

STORY OF TJONG A FIE: Programmatic Music Composition Combining Chinese, Malay and Western Music Elements

Junita Batubara

Department of Music and Music Education, Faculty of Music and Performing Arts,
Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Malaysia.

DOI: 10.6007/IJARBSS/v7-i9/3327 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v7-i9/3327>

Abstract

Many composers have combined Western music with Asian music such as Turkish, Arabic, Berber, Persian, Indian, Japanese, Chinese, Indonesia and others. The most significant characteristic of Asian music is the use of pentatonic and gong. Pentatonic and gong are also used in western music along with other instruments. This describes the relationship between Western and Asian music.

This music composition is an idea from the story of the life of *Tjong A Fie*. Tjong A Fie (1860-1920) or Tjong Yiau Hian was a Hakka Chinese businessman, banker and *kapitan* (Chinese Major) who built a large plantation business in Sumatera, Indonesia. This composition examines the Tjong A Fie story which combines Chinese, Indonesian (Malay rhythm: *inang*, *joget* and *zapin*) and Western music techniques. The researcher created a music composition as entitled above, using the six-pitch scales or modes, *Huowu*. The six-pitch scale is then combined with the twelve tones of the Western music system. Then the tones are transposed within twelve tones in the Western music system that will produce a new pitch scale. With the new set of scales, the music has more aesthetic expressions in terms of visual elements which include melodic motif, color, sound, atonal harmony, rhythm patterns, and texture.

Keywords: Composition, Programmatic Music, Story, Cross Cultural

Background

Many composers use different approaches to finding new sounds and ideas to produce a new piece of music with a 'new source'. The source of inspiration may be found in folk music, popular music, or the influences of other composers from both Eastern and Western countries, each with its own distinctive features (Cook, 2009).

In order to do this, we need to know the characteristics of Western and Eastern music. In this paper, Eastern music will be limited to only music from Indonesia. According to SukaHardjana (2004) in his book "Musik: Antara Kritik dan Apresiasi", the musical creation approach in the West generally uses the materials of thought, ideas and conceptions which are later poured into structure or form and translated into musical techniques. Through the use of these elements, Ferruccio Busoni, a Western composer and thinker, argues that the creator will be able to imagine and reinterpret what humans perceive because music is part of the vibration

of the universe (in Hardjana, 2003). This is different to the eastern music scene in which sound materials are not considered to be developed but are disseminated so that the result is the absence of the passage of time (McCalla, 1996). This opinion is also supported by Chou Wen-Chung (cited from Asian Music, Dictionary of Contemporary Music by John Vinton: 1971) who said that every single note is a musical unity in itself so that musical meanings have existed in those single notes intrinsic, by which there is an emphasis on the elements that produce the tone resulting in a vast treasury of articulation, the change of the tone, the alteration of the tone, the vibrato and the tremolo. The focus on the elements and values of each single tone is the opposite of the traditional Western polyphony concept.

Yang (2005) proposes that in the twentieth century, Asian music played a role in Western music art as a source of inspiration for modern composers. Most discussions of Asian musical influences have shown clear signs of oriental-pentatonic melodies. The composer, in a Western context, has used exotic percussion, references and titles that originate in ancient philosophy and religion. The most obvious evidence is the use of pentatonic and gongs to describe wealth in the practice of music. According to Yang (2005), this envisioned a meeting between the East and the West in isolation. In this case the gamelan is an important element in the integration of Western music and Asian music. Gamelan is a collection of traditional musical instruments that are included in the category of hit and hammer. Most gamelan components are produced from metal.

Ideas and Concepts Behind the Creation of TjongA Fie

Ideas

The idea in this piece of music comes from the story of the life of TjongA Fie. The story is obtained from one of TjongAFie's grandchildren, the late FonPrawiraTjong (interviewed on 31st of January 2015). Tjong A Fie (1860-1920) or TjongYiauW Hian was a Hakka Chinese businessman, banker and kapitan (Chinese Major) who built a large plantation business in Sumatera, Indonesia. Tjong A Fie built his business that employed more than 10,000 labor workers. Because of his great success, he maintained a good relationship with the ruler of Deli, including Sultan Deli Makmun Al Rasjid and Dutch researcherities. He was linked with the economic and political systems of the city.

Concept:

The concept in this musical work is to use three different cultures namely Chinese, Western and Malay. The use of the *Huowu* mode F G Bb C D E is taken from the Chinese culture. These six tones are then combined with the twelve tones of the Western music culture to find variations from the *Huowu* mode. And taken from the Malay culture are the rhythmic patterns of *inang*, *joget*, and *zapin*.

Focus in the Creation of the Work

In this paper, the researcher creates a musical work in the form of Programme Music, using the following instrumentation to create a music ensemble: Flute, Oboe, Guitar, Violin, Viola, Cello, Double Bass, *Malay Gendang*, *Rebana*, Temple Block, Cymbal and Gong. In this work, the

researcher tries to recreate elements of Chinese, Malay and Western music. However, the use of these traditional instruments are without changing their original tone colours, retaining the sounds of Malay, Chinese and Western musical instruments into the composition. The focus of the creation of this work is to combines elements of traditional music with that of Western music, resulting in a new texture, harmonic formations, melodic expansion from the *Huowu* mode and the technique of combining Western and traditional musical instruments that produce different 'sound colors'.

Composition Methods Used

In order to create the composition "Story of Tjong A Fie", the researcher first gathered information and ideas from existing works by composers who have also merged Western and Indonesian music. These concepts are then synthesized into the melodies and tones of all the instruments be it Western or Asian, and into the music which is Indonesian in origin. This synthesis of various elements from different origins produces a new sound colour for the ensemble. Then the result of this new tone colour is used to realize the concept into a musical score form.

In order to realize the concept into the musical score, the researcher uses the *Huowu* mode and transposes it into the twelve-tone scheme of Western music, producing a new set of tones which is then used in the composition for the ensemble. After modifying this sequence in writing of music works then the researcher realize it into the form of a complete musical score. After going through the stages above the researcher embody in the form of one artwork is the ensemble "Story of TjongA Fie".

In this article, the researcher will discuss the capital and practice systems of the Chaozhou capital with respect to Xianshi music. The researcher has chosen Chaozhou's capital as the mode represented for this programme music work. According to Dujunco (2013: 1), in Chaozhou music, scale, pitch ornaments, pitch temperament, interval patterns and typical melodic motion recurrence are important parameters to distinguish one variant of capital from a certain tune from another song. The pitch key tone or initial tone and rhythm are not considered important as determinants of the capital. This is in contrast to China's mainstream folk music tradition capital system where the initial tone and permeation are of certain pentatonic intervals. The resulting scale series identifies the mode.

The original works for ensemble using the *Huowu* mode is composed of only six tones. In this composition, these six tones are used over and over across the twelve tones of the Western chromatic scale, producing 12 new modes from the original *Huowu* mode. The original *Huowu* mode (one of the tonal materials from Chaozhou) can be seen below, Dujunco (2013):



Image 1. Huowu Mode

Implementation of *Huowu* mode, Malay rhythm and variations of modes into the musical instruments

This is the *Huowu* mode which starts from F and goes to G, A #, C, D, and E, which is played on the violin. This can be seen below:



Image 2. *Huowu* mode on Violin music score

The *Huowu* mode is then changed twelve times, following the Western music system and producing new modes. Here is the new mode found on the oboe starting on the note A as seen from bar 9 to bar 11 below:



Image 3. The New *Huowu* mode after combined with twelve tone

The use of Malay rhythms namely *zapin*, *inang*, and *joget*, can be seen from bar 7 to bar 8 below:



Image 4. Malay Rhythm

The variations of the inang rhythm played by one percussion and the two percussions can be seen from bar 28 to 31 below:



Image 5. Variation *Inang* rhythm on percussion

The rhythm of *jogetis* found on the oboe on bar 9 to bar 11 as below:



Image 6. *Joget* Rhythm

The *Zapin* rhythm is found in the *rebana*, temple block and cymbal, as below:



Image 7. *Zapin* Rhythm

From bar 46 - 47, there is a use of the reverse side of the bow on the violin to produce a different tone, as seen below:

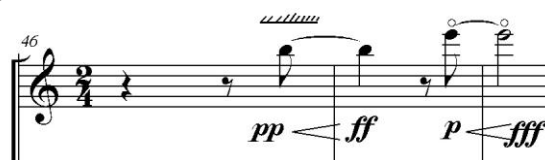


Image 8 . Using the reverse side of the bow

From bar 1 to bar 3, there are indications of which stick to be used on the percussion instruments. The gong is played using a hard stick, to produce a big round sound. The cymbal is first played with a soft stick then with a wood stick. The soft stick gives the cymbal a soft and fine tone, and the wood stick produces a shimmering sound.

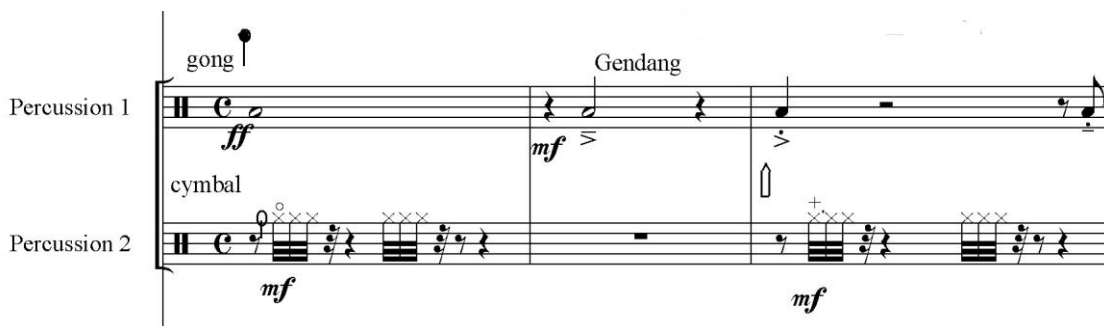


Image 8 . Sticks to be used for percussion

These are some of the instructions which are put into the score for various instruments:



Hard stick



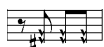
Soft Stick



Wood stick



Excessive pressure to produce noise on that specific pitch; degrees of pressure are determined by the indicated dynamics. (mf, the pitch still can be recognized but f , the pitch is not recognized because of heavy pressure on the strings).



Bow beyond bridge on the indicated string



Denotes a quick vibrato



Denotes pitch lower than note E natural but higher than note E



Denotes pitch higher than note Bb but lower than note B natural

Conclusion

This new composition is a programme music, depicting the story of Tjong A Fie, a tradesman who came to Indoensia from China, and worked hard with the locals who were mainly Malay people. He helped the community to grow and become prosperous. Based on this idea, the researcher has used a mode of Chinese origin, the *Huawu*, and combined it with the Western chromatic scale, producing new sounds by transposing the six-note mode into all twelve keys of the Western scale. To further enhance and add new sounds into this composition, the instruments used in the ensemble are given specific directions on technique, such as the violin using the wooden side of the bow instead of the hair to play notes. The percussion are also given instructions on which sticks to use, to create specific tone colours. As a result, this composition is rich with new tones and sounds which give the piece a range of expressiveness in telling the story of Tjong A Fie.

References

- Hardjana, S. (2003). *Corat-Coret Musik Kontemporer: Duludan Kini*. Ford Foundation dan Masyarakat Seni Pertunjukan Indonesia.
- Hardjana, S. (2004). *Musik: Antara Kritik dan Apresiasi*. PT Kompas Media Nusantara, Jakarta.
- McCalla, J. (1996). *Twentieth-Century Chamber Music*. New York: Routledge.
- Cook, M. L. (2009). Thesis for PhD: *Living in Northwest Asia: Transcultural and Postwar Art Music*, Departement of Musicology University of Colorado.
- Wen-Chung, C. (1971). "Asian Music" in Vinton (ed.) *Dictionary of Contemporary Music*, E.P Dutton and Co., Inc.
- Yang, M. (2005). *American Music*. Journal The Board of Trustees of The University of Illinois Press, Vol. 23, 395.
- Dujunco, M. M. (2013). Chaozhou Model Theory.
<https://www.umbc.edu/eol/8/dujunco/dujunco1.html>, 2013