INNOVATION AND REFORM OF THE HAMMERED DULCIMER YANGQIN IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA

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We certify that we have read this thesis and that, in our opinion, it is satisfactory in scope and quality as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Music.
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CHAPTER 1
ENCOUNTERING THE YANGQIN

"You study yangqin? What's yangqin? Is that the long instrument with many strings that you pluck with your fingers?"
"No, that's zither guzheng, not yangqin. Yangqin is played with bamboo beaters. We strike the strings with beaters."
"Oh, I see. It's not a popular instrument, is it?"

This is a conversation I have had countless times with my relatives and friends, as well as with strangers since my first day of learning to play the Chinese hammered dulcimer yangqin. It is common to see people mislabeling yangqin as the zither guzheng (a rectangular bridged-zither, usually strung with twenty-one strings) in both formal and informal occasions (see Figures 1.1 and 1.2). As a yangqin performer and a graduate student in ethnomusicology, I have been urged by my colleagues in both fields to study about my instrument critically because there are so few scholarly works about the yangqin despite its popularity in China and Chinese communities overseas. My experiences in recent years have prompted me to think more about the changes in the instrument and its music. I witnessed some of the changes on the yangqin and its music during my undergraduate study at the China Conservatory [sic] in Beijing from 2000 to 2004. When I first heard the newly reformed "concert grand yangqin (yinyuehui da yangqin)," which emulated the timbre of the "Hungarian concert cimbalom," I thought that it deviated far
from the “authentic” sound of yangqin, and was losing its “Chineseness” — the timbre is not that of the Chinese yangqin with which I am familiar.

Later in 2004, I entered the program for the master’s degree in ethnomusicology at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa and joined its Chinese ensemble. The ensemble’s yangqin is a three-bridge model that I had not seen or played before. Its pitch arrangement is similar to that of the four-bridge yangqin but the timbre is a bit different. I was told that it is the model used in sizhu (“silk and bamboo” music) ensembles.² In addition, the music played by the ensemble is very different from what I had learned earlier, in terms of repertoire, style, and aesthetics. After meeting some middle-aged and older musicians who play this kind of music in Hong Kong and Honolulu, I found that the yangqin and its musical styles I had learned at the conservatory were not the idealistic yangqin sound in their minds. This prompted me to think beyond my own sonic experience with the yangqin and to imagine an older, if not the so-called “authentic” musical sound. When the older musicians heard my yangqin performance, they thought the yangqin should not sound like that. I began to question what qualifies as an idealistic yangqin sound and to what extent the timbre produced by the recently-reformed yangqin models depart from that of the earlier models. I gradually recognized that it is futile to search for the “real” yangqin sound because such absolute, “unpolluted,” or “authentic” sound does not really exist. In the process, however, my interest turned to looking at changes in the instrument, and why the yangqin, which has already undergone rapid and radical change since the early twentieth

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¹ The design of the “concert grand yangqin” was an imitation of the “Hungarian concert cimbalom,” in terms of its appearance, timbre, the use of a pedal for damping, and the materials used for beaters.

² Sizhu music generally refers to regional instrumental ensembles including string and wind instruments, usually played indoors (Witzleben 1995:2).
century in China, continues to reform while other Chinese instruments remain virtually unchanged.

Figure 1.1: A misidentification of the yangqin and the zither guzheng (written as "zheng" here) players due to a confusion of the two instruments, on liner notes from a professionally-produced CD. The female musician shown top right is Liu Yuening, the yangqin player; and the female player below is Chow Wan, the guzheng (or zheng) player.

Figure 1.2: Four leading instruments in the Jiangnan Sizhu ensemble. Here, the yangqin was mistakenly replaced by the seven-string zither guqin (second from left), which is rarely used in the genre. The picture was taken in McDonald's at the Yu Yuan Garden, Shanghai, which for decades has been one of the centers of Jiangnan Sizhu music (photo by the author, December 2006).

3 "Riverside Scenes on Qing Ming Festival" (1991). The four players are the leading conservatory-trained musicians of the new generation in the 1980s and 1990s.

4 Jiangnan Sizhu is an instrumental ensemble music from the area of the south of the Yangtze River, featuring the bowed-fiddle erhu, the bamboo flute dizi or xiao, the plucked-lute pipa, and the yangqin.
An imported instrument, the yangqin initially flourished in the instrumental and vocal genres of folk music by at least the eighteenth century (Xu K. 2003 [1986]:4919, 4941). It had been used mostly as an ensemble instrument prior to the early 1950s, when the yangqin began to be featured as a solo instrument on stage and in performance programs at music institutes. To shed the traditional role of the yangqin and to present it as a versatile instrument that can play not only solo repertoire, but also concertos and foreign pieces, musicians have made various kinds of changes to the instrument. The reform of the yangqin still continues, despite its having already been elevated to a visually and aurally sophisticated solo instrument. With a discussion of the changes of yangqin music, performing technique, and performance practice, this thesis investigates the underlying social and cultural meaning of the ongoing reform in yangqin circles. More specifically, I examine how contemporary musicians, through the changes in the various aspects of yangqin performance, construct a new identity in order to distance themselves from the socially inferior “folk artists” (minjian yiren) of the past.

**BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE YANGQIN**

The yangqin is a trapezoidal, horizontally-placed box zither strung with as many as almost two hundred bronze or steel strings. It is played by striking the strings with

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4 In the Chinese language, “folk music” is referred to as “minjian yinyue.” It is slightly different in connotation from the Anglo-European term “folk music” which is based mostly on an urban-rural distinction. “Minjian yinyue” refers to the music practiced among the commoners and in secular contexts, in contrast to those in the court, of the elite class, and in sacred religious rituals. In China, one can also find minjian yinyue in urban settings and performed by the elites as well. Minjian yinyue is mostly transmitted through oral tradition rather than notation. Its stylistic features are mostly region-based. Thus, any discussion of minjian yinyue cannot be separated from particular regional genres.
bamboo beaters (see Figures 1.3 and 1.6). The earliest surviving yangqin type has two bridges each of which supports seven courses, the majority with three strings per course but some with only two. The instrument is known by many names: “hudie qin” (“butterfly instrument,” “butterfly yangqin,” or “butterfly harp” in English writings), “da qin” (“struck instrument”), “tongsi qin” (“bronze-string instrument”), “yao qin” (“yao instrument”), “qiao qin” (“struck instrument”), “shanmian qin” (“fan instrument”) and so forth. Today the most popular model is one with four bridges, about forty-eight courses with two to five strings in each course, and a range of more than four octaves (see Figures 1.4 and 1.5). It has been widely adopted in music institutes and regional musical genres in China and in overseas Chinese communities as an indispensable instrument in vocal and instrumental traditions. In addition, since the early 1950s, it has been frequently presented as a solo instrument on the national and international stage.
Figure 1.3: Musician Zhou Hui playing a two-bridge *yangqin* with bamboo beaters at his home in Shanghai (photo by the author, July 2006).  

Figure 1.4: A four-bridge *yangqin* (Chugokuya-gakkiten 2007).

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6 Zhou Hui (b. ca. 1923) is a prominent *yangqin* musician of *Jiangnan Sizhu* in Shanghai.
BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The issue of insider/outsider has been widely discussed in the field of ethnomusicology (Hood 1971:371-75; Nettl 1983:259-69; H. Myers 1992:29-31; Romero
In many cases, the researchers were not born into the societies they studied. In a broader sense, however, the concept of insider/outside should not be narrowly defined by its geographical connotations; it may involve race, ethnicity, nationality, and linguistic competency. As a long-term practitioner of the *yangqin*, I find myself straddling an ambiguous position between insider and outsider during most of this study. I had been an insider in the professional circles, involved in the changes to the construction of the *yangqin* and its music before this research. Some of the findings in this thesis were gained from my first-hand experience as a *yangqin* student and observation in my everyday life in the field prior to my intensive fieldwork in summer 2006. To some extent, I am writing of myself rather than the Other.

In 1995, I started learning *yangqin* with Yu Mei-lai, a celebrated *yangqin* performer in Hong Kong, in the Junior Music Program at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. During my three years studying *yangqin* with her while I was still a high-school student, Yu encouraged me to study in Beijing, where she had studied *yangqin*, to pursue the instrument professionally. After two short visits with some teachers there, I moved to Beijing at the end of 1998 and started studying *yangqin* with several professors at the conservatory. In fall 2000, I enrolled in the *yangqin* performance program at the China Conservatory. During my four-year undergraduate study, I was fortunate to study with Xiang Zuhua (b. 1934), one of the earliest *yangqin* teachers at music institutes. During the past five decades, he has been active in various aspects in *yangqin* circles such as performing, composing, researching, and reforming the instrument. Apart from Xiang, I took *yangqin* lessons with other teachers during my stay
in Beijing, including Gui Xili, Xu Xuedong, and Liu Yuening. The connections built up with other colleagues during my study in Beijing were of great use when I revisited there for intensive fieldwork. My participation as a yangqin performer did not end after I entered the University of Hawai‘i. Besides frequent on- and off-campus performances, I have played the yangqin to accompany Cantonese Operatic Song at the Hawai‘i Cantonese Opera Association in Chinatown, Honolulu.

In summer 2006, following two years of coursework at the University of Hawai‘i, I carried out my intensive fieldwork in Beijing, Shanghai, Canton,7 and Hong Kong. During the fieldwork, I interviewed yangqin professors and students at music conservatories, yangqin performers in professional troupes, yangqin makers and designers, and musicians in amateur music groups. As a long-term yangqin player, I had never felt like an outsider when playing the yangqin until I visited the amateur groups in Honolulu, Canton, and Shanghai. The groups in Honolulu and Canton played Cantonese Music and Cantonese Operatic Song while the groups in Shanghai played mostly Jiangnan Sizhu music. Regional music was not an important part of the program when I studied yangqin at the conservatory. Although I learned several traditional regional pieces, my teachers rarely discussed the musical styles or how folk musicians played in the past. In contrast to the use of Western staff notation as well as cipher notation and a fixed version of musical scores in my conservatory training, the traditional gongche notation8

7 Canton is an older name for “Guangzhou,” the capital of Guangdong province in southern China. The use of Canton throughout this thesis is for closer connection with its adjective “Cantonese” in “Cantonese Opera,” “the Cantonese yangqin school” and so on.
8 Gongche is a traditional notation system that has been widely used in instrumental and vocal genres throughout China, in which Chinese characters are used to indicate pitch degrees. Durations are loosely indicated by dots and/or some small symbols.
and oral tradition occupied a more important role in the amateur groups I visited in Honolulu, Canton, and Shanghai. Although they knew I was a yangqin player and had no problem with the instrument, the musicians in these groups have never considered me as an insider. In addition, even though I am a Cantonese from Hong Kong and am able to read the gongche notation, and I have no problem in verbal and musical communication in the amateur groups in Honolulu and Canton, I still felt I was an outsider in the community. This was probably due to my practice of using written music and, more importantly, the musical styles of my playing. In short, playing the yangqin (and, on some occasions, being Cantonese) provided me some advantage in gaining entry to those communities; however, during my fieldwork, the musical training I had received kept me as an outsider to the groups playing regional music.

As mentioned previously, my intensive fieldwork was done in Beijing, Shanghai, Canton, and Hong Kong in summer 2006, and in my irregular visits to the group of Cantonese Operatic Song in Honolulu from 2004 to 2006. In this study, I examine changes in the construction of the yangqin, its repertoire, musical style, and performance practice. My approaches included library and archive research, participant observation, and interview.

Library and Archive Research

On an earlier visit to China in summer 2005, I collected published materials related to yangqin music at the Institute of Music Research at the China Art Research Institute, and the National Library of China (both in Beijing), and the Shanghai Library. Much of this material, some published as early as the 1920s, is no longer commercially
available. Unfortunately, the audio archives of the Institute of Music Research were not open to the public. After arriving in Shanghai, however, I was fortunate to access some of the older recordings at the China Records Company there, which had kept most of the original copies of the phonograph recordings released from the early 1920s to the 1980s. Although, in the first half of the century, the yangqin was rarely played as a solo instrument, this was a great opportunity for me to listen to the yangqin as used in the traditional, regional vocal and ensemble genres in the old days. The Chinese Music Archive at the Chinese University of Hong Kong holds some yangqin solo recordings that were produced and released in Taiwan and Hong Kong in the 1970s and 1980s. These audio materials helped me to understand what yangqin solo music was and how it was played during that period. From the library of the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, I also got access to master's theses written by the yangqin students in the past ten years.

**Participant Observation**

Observation and participation cannot be clearly separated in most fieldwork and my experience is an example. Since I started my first yangqin lesson in 1995, I have been at once participating and observing in the field.

During my intensive fieldwork in summer 2006, in order to understand trends in repertoire and models played in professional circles in recent years, I attended and made video and/or audio recordings of the student examinations at the China Conservatory and the Central Conservatory of Music.
In the amateur groups in Shanghai, Canton, Hong Kong, and Honolulu, observation was almost impossible without participating in the communities. Participation was encouraged and even required on these occasions, regardless of my limited understanding and ability to interpret the regional music. In most places I visited, the *yangqin* provided were four-bridge models. However, in the group at Lok Cha Tea Shop, Flagstaff House Museum of Tea Ware in Hong Kong, I was fortunate to have an opportunity to play an old butterfly *yangqin*. The instrument was borrowed from the collection at the Music Department of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and had been owned, at different times, by two prominent Cantonese *yangqin* musicians of the first half of the twentieth century: Qiu Hechou (1880-1942) and later Lu Wencheng (1898-1981). Very different from the “reformed” *yangqin* of recent decades, the experience of playing the old butterfly *yangqin* gave me some insight and understanding of the construction of the early *yangqin*, its beaters, timbre and, most importantly, the interrelationship of all these factors with musical styles.

**Interview**

Interviews (both formal and informal) occupied an important part of my fieldwork. To investigate the changes of the instrument and its music, my interviewees included *yangqin* teachers and students at conservatories, *yangqin* performers in state-run performing troupes, *yangqin* makers, *yangqin* designers (or “reformers” [gaijie jia]), composers of *yangqin* music, and musicians of other Chinese instruments. These roles usually overlapped, since it is common to see *yangqin* musicians in multiple roles, as

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9 In this thesis, I use “*yangqin* musicians” to refer to all the people who play, teach, make, and design *yangqin*, as well as the people who compose *yangqin* pieces.
performer, teacher, and composer. Their origins ranged from Hong Kong to Guangdong province (incorporating the Cantonese and the Chaozhou culture communities), the Jiangnan area (south of the Yangtze River), Sichuan province, Beijing, and elsewhere. If I include people working at state-run musical organizations and those making music for a living as professional musicians, most of the interviewees I visited in Beijing were professional musicians. In contrast, the majority of my interviewees in Shanghai, Canton, Hong Kong, and Honolulu had been professional musicians, but are currently semi-professional musicians, or amateurs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In ethnomusicology, studies of a specific musical instrument have been undertaken by scholars over the past few decades. The trend has moved from studies focusing on the physical features of the instruments, technical and musical descriptions of the performing techniques, music, and repertoire such as those by Jacqueline Djedje (1980), J. Lawrence Witzleben (1983), and John Myers (1992), to investigations of the relationship of the instrument to its society, or "the interaction of the 'musical' and the 'non-musical'" (Stock 1996:11). Later writings are more people-oriented, that is, they focus on individual musicians rather than the musical instruments. Among the writings on the instruments in China, the significant studies dealing with the politics and/or social ideology include Richard Kraus's Pianos and Politics in China: Middle-Class Ambitions and the Struggle over Western Music (1989), Frederick Lau's doctoral dissertation entitled "Music and Musicians of the Traditional Chinese Dizi in the People's Republic
of China" (1991), and Jonathan Stock's *Musical Creativity in Twentieth-Century China: Abing, His Music, and Its Changing Meanings* (1996). In his studies on individual pianists, Kraus nicely illustrates how piano music was interpreted differently with the socio-political changes in contemporary China. Investigating the solo repertory and the flute *dizi* musicians, Lau discusses the changes of the musical thoughts and practice of musicians with the shift of social ideology in China. Stock focuses on an individual folk musician in China and examines the different re-creations and interpretations of his music under the ever-changing political contexts.

Bruno Nettl's *The Western Impact on World Music: Change, Adaptation, and Survival* covers various issues of the musical changes of non-Western music under Western influence during the past hundred years. Some issues Nettl raises are closely related to the changes of the *yangqin* in contemporary China.

As mentioned earlier, scholarly works (both those in Chinese and in English) on the *yangqin* are limited. Writings in Chinese about *yangqin*, by *yangqin* musicians and non-musicians, are not rare, but most of them are brief, general and descriptive; few of them consider the cultural context of the *yangqin*. They usually appear in introductions to collections of *yangqin* pieces and of Cantonese Music; the majority introduce the instrument (including brief history and the names of different parts of the instrument), pitch arrangements, guides to selecting an instrument, and instruction on tuning and performing. Most existing writings and music scores for the *yangqin* published in the first half of the twentieth century were by Cantonese musicians and were published in Shanghai or Hong Kong (see Qiu H. 1920, 1923, 1928, 1932; Yi 1932; Shen 1934; Mei C.
1936; Chen J. 1941). Of these, the most significant and influential is Qiu Hechou, a well-known Cantonese musician, and one of the earliest musicians to notate *yangqin* music and to write about the instrument and its music. In post-1949 China, publications on the *yangqin* and its music have boomed along with the establishment of programs of *yangqin* performance in music institutes and of state-run performing troupes all over the country. Musicians from different regions of China have increasingly engaged in writing about the *yangqin* and publishing *yangqin* music. Like the publications from the first half of the twentieth century, musical scores are dominant while textual writings are quite brief in the publications of the most recent five decades. Since the establishment of the master’s degree programs in the China Conservatory and the Central Conservatory of Music in the mid-1980s, more in-depth studies of the *yangqin* and its music have been written (see Xu P. 1987; Zhang J. 2001; Li J. 2001; Luo 2002; Qian 2002; Shi 2003; Ao 2004; He K. 2004; Gao 2005; Liu Z. 2005; Mei J. 2005; Xiong 2005). Most master’s theses are performance-oriented; their authors have overwhelmingly written about technique, training process, superficial analyses of regional schools and contemporary compositions, and the history of *yangqin* reform. It is hard to find a critical study that locates the *yangqin* in its cultural and social context.

As a popular instrument in folk music, the *yangqin* has been visible in academia in the West since the early twentieth century. The earliest reference in English that I could locate is in A.C. Moule’s *A List of the Musical and other Sound-Producing Instruments of the Chinese* (1908). Moule classified the *yangqin* under the subclass of “struck instrument” in the category of “stringed instrument,” and provided the physical
characteristics and the tuning of the instrument (118-20). The *yangqin* is also included in English-language works by later scholars who wrote about musical genres, and only briefly about the instrument (see Yung 1989; Jones 1995; Witzleben 1995; Thrasher 2000). In the entry on “Instruments: *Yangqin*” in *East Asia: China, Japan, and Korea (Garland Encyclopedia of World Music, Volume 7)* (2001), Wu Ben mentions some traditional genres in which *yangqin* plays an important role together with some of the repertoire, and the significant musicians in both folk music and contemporary *yangqin* solo music (179-81). Particular *yangqin* schools or genres have not been studied in the West except in Edward Ho and Xu Pingxin’s articles on the Manchurian *yangqin* school,10 one of the “Four Major Schools” of *yangqin* tradition (which I will discuss in Chapter 3) (1995:50-55; 1996:9-15). Contemporary *yangqin* solo music has not attracted the attention of English-language scholars; I could only locate two short articles on the *yangqin* and its music in the period from 1949 to 1979 (Ho 1997a, 1997b).

Since hammered dulcimers are present in many cultures around the world, I also searched for studies on the *yangqin*’s siblings. Unfortunately, as a not-very-important ensemble instrument in folk cultures of many lands, hammered dulcimers have not been the focus of scholarly interest for in-depth research or comparative studies. Arthur Hartmann’s “The *Czimbalom*, Hungary’s National Instrument” (1916) is the earliest published study of the Hungarian *cimbalom* that I was able to access. It also briefly mentions the *cimbalom*’s siblings around the world. In the entry for “dulcimer” in “Grove Music Online,” David Kettlewell gives a brief overview of the hammered dulcimers in

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10 In this thesis, I call this school the “Northeastern *yangqin* school.” See also Chapter 3, Note 6.
various cultures (Kettlewell 2007). Another relatively comprehensive publication on hammered dulcimers that I found was Paul Gifford’s The Hammered Dulcimer: A History (2001). Gifford is an archivist and himself a performer of the hammered dulcimer. He presents a broad picture of the hammered dulcimers in various parts of the world, and loosely groups the hammered dulcimers according to geographical and cultural aspects, physical features, history, timbre, and music for the instrument. While both studies are largely based on secondhand sources, and their sections on the Chinese yangqin are brief and general, it should be recognized that dealing with an instrument distributed worldwide and sources in many languages is not an easy task. Both Kettlewell and Gifford provide a good general introduction to almost all the hammered dulcimers in the world. I look forward to a future collective work written by experts in different cultures on the hammered dulcimers in the world.

ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS

Following this brief introduction to my initial motives in beginning this study, my background and position, my fieldwork, and relevant scholarly works, I will provide some further background of the yangqin in Chapter 2 by discussing its history, how it has been categorized, and the changes in its construction in contemporary China. I focus on how the yangqin was elevated from a folk ensemble instrument to a sophisticated, versatile solo instrument over the past five decades. Chapter 3 examines the regional heterogeneity of traditional yangqin music and discusses the so-called “Four Major Schools” of yangqin music. Based on my experience participating in
regional amateur groups and professional circles, I will further discuss the implications behind the divergence of the general attitude toward and the practical use of traditional yangqin music from the discourse within professional circles. Following the discussion of the changes in the construction of the instrument and its music, Chapter 4 focuses on ethnographic data of yangqin musicians’ reflections on the changes to the instrument and its music. Through investigating what they think about the changes in the construction, performing techniques, music, the mode of transmission of traditional music, and the performance format, I found that musicians have attempted to make the yangqin a scientific, cosmopolitan instrument, based on the fact that the yangqin has already identified as a solo instrument. Differences in representation of performance practice of a traditional piece are illustrated through one of the earliest known notations, my transcription of a recently-recorded performance, and my transnotation of the score used in contemporary conservatories. In the final chapter, I will summarize the changes in yangqin circles since the early twentieth century; and present my conclusions including that the focus of yangqin music has moved from regional traditions to the “Four Major Schools” to individuals’ contemporary compositions. Through examining the reflection on themselves and their teachers, I contend that yangqin musicians’ efforts to continue reforming their instrument implies a desire to raise the status not only of the instrument, but also of themselves as “expert musical artists.”
ROMANIZATION AND TRANSLATION

The pinyin romanization system is used for most of the Chinese terms, names of places and people in mainland China. For my interviewees in Hong Kong and others who prefer it, I romanize their names based on the pronunciation of the Cantonese dialect. For all Chinese names, I place family names before given names. I capitalize genre names including “Cantonese Music,” “Cantonese Operatic Song,” “Cantonese Opera,” “Jiangnan Sizhu,” “Sichuan Yangqin,” “Shandong Qinshu,” and "Erren Tai."

All translations of Chinese terms, titles, and quotations from both written sources and interviews are my own.
CHAPTER 2
THE PATH OF THE BUTTERFLY

The yangqin, in earlier days widely known as the butterfly yangqin (hudie qin), is a hammered dulcimer, played with thin, flexible bamboo beaters. The number of bridges varies from two to four; that of courses from fourteen to more than forty, and of strings per course from two to five. Although widely believed to be an imported instrument, the yangqin’s origin and history have been controversial among both local and international scholars. I begin this chapter by discussing writings on the history of the yangqin.

Organology, the study of musical instruments, occupies an important place in the field of ethnomusicology. Classification systems of instruments vary from culture to culture. Local culture, philosophy, and aesthetics are embedded in different degrees in the classification systems. As a novel instrument introduced to China in about the seventeenth century, the yangqin is unlike most of the other popular instruments in China in having been classified in different ways and in various categories. In section two of this chapter, I will discuss the classification of the yangqin in modern music scholarship and its cultural implications, and explain why the yangqin does not fit within the bayin system, a native, ancient classification system of China.

The last section of this chapter examines the changes in the construction of the yangqin along with the “reform” project of Chinese instruments and the establishment of the yangqin performance programs in music institutes in the mid-twentieth century. I will
discuss how the yangqin has been changed from a folk ensemble instrument to a visually and aurally sophisticated solo instrument in modern stage performances.

HISTORY OF THE YANGQIN

Among the popular Chinese instrument, the yangqin is probably one of the most recent. According to yangqin musicians Zheng Baoheng (1995:5) and Xiang Zuhua (1992:22), the yangqin can be dated back to 1663 with a picture and textual description in Kina Moriaiki’s Okinawa and Chinese Performing Arts (1989 [1984]). It reports a visit to the Ryukyu Islands by Chinese official named Zhang Xuezha who sang with the accompaniment of a yaoqin (another name for yangqin used in the Chaozhou region in southeast China) and a huqin (bowed-string fiddle). However, the origin and early history of the yangqin are still in dispute among yangqin musicians and scholars due to a lack of adequate historical sources. In discussing the introduction of dulcimers to a new country, Paul Gifford states that “Unlike other instruments, which entered new countries through the front door of high fashion, diplomacy (as with band instruments), or religion, the dulcimer largely entered through the back door … through association with prostitutes” (2001:3). The yangqin is not an exception. The limited sources inform us that in the past, the yangqin was frequently used in brothels and among the commoners (He C. 1984:92). The scarcity of documentation on the yangqin is not unrelated to the social status of this instrument and its players in traditional China. Unlike musical instruments that were connected to the court and literati, such as the bronze bells bianzhong, seven-string zither guqin, and later the plucked-lute pipa, for which there are extensive, preserved historical
records on performance practices and musical details, the *yangqin* first gained popularity among illiterate common people in secular and folk contexts, at least as early as the eighteenth century (ZYYY 1985:450; Zheng 1995:5; Gifford 2001:197),

Another reason for the difficulty in determining the instrument’s origin is the confusion that arises from the name the Chinese initially applied to it: “*yangqin,*” which, from the seventeenth to the early twentieth century, was a designation for foreign instruments. In the roots of the word, “*yang-qi*,” the Chinese character “*yang 洋*” literally means foreign, ocean, wide, and vast, and the character “*qin 琴*” is a generic term for string instruments. In writings prior to the mid-twentieth century, “*yangqin*” is used to refer to several foreign instruments, including the piano, harpsichord, and clavichord (Xu K. 2003 [1986]:4962; Qiu and Feng 1929). Due to the similarity of the layout of strings on the soundboards of the dulcimer and the Western keyboard instruments, the relationship of the Chinese dulcimer and the earlier descriptions of “*yangqin*” (foreign instrument) are controversial among the Chinese scholars (Xiang 1981:27; He C. 1984:92; Xu P. 1987:6-8; Thrasher 2007b; Huang M. 2006¹). Some argue that the instrument presented by the Christian missionary Matteo Ricci (1552-1610)² as a tribute to the court in 1601 was a dulcimer (Li H. 2002:48; Huang M. 2006). Regardless of the way in which the dulcimer was imported to China, the *yangqin* became a popular

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¹ Huang Manwen, 2006. Interview, September 1. Canton, China. Huang is a researcher of Cantonese Music. Her father-in-law, Huang Longlian (1908-1980), was a prominent musician of the Cantonese *yangqin* school and was one of the founders of the *yangqin* performance program at Xinghai Conservatory of Music, Canton in 1958. Her husband, Huang Jiaqi (1940-2005), was a *yangqin* player and a scholar of Cantonese Music.
² The Christian missionary Matteo Ricci was an important figure of cultural exchange between China and the West in the sixteenth century. It is documented that he presented several Western musical instruments (written as “*yangqin*” [foreign instrument]) to the court in Beijing from 1598 onward (Tao 2001:8).
instrument in different regions in the country during the Qing dynasty (1644 to 1912). Keeping the same pronunciation as “yang-qin 洋琴” (foreign instrument) but changing the first Chinese character, the new name “yang-qin 揚琴” (Chinese dulcimer) has gradually come into use since the early twentieth century. The meanings of the character “yang 揚” include to raise, to spread, to make known, and to praise. It is also a character in the name of a prosperous city, Yangzhou 揚州. Even if the yangqin was originally a foreign instrument and later became localized, the change from “yang 洋” (foreign) to “yang 揚” and the extensive use of the character “yang 揚” in the past few decades reveals that the instrument had been accepted as a Chinese instrument in the twentieth century.

A Native Instrument?

Among the different views on the origin of the yangqin in China, some musicians believe that it is a native instrument of China, while the majority argue that the contemporary yangqin is a localized dulcimer of foreign origin.

According to yangqin musician Wu Shide, the struck-string zither zhu (see Figures 2.1 and 2.2) is the predecessor of the yangqin (1958:1). The zhu is an ancient, struck-string zither of the imperial court. It was popular as early as the Warring States Period (ca. 5th century to 211 B.C.E.) and gradually fell out of use. However, many yangqin musicians disagree with Wu’s view, arguing that the yangqin is not descended from the zhu because documents show significant differences in number of strings.

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3 Such as Fujian province, Hanzhou city, and Canton city (Xu K. 2003 [1986]:4919,4941).
4 Yangzhou 揚州 is in Jiangsu province in eastern China. “Zhou” 州 means city.
appearance and construction, and in the performance movements (Wang Z. 1981a:24; Xiang 1992:21). The number of strings on the zhu is much smaller than on the yangqin, and its body is shaped more like that of the twenty-one-string zither guzheng, being basically rectangular (see Figure 2.3).\(^5\) The zhu player held the instrument with the left hand, and used the right hand to strike the strings with a thin bamboo stick (ZYYYY 1985:516).

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\(^5\) The numbers of strings on guzheng (also zheng) varied throughout the history of the instrument. The earliest guzheng is believed to have had twelve strings. Today's most popular guzheng has twenty-one strings (see ZYYYY 1985:501).
Make it Native!

In one of the oldest surviving *yangqin* manuscripts, *Qinxue Xinbian* (Introduction to the Study of the *Yangqin*) (1920), the author Qiu Hechou, a celebrated early twentieth-century *yangqin* performer, states that Yangzhou, a well-known city north of the Yangtze River, is the origin of the *yangqin* because the name contains the character “yang 揚” which is the first character of the city name, Yangzhou 揚州 (1920:13). Although his opinion is not widely accepted among *yangqin* musicians and scholars, it is not entirely groundless because Yangzhou was a prosperous city and many courtesans from Yangzhou traveled to Canton (Xu K. 2003[1986]:5203). Interestingly, his earliest *yangqin* notation, *Qinxue Xinbian*, was published in 1920 when the character “yang 洋” (foreign) was still more commonly seen than “yang 揚” when referring to the instrument. As a prolific author who published a significant amount of influential notation for Cantonese Operatic Song, Cantonese Music, and *yangqin* music in the early twentieth century, I assume that Qiu must have known that the name of the instrument was originally written with the character “yang 洋” (foreign). Whether he made this substitution on purpose or not, it is obvious that he intended to make the *yangqin* a Chinese instrument and furthermore, to reinforce the Chineseness of the instrument by

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6 The original text is “揚琴...初出於揚州。故名曰揚琴。” (Qiu 1920:13)
“eras[ing] the foreign (barbarian) association” (Yu 2005:227) and ascribing an indigenous origin and history.

**An Imported Instrument?**

In recent scholarship, it is commonly held that the dulcimer is a foreign instrument which was imported to China and then localized to become the Chinese *yangqin* (ZYYY 1985:450; Xu P. 1987:6-8; Xiang 1992:21-24; Yu 2005:49). According to existing studies on the *yangqin*, scholars have proposed two possible routes for the introduction of the dulcimer to China.

As Josephine Ng summarizes it, among Chinese scholars, it is generally believed that the dulcimer was introduced to China from Europe over the sea route (quoted in Gifford 2001:196). Several documents support this viewpoint. In the second volume of *Music History of China* (*Zhongguo yinyue shi*), Wang Guangqi (1892-1936), one of the earliest musicologists in China, briefly mentioned that the *yangqin* was originally a European instrument and was introduced to China in the seventeenth or eighteenth century (1957:78-79). In *Classified Anecdotes of the Qing Dynasty* (*Qing Bai Lei Chao*), under the entry, “Jin Chiquan listening to the *yangqin*,” there is a relatively detailed description of the instrument (Xu K. 2003[1986]:4963). The phrase, “this instrument came via the big ocean” hints that the dulcimer arrived in China by sea. Neither source specifies the exact period when the dulcimer entered China, nor precisely how it was imported. While some scholars believe that it was Matteo Ricci who brought the first

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7 *Classified Anecdotes of the Qing Dynasty*, written by Xu Ke (1869–1928) and first published in 1917, is a series of books containing anecdotes from the Qing dynasty (1644 to 1912). It covers many issues such as economy, academia, politics, folklore, performing arts, costumes, and ritual.

8 The original Chinese text is “此琴來自大海洋” (Xu K. 2003[1986]:4963).
dulcimer when he visited Beijing in 1601 (Huang M. 2006), it is also suggested that the instrument he brought was not a dulcimer but the European clavichord (He C. 1984:92; Xiang 1992:23).

In “Grove Music Online,” the entry for “yangqin” states that “yangqin is an adaptation of the Persian santur, which was introduced to coastal areas of Guangdong province in south China late in the Ming dynasty (1368–1644)” (Thrasher 2007b). It does not indicate the means of the santur’s arrival in China. This statement echoes Uyghur music specialist Wan Tongshu’s description of the chang dulcimer in his *Uyghur Musical Instruments* (*Weiwu’er Zu Yueqi*): the chang from Persia, Iraq, and Turkey was the origin of the yangqin, and that it was imported to China through both a sea route and a land route at different times. He states that the chang was introduced to the coastal area of Guangdong province via the sea in the mid-seventeenth century; and, separately from the sea route, it was later transported via the land route into Kashgar, a city in northwestern China, from Central Asia in the eighteenth century (1986:65). In his master’s thesis, yangqin musician Xu Pingxin shares a similar view to that of Wan on the two possible routes of the introduction of foreign dulcimers to China, but argues that there were two types of dulcimers imported to China separately, one through the land route and the other through the sea route. He points out that, on the one hand, the chang from Persia was the origin of the dulcimer used in Xinjiang, northwestern China, and was probably transported by a land route from Western Asia. On the other hand, he believes that the

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9 Today, there are two types of dulcimers in Xinjiang. One is model 402 (or model 401) that has been used by music institutes and professional performing troupes. The other one, also called chang, has been popular in the local Uyghur ensembles. The ethnic Han yangqin musicians prefer “Xinjiang yangqin” to “chang” when they refer to the latter.
yangqin in the coastal area of China in the seventeenth century had a European origin, and was introduced to China through the sea route. He concludes that the European-originated dulcimers in the coastal area were gradually localized as a Chinese instrument, became popular and influential throughout China, and regards them as the ancestors of today’s yangqin; whereas, the popularity of the dulcimers introduced from Western Asia remained basically limited to Xinjiang and had fewer changes (1987:5-8).

Although it is not clear whether the European dulcimer was the first dulcimer introduced to China, there are some facts supporting the argument that the first dulcimer arrived in China by sea. The Portuguese resided in Macau as early as 1557. Later, Christian missionaries largely visited southern China via Macau which resulted in Macau becoming the center of Christianity in East Asia (Li Y: 2005:5; Encyclopedia Britannica Online 2007). As the earliest existing source documenting the dulcimer dates back to 1663 (Kina 1989[1984], quoted in Zheng 1995:5, and Xiang 1992:22), it is possible that the dulcimer was introduced to China after its transportation by European vessels in the sixteenth century. That yangqin music first flourished in the Canton region further points to the conclusion that dulcimers were introduced to the Chinese through the southeast coast, despite the lack of convincing evidence to reveal its place of origin and exact period of transport.

**CLASSIFICATION AND CATEGORIES**

Today, when looking at the classification of musical instruments to which the yangqin belongs, there may be a variety of answers, which is seldom the case for Chinese
Yangqin has been classified as a “percussion instrument” (Witzleben 1983:29), a “plucked-string instrument” (tanbo yueqi) (Su 1965:1; Hu 1997 [1983]:131-49), a “struck-string instrument” (jixian yueqi) (Xiang 1992:13), and a “chordo-percussive instrument” (daji xianming yueqi) (Yue Sheng 2005:89-94). The multitude of answers results from the different classification systems to which people refer.

The two categories to which the yangqin has been assigned most frequently are “percussion instrument,” “plucked-string instrument” (tanbo yueqi). Modern Chinese orchestral categorization, modeled in part on that of the Western symphony orchestra, identities four types of musical instruments according to the ways in which musical sound is produced. They include “blown (chuiguan),” “plucked (tanbo),” “bowed (lashian),” and “struck (daji).”10 As a member of the modern Chinese orchestra, the yangqin, odd as it may seem, is usually placed in the percussion instrument category because it produces musical sound by striking the strings with beaters. In other contexts, it is more usual to see the yangqin placed in the plucked-string category because of its proximity to plucked-string instruments in terms of timbre and musical vocabularies. The yangqin is the only instrument that belongs simultaneously to two different categories within this system.

In addition, yangqin is also placed in several newly-created categories, including “struck-string instrument” (jixian yueqi) and “chordo-percussive instrument” (jizou

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10 The “blown” category, called “chuiguan” or “chui” in Chinese, refers to wind instruments, such as the transverse flute dizi, the mouth-organ sheng, and the shawm suona. The “plucked” category, called “tanbo” or “tan” in Chinese, refers to plucked-string instruments, such as the plucked-lute pipa, the round-shaped plucked-lute zhongruan, and the guzheng. The “bowed” category, called “lashian” or “la” in Chinese, refers to the bowed-string fiddles, such as the two-string fiddle erhu, the high-pitch fiddle gaohu, and the middle-range fiddle zhonghu. The “struck” category, called “daji” or “da” in Chinese, refers to percussion instruments, such as the gong xiaoluo, the drum gu, and the woodblock bangzi.
xianming lei yueqi, or daji xianming yueqi) (Xiang 1992:13; Liu Z. 2005:3; Yue Sheng 2005:89-94). Although these categories have been increasingly popular in Chinese music scholarship during the last twenty years, they are often ill-defined; it is not always clear to what extent these new labels usefully transcend older categories. As the categories “plucked” and “struck” were dominant before the 1990s, I suggest that the use of “struck-string instrument” and “chordo-percussive instrument” have combined the meanings of the “plucked” and “struck” categories. Yangqin musicians, perhaps influenced by the Sachs-Hornbostel system, are aware of the medium of vibration when the instrument is played as a criterion for classifying musical instruments. Apart from the physical motions during performance, the medium of vibration – “string” (xian) – is emphasized in the names of “struck-string instrument” (ji-xian yue-qi), or “chordo-percussive instrument” (ji-zou xian-ming lei yue-qi, or da-ji xian-ming yue-qi). In any case, yangqin is perhaps the most diversely-classified Chinese musical instrument.

That the indigenous bayin (“eight tone”) classification system is rarely mentioned in classifying yangqin deserves our attention. The bayin system is the oldest instrument classification system in China. It was devised by court scholars in the West Zhou dynasty (ca. 11th century to 771 B.C.E.) and was commonly used in ancient China (Thrasher 2007b; Yang Y. 2001 [1981]:41-42). Not merely a classification of instruments, it is closely related to traditional Chinese cosmology and philosophy. In this system, instruments are categorized into eight groups according to their materials “either to produce the sound or to contain the vibrating air” (Dournon 1992:250). These include metal, stone, earth, skin, silk, wood, gourd, and bamboo. Most of the string instruments,
for example, the guqin and the twenty-five-string zither se, are classified under the silk category because silk was the earliest material for making their strings.

The system was devised long before the presence of the dulcimer in China. Unlike most of the Chinese string instruments, the strings of the yangqin have never been made of silk. Instead, metals, such as bronze and steel, have been the major materials for yangqin strings. According to the bayin system, it is possible to group yangqin under the metal category; however, in the general understanding of the system, people usually consider the bell types, such as the zhong and the nao, in which the resonating bodies are made of metal, as members of that category. The bells are somehow icons of ancient, imperial China. Given its “foreign” or “barbarian” origin and history, yang-qin ("foreign instrument," the original Chinese name of the instrument), as an imported instrument, is incompatible with the ancient bayin system, which is closely related to Chinese cosmology, and associated with the iconic, royal bells in the metal category.

To summarize, the yangqin is hardly categorizable under the bayin system, which was used mainly for the instruments used in the court in ancient, feudal China. The physical performing movement allows yangqin to be categorized as a percussion instrument; its musical role in the modern Chinese orchestra is that of a plucked-string instrument; and, in professional circles, combining the concepts of the performing movements and the sound-producing medium, the yangqin has been recently regarded as a struck-string or chordo-percussive instrument.

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11 Bells were used in court music in ancient, feudal China. They symbolized power and wealth, especially of the emperors in the Shang (ca. 1570 B.C.E. – 1045 B.C.E.) and Zhou (1122 B.C.E. – 256 B.C.E.) dynasties.
The traditional two-bridge *yangqin* (see Figure 2.4), a popular ensemble instrument for vocal and instrumental genres in the early twentieth century throughout China, is commonly regarded as the earliest Chinese dulcimer. Since the early 1950s, the *yangqin* has become not only a solo instrument on stage, but also a solo instrument in music institutes where students can major in *yangqin* performance. Under the *zeitgeist* of "improving" musical instruments (*yueqi gaige*), various changes have been made to the instrument, numerous models having been designed and manufactured since the early 1950s making the *yangqin* more amenable to the modern demand for musical virtuosity by elevating its appearance, increasing its volume, and enriching its timbre. Despite widespread acceptance of the "improved" *yangqin* today, "reform" projects still continue and are deemed necessary for the betterment of the instrument.

![Figure 2.4: A butterfly *yangqin* (hudie qin), a kind of two-bridge *yangqin*. Kept at the Instrument Collection at the Music Department, University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa (photo by the author, April 2007).](image)
Two-Bridge Yangqin

The two-bridge yangqin (see Figure 2.4) was the instrument's only basic design throughout the history of the Chinese yangqin until the 1950s. In the region of Guangdong province, that is widely regarded as the earliest region in which the yangqin gained popularity, the instrument was usually called the butterfly yangqin (hudie qin) because with wavy edges of its essentially trapezoidal body, it resembles the shape of a butterfly with its wings outspread. Consequently, the butterfly yangqin is commonly regarded as the earliest form of Chinese yangqin. On the butterfly yangqin, there are two sound holes on the surface of the soundboard, and below the center of the soundboard, there is a small, built-in, multi-functional drawer (see Figure 2.5).12

12 I am not sure whether the earlier two-bridge yangqin outside Guangdong province has this kind of drawer because I have only seen it included on the butterfly yangqin. However, Jiangnan sizhu yangqin musician Zhou Hui mentions that the two-bridge yangqin used in the Jiangnan Sizhu (also called "shanmian qin" [fan yangqin]) also has a drawer (Zhou Hui n.d.:2). The little box-like drawer contains the tuning hammer and the bamboo beaters. Before a stand was used, yangqin were placed on a table and the drawer was placed under the side of the instrument that is opposite to the player to raise it at an angle, to make the farthest strings easy to reach. According to yangqin musician Xu Xuedong, in the past, the little drawer was also used to collect money from the audience (Xu X. 2006).
Figure 2.5: A butterfly yangqin with a built-in drawer which usually stores the tuning hammer. Kept at the Instrument Collection at the Music Department, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (photo by the author, April 2007).

Figure 2.6: Tuning on each course was written in gongche notation on the surface of the soundboard of a butterfly yangqin. Kept at the Instrument Collection at the Music Department, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (photo by the author, April 2007).

13 See Chapter 1, Note 8.
On the two-bridge yangqin, the bridges rest on the soundboard, each bridge designed to uphold and determine the vibrating length of seven of its fourteen courses of strings. It is shaped to allow the courses strung over the other bridge to pass through depressions without touching it. The left bridge is placed precisely at two fifths of the vibrating length of the strings it upholds, resulting in the segments on the two sides of the bridge producing the interval of a fifth (Yung 1989:124). The strings on both sides of the left bridge are played. There is no specific point in the length of the courses of strings upheld by the right bridge at which the bridge must be placed because only the strings on its left side are played. On some two-bridge yangqin, instead of two one-piece bridges,

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14 In Qiu Hechou's Qinxue Xinbian (Introduction to the Study of the Yangqin), the pitch arrangement was written in the degree of pitches in gongche notation, but not in absolute pitch. I also referred to Gui Xili's pitch arrangement on the two-bridge yangqin which indicates the absolute pitches, despite that the two-bridge yangqin he chose is a later version with wider range and ten courses on each bridge.
there are fourteen individual, movable chessmen-like bridges, one for each course (seven of which are tied together with a thin thread) allowing for fine tuning.\textsuperscript{15}

As shown in Figure 2.7, the pitch interval between horizontal neighboring courses of strings on two-bridge \textit{yangqin} – those lying to the right of the left bridge and to the left of the right bridge, as well as of those lying to the left and right of the left bridge – is a fifth, while the interval between the vertically neighboring courses of strings is that of the adjacent pitch in the tonal system to which the \textit{yangqin} is tuned – most of them being a major second, but some a minor third or a minor second. This arrangement is the so-called “horizontal fifth, vertical second” (\textit{heng wu zong er}). The tunings on the two-bridge \textit{yangqin} are designed for the modes and melodic vocabulary of traditional folk music which is basically pentatonic and hexatonic. For example, in Figure 2.7, there is no pitch $b$ on the right bridge or $b^2$ on the left side of the left bridge.

In addition, the arrangement of pitches on the two-bridge \textit{yangqin} is relatively flexible across different regional traditions. The following examples (Figures 2.8, 2.9, and 2.10) show the different tunings in the Cantonese tradition, \textit{Jiangnan Sizhu} (“silk and bamboo” ensemble music from the area of the south of the Yangtze River), and \textit{Sichuan Yangqin} (a narrative genre in Sichuan province with \textit{yangqin} as leading instrument) tradition respectively:

\textsuperscript{15} Although the sources I have accessed do not mention if the \textit{yangqin} with two bridges or individual, movable bridges appeared first, the \textit{yangqin} picture in Kina Moriaki’s \textit{Okinawa and Chinese Performing Arts} (1989 [1984]) has just two bridges so I suggest that separate, movable, individual bridges were a later design.

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Figure 2.8 Pitch arrangement of the courses of strings on the two-bridge *yangqin* in the Cantonese tradition (Qiu H. 1920:29; Gui 2005:5).\textsuperscript{16}

Figure 2.9: Pitch arrangement of the courses of strings on the two-bridge *yangqin* in *Jiangnan Sizhu* (Zhou Hui n.d.:7).\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{16} See Note 14.

\textsuperscript{17} Zhou Hui wrote the pitch arrangement in cipher notation (an imported pitched notation system, using numerals). Given the absolute pitches, I had to determine to which octave each pitch belongs by referring to the pitch arrangement of the two-bridge *yangqin* in the Cantonese tradition (Figure 2.8).
Thin, flexible bamboo beaters (qinzhu) are used to strike the strings. The strings were originally made of bronze which was delicate and the sound was muffled. In 1926, Cantonese musician Lu Wencheng (1898-1981) replaced the bronze strings with steel strings (Li and Huang 2003:295) for a brighter sound. Some later two-bridge yangqin models do not have sound holes at the center of the surface of the soundboard, but instead, the sound holes are in the two sides or in the bottom of the instrument’s resonating chamber. These placements of the sound holes were largely adopted on later models of yangqin. Subsequently, there were some models which varied from the traditional two-

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*Footnote:* I found three versions of tunings of the yangqin as tuned in the Sichuan yangqin school. The version I show is from Yang Jingming (1958:1). Xu Pingxin’s version only shows the degrees of pitches, not the absolute pitches (1992:12). The third version was obtained from the performer of Sichuan Yangqin, Fu Bing, during my interview with him. The pitch of the entire tuning of Fu is a second lower than the one of Yang (Fu 2006). After looking at the frequently-used pitches in Sichuan yangqin pieces, it seems to me that Yang Jingming’s version is most convenient to play Sichuan yangqin music.

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Figure 2.10: Pitch arrangement of the courses of strings on the two-bridge yangqin in *Sichuan Yangqin* (Yang Jingming 1958:1).\(^{18}\)
bridge *yangqin* with a wider range of pitches. The number of courses on each bridge gradually increased from seven to eight, ten, and finally twelve.\(^{19}\)

**Well-Tempered Grand Yangqin**

![Image of Well-Tempered Grand Yangqin](image)

Figure 2.11: "Improved version" of the well-tempered *grand yangqin* (*gaijing lulu yangqin*) (Yue Sheng 2005:91).

Until the early 1950s, the two-bridge *yangqin* had been the only type of *yangqin* played by both professional performers and amateurs. Following the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, many "improvements" (*gai liang*) were made on the instrument. In 1953, *yangqin* musician Zheng Baoheng (b. 1924) and composer Zhang Zirui designed a "well-tempered grand *yangqin* (*lulushi da yangqin*)" in Beijing (see

\(^{19}\) The model with seven courses on each bridge is called "double-seven model (*shuang qi xing*)"; the range used in Guangdong province is g to c\(^{3}\) (without the pitches b, e, and b\(^{5}\)). The model with eight courses on each bridge is called "double-eight model (*shuang ba xing*)"; the range used in Guangdong province is g to c\(^{3}\). The model with ten courses on each bridge is called "double-ten model (*shuang shi xing*)"; the range used in Guangdong province is g to e\(^{2}\). The model with twelve courses on each bridge is called "double-twelve model (*shuang shi er xing*)"; the range used in Guangdong province is f to e\(^{2}\) (Qiu 1932:21; Huang 1956:2; Gui 2005:5; Gui 2005:4).
Figure 2.11. There are significant changes from the two-bridge *yangqin* to the well-tempered grand *yangqin*. Physically different, the first well-tempered grand *yangqin* was significantly heavier and larger than a regular two-bridge *yangqin*. Unlike the two-bridge *yangqin*, the well-tempered grand *yangqin* is impossible for one person to move or carry. Since the well-tempered grand *yangqin* cannot fit on a table like the two-bridge *yangqin*, a specially-designed stand is used to support the instrument. The well-tempered grand *yangqin* had four or five bridges and contained three to four full octaves (Zheng 1959:40; 1995:15). Its most innovative designs are its chromatic range, and the newly-added pedal used to damp sustained sound. In addition, as stated by one of the designers, Zheng Baoheng, the advantages of the well-tempered grand *yangqin* over the two-bridge *yangqin* also include its larger dynamic range and more stable tuning. Notorious for its bulky appearance, uneven timbre (across different registers), and insensitive pedal, the well-tempered grand *yangqin* was refined in attempts to “improve” its weight, soundboard, and damping capacity.

The term “*lulu*” is used here with historical connotations. *Lulu* is an ancient musical term referring to the equal division of an octave into twelve pitches. Using *lulu* in

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20 The weight of the earliest well-tempered grand *yangqin* was 80kg (Zheng 1959:40). A regular two-bridge *yangqin* is less than 5kgs. According to Zheng Baoheng, one of the designers of this model, the length of the early well-tempered grand *yangqin* is 129cm (the lower length), and the thickness is 16.5cm. However, he does not mention the width (ibid). *Yangqin* musician Yang Jian provides the dimensions of the improved well-tempered grand *yangqin*: 120cm x 60cm x 10cm in her article focusing on this model (2005:143). The dimensions of a regular two-bridge *yangqin* are 75cm x 30cm x 5cm.

21 A bar covered by thick cloth and attached to the pedal under the instrument, is inserted between the strings and the soundboard. When the bar is raised, the cloth stops the vibration of the strings and the sustained sound.

22 Zheng Baoheng is among the first musicians who taught *yangqin* at the professional music institutes. He started teaching at the Central Conservatory of Music and some other schools in Beijing in 1952 (Zheng 1959:39). Later, he transferred to the Tianjin Conservatory of Music in 1961 (Lan and Wen 1989:36) and taught there until he retired a few years ago.
the name of this new yangqin highlighted its absolute tuning on every course and its chromatic tuning rather than the variable and tunings of the two-bridge yangqin. The chromatic tuning is not only borrowed from the ancient lulu system, but also from the Western piano and the Russian dulcimer (Zheng 1959:39) which are well-tempered and chromatically tuned. Moreover, the arrangement of pitches on the two-bridge yangqin differs from region to region in China. Since the beginning of the cultural nationalism project in the early twentieth century, the very act of standardizing the pitches of each course is probably part of the nationalism movement – adopting a universal yangqin and a standardized tuning in music institutions is comparable to the nationalization of Mandarin as the lingua franca for the whole country. This reformed yangqin was not intended for performance of the traditional, regional repertoire, but instead for recently-composed yangqin solo pieces and pieces adopted from Western instruments.

However, why was “lulu” used in its Chinese name and not “pingjunlu” (well-tempered) or “shier pingjunlu” (twelve well-tempered tones)? Since lulu is a well-known and influential concept and invention from ancient China, people easily associate this term with remote antiquity in music history. I believe that, by choosing the ancient term for the new yangqin, the designers and manufacturers of this model intended to make and/or consolidate that history with the roots of the yangqin.

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23 Zheng Baoheng’s “Tone Picture of Chuanjiang River” (Chuanjiang yinhua) and “Journey of Lijiang River” (Lijiang you) (Liu Z. 2005:9; Yang Jian 2005:144).
Modulatory *Yangqin*

Despite the fact that the well-tempered grand *yangqin* was invented and used among the professional musicians since 1953, it did not entirely replace the two-bridge *yangqin* due to its complicated tuning. The piano-like chromatic tuning on the well-tempered grand *yangqin* did not fit the musical idioms of the majority of *yangqin* pieces at that time. The two-bridge *yangqin* was still popular until the 1960s, when it was eclipsed by the modulatory *yangqin* (*bianyin yangqin*), which was invented and first introduced to professional circles in 1959. The modulatory *yangqin* is also called “fast modulatory *yangqin* (*kuaisu zhuandiao yangqin*)” (Yang Jingming 1965:1). The remarkable innovation consists of a fine-tuning roller (*gunzhu*) for each course of strings, sliders (usually known as “*bianyin cao*” or “*xiao tuiche*”), and modulatory troughs (Yang Jingming 1965:4; Liu Y. 1997:4). Some fine-tuning rollers are housed on the sliders that are attached to and on the top of the troughs, while some rest directly on the trough boards. Players may raise or lower particular pitches by either adjusting the fine-tuning rollers, or moving the sliders (see Figure 2.12).
Among the subsequent models that incorporated the fine-tuning rollers and sliders, the earliest was the small modulatory yangqin (xiao bianyin yangqin). It was designed by yangqin performer Yang Jingming (1918-1995) in 1959. The thin higher-pitched strings are made of steel, and the thick lower-pitched strings of steel wrapped with bronze. The small modulatory yangqin contains three bridges, sliders, and an expanded range (d to d^3), maintaining the “horizontal fifth, vertical second” principle (Yang Jingming 1965:3) (see Figure 2.13). Its tuning is basically diatonic but includes some chromatic pitches.

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25 The author of Guide to Modulatory Yangqin Performance (Bianyin Yangqin Yanzou Fa) (1965), Yang Jingming, was also the designer of the first modulatory yangqin. He mentioned that there are three types of modulatory yangqin, and that the “small modulatory yangqin (xiaoxing) was not popular” (1965:3). He introduced the “medium modulatory yangqin (zhongxing bianyin yangqin)” and the “grand modulatory yangqin (daxing bianyin yangqin)” and their tunings (1965:3-15). The medium modulatory yangqin discussed in the book is actually the one we, today, call the small modulatory yangqin (xiao bianyin yangqin). People may assume it is the smallest and earliest modulatory yangqin because of the low distribution of the original modulatory yangqin.
Figure 2.13: Pitch arrangement of the courses of strings on the small modulatory yangqin (Yang Jingming 1965:8).

Its unprecedented use of sliders became the basic model for most of the later yangqin. On the traditional two-bridge yangqin, it is necessary to tune each of the strings in a course when changing from one pitch to another. In contrast, when players of the modulatory yangqin want to change a pitch, all they have to do is to move its fine-tuning rollers or sliders. Modulating between the tonic and the dominant keys in contemporary yangqin solo and large-scale ensemble pieces – for example, from C major to G major – is common. On the two-bridge yangqin which has no fine-tuning rollers or sliders, it is impossible to change quickly from F to F sharp.

The invention of the small modulatory yangqin has more to do with the increasing popularity of the modern Chinese orchestra since the 1920s than to playing the newly-composed yangqin solo pieces. My assumption is based on several factors. First, most composers of contemporary yangqin solo pieces are yangqin performers. So are likely to compose music for the available models of yangqin. Since modulation was not
convenient on the two-bridge yangqin, it is likely that the performers of those instruments wrote primarily in one key. In contrast, I suggest that the sliders were created to facilitate key changing on the yangqin in the modern Chinese orchestra in which the repertoire included adaptations of Western music. Second, Yang Jingming, the inventor of the sliders, was an active yangqin performer in an influential, state-run modern Chinese orchestra during the mid-twentieth century. From the beginning, the entire concept of the modern Chinese orchestra was adopted from the Western symphony orchestra in terms of the use of functional harmony, tuning, orchestration, training, and so forth. When playing orchestral pieces, Yang might have confronted difficulties in modulation. This may have been a practical reason driving him to invent the mechanism of fine-tuning rollers and sliders to facilitate modulation.

Another experimental model was the grand modulatory yangqin (da zhuandiao yangqin). According to yangqin musician Gui Xili, there is an extended version of the small modulatory yangqin called the “grand modulatory yangqin,” invented in 1961 by the same designer, Yang Jingming. This model has four bridges and spans the range of c to d³ (2005:5). The tuning is slightly different from that of the small modulatory yangqin – the interval between horizontal neighboring pitches remains the fifth, but that of all vertical pitch neighbors are a minor second, not a major second. Vertically, this resembles the chromatic arrangement of the piano keyboard. Interestingly, in his book, Guide to Modulatory Yangqin Performance (1965), the author, Yang Jingming (the

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26 The National Orchestra of the Central People’s Broadcasting Station (Zhongyang renmin guangbo diantai minzu guanxian yuetuan) is one of the oldest and largest broadcast units in China. Many of the audio recordings from the mid-twentieth century were played by its professional performing troupes.
designer), did not mention this model. However, the grand modulatory *yangqin* that appears in his book is similar to the later design, model 401. In addition, I have not seen any source that refers to the tuning of the grand modulatory *yangqin* that Gui mentions. Instead of investigating whether the particular grand modulatory *yangqin* in Gui’s article actually existed and the details of this model, I wish to use this example to illustrate the fact that there were many experimental models between the small modulatory *yangqin* and model 401, which were the representative models of their day. Although the less-known models are not used in today’s professional field, the ideas and designs of these experimental models inspired the designers of later models and contributed to the reform project to varying extents.

A later model, model 401 (or 401-*yangqin*), was invented by Yang Jingming in 1971. It became the most popular model used by professional performers and amateurs until it was gradually eclipsed by its “improved” version model 402 in the 1990s (Xiang 1992:28; Liu Zheng 2005:11). The number “4” in its name implying the number of bridges, model 401 is basically a modified version of the small modulatory *yangqin* with a wide range which extends from G to a\(^3\). The same materials as in the small modulatory *yangqin* are used for the strings of model 401. The partial chromatic tuning on model 401 is derived from the chromatically-tuned well-tempered grand *yangqin* (*lulushi da yangqin*), whose design was intended to make changing from one key to another easier in newly-composed solo pieces and pieces adapted from foreign cultures for both *yangqin* solo and the modern Chinese orchestra. By adopting the “horizontal fifth, vertical second” principle and the chromatic arrangements of pitches; and including a range of
four and a half octaves, playing the recently-composed *yangqin* solo pieces and orchestral pieces in the modern Chinese orchestra became easier for 401-*yangqin* players. Model 401 was then widely used among music institutes and professional performing troupes all over China. Moreover, it became the basic model, in terms of structure, tuning, and timbre, for all the later *yangqin* models.

**The New Star of the Past Two Decades**

Model 402 (also known as "402-*yangqin"), the modified version of model 401, is the most popular model of *yangqin* among the professional and amateur players (see Figure 2.14). Since I started learning *yangqin* in 1995, I have played *yangqin* on various occasions in Hong Kong, Beijing, Honolulu, Shanghai, and Canton. In the last three places, I played in amateur musicians’ gatherings and did not bring my own *yangqin*. The *yangqin* provided were model 402 or sometimes model 401, both of which I have been playing since 1995. However, when I searched for pictures of the *yangqin* (in both Chinese and English sources) on the internet, most pictures that came up are of model 402. This suggests that, in the past two decades, model 402 is the most common model played by not only professional performers, but also by amateurs in China and even overseas Chinese communities.
Model 402, first produced in 1990 in Beijing, is based on the design of the earlier model 401. Similar to the four-bridge model 401, model 402 covers the range from E to
a3 (see Figure 2.15). There are three major changes to the design of model 401 incorporated in model 402: some additional courses, a reduction in the height of the bridges, and a change of the materials used to make the strings. Compared to model 401, the timbre of model 402 is brighter and thicker, and the articulation is clearer (Xiang 1992:29). Its appearance is basically identical to that of the 401-yangqin with the exception of color, changed from model 401's yellowish brown to model 402's dark reddish-brown. Yangqin musician Xiang Zuhua mentions that the paint used on the model 402 is more durable in a humid environment (ibid).

If the popularity and life span of an instrument can be seen as indicators of its success, then the model 402 is undoubtedly the most successful among the models in the reform project of the last twenty years. There are several reasons for its popularity. Apart from its bright timbre, greater durability, and the convenience of modulation to different keys, the pitch arrangement of this model fits the melodic vocabularies of both traditional and contemporary yangqin pieces in the sense that the most frequently used pitches are easy to reach.

**Other Models**

Based on model 401, as mentioned, there has been a trend to extend the instrument's range among the later designs after model 401 and model 402. The features shared by all these models are the well-tempered tuning, the existence of fine-tuning rollers and sliders for quickly modulating among the most common keys, which are C, D, F, and G. In what follows, I will briefly introduce some of the less-popular yangqin models.
Although Beijing has been the center of the development and reform of *yangqin* since the early 1950s, and the most popular *yangqin* models were designed and manufactured there, other cities, such as Shanghai, Canton, and Shenyang, also play a role in the modern history of the *yangqin*. In his article “Reconstructing the Chinese *Yangqin*” (2005), *yangqin* musician and reformer Gui Xiili wrote a brief summary of the models of *yangqin* from the 1950s to 2005. *Yangqin* musician Liu Zheng wrote her master’s thesis, entitled “On the Reform and Development of the *Yangqin*” (2005), in which she briefly introduces both the well-known and the less well-known *yangqin* designs since the 1950s. All these designs sought to explore the possibilities of widening the range, new arrangements of pitches, and greater variety in timbre and volume.

**New Models since the Late-1990s**

In the past ten years, there has been an increasing number of manufacturers making new models of *yangqin*. However, most of the new *yangqin* models have no structural breakthroughs. Instead, they focus more on the instrument’s physical appearance, decoration, and craftsmanship, and on widening the range and extending the lower register: for example, changing the original straight to wavy edges on two sides of the instrument to make it look like a butterfly; painting different colors, such as white and black, on the body of the instrument; using various kinds of decoration on the boards that cover the tuning nails on the two sides of the *yangqin*; designing some fancy new stands

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for the instrument; adding more pitches in order to make playing the full chromatic scale possible in all registers; and extending the lower register with thicker, longer strings which require a sturdier soundboard and stronger resonating chamber. These new models are generally based on model 402. But some of the designs, such as the “concert grand yangqin (yinyuehui da yangqin),” attempt to imitate the Hungarian dulcimer, cimbalom, in terms of appearance, timbre, the use of a pedal for damping, and the materials used for beaters. In addition, as I observed in the summer of 2006 in Beijing, there has been a trend, at least among professional musicians, of attaching a pedal to the regular model 402 in order to control the sustained sound.

SUMMARY

From the earliest two-bridge yangqin, widely known as the butterfly yangqin, to today’s latest models with at least four bridges, the yangqin has gone through tremendous changes since the instrumental reform movement began in the early 1950s. The initial goal was to present the traditional, folk yangqin as a versatile solo instrument and fit the modern stage better both aurally and visually. Today, this goal has basically been reached. And yet, the reform of the yangqin still continues while progressive reform of other instruments has declined or even stopped. In sum, the general direction of yangqin reform is to extend the range, to increase the volume, to equalize the volume and timbre in different registers, to maintain the stability of pitches, to better control the sustaining of sound, and to refine the physical appearance of the instrument. Although the butterfly yangqin and the well-tempered grand yangqin are basically no longer produced or used,
the principle of "horizontal fifth, vertical second" on the butterfly yangqin, and the
innovative idea of chromatic tuning on the well-tempered grand yangqin have become the
blueprint for later models throughout the history of yangqin reform.
CHAPTER 3
INNOVATING ON THE INHERITED?

MAPPING YANGQIN MUSIC

The yangqin is one of the most visible musical instruments in the contemporary scene of traditional music in China, constantly featured as an indispensable instrument in modern national Chinese orchestras and various regional and folk (minjian) ensembles, and in modern chamber ensembles, as well as being a virtuosic instrument in a recently-created solo tradition. In fact, the versatility of the yangqin is evinced not only by its uses in various types of professional stage performances, but also in its multiple roles in regional genres. The seeming homogeneity of the instrument’s construction, its repertoire, and musical style as national music (minzu yinyue) in the national discourse, in which the yangqin is presented as a pan-Chinese instrument, has somehow obscured its stylistic diversity in traditional contexts.

It is generally believed that, from sometime in the seventeenth century when it was first introduced to China until today, the yangqin has been primarily a folk instrument. It had minimal direct connection to the court, literati, or formal sacred ritual traditions but, instead, has been prominent in regional musical traditions, accompanying various narrative and operatic genres, and playing in numerous instrumental genres, performed by folk musicians in secular contexts. It is found in musical genres in many locales that are widely dispersed, appearing in the south in Cantonese Opera and Jiangnan Sizhu (“silk and bamboo” ensemble music from the area of the south of the
Yangtze River), in the southwest in Sichuan Yangqin (a narrative genre with the yangqin as the leading instrument in Sichuan province), and in the north as part of both Shandong Qinshu (a narrative genre in Shandong province with the yangqin as the leading instrument) and Erren Tai (an operatic genre in Inner Mongolia, performed by two people) (Zheng 1995:78). The yangqin is like the bowed-fiddle hu family of musical instruments in China, in the sense that the instrument was adopted differently in regional genres. However, compared to the instruments of the hu family, the construction of the yangqin remained quite homogenous across the various regional traditions, differentiated by idiosyncratic tunings, construction of the bamboo beaters (qinzhu), performing techniques, and musical idioms.

In this chapter, I begin by discussing the traditional schools of yangqin music, which originally derived from the yangqin parts in folk ensembles. Then, incorporating my experience playing the music of the Jiangnan sizhu yangqin and the Cantonese yangqin – two of the major schools of traditional yangqin music – I examine the heterogeneities in regional yangqin music. Through my involvement in professional circles of yangqin performance, I further investigate the general attitude of these musicians toward the yangqin traditions and the role of the traditional yangqin music. Ultimately, I suggest that the act of naming the “Four Major Schools” (sida liupai) of yangqin traditional music is what has been called “cultural consolidation” (Waterman

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1 Representative examples from the hu family include instruments such as the gaohu (high-pitch fiddle) in Guangdong province, the jinghu (Beijing Opera fiddle) in Beijing, and the banhu (wooden-soundboard fiddle) in Shaanxi and Henan provinces.
Yangqin musicians sought grounds for the transformation of yangqin music, and attempted to invent a history and tradition for the instrument – one of the latest among the popular Chinese instruments today. The Four Major Schools function as a constructed ground for the transformation of yangqin music rather than being realistic in practice.

THE FOUR MAJOR SCHOOLS

Yangqin musicians in the mid-twentieth century chose musics from several regions of China and identified them as major traditional stylistic sources. The Four Major Schools of yangqin playing (sida liupai) were frequently mentioned by professionals over at least the past two decades, although none of them provided the exact year that the designation “Four Major Schools” emerged. Xu Pingxin, in his master’s thesis, “The Development and the Comparison of Dulcimers of China and Foreign Countries” [Zhongwai yangqin de fazhan ji qi bijiao] (1987), only mentions that these four schools which he included in his studies are the most popular, but does not use the term Four Major Schools (10-15). Xiang Zuhua, who is the author of The Art of Chinese Dulcimer [yangqin tanzou jiyi] (1992), identifies the Cantonese yangqin school, the Jiangnan sizhu yangqin school, the Sichuan yangqin school, and the Northeastern yangqin school as the Four Major Schools (36-54). When I asked Xiang when the Four Major Schools were first officially designated and how the four schools were selected, he declined to provide any further information. Zheng Baoheng, in his book The Study of the

2 Christopher Waterman, adopting an idea from Charles Keil, suggests that “the very act of naming a genre ... may ... be a declaration of cultural consolidation” (Waterman 1990:8).
Art of Yangqin (yangqin yishu yanjiu) (1995), briefly introduces seven yangqin schools, including the four traditions Xiang mentions, plus the Xinjiang Twelve-Muqam yangqin school, the Tibet “singing-and-dance” yangqin school, and the Erren Tai yangqin school in Inner Mongolia, but he also does not mention the term Four Major Schools (78-84). The Minzu Yueqi Chuantong Duzouqu Xuanji: Yangqin Zhuanji (Selected Compilation of Traditional Chinese Instrumental Solo Pieces: Yangqin Edition) (1996 [1978]) does not mention the Four Major Schools although all the selected pieces are from those traditions. While I am not able to determine the basis on which the pieces were selected for inclusion, it is probably a result of professional yangqin musicians’ eagerness to promote yangqin music by inventing the Four Major Schools. In the history of Chinese music, it has been a common practice to group several representative people, pieces, schools, or genres, and name them the “four great ___” or the “eight great ___;” possibly the best-known examples of this are the “Four Great Male Dan” of Beijing Opera (sida mingdan), the “Four Great Vocal Genres” of Chinese Opera (sida shengqiang), and the “Eight Great Pieces” of Jiangnan Sizhu (ba da qu). The act of identifying and grouping the most significant figures, repertoire, and schools gives the impression that the musical genres have long traditions. In the case of yangqin, I suggest that, musicians (probably starting from Xiang Zuhua) might have intended to ensure and/or exaggerate the longevity of the

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tradition in order to position the relatively “young” yangqin music in the long history of Chinese music.

Because there were no solo yangqin traditions, the repertoire of these four schools actually consists of solo pieces arranged from the yangqin part in the ensembles. The four schools are, namely, the Cantonese yangqin school (yangqin music in instrumental music in Cantonese tradition), the Jiangnan sizhu yangqin school (yangqin music in the “silk and bamboo” ensemble in the south of the Yangtze River), the Sichuan yangqin school (yangqin music in Sichuan Yangqin), and the Northeastern yangqin school (yangqin music in northeastern China). The Cantonese yangqin school refers to the yangqin music used in Cantonese Music (Guangdong yinyue), Cantonese Opera (yueju), and Cantonese Operatic Song (yuequ).\(^4\) It is widely popular not only in the Guangdong province but also among the Cantonese-speaking communities in Hong Kong, Macau, Southeast Asia, London, North America, and Hawai’i following the waves of migration since the late nineteenth century. Although some tunes, such as the xiaoqu (melodic tunes) in Cantonese Music,\(^5\) were originally designed for yangqin, the instrument was seldom spotlighted as a solo instrument, but rather as a member of the ensemble. The Jiangnan sizhu yangqin school is the yangqin music played in Jiangnan Sizhu, an instrumental ensemble genre popular in the region of the Yangtze delta, especially in Shanghai. In Jiangnan Sizhu, together with the bowed-fiddle erhu, the transverse flute dizi, and the plucked-lute pipa, the yangqin is one of the most important instruments in the genre.

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4 Cantonese Music is an instrumental ensemble with the gaohe and the yangqin as leading instruments. Cantonese Operatic Song is the singing of excerpts from Cantonese Opera without traditional acting, scenery, costume, or make-up.
5 For example, Yan Laolie’s “The Coming of Spring Thunder” (dao chun lei), “Thunder on a Dry Day” (hantian lei), and “Hanging Curtain” (dao chui lian).
Sichuan yangqin school is the name of a narrative musical genre in Sichuan province in southwest China. Using “yangqin” as part of the name reveals that it is an essential and leading instrument in this genre. Among yangqin musicians, the Sichuan yangqin school tends to refer to the genre’s instrumental qupai (titled tunes) played on the yangqin without singing. The Northeastern yangqin school designates yangqin music played in the area of the so-called Three Northeastern Provinces, referring to the provinces of Heilongjiang, Liaoning, and Jilin. In this region, in which shadow-puppet theater is popular, the yangqin has played an important role. Although there are several characteristic performing techniques and styles of individual performers in the Northeastern yangqin school, the designation is not limited to any specific genre or repertoire. Established during the early twentieth century, the school was founded on the solo yangqin pieces adapted or arranged by Zhao Dianxue, a prominent musician of the shadow-puppet theater in Liaoning province (Xiang 1992:51; Zheng 1995:79; Ho and Xu 1995:51-52). Zhao was also one of the earliest yangqin musicians to create a solo tradition by arranging yangqin music from traditional ensemble music.

Edward Ho and Xu Pingxin use “Manchurian yangqin” to refer to this school (1995, 1996). Today, the word “Manchu” often refers to the ethnic group originated from the Manchuria region. Manchuria is a historical name for northeastern China, including Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning provinces and part of Inner Mongolia. Because the yangqin school is more related to the geographical region than to the ethnicity of the people, I prefer using the Northeastern yangqin school to the Manchurian yangqin school. The life span of Zhao Dianxue provided by Edward Ho and Xu Pingxin is 1885 to 1959 (1995:51), that provided by Xiang Zuhua is ? to 1963 (1992:51).
A COMPARISON OF THE JIANGNAN SIZHU YANGQIN SCHOOL AND THE CANTONESE YANGQIN SCHOOL

The topic of yangqin schools and the comparative study of them have not yet attracted the attention of yangqin musicians and scholars, equal to those of other Chinese instruments, such as the pipa, seven-string zither guqin, and twenty-one-string zither guzheng. I encountered difficulties when searching for comprehensive studies on the Four Major Schools of the yangqin. Due to the lack of sources, I will use only two of the four schools, the Jiangnan sizhu yangqin school and the Cantonese yangqin school, as examples to illustrate regional heterogeneities of yangqin music in traditional contexts.

In his monograph, "Silk and Bamboo" Music in Shanghai, J. Lawrence Witzleben states that the yangqin was a relatively recent addition to the Jiangnan Sizhu whose important instruments are the dizi, erhu, pipa, and yangqin (1995:37,51). The yangqin began to be popularized by the famous Shanghai musician Ren Huichu (1887-1952) in
the early twentieth century (Zhou Hui, quoted in ibid:51-52). The **yangqin** that was initially played in the genre was a two-bridge **yangqin**.

Thin, flexible bamboo beaters were used. As Witzleben describes them, the heads of the beaters which strike the strings are sometimes covered with leather or felt (ibid:51). During my fieldwork in Shanghai in 2006, I saw musicians using plastic or medical adhesive tape to cover the heads of the beaters. Whatever material is used, the purpose of padding the heads of beaters is to make the timbre less bright and more “mellow” ("rouhe") (Zhou Hui).\(^8\)

Compared to **Jiangnan Sizhu**, the **yangqin** occupies a more important role in various vocal and instrumental Cantonese musical genres, such as Cantonese Opera, Cantonese Operatic Song, and Cantonese Music.\(^9\) The Cantonese **yangqin** school is a designation that refers inclusively to the repertoire, styles, and practices derived from the **yangqin** tradition in all these the various vocal and instrumental Cantonese musical genres. Since the early twentieth century, the **gaohu** (high-pitch bowed-fiddle used in Cantonese musical genres) and the **yangqin** have been the two leading instruments in a typical Cantonese musical ensemble. Similar to the **yangqin** in **Jiangnan Sizhu**, the early model used in the Cantonese **yangqin** school was a two-bridge **yangqin**. It is also commonly called the butterfly **yangqin** (**hudie qin**, see Chapter 2, Figure 2.4) because the wavy edges of its essentially trapezoidal body resemble the shape of a butterfly with its wings outspread. Like the **yangqin** used in **Jiangnan Sizhu**, the **yangqin** in the Cantonese

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\(^8\) My interview with Zhou Hui (b. ca. 1923) was carried out on July 18, 2006. He is a prominent musician of **Jiangnan sizhu yangqin** school in Shanghai.

\(^9\) See Note 4.
tradition is played with thin, flexible bamboo beaters. However, in the Cantonese yangqin school, the unpadded beaters produce a brighter, more metallic timbre. In addition, more delicacy and subtlety can be heard by using this kind of beater to strike the bronze or steel, low-tensioned strings. Today, one can frequently see musicians playing music of the Cantonese yangqin school on the modern models (usually model 402, today’s most popular yangqin model, played with padded and thicker beaters [see Chapter 1, Figure 1.6]) although it is also common to see performers maintain the practice of using unpadded beaters in order to produce a metallic sound. Apart from using unpadded beaters, performers of the Cantonese yangqin school also make use of a special technique called “reversed beater” (fanzhu). This refers to turning the beaters around, and striking the strings with the other side of their heads — the unpadded skin-side of the bamboo or, more recently, a piece of wood which is specifically designed for this technique.

Most Jiangnan Sizhu compositions are in duple meter and start on the downbeat. Rhythmic variation is minimal and the rhythmic flow is relatively even and steady, featuring repetitive patterns. For instance, continuous groupings of 16th notes (\( \ldots F_{r}.F_{r}.F_{r}.F_{r}. \)) dominate in some pieces, such as “Slow Three-Six” (man san liu) and “Street Procession” (xingjie) (Gan 1985:274-76; Zhou, Zhou, and Ma 2000[1986]:43-61).

In contrast, it is common to start a Cantonese yangqin piece with an upbeat (see Example 1).\(^{10}\) The yangqin part in a Cantonese ensemble often features rhythmic patterns with quick 32nd notes, resulting in densely packed melodic phrases, imbued with a feeling of

\(^{10}\) Examples 1 to 10 were originally notated in cipher notation but here are transnotated to staff notation.
urgency and impetus (see Example 2). In addition, there is a relatively wide variety of rhythmic patterns with significant changes between them (see Example 3).

Example 1:
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{\textit{J}} & = [52-60]^{11} \\
\text{etc.}
\end{align*}
\]

The opening (measures 1 to 2) of “Meeting at the Milky Way” (yinhe hui). Composed by Lu Wencheng (1898-1981); version of Zhang Jintang and Liu Yuening (Liu Y. 1997:126).

Example 2:
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{\textit{J}} & = \text{“Medium tempo” (zhongsu) [72-80]}^{12} \\
\text{etc.}
\end{align*}
\]

Measures 41 to 45 of “Rain Striking the Banana Leaves” (yuda bajiao). Ancient tune; version of Tang Kaixuan (Minzu Yueqi Chuangtong Duzou Quxuan Ji Yangqin Zhuanji 1996 [1978]:5).

Example 3:
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{\textit{J}} & = [56-60]^{13} \\
\text{etc.}
\end{align*}
\]

The opening (measures 1 to 3) of “Interlocking Chain” (lianhuan kou). Arranged by Yan Laolie (ca. 1850-1930); version of Fang Han (Minzu Yueqi Chuangtong Duzou Quxuan Ji Yangqin Zhuanji 1996 [1978]:3).

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11 In the original score, tempo marking is not provided. The one here is my suggestion based on the recordings and performances I have heard.
12 In the original score, the tempo marking is “medium tempo” (zhongsu) but no exact tempo is given. My suggestion of the tempo marking here (\textit{J} = 72-80) is based on the tempo I play the piece and the recordings of this version I have heard.
13 In the original score, tempo marking is not provided. The one here is my suggestion based on the recordings and performances I have heard.
In both the Jiangnan sizhu yangqin school and the Cantonese yangqin school, rests seldom appear between phrases. Instead, sustaining a longer skeleton note is usually achieved in one of two ways: alternating it with the note an octave higher or lower (see Example 4), or filling in the long note by dividing it into shorter note values (see Example 5). Long notes with tremolo are rare except at the beginning and end of a section or a piece. It is more common to hear light-hearted dotted notes in the music of the Cantonese yangqin school than in that of the Jiangnan sizhu yangqin school. To make the yangqin part in Cantonese Music more active and dynamic, syncopation and staccato are frequently used.

Example 4:
\[ J = 76 \]
\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{\includegraphics[width=2cm]{example4.png}}
\end{array} \]


Example 5:
\[ J = 92 \]
\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{\includegraphics[width=2cm]{example5.png}}
\end{array} \]


Heterophonic texture dominates in both Jiangnan Sizhu and Cantonese Music. When discussing the texture of Jiangnan Sizhu music, Witzleben observes that “the

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\[ ^{14} \text{The long tremolo is produced by a technique called lunyin (literally “rolling sound”), which means alternating left hand and right hand rapidly on one or more pitches in order to produce a continuous sound.} \]
\[ ^{15} \text{On the yangqin, once the beaters strike the strings, the sound continues until it gradually dies away. To create a staccato effect, players have to damp the sustained sound by touching the strings with their fingers. This technique is called dunyin (dampened staccato) and is occasionally used in Cantonese yangqin music.} \]
leading instruments tend to play the most ornamented melodic lines," and that there is no clear distinction between the primary melodic line and the secondary ones in spite of the fact that it is generally considered a heterophonic music (1995:109). As the aerophone, dizi, and the bowed chordophone, erhu, are able to produce sustained sound, the pipa and the yangqin usually provide the active and moving melodic figures. While the dizi and the erhu play melodies with disjunct intervals, the yangqin, like the pipa, decorates the melodies by filling them in with notes an octave higher or lower, or notes within the interval’s span. At times when the dizi or the erhu plays passages with long, sustained notes, the yangqin repeats its pitches quickly in 8th or 16th notes (see Example 6), sometimes doubling the note an octave lower or in alternation with the note an octave lower or higher (see Example 7). Not only continuing to produce sound, the yangqin also enriches the texture when alternating the notes an octave lower or higher at phrase endings.

Example 6:

\[\text{Dizi} \quad \text{Yangqin} \quad \text{etc.}\]

Measure 105 of the dizi and the yangqin parts of “Slow Six Beats” (man liu ban) (Gan 1985:112, 127). When the dizi plays a long F sharp, the yangqin divides the half note into 8th and 16th notes.

\[\text{Example 6:} \quad J = \text{“Slow tempo” (man ban) [56-60]} \]

16 In the original scores, only “slow tempo” (man ban) is marked but no exact tempo marking is given. My suggestion of the tempo marking here (\[J = 56-60\]) is based on the recordings and performances I have heard.
Example 7:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Dizi} & : \quad \text{etc.} \\
\text{Yangqin} & : \quad \text{etc.}
\end{align*}
\]

Measure 7 of the \textit{dizi} and the \textit{yangqin} parts of "Street Procession" (Zhou, Zhou, and Ma 2000:44). When the \textit{dizi} plays a long F sharp, the \textit{yangqin} first doubles the note an octave lower (the first circle), and then alternates with the note an octave lower (the second circle).

In Cantonese Music, the \textit{yangqin}, as one of the leading instruments (together with the \textit{gaohu}), usually plays the main melody. Disjunct melodies are frequently found in music of the Cantonese \textit{yangqin} school. Some leaps are filled in with passing tones, but some are not. Jumping back and forth between the intervals of fourth, fifth, sixth, and even seventh in a diatonic scale is common (see Example 8). As mentioned previously, it is very common for pieces to begin with a short-valued note or notes on an upbeat (if there is more than one note, they are usually neighboring tones of the skeleton melody).

Example 8:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{\textit{d}} & = \frac{56-60}{17} \\
\text{5th} & : \quad \text{etc.} \\
\text{4th} & : \quad \text{etc.} \\
\text{7th} & : \quad \text{etc.}
\end{align*}
\]

Measure 7 of "Interlocking Chain." Arranged by Yan Laolie; version of Fang Han (\textit{Minzu Yueqi Chuangtong Duzou Quxuan Ji Yangqin Zhanji} 1996 [1978]:3).

\footnote{See Note 13.}
As in the yangqin part in Jiangnan Sizhu, the yangqin in Cantonese Music also plays a sustaining role in supporting the texture of the ensemble. It makes use of alternating octave notes to fill in the long notes. The Cantonese yangqin school differs from the Jiangnan Sizhu yangqin school in note density. Examples 9a and 9b show the difference of note density in the two schools. They are taken from a solo piece of the Jiangnan Sizhu yangqin school, entitled “Song of Happiness” (huanle ge), and a Cantonese yangqin solo piece, called “Rain Striking the Banana Leaves” (yuda bajiao). In the circled notes of Example 9a, the yangqin continues to produce the pitch of the long (half-note) skeleton tunes, B and F sharp, by dividing the note into \( \text{\texttt{JmJlj}} \), and into \( \text{\texttt{Jljn}} \) respectively. In Example 9b, the yangqin divides the original melodic notes E, G, G, and then E, each of which is equivalent to an 8th-note long, into \( \text{\texttt{Jffl}} \). The examples show that, compared to Jiangnan Sizhu, the yangqin part in Cantonese Music is more packed when filling in a long note. There is a higher density of notes when sustaining a long tone in the Cantonese yangqin school.
Example 9a:
\[ j = 84 \ [46-56]^{18} \]


Example 9b:
\[ j = \text{“Medium tempo” (zhongshu) [72-80]}^{19} \]

Measures 41 to 43 of “Rain Striking the Banana Leaves.” Ancient tune; version of Tang Kaixuan (*Minzu Yueqi Chuangtong Duzou Quxuan Ji Yangqin Zhuanji* 1996 [1978]:5).

The feeling of a sustained and uninterrupted sound in Cantonese Music is also reinforced by another technique called “sitting notes” (*zuoyin*). These are often played alternately by the left and right hands in 32nd notes. One hand plays repetitions of one note alternatively with the other hand which plays the melodic notes. The main melody is supposed to be heard clearly against a background of the drone-like repetitive notes. In Example 10, the right hand (marked as \( \uparrow \)) plays the melody \[ \text{etc.} \] , and the left hand (marked as \( \uparrow \)) plays the repetitive G.

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18 Although the tempo marking in the original score is \( j = 84 \), I have never heard anyone play it this fast tempo, including the arranger of this version, Xiang Zuhua. Based on the recordings and performances I have heard, I suggest \( j = 46-56 \) as the tempo marking.

19 See Note 12.
Tanlun Technique in Both Schools

Apart from the salient musical differences between the music of the yangqin as practiced in Jiangnan Sizhu and in Cantonese Music, its performing technique also varies significantly. One good instance for comparison is a technique called “pluck-and-roll” (tanlun).

The tanlun technique, also called “gunzhu” (rolling-beater) and “chanzhu” (trembling bamboo beater), is the general term for a frequently-used technique shared by many regional yangqin genres and contemporary solo pieces. When playing with this technique, the performer, after striking the strings by moving the wrist, uses his/her thumb and index fingers as a pivot and lightly presses the beater down. Given the flexible nature of bamboo, the delicate beater then bounces on the strings to produce short, swift, and light trembling patterns.21

The tanlun technique is commonly employed in all the aforementioned four major yangqin schools, despite the presence of significant regional variety. Within the Four Major Schools, I am most familiar with the use of tanlun in the Jiangnan sizhu yangqin

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20 See Note 13.
21 The use of bamboo as the material for beaters and the tanlun technique distinguish the Chinese dulcimer from the dulcimers of other countries, such as the Hungarian cimbalom, German hackbrett, and Middle Eastern santur.
school and the Cantonese yangqin school; therefore I will use the tanlun techniques in these two schools to further discuss heterogeneity in regional yangqin music. Since a large part of my musical experience of these two genres was gained from my participation in local amateur groups and with retired professional musicians in Shanghai, Canton, and Honolulu’s Cantonese community from 2004 to 2006, I will discuss the relationship between the use of tanlun technique and the style based on these musical encounters and engagements.22

In neither tradition is there a strict rule as to the use of the tanlun technique. The tanlun technique is normally used as an embellishment to relatively weak and unimportant notes, usually the upbeat and/or a short skeleton note before a longer skeleton note; it is rarely used on two successive notes. I found that tanlun is used more often in the Cantonese yangqin school than in the Jiangnan sizhu yangqin school and, in fact, the role of tanlun is more important in the former tradition than in the latter.

During my fieldwork in Shanghai, I found that it is uncommon for yangqin players in the Jiangnan Sizhu ensembles there to employ tanlun intensively throughout its repertoire. Apart from observation, participation is also expected in this kind of ensemble. Since there is no strict rule for adding tanlun decorations and other ornaments in the music of the Jiangnan sizhu yangqin school, when I played with the groups I, as usual, embellished the yangqin part as much as I could for the pieces I was familiar with. Once after I played a piece with one of the groups, I was told by a yangqin player in the group

22 In Shanghai, I played in the Guilin Park, Mid-Lake Pavilion in Yu Yuan Garden, and Golden Autumn Arts Troupe (jinqiu yishu tuan) on Hunan Road. In Canton, I joined the group called New Sushe (xin su she) which meets at the home of one of the musicians. And the group I visit in Honolulu is the Hawaii Cantonese Opera Association in Chinatown. In the last group, most singers and instrumentalists are Cantonese immigrants. They play and sing mainly Cantonese Music and Cantonese Operatic Song.
not to add too many tanlun decorations to the notes. His comments brought to mind that I had never seen or heard yangqin players in Jiangnan Sizhu playing dense ornaments hastily. In short, my overornamented interpretation with excessive use of tanlun technique did not conform to the Jiangnan Sizhu style.

The use of the tanlun technique differs in the Cantonese tradition. A large part of my involvement in the Cantonese yangqin school was from my visits to a Cantonese Opera club in Honolulu. During those musical gatherings, I usually sat beside the yangqin player, Kwok Bun, and observed his accompaniment to Cantonese Operatic Song. After a period of time, I started playing yangqin in the accompanying ensemble. Although I could follow the music and the singer, I found that my playing was different from Kwok’s. I could play the basic melody and some ornaments but my style was not close to his. I gradually found that the biggest difference between Kwok’s playing and my own was my minimal use of ornaments between phrases and between lyrics. I also noticed that in Kwok’s ornaments, the beaters seemed to skim over the strings. The notes were short, light, and without any accents. Technically speaking, the notes are likely played with the so-called “fishing” technique (Kong 2006) using two or three fingers, but not by moving the wrists and to strike the strings. In my understanding, the metaphor of fishing refers to holding the very end of the thin and flexible beaters, and using the thumb and index fingers as a pivot to lightly strike and move the beaters. In fact, this movement is similar to that of the tanlun technique. I believe that Kwok’s ornaments are

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23 See Note 22.
played with the *tanlun* technique. The difference is that, when playing *tanlun*, the beater, after reaching one course of strings, usually remains there, and the player lets it bounce continuously to produce a tremolo. In contrast, what Kwok did was to remain on the same course of strings briefly and then move smoothly to another. His wrists moved upward and downward slightly when striking the strings. As a result, several light, short, and accent-less ornaments were played, instead of a tremolo on a single pitch. I realize that the incompatibility of my playing resulted from the basic principles of the *yangqin* playing that I learned at conservatory. As Taiwanese *yangqin* musician Li Tingyao describes it, a requirement in today’s conservatory training is “Strike the strings determinedly; make the attacks lucid, clear, and rich in timbre; reinforce the independence of each hand” (2005:19). I was also trained to make the up-and-down movements of the wrists fast and lucid in order to give every note a clear articulation. This way of playing *yangqin* usually gives the *tanlun* note an accent, which is not desirable in the Cantonese *yangqin* school. Moreover, as *yangqin* is one of the leading instruments in Cantonese Opera and Cantonese Operatic Song, the short and light ornaments with the *tanlun* technique before a section or a phrase also function as pickup pitches for the singers.

In addition, the importance of the *tanlun* technique is also related to the beaters and the timbre produced in both genres. As mentioned earlier, the beaters used in the *Jiangnan sizhu yangqin* school are usually padded with some plastic in order to make a less-bright sound. In this case, the effect of the *tanlun* technique which features a dense tremolo and subtlety of timbre change cannot be clearly heard. In contrast, the bright
metallic sound created by the players of the Cantonese yangqin school with unpadded beaters makes the nuances more obvious. While padding the beaters with plastic is the common practice of most yangqin players today, it is not uncommon to see both the local amateur players in Cantonese communities and the conservatory-trained performers using unpadded beaters when playing Cantonese pieces. As the unpadded beaters give a metallic sound and make the tan/un technique more obvious, I suggest that the use of unpadded beaters in the Cantonese yangqin school reveals that the tan/un technique is indispensable to the style of this genre.

In both the Jiangnan sizhu yangqin school and the Cantonese yangqin school, the tan/un technique is used to embellish the melody. However, an occasional absence of the tan/un technique does not affect the style of the former as much as that of the latter. Using unpadded beaters to produce the brighter metallic timbre for Cantonese yangqin pieces suggests that the tan/un technique is supposed to be heard as a subtle, light, clear ornament. In this sense, compared to the Jiangnan sizhu yangqin school, the tan/un technique in the Cantonese tradition is not only used to decorate the melody, but also plays a role in its musical stylization.

TRADITIONAL YANGQIN SCHOOLS IN PROFESSIONAL MUSIC INSTITUTES

Along with many other traditional instruments, the yangqin has gone through a period of modernist reform since the early 1950s. Professional yangqin performance programs have been established in the recently-founded music conservatories, many of
them with the mission of producing professionally-trained virtuosic performers. Students in this kind of program are trained to be solo yangqin performers in a "scientific" (kexue) and "systematic" (xitong) way. Yangqin teachers at music institutes and other prominent performers need to compose exercises and solo pieces to serve this professional training, because, as an accompaniment to singing and as a member of the instrumental ensembles in traditional contexts, the yangqin did not have its own solo repertoire. Therefore, to establish a solo repertoire, musicians have been active in arranging or adapting folk tunes for the yangqin with some traditional performing techniques and musical vocabularies. However, seldom have regional-based musicians been involved in composing or arranging folk-tune-inspired compositions. Most influential yangqin music composers and arrangers in the 1950s and 1960s, for example, were not native to the cultures of the music they arranged. Many of them were fond of rearranging pieces of the Cantonese yangqin school. Since Cantonese Music occupied a large portion of the phonograph recordings produced throughout the first half of the twentieth century, I assume that the non-Cantonese yangqin arrangers learned the style of yangqin in Cantonese Music by listening to the recordings played by Cantonese musicians. Interestingly, their versions of Cantonese yangqin solo pieces are rather diverse: they usually maintain the main melodies, but provide different decorative notes and tanlun ornaments. Some of these versions, the bereft of the regional idiosyncrasies they claim to possess depart significantly from the original piece. A similar phenomenon also exists among the newly arranged solo pieces based on music of the other three traditional yangqin schools. In sum, the pieces of the traditional yangqin schools that have emerged in arrangements
during the past three to four decades have already amalgamated the heterogeneous musical vocabularies and performance practices of other schools as a result of the musical backgrounds and different interpretations of the arrangers in the mid-twentieth century.

The idea of four distinctive yangqin stylistic schools has gained much discursive currency in professional yangqin circles, especially during the past two decades. It is ambiguous whether each of these so-called “Four Major Schools” actually designates a “school” of solo yangqin music or merely refers to the yangqin music in the four regional instrumental and vocal genres. To the best of my knowledge, none of the yangqin musicians has clearly articulated an answer to this question. On the one hand, in their textual descriptions, they do not claim that these traditional schools are based on solo music (solos hardly ever having been played in traditional contexts); on the other hand, they use only solo rearrangements of traditional yangqin pieces as examples when introducing the Four Major Schools. Whether the Four Major Schools do or do not refer to the solo repertoire that arose since the mid-twentieth century, I suggest that incorporating “Four Major” into a designation both consolidates the imagined history of yangqin music, and at the same time provides a ground for the transformation of yangqin solo music. Prevalent among professional performers and music scholars alike, the concept of yangqin schools, however, has very limited application or relevance if we scrutinize their repertoires and performing practices in particular instances. In order to probe the concept of yangqin schools, in this section, I discuss the repertoire, performing techniques, musical style, representative musicians, and performance practice.
First, taking the Sichuan yangqin school as an example, I can find only three solo pieces in this yangqin school, only one of which is frequently played in professional circles. This situation is similar in the other three schools in that there is a small repertoire of yangqin solos and only a few pieces that are played professionally. Compared to the schools of other instruments, such as pipa and guzheng, the repertoire in each yangqin school may be too small to truly constitute a school.

Second, not all the performing techniques of the traditional contexts are used in the solo pieces of the four respective schools. Because some traditional performing techniques are not easy for outsiders to identify, and the adopters and arrangers may not have studied the traditions deeply, some of the regional performing techniques are absent in transmission in which the professional field, such as gulu yin ("tremolo sound") and langzhu ("waving beaters") in the Sichuan yangqin school. When musicians introduce gulu yin, they usually state that it is similar to the tanlun technique in terms of its sound effect (Dai 2006:93; Pang 2006:184). However, there is a big difference between the method of performing tanlun and that of gulu yin. When playing gulu yin, the player has to use the set of strings on the first bridge (nearest the player) as a pivot to support the beater. With a point on the body of the beater touching the strings, the thumb should press the beater down while the index, middle, and ring fingers push the beater upwards. This results in a continuous bouncing on the strings and produces a swift tremolo.

Langzhu, on the other hand, is the repetitive use of tanlun on one pitch.

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25 The three solo pieces of the Sichuan yangqin school are “General’s Command” (jiangjun ling), “To Liven Up the Stage” (naotai), and Nan Jing Gong. I have only heard “General’s Command” being played in the professional field.

26 There are at least ten pieces in the repertoire of each school of pipa music and guzheng music (see Yuan 1999[1987]:175-79; ibid:127-38).
Since my first yangqin lesson in 1995, I have learned only one piece from the repertoire of Sichuan yangqin school, “General’s Command” (jiangjun ling). Over the last twelve years, I have studied this piece with three different, celebrated performers;27 none of them were from Sichuan province and none, moreover, has attempted to explain or reference the composition in terms of any musical idiosyncrasies of the respective school. I have seen textual descriptions of the terms gulu yin and langzhu, but I have never learned to play these two techniques. In the most popular version of “General’s Command,” tanlun is actually used to substitute for the gulu yin technique.28 In contrast, the version I found with a Sichuan musician as the arranger uses gulu yin rather than tanlun technique (Pan 2006:140-41). During my interview with the prominent musician of Sichuan Yangqin narrative, Fu Bing, he introduced the characteristic performing techniques with demonstrations. After he demonstrated the use of the gulu yin technique and its variations in “General’s Command,” I told him I had never learned the technique even though I had played the piece before. Fu added that most yangqin teachers in conservatories and professional performers do not master the characteristic techniques of the Sichuan yangqin school. He also explained and demonstrated the technique of langzhu with its use in the piece entitled “To Liven Up the Stage” (naotai), another often-mentioned Sichuan yangqin solo piece. Although it is frequently mentioned when musicians discuss the Sichuan yangqin school, I had not seen or heard people playing this

27 They are Miss Yu Mei-lai in Hong Kong (1995-1998), and Miss Liu Yueming (1999-2001) and Mr. Xiang Zuhua (2000-2004) both in Beijing.
28 Generally, professional musicians use only the version arranged by Li Xiaoyuan and Xiang Zuhua based on the performance of Li Decai (1903-1982) (Minzu Yueqi Chuangtong Duzou Quxuan Ji Yangqin Zhuanji 1996 [1978]:15-17).
piece or using the *langzhu* technique until my interview with Fu (2006).\(^{29}\) In addition, from the textual description of the Sichuan *yangqin* school, I learned that its style is rough, loud, and dramatic (Xiang 1992:48; *Minzu yueqi chuangtong dazuou quxuan ji yangqin zhuanji* 1996 [1978]:III). During Fu’s demonstration, I found that it had an aural excitement and a hurly-burly mood that I had never experienced in performances or recordings of conservatory-trained *yangqin* players. Performing technique and musical style are two major criteria to distinguish regional genres. Regional-specific techniques characterize musical styles. Certainly, Fu’s use of regional-specific techniques intensified the distinctiveness of the Sichuan style. In some cases, in the other three schools of the *yangqin* tradition, the absence of some characteristic traditional performing techniques also diminishes the distinctiveness of their musical styles. In actual practice in contemporary professional circles, the Four Major Schools are not as different from each other as they are in textual description and in the *yangqin* musicians’ minds.

Third, when a genre or a school is formed, we can usually find its representative musicians and their transmission of the repertoire to a younger generation. Despite the fact that there are some resources about the iconic figures in each *yangqin* school, it is hard to find in-depth studies of them. In addition, when I was learning the repertoire of the Four Major Schools, my teachers seldom told me about the way the local musicians played the pieces. Listening to old recordings of representative musicians, I believe, was not part of the conservatory-learning process. Only a few of the pieces we learned were based on the renditions of local musicians; rather, most of them were versions arranged

\(^{29}\) Fu Bing, 2006. Interview, July 21. Hong Kong.
by instructors at music institutes or professional performers in state-run performing troupes. In a nutshell, the prominent musicians of the *yangqin* schools and their interpretations of the local genres are not important or influential among contemporary professional musicians.

Lastly, based on observation during my four-year undergraduate study in Beijing, I found that the traditional *yangqin* schools occupy a lower status among professionals. In 2000, when I was choosing pieces for the entrance examination at the China Conservatory together with my *yangqin* teacher, Xiang Zuhua, he mentioned that *yangqin* students had more flexibility than those of other musical instruments when selecting examination pieces because *yangqin* candidates are not required to include traditional pieces in their examination repertoire, while it is a requirement for candidates of the *pipa* and the *guzheng*. Instead, playing virtuosic, contemporary pieces as well as arrangements of pieces originally composed for Western instruments was the "standard" by which to become a professional *yangqin* musician.\(^\text{30}\) In my undergraduate training, most of the pieces I learned had been recently composed or were adaptations of works for Western instruments; only a few were from the repertoire of the Four Major Schools. The majority of the pieces we play today were composed around the 1980s. In most *yangqin* solo works written before the 1980s, the composers borrowed and wrote variations on a folk or a well-known tune featuring different *yangqin* performing techniques. An increasing number of through-composed solo pieces have emerged in the professional world since

\(^{30}\) For example Xiang Zuhua’s "Lin Chong Escaping at Night" (*Lin Chong yeben*) (1984), the *yangqin* piece adapted from Chen Gang’s "Sunshine on Taxkorgan" (1976), and the *yangqin* piece adapted from Pablo de Sarasate’s "Zigeunerweisen" (1878).
the late 1970s. Along with the reform of the instrument, this kind of piece is more technically demanding than older pieces. Some newly-invented performing techniques are applied in the compositions in order to explore the instrument's expressive quality (biaoxian li). Today, the post-1980 solo yangqin compositions and the pieces adopted from Western instruments dominate the professional stage and institutes.

In my first year, I practiced a Cantonese yangqin piece entitled “Hanging Curtain” (dao chui lian). It is categorized as a “grade-two” work in an anthology for the yangqin grade-examination, a nationwide musical examination system launched in the late 1990s that emulates The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music for Western instruments in the United Kingdom.\(^{31}\) When my teacher was not satisfied with my playing, he would say “you can’t even handle a grade-two piece well, what other pieces could I assign you?” In fact, I had played contemporary pieces at the level of grades seven and eight before. Neither he nor I could understand why I had so much difficulty playing this piece. A few years later, after I played more Cantonese yangqin music, I began to realize that, the major problem I had encountered involved the sense of style rather than performing technique.

Traditional music had been transmitted primarily through an oral tradition until Western musical practices were introduced to China in the late nineteenth century. Any mode of musical transmission is intimately related to the processes of musical change. In most orally transmitted music, melodic and rhythmic details are more susceptible to

\(^{31}\) In order to make the teaching and learning of Chinese instruments more systematic, the Society for Chinese National Instruments, borrowing the idea of a grading system of Western instruments in the West, grouped the solo pieces of the major Chinese instruments grade by grade, and set up graded examinations for non-conservatory-trained students. Each instrument has its own anthology which includes pieces from grade one to grade ten. The one I use is The Anthology of Chinese Dulcimer Pieces (vols 1-2) (Xiang 1999).
change than the overall musical style. In contrast, in written scores, musical styles are not maintained as adequately as melodies and rhythms. Because written scores dominate today’s yangqin pedagogy, we learn traditional yangqin repertoire from scores in which the musical styles are incompletely represented. We still need to rely on oral transmission to learn musical styles. Apart from face-to-face lessons, listening to old recordings is another way to learn the musical styles which are not transmitted through the scores.

As I was seldom encouraged to listen to old recordings when learning traditional yangqin music, did my yangqin teacher assume that I already knew the musical style? Did he think that the style was adequately represented on the music score? Did he assume that the musical style was easy to learn and I should learn it by myself? Or did he simply neglect the importance of musical style? Although I do not attempt to provide answers, the case I have presented above raises several culturally and musically relevant questions. My purpose here is to point out that the traditional yangqin repertoire and its musical styles are not considered important in today’s conservatory training.

Another experience with the piece, “Hanging Curtain,” illustrates the general attitude toward the traditional yangqin schools in the professional circle. Eventually, I had chosen “Hanging Curtain” for the final examination. On that day, in the waiting room, there was a piece of paper with students’ names and the titles of the pieces they were to play on the notice board. While I was waiting there, a classmate of mine who played the pipa stopped and looked at the notice board. She suddenly said “Huh? Who’s playing ‘Hanging Curtain’?” with a disdainful tone and facial expression. I answered, “That’s me!” She looked a little bit embarrassed and said nothing.
These two cases illustrate that in the professional field of Chinese instrumental performance (not only of yangqin), the traditional yangqin schools do not occupy a significant status. Similar to Witzleben’s observations about musicians’ attitude toward traditional Cantonese Music and its reception, traditional yangqin pieces “offer a less obvious challenge” to the performers and “less excitement” to the audience (1983:15). Among the yangqin repertoire, traditional pieces are often looked down upon when compared to modern or newly-composed virtuosic pieces. They are usually assigned to beginners or beginning grades. In this sense, awareness of stylistic details is often considered secondary to competency in technical difficulty; comprehension of styles gives way to virtuosic technical display. In formal occasions, such as entrance and final examinations at conservatories, solo recitals, competitions, and job interviews, traditional pieces from the Four Major Schools are rarely played because they are not technically demanding enough. Instead, professional musicians usually choose challenging contemporary solo pieces or pieces adopted from Western instrumental repertoire.32

Under the incessant demand for virtuosity, the term “technique” is defined narrowly to refer to the ability to create dramatic contrast – having good control in playing very fast and very slow, very loud and very soft – with high accuracy and clear articulation. This definition of technique is considered more important than stylistic interpretation. In this sense, the traditional yangqin repertoire, which is less technically challenging compared to the contemporary pieces, occupies a trivial role in professional circles.

32 Such as Xiang Zuhua’s “Lin Chong Escaping at Night” (Lin Chong yeben), Yang Qing’s “Seeking” (mi), the yangqin piece adopted from “Carmen Fantasy for Violin and Orchestra”, and “Zigeunerweisen”. 81
Make the Tradition!

"Inherit the tradition and make the innovation" has been frequently mentioned by *yangqin* musicians in the professional field, and it has seemingly become the notion of the future of *yangqin* music. *Yangqin* musicians have been looking for a grounding or foundation. Generally speaking, the ground or tradition they refer to is in the folk *yangqin* schools. By concluding that the tradition is constructed and rhetorical rather than actually practiced in the professional field, I argue that the very act of naming the four major *yangqin* schools is indeed a cultural consolidation wherein *yangqin* musicians intend to inscribe a history and tradition for the instrument.

**SUMMARY**

Since the establishment of *yangqin* programs at music conservatories in the early 1950s, the Central Conservatory of Music (Beijing), the China Conservatory of Music (Beijing), and the Shanghai Conservatory of Music (Shanghai) have played leading roles in the process of centralization and institutionalization of *yangqin* pedagogy. Today, an outcome of such intensive professionalization is the homogeneity of the instruments' construction and tuning, its performing practice, techniques, terminology, repertoire and pedagogy. Behind this contemporary, homogenized pan-conservatory-trained *yangqin* "school" (the so-called "Conservatory School" [xueyuan pai]), there still exist different

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33 See Note 2.
34 Zheng Baoheng is the first teacher who started giving *yangqin* lessons at the Central Conservatory of Music in 1952. In 1957, Su Ying and Wang Yifu started offering the first *yangqin* lessons at the Shenyang Conservatory of Music and the Xi'an Conservatory of Music respectively. One year later, Hong Shengmao and Huang Longlian first started teaching *yangqin* at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music and the Xinghai Conservatory of Music respectively (Ho 1997b:26).
degrees of regionalism in professional circles. For instance, some models of the *yangqin*
are considered regional. Even though model 402 is the most popular among professional
and amateur *yangqin* players throughout China, Kong Qingyan, a former performer of
*yangqin* in a Cantonese Opera troupe in Canton, still maintains that model 402 was from
Beijing. It is true that this model was designed and first made in Beijing, but it is
interesting to see how the concept of self/other is deep-rooted among musicians
regardless of the distribution and popularity of particular models. This sense of
regionalism still exists in the musicians’ minds despite the fact that the majority of
today’s *yangqin* players are sharing a “standardized,” “homogenized” model.
CHAPTER 4
THE TRAJECTORY OF THE “DEVELOPMENTS”

In order to understand the transformation of the yangqin and its music, it is interesting to study what the yangqin musicians think about the changes and their projections for the future. In this chapter, I discuss changes in the construction of the instrument, its music, performing techniques, and its musicians’ social status. My goal is to highlight musicians’ perceptions and their roles in the changes in the instrument.

FROM THE “PRIMITIVE” TO THE “ADVANCED”: THE YANGQIN REFORM SINCE THE 1950s

From the earliest two-bridge yangqin to today’s latest models, the instrument has undergone significant changes since the early 1950s. The two-bridge yangqin was the only model until the first “reformed” yangqin, the well-tempered grand yangqin, appeared in 1953 (Zheng 1959:39). The two-bridge yangqin remained a mainstream model until the 1960s when the modulatory yangqin gradually gained popularity. Since most of my interviewees were born before the 1960s, they are witnesses to, and practitioners of the instrument during the changes of the “reformed” yangqin.¹ Some have

¹ My interviewees born before the 1960s include Huang Jinpei (b. ca. 1918), Zhou Hui (b. ca. 1923), Xiang Zuhua (b. 1934), Fu Bing (b. ca. 1942), Gui Xili (b. ca. 1943), Kong Qingyan (b. 1945), Kwok Bun (b. ca. 1950), and Bian Yu (b. ca. 1950). Others include Xu Xuedong (b. ca. 1963), and Zhang Gaoxiang (b. ca. 1964).
played the two-bridge yangqin while some have been deeply involved in designing and creating the later yangqin models.

In general, I found that yangqin musicians were not interested in discussing the two-bridge Yangqin. They shared the view that it was a preliminary product with unstable tuning. Similar to what J. Lawrence Witzleben observed, most of my interviewees thought that the two-bridge yangqin was for amateurs or beginners, and was not designed for today's professional performance (1995:52). When talking about tuning the instrument, they would usually point out that its tuning mechanism and method are unscientific and unwise. According to yangqin musician Kwok Bun, after the player tunes one course of strings and stabilizes it by hitting the tuning nails with the tuning hammer, the other courses of strings would go out of tune as a result of the pounding. Tuning the early yangqin was a time-consuming task because the strings were very sensitive to tension and temperature. In addition, the pitch would change after being played for a while. Issues of cultural advancement or development aside, based on my experience with tuning and playing the two-bridge yangqin, I agree with the musicians that tuning is a problem in the early model.

Among my interviewees, only Yu Qiwei, a prominent gaohu (high-pitch bowed-fiddle) musician from Canton, who used to play the yangqin during his childhood, was interested in talking about the timbre of the two-bridge yangqin. He used the word “crispy” (“sucui 酥脆”) to describe its sound. I have not heard anyone else use this word to describe the timbre of any instrument.² From my understanding, I would translate it as

"delicate" and "bright," but "light." In sum, when discussing the two-bridge *yangqin*, contemporary musicians tend to highlight its technological shortcomings, overlooking its great versatility as a trans-regional musical instrument.

**The Yangqin-Making Industry**

Apart from the shortcomings of its tuning, one reason that the early, two-bridge *yangqin* were looked down upon "as little more than toys" (Witzleben 1995:52) relates to its physical construction. Compared to later models, two-bridge *yangqin* are structurally simpler. In the past, the dimensions of the instrument, as well as the number, tension, and thickness of the strings were not standardized. Unlike later *yangqin* models, which require stronger bodies to withstand the high tension of their additional, thicker strings, two-bridge *yangqin* are smaller and have fewer strings and they are strung at a lower tension. Due to its simpler structure prior to the mid-twentieth century, it was common for musicians to make their own *yangqin*. When Cantonese *yangqin* musician Kong Qingyan learned that I had ordered a two-bridge *yangqin* in summer 2006, he laughed and said, "Even I can make a two-bridge *yangqin* for you! It is so easy." However, I have not heard anyone say that they could make other models by themselves.

Since the beginning of the reform project of the instrument in the mid-twentieth century, the manufacturing process for the *yangqin* has become more and more complicated. *Yangqin*-making became an industry, in which machinery and technology play important roles. In the past several decades, *yangqin* musicians and makers have

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3 For example, according to Ho and Xu, musician from the Northeastern *yangqin* school, Zhao Xuedian (1885?-1959), was a good *yangqin* maker (1995:51). Another example comes from northern Shaanxi province, where some musicians used the copper (or bronze) from the telephone lines to make *yangqin* strings (Li and Huang 2003:61).
made meticulous calculations and conducted extensive research on different parts of the instrument, such as on string tension, total pressure on the soundboard, and the point on the string producing the best sound quality. Bian Yu, a yangqin designer and maker in Beijing, wishes to elevate yangqin-making to a profession. She stated that, from the old days until the present, most yangqin makers and designers have been craftsman, implying that there is no professional or systematic training to become a yangqin maker. After pointing out that most yangqin designers and makers are shortsighted and keen on solving only their immediate problems, she added that the “fundamental problems” (jiben wenti) which directly affect the quality of yangqin, such as the relationship between the pressure on the soundboard and its durability, and the stability of pitches are not yet solved. She stated that yangqin must be produced in a “scientific” (kexue) and “rational” (li zhi) way, and that the manufacture of yangqin should be as advanced as that of the piano.4 Like Bian, yangqin designer Gui Xili mentioned that the yangqin produced by the Yuehua Instrument Manufacturer are the best, because they have a huge machine, originally used in manufacture of pianos, to dry the wood for yangqin.5 My interview with another yangqin designer, Xiang Zuhua, echoes the beliefs of Bian and Gui, although he was referring to the manufacturing industry of the Hungarian concert cimbalom. Xiang said that yangqin production is far behind the making of Hungarian concert cimbalom. He hoped that yangqin-making could be as “scientific” and

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5 Gui Xili, 2006. Interview, June 15. Beijing, China. Gui is a professor of yangqin at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing. He has been designing new yangqin models with several instrument factories since the 1970s. The Yuehua Instrument Manufacturer is one of the leading manufactories of yangqin in Beijing.
“meticulous” (jingxi) as the manufacturing industry of the Hungarian concert cimbalom which produces only seven to eight units each year.6

During the interviews with Bian, Gui, and Xiang, I found that the yangqin designers and makers not only believe that the technology for making the piano and the Hungarian concert cimbalom should be applied to yangqin-making; they also set the piano and the Hungarian concert cimbalom factories as “scientific” targets for the yangqin manufacturing industry to emulate. The ideal of the “scientific” is frequently mentioned by yangqin musicians, but without elaboration on what “scientific” means in this context, or a clear strategy to achieve this goal. However, from my conversations with them, I conclude that what constitutes being “scientific” requires measuring and calculating the details of the instrument, and using precise data to justify and improve the design of all of its parts. Moreover, they intend to systematize and professionalize yangqin manufacture. Nowadays making yangqin is not a task that one can do at his or her home or workshop; it requires complex processes and machinery. Generally speaking, elevating yangqin production to a professional level with specialized training and scientific research is considered to be a crucial component in yangqin reform.

Perception of the Ideal Yangqin

Despite the fact that most of my informants have been playing model 402 (the most popular model over the past two decades) for more than ten years, they maintain that they are still not satisfied with various aspects of it. This prompted me to find what, according to their notions of development, would qualify as an ideal and perfect yangqin.

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I attempt to focus here on the musicians' opinions on the trend of yangqin development. From two bridges and a pitch range spanning two octaves to today's four bridges and range spanning four and a half octaves, the expansion of range is obvious. Unlike earlier reformed models, on which certain chromatic pitches are absent in some octaves, the newly reformed models include all the semitones in all octaves. When talking about his ideal yangqin, Xiang mentioned that it should contain five octaves (2006). Therefore, in the near future, the yangqin may contain only two less octaves than the piano.

In recent years, yangqin designers have been more interested in expanding the lower register than the higher register. Bryan Lai, a graduate student at the Central Conservatory of Music, majoring in yangqin performance, pointed out that yangqin players as a whole do not fully utilize the instrument's full range; they use only its lower register as a bass instrument in yangqin ensembles. His observation suggests that yangqin players do not use the latest models as solo instruments, but as supplementary instruments for the bass in an ensemble. If this is the case, it means that models with a wider range in the lower register are still not the mainstream in today's professional circles. If the latest models of yangqin mainly serve in yangqin ensembles rather than for solo pieces, then those models could have been designed for lower register playing only, and would not have needed a more than four-octave range. However, I found that musicians are eager to expand the yangqin's range, whether the added pitches are frequently used or not. When talking about changes to the yangqin in contemporary

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7 A group of yangqin played in unison or multi-parts, sometimes having a conductor, with or without accompaniment by other instruments.

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China, *yangqin* performer Xu Xuedong proudly stated, "Look! The zither *guzheng* took many years to add one string [pitch]. Our *yangqin* developed so fast" (2006), thus justifying that expanding the range is an indispensable stage in the reform of the *yangqin*.

**The Yangqin Family**

Echoing the point mentioned above about the common use of the latest models with their extended low register in *yangqin* ensembles, some musicians consider creating a *yangqin* family of instruments, paralleling the violin family in the European string quartet, as a way to develop the instrument. According to Gui and Xu, the *yangqin* family would consist of different models with high, middle, and low registers (Gui 2006; Xu X. 2006). Similar to the violin family, each member of the *yangqin* family would be responsible for a particular register, timbre, and musical vocabulary. In fact, members of a *yangqin* family were designed and introduced into professional circles at different times. Model 402 plays the middle register and forms the backbone of the ensemble. Although *yangqin* designers have been more interested in designing models with lower registers, and, for this reason, bass *yangqin* have been produced by various manufacturers since the late 1990s, I had not seen a bass *yangqin* until I attended a *yangqin* recital in Beijing in 2004.9 The treble *yangqin* has rarely been used, except in the *yangqin* ensembles.

Compared to model 402 and a bass *yangqin*, the treble *yangqin* has a narrower range.

During my fieldwork in summer 2006, I went to an instrument exposition in Canton.10 Among the *yangqin* models displayed, the majority were model 402. I interviewed Song

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9 The recital, entitled “Dream of Butterfly and Flying Bamboo: Li Lingling and Students Yangqin Concert,” was held in the Concert Hall at the Central Conservatory of Music, Beijing, on June 26, 2004.
10 The exposition was held from August 4 to 6 at the Guangzhou International Convention and Exhibition Center, Canton, China.
Congjia, the manager of an instrument manufacturing company that produces the treble *yangqin* (which was not displayed), who said that the treble *yangqin* is a special model, mainly sold to professional performers in *yangqin* ensembles, adding that if I wanted to buy one, I would have to place a special order because it is not a regular product and usually not in stock. My conversation with him reveals that the treble *yangqin* has only a small market. Unlike the individual instruments in the Western violin family,\(^{11}\) not all members of the *yangqin* family are utilized as solo instruments.

A number of possibilities arise from the idea of a *yangqin* family similar to the violin family that is supported by Gui and Xu. Although some models of the *yangqin* family would be for ensemble use only, Gui and Xu seemed to imply that the *yangqin* ensemble would be the major – or at least a new – direction of *yangqin* performance among professionals. As Song stated that the treble *yangqin* is aimed at professional performers for *yangqin* ensemble use, but not at amateurs or the commercial market, the attempt to build up a *yangqin* family may also result in a growing distinction between professional performers and amateurs or older-generation musicians.

**Becoming Hungarian Concert Cimbalom and Piano**

The idea of developing a *yangqin* family is also related to the timbre of today’s *yangqin*. Many *yangqin* musicians are not satisfied with the timbre of the current model.\(^{402}\) They consider the timbres in different registers to be uneven as the lower register buzzes and is thin, while the higher register is too dry, and not bright enough (Bian 2006; Gui 2006; Xu X. 2006). When asked what an ideal *yangqin* timbre would be, many

\(^{11}\) Every instrument in the violin family has its own solo repertoire although that of the viola has a smaller than those of the violin and the cello.
musicians favor that of the piano and the Hungarian concert *cimbalom*,\(^{12}\) especially in the lower register. On the earliest *yangqin*, there is no low register— the lowest pitch is d (used in *Jiangnan Sizhu* music). As part of the reform project, pitches in the lower register have been added. With the absence of lower pitches in early *yangqin* models, reformers need to mimic the lower timbres of other instruments when creating one for the *yangqin*. But why is the timbre of the piano and Hungarian concert *cimbalom* chosen as role models for the extension of the lower register?

Xiang stated that “We should adopt progressive culture and things. The Hungarian concert *cimbalom* is the most progressive [among the dulcimers in the world]” (2006). To answer my question of why *yangqin* musicians focus only on the Hungarian concert *cimbalom* and not dulcimers in other cultures, he explained with an example that the musicians of the dulcimers in the Middle East are close-minded (*fengbi*) in the sense that their dulcimers have not changed much. In contrast, dulcimers in Hungary are more advanced because musicians have made significant changes in them. His interpretation of the dulcimers in various cultures and their relationship to the *yangqin* implies that the degree of change is equivalent to the progressive advancement of an instrument—the more changes there are, the more advanced the instrument is. The Hungarian concert *cimbalom* has a huge volume, rich timbre, and a wide range. These features have been used as a benchmark for the contemporary reformed *yangqin*. If we look back on the history of *yangqin* reform, it is obvious that the instrument has undergone changes to

\(^{12}\) The Hungarian concert *cimbalom* is a revised version of the traditional Hungarian *cimbalom*, first manufactured in 1874. The features of this new product are an added damping pedal, increased chromatic range, and an internal cast iron frame (Gifford 2001:115).
increase volume, enrich timbre, and extend range. All these are significant to effective
stage performance. It seems that to become progressive also means to be able to occupy
the proscenium stage in front of a large audience.

In addition, from conversations with numerous yangqin musicians, I noticed a
hierarchy of dulcimers in different cultures. Those closer to European classical music are
considered more advanced and developed, hence desirable. The distance here is not
geographical but musical. Yangqin musicians place the Hungarian concert cimbalom at
the top of this hierarchy because of its close relationship to the piano in terms of timbre,
range, volume, and damping capacity. Apart from these physical aspects, yangqin
musicians regard the Hungarian concert cimbalom and its music as the most advanced
because of its close relationship with European classical music. Since Franz Liszt’s use of
a newly-reformed Hungarian concert cimbalom in his orchestra piece “Hungarian Battle
March” (“Ungarischer Sturmmarsch”) in 1875, unlike dulcimers in other cultures, the
Hungarian concert cimbalom has occasionally been included in compositions of
symphony orchestras. Since then, the Hungarian concert cimbalom has appeared as an
orchestral instrument in compositions written by classical music composers such as Igor
Stravinsky and Zoltán Kodály.13 The Hungarian concert cimbalom is perhaps the only
dulcimer among its siblings that has been consistently used in European classical music.
As a result, it is considered closer to European classical music than any other dulcimer in
the world.

13 Later, Igor Stravinsky included the cimbalom in his “Renard” (1916) and “Rag-time” (1918). It is
believed that Zoltán Kodály’s “Hary János” (1926) made the instrument more widely known outside
Eastern Europe (Kettlewell 2007).
Since the early twentieth century, musicians in China have started to embrace the evolutionary concept that European music is more advanced than Chinese traditional music. Accordingly, reforms of Chinese instruments have been influenced by the aesthetics of European music. The ideology of cultural evolution has been embedded in the mind of the majority of instrumentalists in Chinese music since the early twentieth century. They generally believe that European music is more advanced than most musical cultures in the world, including that of China. Moreover, they suggest that, Chinese music should “develop” (fazhan) in the direction of European music (Jones 1995:37-41; Wang Yuhe 2001 [1994]:61-68; I. Wong 2001:379-83). In the case of yangqin, as with the Hungarian concert cimbalom’s association with classical music, musicians tend to consider Western performance traits as the ultimate goal for the yangqin to “develop.” The musicians use the word “develop” (fazhan) rather than “change” (gaibian or bianhua), implying that there exists a concept of hierarchy or evolution in the changes of the instrument. Implicit is the understanding that the yangqin is changing for the better, and should not or may not revert to its earlier stages.

MUSICAL CHANGES

Traditional Pieces

As mentioned in Chapter 3, conservatory-trained professional musicians generally look down upon traditional yangqin music. They consider that the monophonic and heterophonic traditional pieces are easy to play. When recalling the memory of his yangqin teacher, Ren Huichu (1887-1952), a famous musician of Jiangnan Sizhu, Xiang
Zuhua stated that our speed is much faster than Ren’s recordings, and that the melodies we now play are more elaborated, proudly concluding that “We have made progress (jingbu)! And we should have something new from traditional music” (2006). The idea of progress here has more to do with virtuosity — today’s yangqin musicians are able to give more exciting interpretations by playing more notes at a faster speed.

Not only that traditional pieces are easy to play, yangqin musicians also regard their musical structure and texture as too simple. It is common to see musicians harmonizing the melodies and adding counterpoint in order to give a thicker texture and make the music sound more complex. The concept of form and structure can also be found in some traditional pieces arranged by yangqin musicians. Cantonese yangqin musician Tang Kaixuan’s version of the piece, “Rain Striking the Banana Leaves” (yuda bajiao), is a good example of harmonizing a traditional melody, adding counterpoint, and structuring the piece into several parts (in this case fast-slow-fast) (see Appendix B). Apart from solo pieces, I also saw professional musicians playing the yangqin with triadic harmony, contrapuntal melodies, and arpeggio-like passages in traditional ensembles such as Cantonese Music, and in accompanying traditional Sichuan vocal music. Sichuan yangqin musician Fu Bing said that he knows the melodies very well and feels free to add harmony and arpeggios during live performances of traditional Sichuan vocal music. He emphasized that, unlike the yangqin musicians of the older generation, as an institute-trained professional musician, he has studied European music and composition, which allows him to add harmonies to traditional music (2006).¹⁴

In fact, improvisation is a common practice in Chinese folk and traditional music. Unlike conservatory-trained musicians in post-1949 China, folk musicians have no serious training in European music and composition. Instead, composing is part of the folk music performance practice. Similar to many yangqin musicians, Fu overlooks the improvisational skill of folk musicians, and regards harmonizing traditional yangqin music within a Western framework as a better way to transmit traditional yangqin music.

In sum, in professional circles, combining traditional pieces with some European musical practices is a common way to interpret and transmit traditional yangqin music.

Apart from harmonizing the melodies, there are several ways of playing traditional pieces in today’s professional circle. Although many professional performers frequently incorporate European harmony into traditional yangqin music, the prominent Jiangnan Sizhu yangqin musician Zhou Hui disagrees with this way of interpreting the traditional pieces. Instead, he has adopted octave doubling from the Sichuan yangqin school into the fast section of the Jiangnan sizhu yangqin piece “Street Procession” (xingjie) (see Appendix C).15 This example shows that not only European musical elements, but also regional musical vocabularies and performing techniques are incorporated into other regional yangqin traditions.

Some traditional pieces are shortened during their adoption and transmission. For example, Zhou shortened the piece, “Street Procession,” from more than ten minutes to five minutes (Zhou 2006).16 By doing this, he believes that the effect is good (ibid). Here, the “good effect” mentioned implies that the newly arranged traditional yangqin piece is

16 I was not able to find out which parts are eliminated when comparing his version with other versions.
acceptable to general audiences. To bring traditional folk genres to nationwide stage performance, musicians sometimes feel a need to change traditional music to make it appeal to audiences who are not very familiar with that tradition. Amalgamating the regional yangqin traditions is a result of the cultural nationalization project since 1949. Similar to the case of the transverse flute dizi, yangqin musicians "are striving for national recognition" by "changing their compositional style and devising new [or in some cases, amalgamating regional] performing techniques in order to present themselves as modern, innovative, and people who do not 'stride on an old path'" (Lau 1991:185).

In transmitting traditional music to national audiences, yangqin musicians generally believe that the traditional yangqin pieces should not be played as they were played in traditional contexts. They maintain that playing the pieces in the traditional way is too simple and does not fit stage performance or the taste of today's audiences. In sum, the most common practices of transmitting traditional yangqin music in professional circles include rearranging traditional pieces within a European frame, sharing regional musical vocabularies, and adjusting the length of the pieces.

**Performing Techniques: Toward a Versatile Instrument**

As in many musical cultures, changes in performing techniques are inseparable from changes to the music itself. Performing techniques have changed along with the transformation of the instrument. Not surprisingly, performing technique has been one of the foci of the reform project, in the effort to make the yangqin a versatile instrument on national and international stages. Apart from the introduction of new performing
techniques, the standardization of names and symbols for the performing techniques became a goal among yangqin professionals during the 1970s and 1980s.

The 1920s: “Ten Performing Techniques”

Through his manuscript, Qinxue Xinbian (Introduction to the Study of the Yangqin) (1920), Cantonese musician Qiu Hechou (1880-1942) was the first yangqin musician to standardize the performing techniques of the instrument. He stated that there are ten types of performing techniques (zhufa) (19); he assigned specific symbols for each technique. In Qiu’s explanation of the “Ten Performing Techniques” (zhufa shidu or shida) and his application of them in the book, these “Ten Performing Techniques” indicate the order of hammering and the duration of notes; they differ from the meaning of performing techniques in today’s sense. Before the cipher notation system was widely adopted for yangqin music in the mid-twentieth century, most yangqin music was notated in the gongche system, in which the durations of the notes are only roughly indicated. The zhufa symbols on yangqin scores usually give the exact duration of every note. However, some zhufa symbols which carry rhythmic indications are redundant with already existing rhythmic markings on the scores.

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17 Original text: “箏琴竹法，共分十六，故名十打，每度竹法不同。” “There are in total ten kinds (shi du) of performing techniques of yangqin. ‘Ten kinds’ (shi du) is also called ‘ten beatings’ (shi da). They are all different from each other” (Qiu 1920:19). The word “zhufa,” used to refer to the performing techniques is made up of the characters “zhu” (bamboo) and “fa” (way, method, rule, or technique).

18 Shida includes “shun yi da” (play one 16th note), “shun er da” (play two 16th notes, the second an octave lower than the first), “shun san da” (play three 16th notes, the second an octave lower than the first, and the third the same as the first), “shun si da” (play four 16th notes, the second and fourth an octave lower than the first and third), “man yi da” (play one 8th note), “man er da” (play two 8th notes, the second an octave lower than the first), “man san da” (play three 8th notes, the second an octave lower than the first, and the third the same as the first), “man si da” (play four 8th notes, the second and fourth an octave lower than the first and third), “qi da” (double the note with an octave lower, played by both hands at the same time) and “mi da” (tremolo in octaves) (1920:19-25).

19 See Chapter 1, Note 8.
Despite that redundancy and inconsistency in the ten zhufa, Qiu’s standardization of performing techniques is significant in the notation of yangqin music. The concept of the “Ten Performing Techniques” was still being used until the late 1970s (Chen D. 1955; Chen J. 1958; Yue Si 1978). In his later work Zenke Qinxue Jinghua (Supplement to the Essence of Study on the Yangqin), Qiu increased the number of performing techniques to more than forty (1932:10,11). In his introduction, he stated that “The zhufa in Qinxue Xinbian are relatively simple in order to serve the beginners. In contrast, the zhufa in this book are denser. They are designed for more advanced players. However, the zhufa here are neither too dense nor too sparse” (1932:9-10). It is obvious that the use of “zhufa” here has more to do with the durations and densities of the notes than with the different ways of manipulating the beaters and other ways to make the strings sound. Similar to the “Ten Performing Techniques” in Qinxue Xinbian, the order of hammering is also indicated in zhufa in this book. In addition, some zhufa are symbols for general musical expression that are not specific to the yangqin, such as repeat signs and dynamic markings (1932:23-24). In short, it is interesting to note that, on the one hand, Qiu considered most musical markings on yangqin scores as zhufa; on the other hand, he standardized the names and symbols of ten frequently-used performing techniques and called them the “Ten Performing Techniques,” most of which indicate the durations of notes and some basic hammerings.

The Late 1950s: “Eight Great Performing Techniques”

As newly-composed yangqin pieces and the reformed models of yangqin were introduced to the professional circle from the early 1950s, musicians designed some new
performing techniques to enrich *yangqin* performance. Neither Qiu’s “Ten Performing Techniques” nor his forty-odd *zhufu* were sufficient to encompass all the emerging performing techniques. In the late 1950s, the prominent Northeastern *yangqin* musician Wang Yifu coined the “Eight Great Performing Techniques” (*bada jiqiao*) (Wang Z. 1983:20). These “Eight Great Performing Techniques” in fact number more than eight, and should be understood as eight major categories of performing techniques: “striking (*tan*), tremolo (*lun*), bouncing (*chan*), sliding (*hua*), damping and overtones (*dian*), plucking with the tails of beaters (*bo*), vibrato (*rou*), and finger plucking (*gou*)” (Wang Z. 1981b:11-44). He classified the techniques by how the sound is produced and what movements are involved.

The differences between Qiu’s “Ten Performing Techniques” and Wang’s “Eight Great Performing Techniques” are not only temporal but also regional. Among the “Eight Great Performing Techniques,” some are absent in the “Ten Performing Techniques.” Some of the new techniques found in “Eight Great Performing Techniques” were not derived originally from the basic *yangqin* performing movements, but were adopted from other instruments. For example, techniques in the category “finger plucking (*gou*)” were apparently adopted from the basic performing movement of the *guzheng*; in the category of “damping and overtones (*dian*),” the overtone techniques imitate those on the *guqin*. Regional differences can be found in the “Eight Great Performing Techniques” categories of “sliding (*hua*)” and “vibrato (*rou*),” which are also absent from Qiu’s “Ten Performing Techniques” and Cantonese *yangqin* music.
The "sliding (hua)" and "vibrato (rou)" techniques are two unique performing
techniques of the Northeastern yangqin tradition. Many active yangqin performers in the
mid-twentieth century were from this tradition. Apart from playing traditional
Northeastern yangqin pieces, they also arranged and composed new pieces. When Wang
classified performing techniques in the late 1950s, he included some local Northeastern
yangqin techniques which had been used in solo pieces composed after 1950. As a result,
his "Eight Great Performing Techniques" includes some regional techniques from the
Three Northeastern Provinces that are absent from Qiu's "Ten Performing Techniques,"
which is largely based on the yangqin tradition in the Guangdong area.

The 1980s: "New Ten Performing Techniques"

Based on Qiu's "Ten Performing Techniques" and Wang's "Eight Great
Performing Techniques," yangqin musician Xiang Zuhua proposed the "New Ten
Performing Techniques" for the instrument in the 1980s (1985:61). Again, not specific
techniques so much as categories, the ten are: "single hammering (danzhu), double
hammering (qizhu), tremolo (lunzhu), bouncing (chanzhu), changing the pitch of the
sustained sound by using a sliding-pitch ring (huamo), vibrato (rouxian), plucking with
the tails of beaters (boxian), finger plucking (zhuaxian), touching the strings (dianxian),
and ornaments (zhuangshi yin or huayin)" (1985:63-64). Like Wang, except in the last
category of "ornaments," Xiang classified the performing techniques based on how the
sound is produced. Some new techniques and combinations of two techniques can be
found in Xiang's "New Ten Performing Techniques." The category of "sliding" was an
emerging technique along with the invention of the sliding-pitch ring (huayin zhitao) in
the 1960s (see Appendix D). Prior to this invention, players could not deliberately alter
the pitch of a note after striking the strings. With the use of the sliding-pitch ring,
however, the pitch of the sustaining sound can be bent. The effect is similar to the
bending of pitches on the plucked-lute pipa (by pushing or pulling the strings) and on the
bowed-fiddle erhu (by sliding fingers on the strings). This example shows that, by
introducing new techniques into yangqin performance, musicians have sought to
incorporate the effects and timbres produced by other instruments.

Summary of Changes in Performing Techniques

From the “Ten Performing Techniques” to the “Eight Great Performing
Techniques” to the “New Ten Performing Techniques,” we witness evolutionary changes
in the conception of performing techniques (jifa) and zhuJa. In the first half of the
twentieth century, zhuJa mainly referred to the sequence of hammering and the duration
of notes. This shows that the proper way of hammering and the exact duration of each
note were more important than a large variety of timbres and sound effects. Later, in the
classification systems devised by Wang in the late 1950s and Xiang in the 1980s, the
emphasis shifted to variety in timbre and the physical motions to create them. Gradually,
the performing techniques or zhuJa came to mean not only the sequence of hammering,
but also more broadly to indicate players’ subtle movements for playing the yangqin.
Along with those changes, there was a trend to expand the performing techniques to
include those across regions and instruments. The “Ten Performing Techniques” and the

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20 The sliding-pitch ring was designed by yangqin musician Zheng Baoheng. Players wear the sliding-pitch
ring on the middle or ring finger of the left hand. After striking a course of strings, players press the strings
with the ring and change the pitch of the sustained sound by sliding the ring along the strings’ length.
later volume by Qiu were based only on the Cantonese yangqin, while the “Eight Great Performing Techniques” and the “New Ten Performing Techniques” include many regional specialties. Qiu’s books include the basic way of playing the yangqin while techniques that are borrowed from other instruments are subsumed into both the “Eight Great Performing Techniques” and the “New Ten Performing Techniques.”

In the process of adding performing techniques and standardizing their names and symbols, there was a tendency to minimize regional differences and an attempt to establish a pan-Chinese dulcimer school. Yangqin musicians want to adopt the performing techniques from different yangqin traditions to serve in new solo pieces. Techniques from different regional traditions are amalgamated in the performance of contemporary solo compositions. As the yangqin performer Xu Xuedong rightly points out, “In the future, no one can represent a yangqin school. We will only have a ‘pan-Chinese dulcimer system’ (Zhonghua yangqin tixi)” (Xu X. 2006). Echoing his viewpoint, I argue that yangqin musicians have been equipped with performing techniques from various regional traditions as well as from other instruments to become a versatile instrument with the capacity for playing different kinds of music and producing a wide range of effects.

**Inheriting Tradition on the Versatile Yangqin**

I now examine the changes of interpreting traditional yangqin music by comparing a slow section of “Zhaojun’s Resentment” (Zhaojun yuan), a piece shared by many instruments in Cantonese Music. The first version is from the Zenke Qinxue Jinghua (Supplement to the Essence of Study on the Yangqin) (1932), one of the earliest
surviving yangqin manuscripts. This version was specifically arranged for yangqin accompaniment to a Cantonese Operatic Song with lyrics, notated in the gongche system\textsuperscript{21} with additional hammering and detailed duration indications. I include both that gongche version and a transnotation to the staff (see Appendices E and F). The second version is one I transcribed from a recording of a yangqin solo played by a celebrated Cantonese yangqin performer, Zhao Lili (see Appendix G). The compact disc does not indicate the year of recording or release; but it was probably produced in the late 1980s or early 1990s.\textsuperscript{22} The third version is a transnotation from cipher notation to staff notation of a yangqin solo arranged by Xiang Zuhua, a professor of yangqin at the China Conservatory. It is one of the most commonly used pedagogical versions in music conservatory training (Appendix H). By comparing the slow section of these three versions, I illustrate how yangqin traditional music is transmitted in a new way in terms of musical vocabulary and performing techniques.

“Zhaojun’s Resentment” is an anonymous ancient tune in the Cantonese instrumental music tradition. Since the early twentieth century, it has been frequently played by Cantonese Music ensembles and also as a solo piece played by the yangqin as well as the gaohu. Its meter is 4/4 (“man san ding ban” [one initial and three subsequent beats]), and, depending on the rendition, the piece may consist of either two (slow-fast) or three (slow-fast-faster) sections. It is in the yifan mode, a characteristic Cantonese mode featuring slightly flattened B and a slightly sharpened F.

\textsuperscript{21} See Chapter 1, Note 8.
\textsuperscript{22} My assumption is based on two things: I bought this disc, “The Best of Chinese Classics, Volume 6 Yangqin,” in about 1994; Zhao Lili is currently in her forties or early fifties and was active in Canton in the late 1980s and 1990s.
Like many other versions arranged or notated by Cantonese musicians, the first version is notated in a pentatonic mode, *zhengxian* (in the key of C major). In books published by the *yangqin* teachers at music conservatories, this piece is usually notated in the key of B-flat major (Xiang 2000:142-44; Ding 2003:83-85; Gui 2003:113-14). This probably results from the fact that the *yifan* mode has been commonly misunderstood by non-Cantonese musicians as the equivalent of the key of B-flat major. In the second version, the notes B-flat and F in the commercial recording are tuned almost to well-temperament; therefore I notated the music in the key of B-flat major instead of C major with lowered B. Xiang’s version, the third version, is notated in the key of B-flat major. When I was learning the piece with him, I played it with well-tempered tuning in the key of B-flat major without any pitch adjustment to accommodate the *yifan* mode.

Comparing the three versions, I find that the first version differs most from the other two, not only in mode but also in melodic configuration. The first version has a higher density of notes and more detailed hammerings. The performer decorates the melody by alternating notes between higher and lower octaves. The entire slow section is dominated by the basic string-striking techniques plus short tremolos (called "gunzhu" in Qiu’s books.

In Zhao’s version, apart from the basic string-striking techniques and short tremolos (*tanlun*), long tremolos (called “*lunyin*”) and octave doubling (called “*shuang yin*” that usually doubles the note an octave lower) are frequently found. There are

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23 The aural effect of the emphasis on the lowered B in *yifan* mode produces an illusion that the tune is played or sung in the key of B-flat major.
24 See Chapter 3, section on “*tanlun*.”
25 See Chapter 3, Note 14.
several places where the performer plays with rhythmic freedom.\textsuperscript{26} A short counter
melodic phrase is added in Measure 22.

Xiang’s version, in addition to the techniques of basic striking, short tremolos,
long tremolos, and octave doubling, also contains newly-adopted techniques from other
instruments. The most obvious being the use of the sliding-pitch ring (marked with $\bigcirc$ or $\bigtriangledown$) throughout an entire section. According to Xiang, the pitch-bending produced
by the sliding-pitch ring is used to imitate that of the gaohu. The succeeding ornamented
notes in Measures 11 and 21 imitate the finer-plucking technique on the guzheng. The
vibrato (rouxian) technique is applied in Measure 21. This technique, originally absent in
the Cantonese yangqin tradition, is commonly used in the Northeastern yangqin school as
well as on the guzheng. The overtone technique (fanyin), an uncommon yangqin
technique, gives a guqin-like timbre to end the section in Measures 28 and 29. A
contrapuntal style is employed from Measures 23 to 27 and in Measure 41.

Through comparing the three versions, I find that the musical vocabulary and
performing techniques have been enriched over time, from region to region, and from
other instruments to yangqin. The first and the second versions illustrate differences in
interpretation of the piece in the 1930s and in the past twenty years. A larger variety of
musical vocabulary and performing techniques have been added to the traditional music
repertoire by recent Cantonese yangqin musicians. Compared to alternation of lower
octave notes in the first version, the embellishing notes in the second version makes the
melodic line smoother and sound more like an instrumental piece rather than an

\textsuperscript{26} Such as Measures 9, 23, 34, 38, and 43 to 46.
accompaniment to the vocal part. The third version exhibits adoption of performing techniques from other regions to a *yangqin* tradition – in this case, the vibrato technique from the Northeastern *yangqin* school to the Cantonese *yangqin* school. A standard solo piece in nationwide conservatories, it also contains various performing techniques that are borrowed from other Chinese instruments. To summarize, in the process of transmitting traditional *yangqin* music, musicians intend to present *yangqin* as a versatile instrument that is capable of producing the effects of other instruments.

**CHANGES AND EXCHANGES: TOWARD A COSMOPOLITAN INSTRUMENT**

During the twentieth century, the role of the *yangqin* has changed from its traditional role as accompaniment to vocal genres and as participant in instrumental ensemble genres in various regional traditions to that of a major solo instrument since the establishment of *yangqin* performance programs at music conservatories in the early 1950s. Today, a large amount of *yangqin* solo music is available to beginners, amateurs, and professional performers. There is no doubt that the *yangqin* is now being primarily considered as a solo instrument. As a result, solo pieces are standard for *yangqin* teaching and performing while numerous compositions for *yangqin* duets, ensembles, chamber music, and concertos have also been introduced since 1950.

**Yangqin Concertos and other Compositions for Yangqin and Orchestra**

After the establishment of performance programs in Chinese instruments at conservatories in the early 1950s, many musicians thought that, as solo instruments, the Chinese instruments ought to be played with virtuosity comparable to that of instrumental
music in nineteenth-century European. Musicians of traditional Chinese instruments at Chinese conservatories and professional performing troupes believed that writing technically demanding pieces with orchestral accompaniment was indispensable to bringing Chinese instruments beyond their traditional folk cultures and validate them as solo instruments for the concert stage. This belief led to concerto compositions for many Chinese instruments, although the number of compositions varies by instruments.

Today, the *yangqin* has its own concerto repertoire. According to *yangqin* musician Zheng Baoheng, the first *yangqin* concerto, entitled “Fenhe River” (*Fenhe changxiang qu*), was composed in the 1950s (1995:111). Zheng also named several *yangqin* concertos and some other compositions for *yangqin* and orchestra (either European symphony orchestra or modern Chinese orchestra). Like “Fenhe River,” the pieces he cited have rarely been mentioned or played in professional circles at least in the past two decades.

During my study in Beijing, I did not learn any *yangqin* concerto or composition for *yangqin* and orchestra except the first movement of the *yangqin* concerto entitled “Tone Poem of the Taiwan Strait” (*haixia yinshi*) (1981) (see Appendix I). My *yangqin* teacher, Xiang Zuhua, is the composer of the piece. Interestingly, he did not teach me the second or third movements, and I have never heard of anyone learning or performing the entire concerto. In contrast, the first movement is frequently played by conservatory students and professional performers. It is usually considered a separate work rather than a movement from a concerto. In terms of texture, it sounds like an ordinary solo piece because the *yangqin* dominates throughout the whole work. The principal melody is
played almost consistently by the *yangqin* while the orchestral instruments, at least as reduced to the piano score, provide only harmonic accompaniment, a few counter melodies, and some interludes. In contrast to concertos in European classical tradition, I could discern no thematic interplay or other significant interaction between the solo and orchestral parts. Indeed, it is not uncommon to see this kind of composition played without orchestral or even piano accompaniment; for example, almost all Xiang Zuhua’s students learn the first movement of “Tone Poem of the Taiwan Strait” during their undergraduate studies, but were seldom asked to play it with a piano accompanist during the lessons. It is usually not performed and known as a *yangqin* concerto (*yangqin xiezouqu*), but as a composition for *yangqin* solo and piano accompaniment (*yangqin yu gangqin*).

Apart from the concertos and the pieces for *yangqin* and orchestra composed by Chinese musicians, *yangqin* performers are also fond of playing large-scale pieces written for foreign dulcimers, especially the Hungarian concert *cimbalom* and other dulcimers of Eastern Europe. For example, Bryan Lai played several pieces, which were originally written for various dulcimers of Eastern Europe, in his *yangqin* recital featuring the music of Eastern Europe. In the recital, he used the newly-invented Chinese grand concert *yangqin*, which imitated the design of the Hungarian concert *cimbalom* in terms of timbre and physical appearance. In several pieces, he also used the beaters for the Hungarian concert *cimbalom*. When I asked him how he learned the pieces – some of which were

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27 In his *yangqin* recital entitled “Impressions of Eastern Europe” (July 3, 2004), Bryan Lai played “Concerto for Cimbalom” (composed by the Hungarian composer György Ránski), “Concerto Variations” (composed by the Moldovan composer Vasile Crăciun), “Fairy Tale Suite” (composed by the Czech composer Stephen Zilka) and so on.
China or world premieres – he replied that, in the absence of any audio sources, he taught himself by reading scores. Similar to playing Chinese traditional yangqin pieces, musical styles of foreign dulcimer pieces are not considered as important as mastering the difficult techniques and playing all the notes printed in the score. The real difference is that the compositions for foreign dulcimers are generally more demanding than the pieces composed for the yangqin. Musicians who can play this kind of pieces would not be considered amateurs or beginners.

Moreover, yangqin performers play these pieces from other cultures not only to display their virtuosic techniques, but also to show that the yangqin is a cosmopolitan instrument. Although foreign musics are also adapted for other Chinese instruments, the yangqin recitals of Bryan Lai and later of Song Bing who gave a recital of European music, with foreign music as the theme of the entire concert was rare in professional Chinese instrumental circles. Foreign music occupies a significant place in the yangqin repertoire of the past two or three decades. It is common to see yangqin musicians including pieces adapted from foreign musics in their collections of yangqin pieces for both beginners and advanced players (Zhang Z. 1993[1988]; Liu Y. 1997; Qian 2004; Zhang X. 2004). In attempt to present the yangqin as a cosmopolitan instrument, musician Xiang Zuhua even has a category of “foreign pieces” in his collected works, A Collection of Xiang Xuhua’s Yangqin Music (2000).

In short, yangqin concertos as well as other pieces for the yangqin and orchestra are composed, on the one hand, for the yangqin to shed its traditional role as an
accompanying instrument, and, on the other hand, to validate the *yangqin* as a solo, modern, versatile, and cosmopolitan instrument.

**Yangqin Ensembles**

Foreign pieces are also frequently played by the *yangqin* ensembles. Performances by *yangqin* ensembles began to appear in the 1950s, featuring a group of *yangqin* playing in unison or in octaves in stage performances (Zheng 1995: 109-110). In the 1950s, Zheng Baoheng, the first *yangqin* conservatory-based teacher, created “*yangqin* chamber music” (*yangqin shinei yue*). The term “*yangqin* chamber music” refers to two kinds of instrumental combinations. The first type is comprised of the *yangqin* and several other Chinese instruments, and is similar to the traditional *sizhu* (“silk and bamboo” music) ensemble but smaller in size. European triadic harmony is commonly employed in composing or arranging pieces for this type of *yangqin* chamber ensemble.

The second type, which is the focus of this section, is *yangqin* ensemble, which contains two, three, or four parts, all played by the *yangqin*. In general, pieces for this ensemble type were newly composed in homophonic texture, one part playing the main melody, and the other parts functioning as accompaniment. Formerly, this kind of *yangqin* chamber music was only occasionally performed in recitals; however, in recent years, it has become more widespread, at least at music conservatories in Beijing.²⁸ Many pieces in this kind of performance have been adopted or arranged from European

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²⁸ The *yangqin* ensemble seems more popular in Taiwan than in mainland China. The *yangqin* band, “Taiwan Dulcimer Orchestra,” performs frequently in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and mainland China, since its establishment in 2002 (Taiwan Dulcimer Orchestra 2007).
classical music, non-Chinese folk tunes, and other well-known pieces. Contrary to the early yangqin ensemble compositions, which usually featured a primary melody part and a subordinate accompaniment, today’s yangqin chamber music compositions normally include several equally important parts. Also, the texture of today’s ensemble music is richer than previously; all parts contributing more than simply accompanying the main melody. Another difference is the use of several models of the yangqin family. As mentioned above, yangqin musicians have been keen on establishing roles for the yangqin family, with high-, middle-, and low-pitched members with consistent and harmonious timbre. The new models of the yangqin family were aimed at serving the yangqin ensemble. Although the market for the treble and bass models is basically limited to professional performers, yangqin musicians hope to make the performance format more popular, and even regarded it as a major new direction for yangqin music. By making the yangqin a sophisticated instrument which can play accompaniment, solos, concertos, and yangqin ensemble pieces, musicians have attempted to enlarge and strengthen the development of a pan-Chinese dulcimer line, thus distinguishing the current profession from yangqin performance of the past.

Newly-designed beaters have been made for different timbres in yangqin chamber music. Bamboo is the traditional material used for beaters. However, in recent years, beater maker Zhang Shicheng and yangqin professor Li Lingling have tried using different materials, such as metal and silicone, especially for the beater heads, in order to

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29 For example, the first movement of Antonio Vivaldi’s concerto “The Four Seasons – Spring” (1725), or Aram Khachaturian’s “Sabre Dance” (1942).
30 Both Zhang Gaoxiang and Xu Xuedong, two leading yangqin performers, believe that the future of yangqin music should lie in the formation and consolidation of the yangqin ensemble (Zhang G. 2006; Xu X. 2006).
produce timbres that are distinctive from the ones made by the ordinary bamboo beaters. Apart from different beater materials, I also found that beaters for dulcimers from other cultures are sometimes used in some pieces arranged for the *yangqin* ensemble.\(^{31}\) In this sense, in addition to redesigning the *yangqin* into an instrument capable of playing a wide range of Chinese music, the adaptation of foreign pieces is an attempt to redefine the *yangqin* as a cosmopolitan musical instrument. Making *yangqin* performance across national boundaries echoes the ideology of establishing the “pan-Chinese dulcimer system” among the dulcimer cultures around the world.

To validate the “pan-Chinese dulcimer system,” various changes on the *yangqin* and its music have been undertaken. In order to elevate the *yangqin* to a visually and aurally sophisticated instrument, *yangqin*-making needs to be standardized, industrialized, “scientificized,” and professionalized. The manufacturing industry of the *yangqin*, narrowly speaking, needs to imitate the process of those of the piano and Hungarian concert cimbalom, as well as the concept of the violin family. To make traditional *yangqin* music more aesthetically appealing to the national concert-going audiences, musicians have tried increasing the tempo, shortening the pieces, enriching the textures and sonic complexity by adding Western harmony and/or counterpoint, and incorporating performing techniques of other instruments. While inheriting traditional music, musicians have also explored the potential of the instrument. To qualify *yangqin* as a versatile, solo instrument, musicians find it necessary to construct its concert repertoire. Much similar to that of the Four Major Schools, the large-scale *yangqin* concertos and

\(^{31}\) For example, the audiovisual recording of the all-*yangqin* ensemble playing first movement of Antonio Vivaldi’s concerto “The Four Seasons—Spring” (“Dream of Butterfly and Flying Bamboo”).
compositions for *yangqin* and the orchestra are rhetorical rather than musically and practically convincing. Furthermore, in order to claim a “pan-Chinese dulcimer system,” *yangqin* musicians are also eager to make themselves and the instrument cosmopolitan by embracing other cultures and incorporating them into the *yangqin* and its music. In order to examine the cultural implications behind musicians’ eagerness to produce a cosmopolitan dulcimer, I will discuss musicians’ social identity, giving special attention to ethnographic data I collected in my fieldwork.

**FOLK MUSICIANS VS INDIVIDUAL “EXPERTS”: IDENTITIES AND SOCIAL STATUS AMONG MUSICIANS**

**Professionalism and Amateurism in Traditional Chinese Society**

As noted by scholars of Chinese music such as Liang Mingyue (1985:19-20), Frederick Lau (1991:39-50), and J. Lawrence Witzleben (1995:30), in the past, “professional musicians” usually referred to people who played music for a living and were generally regarded as members of the lower-class and not highly regarded in society. In contrast, people of the middle-class and the elite, who played music as entertainment, were considered to be amateur musicians, usually distanced themselves from association with these humble professional musicians; they considered their own musical activities to be manifestations of refinement. On the whole, the difference between professional musicians and amateurs depended on whether the musicians made their living by playing music.
Professionalism and Amateurism since the Mid-Twentieth Century

In contrast to the distinction in the past, since the mid-twentieth century, one’s identification as a professional or amateur musician is closely related to the institutions in China since the mid-twentieth century. Professional musicians usually receive serious training at music institutes (including music conservatories and the music programs in institutions of higher education), and/or work in state-run performing troupes or music institutes. Musicians with no serious institutional training and who are not working in state-run professional organizations are generally called amateurs, regardless of their artistic abilities or skills.

Under such labels, the majority of my informants are professional musicians. Of those under sixty years of age, most are the conservatory graduates. Most of my older informants, those over age sixty, did not attend music institutes. Generally, this latter group learned how to play the yangqin from folk musicians (or folk artists, “minjian yiren”) before the establishment of yangqin performance programs at music institutes in the early 1950s. They later became prominent yangqin performers and were appointed to jobs at conservatories or with performing troupes in the 1950s and the 1960s. They were the first generation of teachers at conservatories and performers in professional performing troupes. In other words, they are the bridge between folk musicians and the institutions.

Musicians of this generation experienced the transition from folk tradition to systematic institutionalization. It was prestigious for a yangqin player to be appointed to

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32 They are Xu Xuedong, Zhang Gaoxiang, Xiong Junjie, and Bryan Lai.
33 Huang Jinpei, Zhou Hui, Xiang Zuhua, and Gui Xili.
an institutionalized unit during the 1950s and 1960s. Through performing, composing, publishing, standardizing terms and symbols, and creating a “systematic” and “scientific” pedagogy, they not only contributed to making the yangqin into a solo instrument on a nationwide scale but, more importantly, also showed that they were different from the minjian yiren.

The Historical “Absence” of Yangqin Musicians

In trying to understand how the yangqin and its music were played in the early twentieth century, I have looked at documents written by this “transition generation” of yangqin musicians and have also interviewed them. Unfortunately, there are only brief biographies of a small number of folk yangqin musicians in existence. In contrast to the more in-depth studies on performers of other instruments, I could not find any on individual yangqin musicians. From this, I concluded that yangqin musicians in the most recent decades have not been interested in writing about their yangqin teachers and their own learning processes. As a result, I tried to gain an understanding of the musicians in the older generations by interviewing informants whose teachers were folk musicians.

Most of my informants did not seem interested in talking about their teachers although they did not refuse to answer my questions. Among my interviewees, three musicians, Xiang Zuhua (b. 1934), Zhou Hui (b. ca. 1923), and Huang Jinpei (b. ca. 1918), started learning yangqin with family members during their childhoods. 34 None shared the details of their learning process.

34 Xiang 2006; Zhou 2006; Huang 2006.
Xiang Zuhua did not mention any of his *yangqin* teachers except Ren Huichu (1887-1952), who was a famous *Jiangnan Sizhu* musician from Jiangsu province. During my five years of studying *yangqin* with Xiang and in my summer 2006 interview with him, he was visibly proud every time he mentioned that he was Ren’s student. He usually added that Ren was the son-in-law of Li Hongzhang (1823-1901), a famous general of the late Qing dynasty (1644-1912). In the brief biography of Ren, Xiang writes that Ren was from the official’s family and was a member of the elite classes, and that he was skilled in both literature and folk music (1992:44). I surmise that Xiang attempted to raise the social status of *yangqin* musicians (including that of both Ren and himself) by emphasizing that Ren had not been born into a humble family, like ordinary professional musicians of his time. In addition, he occasionally mentioned his wish to establish a “Xiang’s *Yangqin School*” (*Xiangshi yangqin xuepai*), featuring the lineage starting from him, his compositions, and theories. By highlighting his teacher’s literary knowledge as well as intellect and his own ideology in the art of *yangqin* performance, I found that Xiang has attempted to elevate *yangqin* (or at least the *Jiangnan sizhu yangqin* school) from a folk tradition to a high art or an elite culture.

Like Xiang, Cantonese musician Huang Jinpei did not talk about his *yangqin* teachers in my interviews. He briefly mentioned that he learned *yangqin* with his older brother Huang Jinbo. Although I did not ask, he added that he studied the *pipa* with Wei Zhongle (1908-1998) and the *erhu* with Lu Xiutang (1911-1966), two important figures on their respective instruments and in the music history of modern China. In fact, Huang
is a famous Cantonese musician who plays a variety of instruments. His initiative in telling me of his famous pipa and erhu teachers rather than directly answering my question made me wonder why yangqin musicians of his generation are not eager to talk about their yangqin teachers. Was it common that musicians of the older generation started learning their instruments informally? Was it that they might not have seriously studied the instruments with particular teachers? Did Huang’s specific mention of his pipa and erhu teachers indicate that there were no comparably significant figures among yangqin musicians in the old days, who are as well-known and influential as the famous musicians of other instruments?

Despite the fact that both Wei Zhongle and Lu Xiutang were folk musicians or folk artists ("minjian yiren"), they gradually gained fame and respect since the 1930s. People usually refer to them as musicians ("yinyue jia"), instrumentalists ("yanzou jia"), or music educators ("yinyue jiaoyu jia"). In contrast to the designation “minjian yiren,” the character “jia” in the titles for the important figures of Chinese music conveys the image of an expert with professional knowledge and a higher social status. Indeed, there is no standard by which to determine whether one is a minjian yiren or a yinyue jia. As I observed, the better known a musician is, the higher the probability of his being called a yinyue jia. Among the yangqin musicians prior to 1950, there are no significant figures as well-known as those of the erhu, pipa, and dizi. In the mind of today’s yangqin

35 As far as I know, he plays the yangqin, pipa, erhu, and qingqin (three-string plucked-lute, popular in Cantonese music and Chaozhou music).
36 The famous musicians of the erhu are Liu Tianhua (1895-1932) and Abing (1893-1950), of the pipa are Wei Zhongle (1908-1998), Li Tingsong (1906-1976), and of the dizi are Lu Chun1ing (b. 1921) and Feng Zicun (1904-1987).
musicians, most *yangqin* musicians in the first half of the twentieth century are considered "*minjian yiren.*"

**"Minjian": A Negative Symbol**

The word "*minjian*" has a broader meaning in the discourse of Chinese music compared to its use in other fields. It literally means "among the people," which can be understood as "folk." Based on interviews during my fieldwork, I found that "*minjian*" also has negative connotations, including primitive, rough, unscientific, inartistic, uneducated, and low status. For example, discussing the damping pedal on modern *yangqin*, I was told that "it was too 'minjian' to use the hand to damp the sustained sound" (Xu X. 2006). The use of "*minjian*" here implies that the design of the earlier *yangqin*, which had no damping pedal, was primitive and required coarse movements in stage performance. Another example is the meaning of "*minjian*" in the term "*minjian yiren.*" In this context, the word "*minjian*" refers to the inferior status of the older generation musicians ingrained in musicians' minds today. Contemporary musicians attempt to distance themselves from the "*minjian yiren.*" When talking about his improvisational accompaniment in a concert, Fu Bing emphasized that he is a composer as well as a *yangqin* performer, and that the professional training he received allows him to improvise in live performance. As mentioned previously, improvisation is in fact a traditional practice in performing Chinese music, the conceptual distinction between composing and performing, which is so well established in the classical European music traditions, is not clear in the traditional context in China. What Fu does in live performance is actually similar to what performers did in the past. Fu did not
acknowledge that; instead, he stressed that today’s musicians like him are different from musicians in the old days. He added that, unlike the minjian yiren who could only perform, today’s yangqin musicians compose, reform the instrument, engage in research, and publish (Fu 2006). He implied that the minjian yiren in the past had no professional training and were not educated. They were not qualified as individual experts (“jia”): “yinyue jia” (musicians), “zuoqu jia” (composers), and “gaige jia” (reformers). The example of Fu further suggests that today’s yangqin musicians are not interested in talking about older generation musicians because they avoid associating themselves with the “minjian yiren” of the old days, who were generally lower-class people and looked down upon in society.

THE RESULTANT DICHOTOMY OF “MINJIAN” MUSICIAN AND “JIA” MUSICIAN

Since the institutionalization of Chinese instrumental performance in the early 1950s, musicians have recognized the distinction between professional and amateur in contemporary China: professional musicians of traditional Chinese instruments being equivalent to conservatory graduates while amateurs are musicians who have not received serious training at music institutes. Through my research, I found another dichotomy that has been of especially relevant to yangqin musicians, the one between the minjian yiren musicians and the “jia” musicians. Minjian yiren generally refers to yangqin musicians prior to the mid-twentieth century who were considered lower-class people and who made their living through performance, whereas the term “jia”
musicians” refers to those of the yangqin musicians who, since the mid-twentieth century, are associated with academic institutions and state-run performing troupes. To qualify as a “jia” musician, performing alone is not enough. “Jia” musicians have to be able to compose or arrange yangqin music, to write about the yangqin and its music, or to design new models of the instrument. Despite the fact that some musicians active in the mid-twentieth century did not have the chance to receive systematic conservatory training, by participating in writing new yangqin music, engaging in research on the yangqin and its music, or through reforming the instrument, they became “jia” musical artists and distinguished themselves from the minjian yiren musicians.
“Musical instruments are formed, structured, and carved out of personal and social experiences as much as they are built up from a great variety of natural and synthetic materials. They exist at an intersection of material, social, and cultural worlds where they are as much constructed and fashioned by the force of minds, cultures, societies, and histories as axes, saws, drills, chisels, machines, and the ecology of wood.”


If musical instruments are socially and culturally produced, then they are also important locations where changes in ideology and human ideas are implicated. Based on the data I have gathered for this study including my own experience as a student and performer of *yangqin* music, it seems clear that the main agents of the changes in both the *yangqin* as instrument and its music since the mid-twentieth century have been *yangqin* musicians. Despite the lack of documentary sources on the early history of the hammered dulcimer in China after its introduction to the country sometime in the seventeenth century, it is reasonable to assume that it was musicians who effectively indigenized it so that, as claimed by many scholars, by the late nineteenth century it has been treated as a Chinese instrument.

The obvious change in the *yangqin* itself as well as in its music since the mid-twentieth century is evidence of its having attained a new role in Chinese music in
addition to continuing to function as an important ensemble instrument in traditional regional genres such as Cantonese Opera and Jiangnan Sizhu. Many other popular Chinese instruments have also undergone changes during this period; however, to my knowledge, the yangqin is the only instrument for which, having already undergone extensive “development” (fazhan) and widespread adoption of the resultant model 402, there continues to be a strong impetus for further technological “improvement” (gaige).

My research for this thesis was undertaken not only to learn more about the history of my chosen instrument and its role in the history of Chinese music, but also, and more importantly, to understand its place in contemporary Chinese culture and its role in contemporary Chinese society. To achieve this, I described the changes in the instrument’s construction in Chapter 2, and examined the heterogeneities of the traditional regional musical styles of this seemingly, organologically homogeneous instrument and discussed the designation “Four Major Schools” of yangqin music in rhetorical discourse and in contemporary institutional practice in Chapter 3. Then to consider the desire for the yangqin to become a versatile and cosmopolitan instrument within a “pan-Chinese dulcimer system,” I discussed the professionalization of yangqin making, the expansion of its repertoire to include virtuosic solo compositions, the creation of an ensemble comprised of members of a yangqin family, the emphasis on being “scientific” in the instrument’s development, and the incorporation of performing techniques and musical elements of regional and foreign cultures in Chapter 4. Following these, I presented excerpts from my interviews with older yangqin musicians whose
responses to my questions about their learning process and their teachers, revealed significant insights into the change of status of "professional" musicians from that in the traditional to the contemporary society in China. Although they did not refer directly to how they had benefited from their positions in the newly-established institutions of higher learning and state-run performing troupes, it is apparent that they place a high value on now being recognized as professional "expert" musicians.

Only the future will determine whether Xiang Zuhua's desire to establish a "Xiang's Yangqin School" (Xiangshi yangqin xuepai), mentioned in Chapter 4, is fulfilled and if he will become an icon in the history of the yangqin. However, I consider it strong evidence of a change of focus from regional ensemble music to solo music for the yangqin in the Four Major Schools to the individual compositions for this instrument. Intrinsically related to that trend is the change of focus from anonymity of minjian yiren to regional identification through the Four Major Schools to the individual "jia" artist-musicians of today.

Because no yangqin musician has become an icon in the history of Chinese music, I suggest that yangqin musicians may still have some feeling of inferiority about their instrument and those who play it, and that it was the opportunity to change their status to that of "jia" musicians that impels those associated with academic institutions and professional performing troupes to continue to change various aspects of yangqin performance not only to elevate their instrument on the international stage, but also to validate and consolidate their status in Chinese society.
FUTURE STUDIES

Some *yangqin* professors and other professional and amateur *yangqin* players who immigrated to the United States during the late twentieth century are actively contributing to the transmission of *yangqin* music in their new homes. A study of their activities and views might add significantly to cultural studies of instruments in diasporic communities. It may also be valuable to compare the change in the musical identity and social status of the *yangqin* and its musicians with any such changes in its siblings and their performers in other cultures.
Appendix A: Map of China
Appendix B: “Rain Striking the Banana Leaves” (Yuda bajiao)

Arranged by the Cantonese Music and Narrative Troupe (Guangdong yinyue quyituan), rearranged by Tang Kaixuan (Central Conservatory of Music 1996 [1978]:5-6).
Appendix C: Jiangnan sizhu yangqin piece "Street Procession" (Xingjie), arranged by Zhou Hui. Adopting the octave doubling from the Sichuan yangqin school in the fast section (Zhou Hui, N.D.:19-21).
Fast section: imitating Sichuan yangqin's octave doubling
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(31)}
\end{align*}
\]
Appendix D: The Sliding-pitch Ring (*Huayin zhitao*)
(picture from Zheng Baoheng 1995:47, text description by Priscilla Tse)
Appendix F: “Zhaojun’s Resentment” (Zhaojun yuan), version 1. Transnotated from *gongche* notation to staff notation by Priscilla Tse.
Appendix G: “Zhaojun’s Resentment” (Zhaojun yuan), version 2.
A yangqin solo piece performed by Zhao Lili, from “The Best of Chinese Classics, volume 6, Yangqin” (No date, Taipei: P.G.M. Culture Enterprise Co., Ltd. CD. PGMCD-9106). Transcribed by Priscilla Tse.
“Ⅱ” means long tremolo (lunyin), alternating left hand and right hand rapidly.
“koń” means short tremolo (gunzhu or tanlun), using the flexible bamboo beaters to bounce continuously on strings.
The pitches B flat and F in this example are slightly lower than the absolute pitches.
"4" means long tremolo (lunyin), alternating left hand and right hand rapidly.
"4" means short tremolo (gunzhu or tanlun), use the flexible bamboo beaters to bounce continuously on strings.
"xa" and "ao" are the symbols for blending pitches, produced by the sliding-pitch ring.
"a" means overtone (fanyin), the pitch produced with this marking is an octave higher than the notated pitch.
"I" means vibrato (rouxian), trembling the strings on the other side of the course after striking.
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