you are less restricted by the prescribed barlines of the original song, seems to help you to take more charge of your own creativity; the expression comes more freely out of the voice (like the voice is the expression). If you recognize this as well, it would be interesting to try to put a bit of the freedom of the second version into the first.

**Feedback from Zhenqi Gao** (Music theorist, Former headmaster at Conservatory of Jiamusi University):

The focus point of your research is very good and really shows your unique perspective. In my opinion, the song cycle of Charles Griffes, if we look at it from a bigger perspective, was a culture infiltration phenomena that happens throughout history. In the 20th century, there were also a lot of Chinese composers that studied abroad and later composed music based on western composition theory. There were always windows for different cultures to influence and emerge with each other, it could be revolution, or it could be colonization. As researchers, we just have to look at it rationally and deal with the historical issues, but I wouldn't accuse his music or your arrangements of cultural appropriation and reappropriation.

## Appendix 4: Transcription of interviews

1. Interview with: **Zheng Sun** (Chinese string instrument “Erhu” player specialized in Turkish music)

Q: What's your impression of western music with Chinese influence?

A: I don't know if my answer will be totally related to this question. But for example, Erhu is an instrument that is strongly influenced by the violin. When I was doing my bachelor studies in China, I also had to play those exercises that were originally written for violin. And now in Europe, I sometimes also play Baroque music with western historical ensembles. In a way, me playing with them also shows the Chinese influence in western music. I find this kind of mixing in music very interesting and nice.

Q: What is the biggest obstacle when playing western compositions using Chinese instruments? And how do you solve or avoid it?

A: For me, the most difficult part is to understand the background of their music and to figure out what kind of feeling and style that I have to play. Technically it's not a very big challenge to merge in, because Erhu technique is influenced a lot by violin, so I can play it with a very western technique too. But of course we also have our own traditional techniques. I learned both of them when I was in the Conservatory.

Once I played in a classical orchestra, and some folk musicians from Turkey and Greece were also invited to play some solo sections within the piece. I found their techniques very traditional and they just put their own style into the music. But for me, when playing western music, I normally intend to play with a more classical technique to cooperate with them, and sometimes I add some small Chinese elements to it when they require.

Q: What kind of western music would interest you to play? How do you usually make choices?

A: I find Baroque music very beautiful. But mostly I search for the music that has an easy possibility to be transcribed and played on Erhu, or the kind of music style that has a vibe with Erhu. I like slow and lyrical music on Erhu very much. But Erhu is an instrument with quite a lot of possibilities, it can play music with all kinds of tonality and even microtonal music.

Q: How do playing western music affect you, technically and artistically?

A: In my upcoming projects, I'll be playing some concertos by both Chinese and western composers. Playing western music can be quite a technical challenge sometimes. I have to practice a lot. Artistically it helps me to understand western music better and gives me a lot of chances to explore it on Erhu.

Q: In your opinion, what is the necessity of musicians playing folk music from other countries? What do you think is the reason for folk musicians to do this?

A: Personally, I find it very interesting to do this, because people haven't done this so much in the past. It's very innovative and special. The real traditional folk music in this world has not been preserved a lot compared to other music forms, I guess that's the case in many countries. So we have to continue making these music and introduce them to the world. I also don't like the kind of contemporary pieces written for traditional folk music, they are always technically difficult and without a sophisticated soul. I enjoy playing all kinds of traditional folk music, because they really touch me, and it gives me space to show my own personality.

Q: When arranging, playing and performing western composition, what is your goal and what do you expect from the audience?

A: For me, I am still exploring. I want to find more possibilities on Erhu. And in this procedure, I have gained a lot of experiences and conclusions of how to cooperate with western ensembles and orchestras. Normally I get very positive feedback from the audience, I am happy to introduce my instrument and culture to them.

## 2. Interview with: **Marcel Reijans** (Professor of classical singing department at Codarts)

Q: What's your impression of western music with Chinese influence?

A: I like it very much. It definitely gives a color local and is as such of course by nature from a very western perspective.

Q: What do you think of the music style of Griffes and Roussel from a western perspective?

A: Interesting music. Both are very different in their use of "Orientalism". Griffes clearly use the pentatonic system as the main musical color in setting the original Chinese and Japanese poems. Whereby Roussel is very impressionistic French in the musical color and uses the poems as inspiration.

Q: What do you think would be a new way of performing these pieces?

A: I could imagine that you make a new arrangement in a chamber music setting. Using traditional Chinese instruments may be.....

Q: Do you think classical singing technique and Chinese opera singing technique conflict with each other?

A: I have to study Chinese opera singing more in detail to give you an answer to this question. My first inclination would be that the singing style, the esthetics and hence the singing technique are indeed quite different.

Q: How do you think these pieces would contribute to my main subjects, artistically and technically?

A: Both artistically and technically they are worthwhile for you to explore.

### 3. Interview with: **Halldór Bjarki Arnarson** (Harpsichordist / folk musician)

Q: How do playing early music and playing folk music incorporate in your music making? Is authenticity a main focus for you?

A: I guess I think differently when I perform early music and when I perform folk music. Although both of them have something with authenticity. I like to be more creative with folk music until it reaches the border of my taste. And of course my taste is also a bit shaped by early music. When I do early music, I also like to add a bit of folk influence according to the repertoires. But the philosophy behind it is very hard to say and I always keep asking myself these questions too.

Q: What do you think is the reason that we do these kinds of repertoires when we know it is not possible to be 100% authentic? Are we trying to preserve some historical taste as much as we can like a heritage?

A: I like to think of it more like discovering. We use the current sources to discover more things about the music and get more information. Then we can choose if we use it or not. Maybe the music will make more sense with it, or maybe not, or something is not agreeing with our taste. I think the bottom line is to find more interesting stuff that can tell us more about the function of the music or the environment of the

music, so that we can perform better. But of course we cannot be 100% authentic, otherwise it'll be like a museum that shows things that were exactly the same as in the past. That's not what I look for.

4. Interview with **Jan Willem Passchier** (pianist, repetiteur of Codarts)

Q: When you hear this piece, what do you think of the style? Does it seem more western or eastern to you?

A: I think it is a mixture of both. For example, the melody is pentatonic, and then there are chords that sound very western and romantic for me. But for me as a western classical musician, I would say that it is more eastern.

Q: If you hear a singer perform this piece, what would you expect?

A: To be honest, I don't really know what to expect because this is a style that I am not familiar with. But I am sure that with this kind of cross-cultural repertoire, there are many ways to do it. I quite like the way you sing it: sometimes you give a lot of air flow and vibrato, sometimes you make it very delicate and put some slides between the notes just like when you play the zither. You can make clear choices and then exaggerate them more to show a bigger contrast.

5. Interview with **Dr. Qian Huang** (Assistant Professor of Comparative Media & Cultural Studies at University of Groningen)

Q: From your perspective as a cultural researcher, is my arrangement of Charles Griffes' pieces a kind of reappropriation?

A: My opinion is, what has already happened in history cannot be changed. Many works in the past may have more or less some kind of historical problems. I believe there were many music pieces that were composed with asian music influence, but if reenactment and rearrangement for this kind of music are restricted, it is losing the point of cultural appropriation criticism. Cultural appropriation criticism is aimed to give back the cultural power and authority to the local people, but not setting a rule of who can use these cultural elements.

One big standard of judging cultural appropriation is not acknowledging or giving credits to the cultural elements. But sometimes although this work is done, the benefit of reputation or profits can still go to the western composers instead of the local artists. This has something to do with the whole social structure and authority system behind it, the personal artist should not be blamed.

## Appendix 5: Transcriptions, (annotated) scores, analyses

- 📄 First Edition "So-fei Gathering Flowers" (Arr. Zijing Meng).pdf
- 📄 Final edition "So-fei\_Gathering\_Flowers" (Arr. Zijing Meng). pdf
- 📄 Final edition "So-fei gathering flowers" with Erhu ornament indication.pdf
- 📄 Mountain Hiking - Text analysis charts.pdf
- 📄 Mountain Hiking (山行) scores with notes.pdf
- 📄 Tears (melody without rhythm).pdf
- 📄 Tears (melody with Ned McGowan's rhythm).pdf
- 📄 Tear (melody with James Hewitt's rhythm).pdf
- 📄 Tears - recitativo version.pdf
- 📄 Tears (Arr. Zijing Meng).pdf