



## Revealing The Exotic Rhythm and Tonality in Bright Sheng's *Dance Capriccio*

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### Abstract

For the different embodiments of exotic styles in musical compositions, composers have provided a number of examples of patterns and new directions, broadly summarizing it as the musical characteristics of a different region, whether apparent or not, that are reflected in a musical work. Bright Sheng is one of the leading Chinese-American whose significant works exhibits a strong exotic style using Western compositional technique. This article analyses Sheng's *Dance Capriccio* composed in 2011, featuring Sherpa folk music. The analysis focuses on how Sherpa folk song and dance are reflected in *Dance Capriccio*, emphasizing how the tonal and rhythmic construction reflects the traditional folk song. It is also gathered that the gestural movement of Sherpa dances are reflected in this work. This paper will provide an insight into the infinite possibilities of modernist works through the integration and narration with exotic characteristics.

**Keywords:** Exotic-Style; Rhythm; Tonality; Bright Sheng; Dance Capriccio; Sherpa Dance

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### INTRODUCTION

Sheng (b. 1955), a leading Chinese-American pianist and composer, was born and raised in China. Despite having a background and training in Western music since 1982, his composition mostly embraced the genre of traditional Chinese folk music. His hallmark of using the traditional folk genre in the style of Western art music may be the reason for his frequent return to China to collect traditional folk material that followed his settlement in the United States, in which Sheng feels that a true integration between cultures must come from the deepest roots of both cultures (Sheng, 2011, p. 1). In the early 1980s, about a decade after his moving from Chi-

na to the United States, Sheng began to re-evaluate Chinese culture, and reflected on his own work, which led to a constant transformation in his writing style and the state of mind he wanted to express in his works. He was invited by the famous cellist Yo-Yo Ma (b. 1955) in 2000 and 2008 to take part in two Silk Road projects. After years of exploration and many field trips back to China, Sheng (2011, p.1) came to a startling conclusion that Chinese musical culture has always been a hybrid or fusion.

China has been in the process of exporting and absorbing musical culture as early as the Han Dynasty (202 B.C.-220 A.D.). For example, while the Persian pipa was introduced to China during the Tang Dynasty, the chime (1046-771 B.C.) from native China were praised and preached

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by foreign emissaries. The rich "Other" culture is evidenced in the 56 ethnic groups in China, such as those from Mongolia, Xinjiang, Tibet, Dai, and so on; each has a unique musical culture. Certainly, due to globalization, local music is no longer limited by geographical and environmental concerns, and new styles of music from all over the country and the world have been incorporated not only into musical works but also other arts genres such as musical theatre, dance, and opera.

Many composers in China have adopted an approach that combines traditional and Western elements into compositions. However, Bright Sheng is one of the few musicians who not only combines most of a variety of traditional cultural elements with Western compositional techniques, but also frequently explores the development and variations of his own compositional techniques fostered by his life experiences in different parts of the world. As Sheng grew up in China with a background of thousands of years of history, this background enabled Sheng's works to be multicultural in nature. After he went to the United States to continue his musical studies, the opportunity to meet musicians such as Yo-Yo Ma and have the Silk Road experience provided Sheng with exposure to the Sherpa musical culture that was different from both Chinese and American cultures. The subject of this study, *Dance Capriccio*, is Sheng's attempt at an exotic stylistic paradigm. The Sherpas are historically part of the eastern branch of Tibet and could be summarized as a new ethnic group that is an extension of Tibetan China. Due to their unique geographical and social environment, the Sherpas have unique styles and ethnic identities that are different from those of Tibetans and Nepalese, and these unique human landscapes and historical cultures are reflected in the living customs, daily work, culture and arts, especially in the traditional Sherpa folk dances (Liu, 1991). When Sheng returned to the plateau during the Silk Road project, his memories of the Sherpa dance form and the new musical elements he en-

countered inspired a sense of deep insight.

"Dance Capriccio" was composed in 2011 as a piano quintet for Peter Serkin and the Shanghai String Quartet and is commissioned by the Maxine and Stuart Frankel Foundation in honor of Lois Beznos, the President of Chamber Music Society of Detroit. Approximately 12 minutes, the work was premiered at the Seligman Center for the Performing Arts in Detroit on February 11, 2012. Sheng gained inspiration for his work through his travels along the Silk Road, and thus this work attempts to capture the various characteristics of the Sherpa dance, from slow to fast, from gentle to raucous and even wild.

### Exotic Expressions in Art and the Influences on Music

The word exotic is derived from the Greek word "*exo*" (outside), which is defined as "something foreign being introduced". Beginning with the rise of European colonialism in the 16th and 17th centuries, the stimulus of Oriental trade led to a growing European interest in non-Western (especially Oriental and Middle Eastern or Asian) art. The rise of colonialism seems to have provided new inspiration for Western artists, as the West gradually appropriated the defeated countries of the East, and the transfer of land was accompanied by a transfer of population and culture. From the beginning of the 17th century, "exotic" was interpreted as "the charm of the unfamiliar" (Sund, 2019, p. 8), and its influence can be seen in many artistic genres of this period. On the one hand, the "exotic" style of art under the influence of colonialism began to appear in European literature. 'Exoticism' refers to the way in which different geographical or ecological features are interposed or incorporated, which thus demonstrates not only the writer's love for countries that seem strange, exciting, new, or intriguing but also their fascination with the various depictions of such places (Tally, 2009, p. 20).

In the seventeenth century, European fiction appropriated and attempted to undermine functional interpretations of

human nature and tended toward subtle portrayals of gender and cultural differences (Douthwaite, 1992, p. 8). As Seshagiri (2001, p. 13) points out, European travel writing tends to figurate non-European peoples as documentary reenactments of exotic customs through descriptions that assume the omniscient authority and omnipresent vision of the Western observer. On the other hand, in music, exoticism is a genre in which tunes, notes, and instruments are designed to make the audience feel like they are in an exotic place or old time. The change from land division to cultural transfer to artistic creation has led to a change in the form of tonal musical dominance, with tonal tones slowly expanding from the dominant to other tones, such as the fifth (dominant) (Taylor, 2007, p. 17). Jones (2013, p. 7) defines exoticism in art and literature as the reproduction of one culture for the consumption of another. For example, In the early 18th century, exotic themes in opera were commonplace, such as Barthold Feind's (1678-1721) ballet section in his opera *Gedanken von der Opera* (1708), which simulated funeral dirges, Jewish Oriental and pagan rituals. Feind brought all these nations together in order to show a holistic classification of other nations, a hallmark of the modern European worldview of other nations (Taylor, 2007, p. 43). In "Essay on Exoticism", Segalen (2002, p. 17) reveals the aesthetic and ontological value of exoticism, which was born in the age of imperialism, as well as an important cultural "otherness" that took the form of primitivist ethnocentrism or humanism. In particular, around the 1850s, the European Revolution led to a massive immigration from many Western countries, resulting in a dramatic increase in musical creativity. Europeans brought musical tastes that embodied more sophisticated notions of nationalism and exoticism. For example, when American composers wrote music for Indian war dances after the influx of musicians, the themes of American operas, ballets and other theatrical productions led to the portrayal of Indian savages in a typically patriotic style

that was clearly tinged with Turkishness (Bellman, 1998, p. 158).

However, these concepts brought about some negative political or social implications and was sometimes evaluated as a negative reflection of the creator's creation of an "imaginary other" or "obsession with the other" (Horn, 2013, p. 79). As a result, such exaggerated or one-sided portrayals of exotic ethnic groups in literature or artworks were not positively evaluated and promoted, and the direction and purpose of the creators were gradually influenced by the duality and authenticity of things as well as the long-term development of artworks. In order to gain more support for their works and more objectivity in describing the real lives of different peoples and receiving different cultures, creators began to learn about foreign cultures through field trips or as in-depth as possible. For example, the French composer Darius Milhaud (1892-1974) left his home country for work and came to Brazil, and it was this passive act of "traveling" that led to the birth of *Saudades do Brazil*, (1920), in which the composer used the Brazilian pentatonic scale, the natural major scale with descending seventh notes (mixed with the Lydian scale). In these two years, the composer felt the charm of dance music such as tango and samba, and interspersed the rhythm of dance music in the piano piece *Saudades do Brazil*, the melody of which is in the Brazilian style tuning that descends the seventh tone (mixed Lydian mode) with the American jazz style blues scale (that descends the 3rd, 6th and 7th degrees of the natural major).

At the end of the 19th century, the Paris World's Fair and the Trans-Mississippi Exposition deepened artists' awareness of "other" cultures, and the impact and charm of foreign cultures led some artists to gradually break the chains of "occupation". Debussy saw the musical cultures of Eastern countries other than the Western countries of France and the United States, such as Chinese opera, Japanese art, and Malaysian instrumental music (Bellman, 1998, p. 225). The pentatonic

scale appears prominently in Debussy's works in a specific Eastern context, and an apparent early fusion of Eastern and Western tonal procedures reflects the gradual normalization of the evaluation of exotic styles. In addition to instrumental works, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Italian opera brought artworks with exotic styles to their peak, such as Puccini's *Turandot* (1924-1926) and *Madam Butterfly* (1904), which used oriental elements as an entry point for exoticism that was blended with Western musical composition. For example, the melody of the traditional Chinese folk song Jasmine is perfectly incorporated in *Turandot*. The melody of the song is repeatedly used during the main character's appearance and at plot reversals, or in the form of transpositions and adaptations. The melodies of the American national anthem and the Japanese folk song *Sakura* are used in the opera *Madam Butterfly*, which thus further justifies the background and synopsis of this work. Given the popularity of these works, the use of exotic representation in these genres seems to have been perceived and accepted successfully.

Based on some one-sided or negative conceptions of exotic style works before the 19th century, the newer and more accessible exotic style after the 20th century may serve as a creative direction for the construction of exotic images, self-reflection and self-discovery (Chai, 2008, p. 8). Music played a key role in the process of acculturation, as it continually used the concept of exoticism to add a sense of attractiveness and timelessness to the cultures and narratives of different peoples. As a result, works associated with exotic styles from the mid to late 20th century and to the present day are more about the perception and expression of difference or diversity, with exotic cultures having qualities that differ from their own native cultures (Altglas, 2014, p. 98).

In addition, the "Other" culture is also used by contemporary Chinese composers as a source of inspiration for their works. For example, in Tan Dun's *Sympho-*

*ny* 1997, the composer incorporates cultural inspiration and exotic musical materials; Chou Wen-chung's *Willow are New* imitates East Asian sounds and incorporates a distinctive articulation and scale system; Chou Wen-chung's other works *Metaphors* and *Pien*, combine traditional musical systems, forms and timbres with a unique synthesis of Western and Asian musical idioms. Within musical compositions, the "exotic style" paradigm is particularly appropriate for instrumental works that candidly express exotic intentions (Locke, 2007, p. 479). For example, the recurring violin solo in Rimsky-Korsakov's twentieth-century symphonic suite *Scheherazade* - said to represent Scheherazade himself - begins with a haunting staircase minor melody in which each dominant alternates with adjacent tones above in a triplet (5-4-5, 4-3-4, 3-2-3, 2-1) and forms an ornamental curving line that often referred to as "Arabic" (Bhogal, 1977, p. 98; Potter, 2003, p. 143). These musical embodiments of exotic styles, commonly used in the 20th century, have been broken through in more innovative ways in 21<sup>st</sup> century works. Locke (2007, p. 480) suggests that exoticism in musical works is a matter of composition's aesthetic art, allowing notes to be arranged and combined in unconventional ways. Sheppard (2019, p. 21) also argues that contemporary musical works can be expressed through musical details of stylistic characteristics of one or more exotic sources (e.g., parallel tetrachords or pentatonic scales, rhythms or melodies from exotic cultures, etc.) with direct context and foreground. Sheng's seems to continue the approach with new experimentation and combinations of exotic works, opening up ideas for the composition of musical works and giving new meaning to the integration of music with other cultures through the imitation of Sherpa dance rhythms, even the dance movements of the hands and feet, and the cross-sensory modes of collaboration. This has also become one of the labels of Sheng's personal compositional style. No matter how closely Western composers imitate exotic music, it

will never represent the 'actual' genre due to the change in instrumentation. Therefore, exotic elements serve only as an imagination of fusing different cultures and arts, as the 20<sup>th</sup> century scholar discussed. For Locke's opinions on 'the exotic style only' paradigm and 'all the music in full context' paradigm, Sheng's use of the exotic style more tend to a "Fusion". As Sheng once said, he "is 100% Chinese and 100% American", and the truth that he raised in China, then immigrated to the U.S. and returned to China, precisely explicates Sheng's ability to express multiple cultures, and his integration of traditional Chinese, Tibetan, Sherpa, and Western music culture is not just limited to "exotic styles", rather it is more like a presentation of the larger cultural context.

#### Exotic Style of the Sherpa Culture and Folk Dance

For this study, the definition of the exotic style involved prefers the perspectives of Locke and Sheppard. The composer constructs instrumental works by arrangement and combination in a non-traditional way, incorporating musical details of stylistic features from several exotic sources into the work. The Sherpa people are primarily found in Nepal and in the townships of Chentang, Dingjie County, Nyalam County, Zhangmu Township, Jomtien Township, Tingri County, and the Tibet Autonomous Region (Qie and Sang, 2006, p. 64). Due to their unique geographical and social environment, the Sherpa has a distinctive style and ethnic identity that is different from that of the Tibetans and Nepalese. Traditional Sherpa literature and art is a reflection of their social and cultural life and also reflects the ideology of Sherpa spirituality and emotion. Their historical and ethnic origin has created a unique human landscape and historical culture, which is reflected in the Sherpa's living customs, work, culture and art (Liu, 1991, p. 141). All these factors are reflected particularly in Sherpa folk dance. As a result, Sherpa dance has absorbed the styles of surrounding Tibet as well as the exotic

characteristics of Nepal, and the three (Nepal, Sherpa, Tibet) have gradually merged over time and with the development of society to form the existing dance styles that have become a peculiar treasure in the world of dance (Liu, 2003, p. 40). Due to the special geographical environment of the plateau, its history cannot be traced back to as early as that of the Central Plains, but due to the development and expansion of the Silk Road, Tibetan music culture has also formed a unique style as a result. Traditional Tibetan music is distinctive and diverse, including folk music, classical music (court music), and religious music (including chanting music, religious ritual music and dance Qiangmu, and temple instrumental music) in three categories. Tibetan music has been a source of inspiration for Sheng that cannot be ignored, works including *Tibetan Dance* (2000) and *Tibetan Air* (2005). Sheng's most works related to Tibetan are based on "Duixie" dance and "Nangma" dance, which are often accompanied by instruments such as Zanian扎念琴, Xianzi弦子 (Biwang碧旺), Yangqin扬琴, Teqin特琴, erhu二胡, Jinghu京胡, flute and mandolin (a musical instrument imported from Italy to China), in which the ornamentation, the imitation of the timbre of the instruments, the rapid change of tonality, etc. are the direction of Sheng's compositions.

From the existing studies, papers on the association of Sherpa music with exoticism are found to remain limited, while Tibetan music in the context of Western art music and exoticism is used by many Western composers and mostly associated with Tibetan Buddhist music. For example, John William included a dyadic Buddhist chant sequence in the opening score for the film *Seven Years in Tibet* (1997) with augmentation by the sounds of non-parallel dung-chen (a Tibetan Buddhist ritual trombone), gongs, and various soft and hard-hitting cymbals (Brownrigg, 2007, p. 313). These "other" exotic instruments, scales, and rhythms form a truly Tibetan musical style with Buddhist musical forms. In addition, Yo-Yo Ma used exotic instru-

ments and tunings to express the Tibetan musical characteristics in his score for this film. The combination of the pentatonic scale D#-F#-G#-A#-C# in the strings and the addition of portamento to imitate single-string fiddles provides the melodic line an “exotic style “ due to the characteristic Oriental grace notes (Brownrigg, 2007, p.315). Philip Glass starts the film *Kunlun* (1997) with a dramatic series of glissando chords, complemented by soaring tremolo strings and loud chords in the high register of the piano. The music intriguingly sways on a pedal, chanting a modal motive (A-B-D-C-B) that lends an exotic flavor to the rest of the primarily B-centered triadic harmonies (Brownrigg, 2007, p. 317-318). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Russian music, especially opera, ballet and other classical music, contained a great deal of “Orientalism”. For example, Mikhail Glinka’s opera *A Life for Tsar* (1831), with its Georgian tunes and its frequent tightly ornamented and clearly augmented seconds, was not mainstream in Russian music at the time, so it was found to be a derivative of exoticism (Bellman, 1998, p. 198). From these examples of combining elements of Tibetan music with Western art music and exotic backgrounds, it can be seen that composers tend to hybridize Tibetan instruments with Western orchestras or mimic melodies, scales, or rhythms to feature exoticism. This provides some direction for the analysis of this study but also emphasizes the distinctive characteristics of Sheng’s exotic compositional approach, which specifically relates the physical movements of exotic music and dance to the construction of pitch relationships.

Sherpa folk dance has accumulated history and gradually formed an artistic and literary identity with Sherpa characteristics. Like another traditional genre, Sherpa folk music consists of folk songs, instrumental music, and dance music. Ge-Qu and Yangjin-Zhuoma (2006, p. 32) list some important genre categorizations (Figure 1).

Instrumental music	Zha Nian 扎念琴	Lu Mu 鲁姆 (Bamboo Flute)	Harmonium		
The music of songs and dances	Xia Ba Zhao Lu 霞布卓鲁 (Song and Dance Music)	Qiang Mu Ya 羌姆雅 (Song and Dance Music with lyrics)			
Folk songs	Le Lu 勒鲁 (Labour Songs)	Chai Lu 柴鲁 (Blessing Songs)	Zhuo Lu 卓鲁 (Pastoral Songs)	Sherpa (Sherpa Ditties)	Qiang Sai Lu 羌赛鲁 (Wedding Songs)

Figure 1. The categorizations of Sherpa Folk Music

Sherpa folk dance is generally a form of group dance, and the songs are mostly choruses and labor songs, both of which were developed in the context of collective work in a traditional culture that was not yet divided. The music is gentle and beautiful, the lyrics are delicate and emotional, and the dance movements are graceful, subtle, and rich. The lyrics are generally closely linked to the people’s daily life, and the songs are mostly about love, labor, glorification of and praise for the motherland, etc. They are rich in content, concise in their language, and lively in rhythm. In general, Sherpa folk dances appear in two formats in the portrayal of folk tales (Wang, 2016, p. 3). Firstly, the dancers usually dance in a circle, and folk stories provide the creative context for the dances, which are combined with such stories and music and then transmitted. The storytelling is fully reflected in the dance movements. Secondly, the dance is interspersed with storytelling, such as the chanting of folk epics such as that of Gesar. This form involves dancing and singing at the same time and achieves a perfect fusion of dance and the chanting of folk literature. The separation of literature and art has not yet been fully realized in traditional folk culture; dance itself is syncretic and intertextual with poetry and drama, and the artistic characteristics of both are very similar. Ronström (1991, p. 71) also agrees that dance performances for the stage are one of the most widely used ways of the transmission of folklore and often the one that attracts the largest audiences. The literary nature of Sherpa folk dance is reflected both in the stories of local Sherpa literature and the traditional folk humanistic sentiments of the local Tibetan people (Qin & Guan, 1982, p. 35). In other words, the musicality of Sherpa folk dance is reflected in the complementarity

of dance and music. As Wang (2016, p. 3) once pointed out, “in the modern classification of art, folk dance and folk music are separate but co-existing.”

Like other traditional genres, dance, and music are rarely separated in Sherpa folk dance, and it is only in the music that the dance unfolds (Wang, 2016, p. 4). Sherpa music fuses the rhythm of the music with the movement of the dance and brings out the positive ideas and abstract symbols of the Sherpa through movement (Wu and Nie, 2017, p. 29). The rhythm of the steps is almost identical to that of the music, and the moods of the two are very similar. For example, the scuffing and stepping can be expressed as accents or skips with a strong beat in the rhythm; the lifting and flinging of a hand gesture can be expressed as a succession of notes, a prolongation of a tone or a wave, and so on; the “two steps and a stomp” can be expressed as a free switch between long and short notes; the “staggering step” is a continuous staccato or skipping.

## METHOD

This study utilized score analysis methods commonly used in musicological research to reveal how a Chinese-American composer interprets Sherpa dances by breaking through the sensory system as well as the manifestations of exoticism in the composer’s compositional style.

The method of data collection was through email interviews with the composer, asking semi-structured questions to provide contextual information for the *Dance Capriccio*. Texts, videos, and journal articles on the presentation of exoticism in Western musical compositions and Sherpa musical culture were also referenced to analyze the score to reveal the various characteristics depicting Sherpa dance, especially tempo and timbre.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Exotic Perspectives of Sherpa Folk Music in *Dance Capriccio*

This analysis aims to examine how the Sherpa folk music and dance, along with the characteristics of the dance in *Dance Capriccio*, are encapsulated in a Western string quartet. Although the theme of this work is ambiguous in terms of providing a clear structure, all the musical materials and their progressions are constructed mainly through vertical harmonic effects for a variety of sound possibilities rather than a simple linear direction in pursuit of harmony and melody, which is why, although partially recognized, all the transitions are smoothly connected. Before any specific Sherpa tonality is highlighted, the sense of Orientalism is emphasized at the beginning of the work through the intervals of fourths and fifths (Figure 2). This indirectly provides a five-note scale that alternates between the semitone in certain notes, such as C#-D-E-F# (F)-G in the piano introduction and E-F(F#)-G-A-B in the string instruments. The pitch development of the melody and harmony of the piece is based on interval relationships in fourths or fifths. Figure 3 provides the thematic constructions in the piano and string sections, where the combination of intervals in fourths and fifths is obviously identifiable, such as G#-C# and F#-C# in the piano section, and D-G, C#-G, C#-F#, etc. in the string section. The use of pitch is based on the seven-note scale and is typically orientalist in character, and the traditional Chinese Zhi Qingyue 徵清乐 (a heptatonic scale as V-VI-VII-I-II-III-IV-V) is repeatedly involved in the tonality of the work. The construction of the pitch relationship of the Qingyue scale is similar to that of the Western major scale, which consists of two tones - one semitone - three tones, while the Qingyue scale is similar to the mixed Lydian scale, which consists of two tones - one semitone - two tones - one semitone. In this piece, the Zhi Qingyue scale is repeated. For example, bars 41 to 52 (Figure 4) are a mini-climax of the second section, as its intensity crosses from *mf-fff*, to the dense notes, etc., that facilitates a rapid shift in tonality. The piano part demonstrates that each phrase continues with either moving

a semitone or a tone gap from the previous one; from E Zhi Qingyue in bar 42, to F# Zhi Qingyue in bar 46, to F Zhi Qingyue in bar 50, to G Zhi Qingyue in bar 51, and finally to A Zhi Qingyue in bar 52.

In accordance with the range of musical exoticism or the characteristics of exotic musical works described earlier, these heptatonic scales, which combine traditional Chinese pitch relationships with Western tonal characteristics, represent if not an “exotic” style, at least a strong flavour in orientalism. There is a simplicity in the composer’s use of tonality, although the sound does not sound tonally harmonious or melodious, due to the way in which the composition is arranged in a multidimensional combination of vertical and linear coexistence, and the *Li diao* (离调, which is out of tune shortly) compositional technique in Sherpa music is used to articulate the vertical harmonies. The description of Sherpa folk music in Qin and Guan (1982, p. 35) – in which the seventh tonic modulation is accompanied by the appearance of the fourth or fifth temporary tonic change to produce a short off-key (*Li diao*) – is similarly found in *Dance Capriccio*. Coincidentally or not, it is not known if this tonality design was consciously used by the composer. In the combinations of the tonal series offered earlier, there are alternations of the same tone, such as F in C#-D-E-F# (F)-G for the piano part of the introduction and E-F(F#)-G-A-B for the strings, or A in the melody G#-A# (A)- B#-C#-D# in the theme in bar 11, which can be interpreted as a brief *Li Diao* (离调). In contrast to other traditional folk music, Zhi and Yu tunings as well as the specific pitches like F#, C#, D#, Bb are predominantly used in Sherpa music. Interestingly, the distance from the first note of each of the heptatonic series to the dominant is exactly four degrees, such as E-A, #F-B, F-Bb, G-C, A-D. Moreover, each of the dominant notes of these scales can be arranged in the same order as the introduction (Figure 2) – E-F(F#) -G-A-B, which reflects the composer’s subtlety.

Figure 2. The use of fourths and fifths in the introductory section, bar 1-5

Figure 3. The theme in the piano and the strings, bar 11-14 and bar 18-20

Besides the exotic style of the tonality and its oriental colors, the composer observes the organization of pitch structures as an important development to the extent that it becomes a distinctive orientalist or exoticism sign. Although the use of fourths and fifths in Western works is commonly a general trait in the reflection of orientalism, these intervals were indeed also an important feature in Sherpa music. As mentioned above, there are short *Li Diao* (离调) that commonly occur in Sherpa music, usually on the fourth or fifth intervals, which cause the original pitch relationships to be altered. As illustrated in the example of the “Sherpa Drinking Songs” provided in Figure 5, the organization of the fourths and fifths is consistently used in melodic progressions such as C-F, Bb-Eb, E-A, etc. The Sherpas use the drinking song to express their welcome to visiting guests or relatives, and apart from the most obvious melodic progressions in fourths and fifths, a large number of repetitions of a particular note or jumps from a single note to an octave are also featured in this work. This



kind of characteristic with a blatant octave color is found in all aspects of the composition. A similar emphasis on the scale is also present, where the chromatically overlapping placement of chords is reflected in the interval relationships between fourths and fifths, such as the first chord of the piano part in bar 161, with D-G, F-C#, G-D, etc. (Figure 6).

The image shows a piano score for 'Dance Capriccio' from bar 40 to 52. It features four distinct tonal sections: 'E Zhi Qingyue' (bars 40-45), 'F# Zhi Qingyue' (bars 46-51), 'F Zhi Qingyue' (bars 52-57), and 'G Zhi Qingyue' (bars 58-63). The score includes dynamic markings such as *ord.*, *mf*, *ff*, *cresc.*, and *loco*. The piano part is characterized by chromatically overlapping chords and a focus on fourth and fifth intervals.

Figure 4. The tonalities of "Dance Capriccio", bar 40-52

The image shows a vocal score for 'Sherpa Drinking Songs'. It includes two versions of the song. The first version, '敬酒歌' (Jingjiu Ge), is in C-F tonality and includes lyrics: 吉玛德嘎夏尔巴民歌 (Jima Degaxia Shalpa Folk Song), 莫佳采茶, 莫佳记谱 (Mojia Citecha, Mojia Jipufa). The second version is in E-A tonality and includes lyrics: 尼泊尔索卢昆布吉玛德嘎村 (Nepal Solokunbu Jima Degaxia Village), 夏尔巴民歌 (Shalpa Folk Song), 莫佳采茶, 莫佳记谱 (Mojia Citecha, Mojia Jipufa). The score includes tempo markings like '自由的 舒缓的' (Ad libitum, Ad libitum) and '渐快的' (Ritardando).

Figure 5. Sherpa Drinking Songs

This image provides a detailed view of the piano accompaniment for the 'Sherpa Drinking Songs'. It shows the first two systems of the score, starting at bar 161. The tempo is marked as *♩ = 40-42*. The score includes dynamic markings such as *ff*, *mf*, *pp*, and *pizz.*. Specific chord voicings are circled in red, highlighting the chromatic overlap and interval relationships mentioned in the text. The right hand (r.h.) and left hand (l.h.) parts are clearly delineated.



Figure 6. *Dance Capriccio*, bar 161-168, the interval relationships between fourths and fifths

In addition to the first section, which has been analyzed in detail, a large number of pitch structures in fourths and fifths also occur in other parts of the work, some examples of which are provided in Figure 7 and Figure 8. Some examples include F-Bb, Bb-Eb, etc., and the same distance between the vertical chords in the piano part (Figure 8), G#-C#, C#-F#, B-F#, etc.



Figure 7. *Dance Capriccio*, bar 138-140, pitch structures in fourths and fifths



Figure 8. *Dance Capriccio*, bar 183-186, pitch structures in fourths and fifths

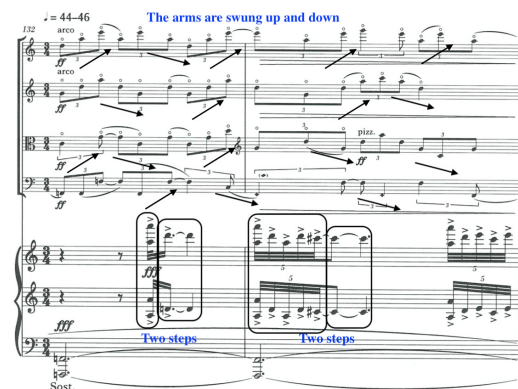
### Rhythm and Articulation that Mirrors Sherpa Dance Steps

Where exotic dance is concerned, it is interesting to observe how this Western string quartet projects it. The traditional Sherpa dance could be identified on the basis of three features: the movement of hands, feet, and body waist. The hand movements include lifting, shaking, and throwing; foot movements include rubbing and stepping; and body/trunk movements include twisting, swinging, and raising. The most common and distinctive combinations are known as “staggering steps” and “two steps and a stomp”. Zhaxi and Gan (1989, p. 24) provide a detailed reference on the combination of Sherpa movements with musical rhythms. For example, the steps usually precede the movement of other body parts in each repetition, and in each cycle of two to three beats, there is a scuffing or stepping movement of the right foot, followed by a lifting or swaying of the hand movement. This trait could be mirrored from bar 59 onwards in section III (Figure 9), where the first repetition of each bar in the viola and cello can be observed as a footstep, while the repeated rapid repetition of two notes tremolo in the violin can be interpreted as a hand lift and sway, and the arpeggio in the piano part as a waist twist (bars 67-69, also bars 116-118).



**Figure 9.** *Dance Capriccio*, bar 59-62, “Staggering Steps” of Sherpa Dance

Zhaxi and Gan (1989, p. 25) also mention another dance step, the “two steps and a stomp”, in which the right foot takes a step forward while the left foot strides forward, followed by a hand movement where the right hand is swung in a circle to the right while the left hand is raised upwards. These dance steps can be reflected by the multiple structures. The “two steps and a stomp,” which involve a free switch between short and long notes, thus occurs in many sections in this piece’s second and third passages. For example, in bar 132 of section IV (marked in Figure 10), the sudden short-long rhythm from the piano moves rapidly from an octave (or a series of phrases that unfold in octaves) to the next sustained long note with *fff* dynamics. Meanwhile the swings from the hand movement could be portrayed by the triplets string melody making ascent and descent in fifths with *ff* dynamics, thus recreating the hand movements in which the arms are swung up and down in a circle.



**Figure 10.** *Dance Capriccio*, bar 133-134, “two steps” and the movement of arms in Sherpa Dance

The Sherpa Drinking Songs that was mentioned in the previous section also characteristically feature this short-long rhythm pattern, as can be observed from the field scores collected by Moja and from Chinese documentaries on Sherpa dance, which usually has a free rhythm and transitions between short and long notes in a repetitive pattern or rhythm and forms an accent to emphasize the rhythm. This rhythm is known in the Sherpa as the scuffing, stepping and stomping of footsteps. In the seventh part of this piece (Figure 11), the piano continues to reflect the footwork, as each vertical chord represents a change of step in the dance, along with the strings that represent the hand or waist movement, such as a legato line that indicates an arm swing.



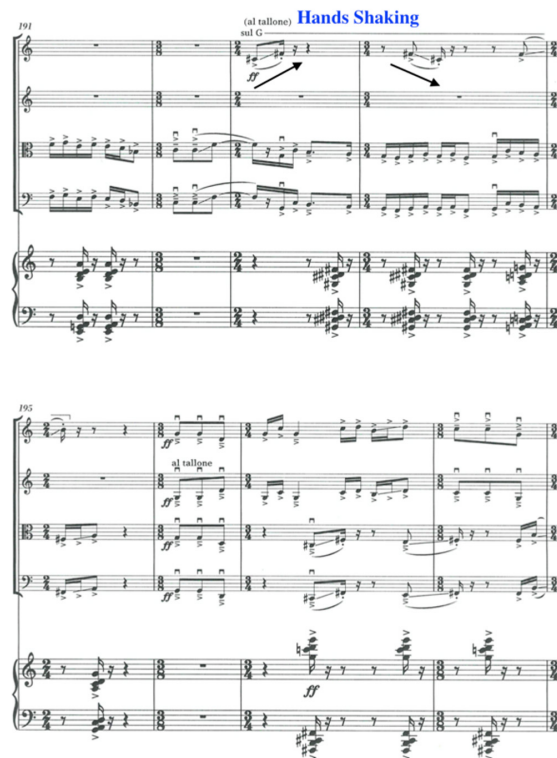


Figure 11. *Dance Capriccio*, “the scuffing, stepping and stomping of the Sherpa dance steps”, mm. 183-198

Another Sherpa dance rhythm may have borrowed from “Qiamu Liya”, as demonstrated in Figure 12. There are three rhythmic groups that can be included in this rhythm pattern: Pattern I (two quavers), Pattern II (one quaver and two semiquavers), Pattern III (four semiquavers), and Pattern IV (two semiquavers and one quaver). In *Dance Capriccio*, the piano begins with a large number of semiquavers (Pattern IV) in bars 185-224 (bar 225), from where the composer introduces this unique dance step. From bar 232 onwards (Figure 13), not only does the piano part reproduce this rhythm, but the string instruments also join in. This rhythmic pattern of the *Qiamu Liya* is employed in the work and adds new rhythmic patterns to the original one, which consists of Pattern I (two quavers), Pattern II (one quaver and two semiquavers), Pattern III (four semiquavers) and Pattern IV (two semiquavers and one quaver).

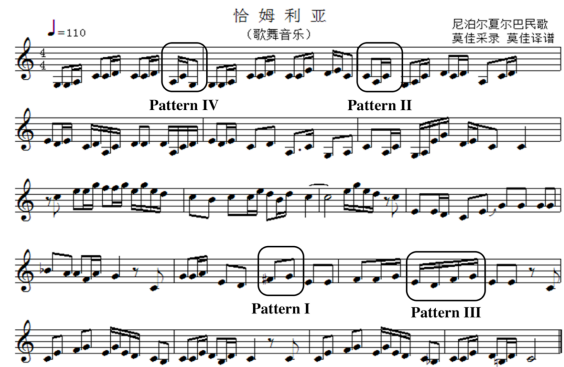


Figure 12. Sherpa Dance Music “Qiamu Liya”

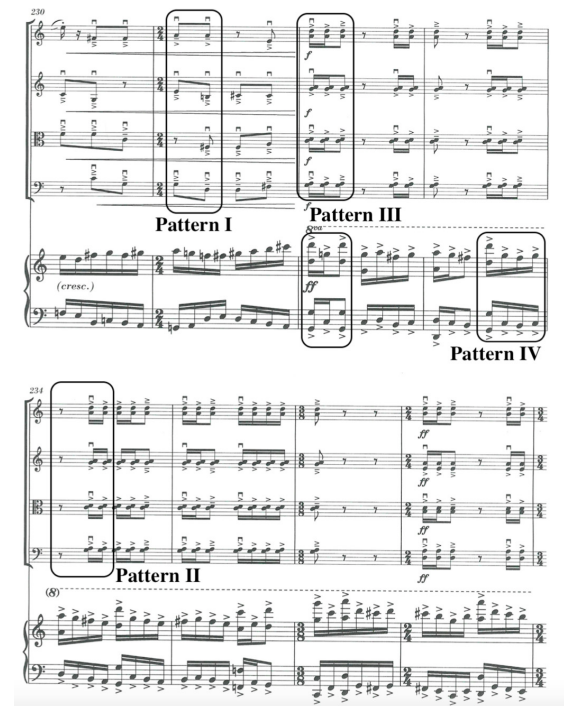


Figure 13. *Dance Capriccio*, the progress of rhythm pattern of Sherpa Dance Music from *Qiamu Liya* in *Dance Capriccio*, mm. 230-237

### Bright Sheng's Exotic Compositional Style

Traditional approaches to musical analysis have mostly explored the harmonic, tonal, structural and rhythmic aspects in-depth, yet have not really understood the feelings and intentions of the creators. As Locke (2012, p. 321) suggests:

“...the creator (or creative team, for example, for a stage production) of an exotic musical work realizes a vision, or reflects a distant and different realm... He or she confides these visions to the page. The skilled, sensitive performer then commu-

nicates the marks on the page—and the meanings behind them—to generations of listeners.”

Although the representation of exotic styles in musical works is controversial or dichotomous, these possible and negative discussion do not hinder the output or development of the artwork, and the musical analysis of such works generally should consider around the composer's original intent and the context of the work; because in the non-figurative world of music, it is only through aspects such as notes, rhythms, tonality, and textures that the composer's feelings are conveyed. In a commentary of Sheng's music, Chang (2007) stated that Sheng expresses the fusion of East and West through the subordination of the musical material to a rigorous and imaginative development of motifs; as evidenced through the use of different combinations, texture, tonality/modality, and structure; so that the listener feels that the richness of the music emerges naturally from the melody rather than it being imposed. Through the analysis of this piece, it can be understood that despite being encapsulated in Western string orchestration, exotic style is indeed emanated much in *Dance Capriccio* than in Sheng's previous works.

Although the composer returned to the United States later in life, he was still drawn to the sites of traditional cultural in China, as demonstrated in *Dance Capriccio* where the Sherpa folk song is highlighted. By personally traveling to Qinghai, Xi'an, Gansu and Xinjiang for inspiration through his participation in two Silk Road projects, Sheng demonstrates the approach of infusing exotic culture in the cotemporary instrumental works in 21<sup>st</sup> century, which significantly through rhythm construction and patterns. By examining the culture of the “other” in the field and enabling the reproduction of this non-popular culture, the composer corresponds to Jones's (2013, p.7) definition of exoticism in art and literature as the reproduction of one culture's consumption of another, emphasizing the description of the positive influence of

exotic styles in musical works.

As a successor of 20th century modern music and one of the representative composers of the 21st century, Bright Sheng's *Dance Capriccio* has led the way and provided innovative ideas that incorporate and promote visualized dance movements into a purely aural experience that can pioneer thought and new directions for other composers and later generations. Sheng not only takes into account the characteristic of exotic works from the 19th century, such as in terms of tonality, scales, melodies and dance rhythm, as well as the objective evaluation of the value of the “other” culture, but also the modernist style of composition from the 20th century onwards, which is based on fusion and innovation. This approach not only opens up ideas for the creation of musical works, but also gives a new meaning to the integration of music with other cultures. This has also become one of the labels of Sheng's personal compositional style. By using the exotic style as a decorative tool, Sheng enables the work to have both a traditional, harmonious music that differs from the Chinese style as well as a separate, individual music that differs from the Western modernist works. In addition to the Chinese and American musical cultures that influenced the composer's work, Sherpa music was incorporated as an input of “other” cultures, which in part reflects Schaffer's view of exotic styles incorporated into a work of art can serve as a decorative backdrop, add an unusual dimension to the work, or serve as one of the ways for the creator to satisfy the space for imaginative expansion (Schaffer, 2000, p. 3). This has also become one of the labels of Sheng's personal compositional style, as the motive of imitation or non-musical inspiration about ethnic dance movements is found in *Dance Capriccio* and his other works, such as *Tibetan Dance* (2000).

## CONCLUSIONS

In this study, it can be concluded that while the exotic style of the music can ne-

ver be perfectly transferred or transcribed, some of its features had been reflected in Sheng's compositions from a few aspects. At first, the rhythms of Tibetan tap dance are broken down into different modal groups, and the segmental manipulation is reflected in the use of interpolation, extension and deletion of syllable and tone durations in *Dance Capriccio*. Secondly, the irregular arrangement of legato and cross-bar lines enabled the piece to present the characteristics of Tibetan dance while emphasizing the composer's innovative techniques of altering the accents of the notes in order to reflect some of the significant Sherpa dance movements. In addition, the exotic style of *Dance Capriccio* was depicted not only from the music but also from the gesture that includes movements from the Sherpa dance. The rhythmic pattern in Sherpa dance emanates from the irregular and complicated writing in the quartet, which also portrays that the important dance steps and movements are not ignored. Through the flexible use of legato and cross-bar legato lines to echo the accents of the Sherpa dance, and the manipulation of segments to arrange the rhythmic structure, this compositional technique allows the exotic flavors of Sherpa music culture to interact with the Western compositional structure, resulting another form of exotic composition. In short, the gestures, footwork, and body movements of the Sherpa are echoed in Western instrumental writing expressed through the arrangement of the notes, the construction of the pitch material, and the organization of the rhythms.

Moreover, through the analysis of tonality in both vertical and linear dimensions, the relationship between the fourths and fifths in Sherpa music and the ethnic compositional technique of *Li diao*, these highly orientalist elements demonstrate the composer's contemplation of works with exotic aesthetics. This comes not only in terms of the expression of exotic style in instrumental works, but also in the different meanings of the works. Although using western composition approach may

never replicate the original exotic genre, the exotic subject serves as a source thereby promoting innovation in compositional techniques or opening up ideas and creative directions for the musicians. By combining the elements of both, a new musical style is created, and the intermingling of different national cultures is encouraged.

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