

"The Sun Shadow IV" Breaks the Musical Language, Artistic Interest and Universal Technical Techniques of Guzheng Composition.

Jiyao Liu*

College of Music, Fujian Normal University, Fujian, 350117, China

*110012020088@student.fjnu.edu

Abstract. This paper mainly describes the development of the expression of traditional zheng music in China. Since the 1980s, and particularly in the 21st century, Chinese composers have emerged as a significant force in the global music industry. Qin Wencheng, as one of the most influential contemporary composers, has successfully blended elements of Mongolian music with Western modern compositional techniques, resulting in his unique artistic style and sonic experiences. This research paper focuses on his composition "Shadow of the Sun IV" and aims to analyze the creation of new sounds and the logical structure within the piece. Furthermore, it seeks to elucidate the influence of Chinese aesthetic concepts on Qin's musical compositions, uncovering his distinctive creative techniques and musical ideas. Additionally, this paper provides an analysis and interpretation of the historical significance and position of Qin Wencheng within the development of modern Chinese music. By delving into the depths of the musical score and exploring the connections between the internal and external aspects of the music, this study aims to establish a broader understanding of contemporary music composition and offers valuable insights for both composers and music analysts.

Keywords: Zither composition; traditional zither music; modern zither music; new sound.

1. Introduction

The guzheng, a traditional Chinese instrument, has undergone a fascinating evolution throughout its history. Its development can be divided into three distinct stages, with the third stage marked by the emergence of a new generation of professional musicians, including Tan Dun and Qin Wenchen, who are often referred to as the "New Wave" musicians from the prestigious Central Conservatory of Music. During this third stage, a wave of compositions emerged that embodied two creative ideas. The first involved utilizing traditional Western compositional techniques, which brought a fresh perspective to guzheng music. This fusion of Eastern and Western musical elements added depth and complexity to the compositions, expanding the sonic possibilities of the instrument [1].

The composers of this era focused not only on melodic development but also on the exploration of (acoustic) sound. They sought to delve into the tonal qualities of the guzheng, experimenting with different playing techniques and exploring the instrument's expressive potential beyond its traditional melodic role. This emphasis on sound as an expressive element opened up new avenues for Chinese guzheng music, allowing for the development of new acoustic, tonal, and performance techniques. The second creative idea that emerged during this phase involved incorporating emerging musical instruments into guzheng compositions. This experimental approach allowed for the exploration of new sounds and textures, pushing the boundaries of traditional guzheng music. By combining the guzheng with instruments such as the piano, violin, or even electronic instruments, the composers created a unique blend of traditional and contemporary sounds. This integration of diverse instruments expanded the sonic palette of guzheng music, creating a rich and dynamic musical experience. One of the key figures of this period was Qin Wenchen, whose composition "The Shadow of the Sun IV" stands as a masterpiece. This piece exemplifies the development and innovation of linguistic expression within guzheng music. Qin Wenchen, along with other New Wave musicians, sought to challenge the traditional tonality and aesthetics of guzheng music. Through her composition,

she explored the erosion of traditional tonality and the introduction of new timbres into guzheng music.

"The Shadow of the Sun IV" is a significant composition that warrants further investigation. Previous research on this piece has often relied on subjective interpretations of musical expression or provided a general overview of innovation in guzheng music creation. However, there is a need for a more comprehensive analysis that combines the dimensions of time and space, aesthetics, and musicality. This paper aims to bridge this gap by providing a detailed analysis of "The Shadow of the Sun IV." It seeks to explore the concept and methodology of guzheng's "new timbre" and examine how the introduction of new timbres has influenced the aesthetic expression of guzheng music. By delving into the intricate relationship between time, space, and musical elements, this research aims to shed light on the evolution of guzheng music and its artistic significance in contemporary contexts.

By connecting time and space, this analysis will delve into the background and development of guzheng music creation during the New Wave era. It will explore the specific expressions of innovation found in "The Shadow of the Sun IV" and analyze the breakthroughs in musical vocabulary that it represents. This research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the composition, examining its aesthetic and musical qualities and placing it within the broader context of guzheng music's evolution. By studying the linguistic expression in "The Shadow of the Sun IV," researchers can gain insights into the changing landscape of guzheng compositions during this period. This analysis will contribute to a deeper understanding of the artistic development of guzheng music and its continued relevance in contemporary music scenes. It will also highlight the importance of exploring new sonic possibilities and pushing the boundaries of traditional musical practices.

2. Retrospection and Innovation of Guzheng Language

2.1. The Development and Broadening of Chinese Modern Guzheng Composition under the Influence of Western Music

2.1.1 Breaking the mold, traveling through space and time - "The Sun Shadow iv."

The modern Western music ideology has had a significant impact on the development of contemporary guzheng music [1]. It is through the influence of avant-garde compositional techniques that the aesthetics and performance of Chinese guzheng music have undergone significant changes. In traditional aesthetics, the interpretation of guzheng music emphasized "rhythm" and "staticity." Today, the traditional tonality and aesthetics of guzheng music are gradually being eroded, leading to major shifts in the realm of aesthetics.

Compositions have become increasingly complex in terms of texture and voice leading, and the introduction of new timbres has further elevated the popularity of the guzheng. People have not only discovered the instrument's untapped potential but also recognized its possibilities. As a result, the guzheng is now being viewed from a new aesthetic perspective.

In conventional discussions, space and time are relatively independent concepts [2]. In human perception, perception of time often fluctuates with the expansion and contraction of the space we occupy. For example, standing on a hill in the grasslands, looking towards the horizon through the dry air, removing the overlapping shadows of urban civilization, the unified green color brings us closer to the subconscious. Alongside this, people awareness of time fades, and what remains is a faint sense of nostalgia, stripped of colors and lines [2]. This is not an overly sentimental reflection on a trip to the grasslands, but rather a feeling often experienced when listening to Qin Wenchin's "Shadow of the Sun" series.

Qin Wenchin's grasslands and footsteps, similar to Debussy's tolling bells, do not dwell on the level of language, nor are they symbol systems organized by logic. They are closer to the symbolic level, possessing broad meanings that transcend the confines of music and text. This broadness of meaning creates favorable conditions for evoking positive imagination. Like dream images, they have

the potential to draw us closer to personal subconscious, a potential often described as "hypnotic" or "trance-like" when used positively.

Whether in choosing titles or writing music reviews, when crafting texts about music, we often strive to mobilize rationality and linguistic abilities to logically describe the work or interpret its logical structure. This undoubtedly suppresses subconscious, resulting in an excess of determinism and objectivity in the written work. Perhaps for similar reasons, in 1987, Qin Wenchin renamed his piano piece "Summer" to "The Sun Shadow." Herders on the grasslands use the length of shadows cast by the sun to discern the time, hence "The Sun Shadow" serves as a metaphor for the concept of "time." Over the past thirty years, Qin Wenchin has created twelve chamber music works under this theme, ranging from solo instrumental pieces to ensembles and chamber choirs. Like twelve mirrors, they reflect the composer's aesthetic taste and creative ideas [3].

"The Sun Shadow IV" is a solo piece composed for the guzheng, commissioned by performer Xu Fengxia and created by Qin Wenchin in 2000 [4]. The entire composition consists of five continuous movements: 1. Rustling, 2. Chang Diao, 3. Serenity and Light, 4. Clouds in Motion, and 5. Song on the Strings [5]. It seamlessly combines elements of modern music with the qualities of Eastern ethnic music [6].

The guzheng has been renowned for its unique timbre since ancient times. In "The Sun Shadow IV," Qin Wenchin not only employs various traditional playing techniques but also incorporates ideas from composers like Helmut Lachenmann. By developing new performance techniques, he utilizes the left side of the guzheng, the soundbox, and the strings themselves as sound-producing elements [7]. By bowing the strings, he "reduces" the guzheng to a bowed string instrument, showcasing the characteristics of instruments such as the guqin, horsehead fiddle, sihu, and percussion [8]. This allows the guzheng's performance capabilities to be maximized.

Furthermore, the performance requirements for this piece are not overly demanding, making it highly popular among guzheng performers and establishing it as a classic work in modern guzheng repertoire.

"The Sun Shadow IV" adopts a relatively simple method of tuning based on the note D. The specific kite code arrangement is plotted in Figure 1, below. Within four octaves, it utilizes the D-based pentatonic scale (1st to 5th strings), D-based heptatonic scale (6th to 10th strings), and two sets of D-based diatonic scales (11th to 21st strings). Although it differs from the traditional method of using the same scale for tuning within four octaves, it is not difficult to operate. It is similar to the common D tuning and can be achieved by moving the bridges, without the need for special configurations such as multiple guzhengs or butterfly-shaped guzhengs. Therefore, the performance requirements for this piece can be considered "not overly demanding." The tuning of this piece also exhibits a certain level of modernity. Firstly, within the range of strings 6 to 21 (d to d3), the pitch is centered around the notes g1 and a1, forming an almost complete symmetrical structure. Secondly, on the 4th and 8th strings, Qin Wenchin added two bridges within the previously undefined area on the left side of the bridges, positioned 22 centimeters and 15 centimeters behind the bridges, respectively. Due to the varying lengths of the resonating boxes of different guzhengs, the remaining string lengths on the left side after tuning are different. Therefore, the additional bridges may not produce the same pitch on different guzhengs, but they have the same indistinct pitch on guzhengs of the same specifications. For example, in the recording of "The Sun Shadow IV" by Jingwen Records, the additional bridge on the 4th string produces an indistinct pitch of b1 and exhibits strong even-numbered harmonics. This design adds an element of aleatoric music to the composition (see the Figure 1) [7].

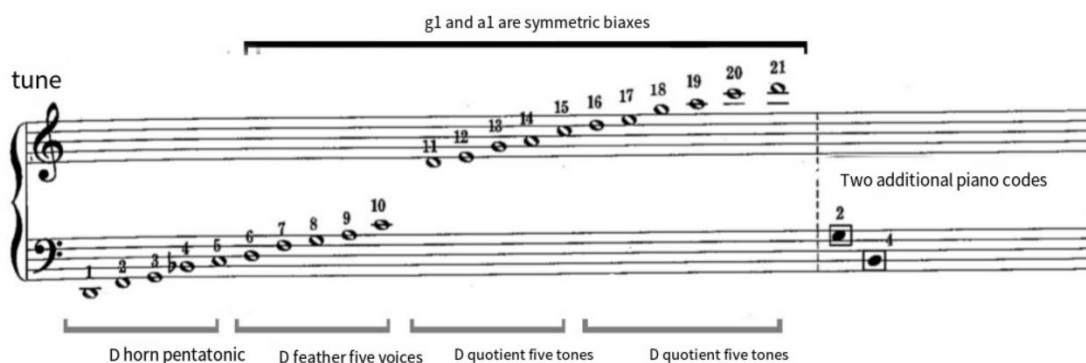


Fig. 1 String Pitch and Koto Code Arrangement [9]

Tuning sets the main pitch space for the piece, but for a guzheng composition, tuning does not encompass the entirety of available pitches. Performers can play microtonal pitches through the technique of pressing the strings on the left side of the bridges, altering the tension and length of the strings. This allows for a certain range of pitches above the tuned pitches. Accomplished performers can use this technique to play ornamentation such as upward and downward glissandi, as well as vibrato with varying degrees, speeds, and techniques of "yin" (sliding), "chan" (tremolo), and "rouxian" (rubbing the strings), the decorative techniques utilized in this track are illustrated in Figure 2 [10]. The subtle pitch variations produced by pressing the strings have characteristics of continuous pitch bending, making them suitable not only for traditional folk music but also for contemporary music. Qin Wenchin extensively employs these techniques in the first four sections of "The Sun Shadow IV." (see the Figure 2) [9].

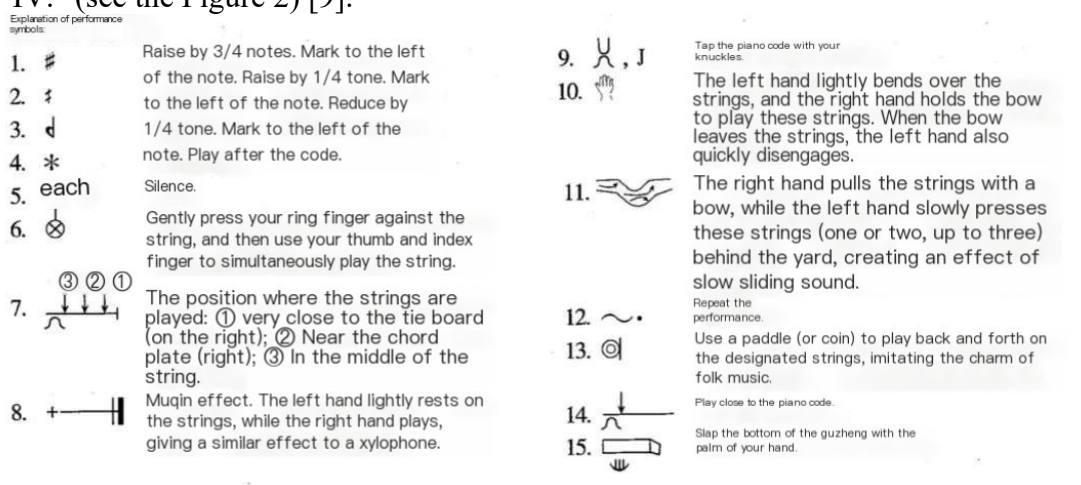


Fig. 2 Technical approach to performance [9]

2.1.2 Klang

The section titled "Klang" serves as a scattered introduction and does not adhere to a specific meter. It lacks traditional bar lines and beats, and the intensity of each sound is individually notated [8]. Qin Wenchin adopts the common technique of graphic notation in contemporary music, using large sections of blank space to separate musical phrases and enhance the sense of dispersion. This also highlights the resonance of the strings, creating a musical texture that resembles faint ink strokes on rice paper, quickly immersing the listener in an ethereal atmosphere. "Klang" utilizes 4x9=36 sounds, mostly in a pointillistic manner, with a significant number of large interval leaps. It also incorporates the three fundamental timbres of the guzheng: open strings, stopped strings, and harmonics, thus bearing some resemblance to guqin music [11]. It can be derived in Figure 3, in terms of interval materials, "Klang" primarily employs pentatonic intervals such as perfect fourths and major seconds.

The combinations include familiar sets such as (0257) and (025), overlapping major and augmented triads with perfect fourth intervals, and whole-tone blocks (see the Figure 3).

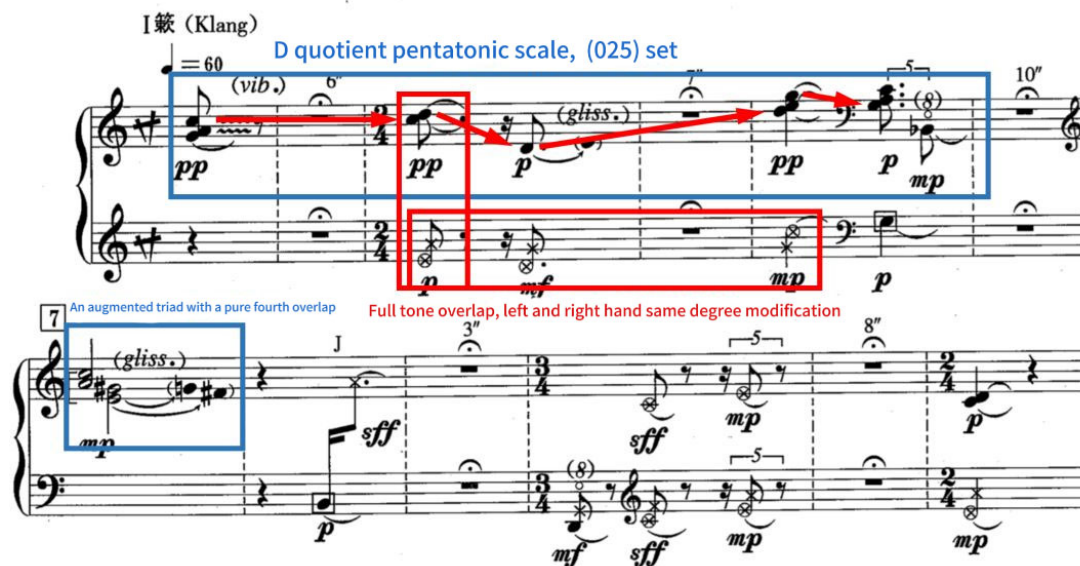


Fig. 3 Chords in Loose Klang [9]

The first eight bars can be seen as the opening phrase of the piece [10]. Qin Wenchin intermittently uses three (025) sets, with the root notes being g1, d2, and g, thus presenting the D pentatonic scale in its entirety for the first time. In terms of syntax, Qin Wenchin employs a technique called "conveyance," where the same pitch connects two adjacent sounds [10]. For example, in the opening phrase, the pitches C, D, and G serve as conveyance notes, forming a pentatonic set. The use of conveyance helps to bridge the gaps created by the large sections of blank space, and together with the technique of transforming horizontal lines into vertical structures, it strengthens the musical structure horizontally. Vertically, Qin Wenchin enhances the structural strength and enriches the timbre by overlapping pitches of the same pitch class. For example, while the right hand plays the notes normally, the left hand simultaneously plays on the left side of the bridges [8], creating a dulling effect on the individual notes and producing a rough auditory effect reminiscent of the guzheng.

2.1.3 Lange Diao

As the title suggests, the second movement, Lange Diao (long melody), is a written reproduction of Mongolian long melody music [12]. Its relationship to the long melody can be demonstrated in several ways. One is that the section is built on the pentatonic modulation of merchant D, using the merchant modulation common in long-tone music. The second is the use of accented long tones. There are two accented long tones in this section: the central D tone and its upper genus A. Look closely at Figure 4, the long tones have an elastic rhythm and fine vibrato with a strong sense of improvisation, but this sense of improvisation is produced by strict notation. On both sides of the single tone, Qin Wenchen adds 1/4, 3/4 and whole-tone intervals to imitate the agitated vibrato of the "Noguera" style of singing in long tones. In the long tone La, the inserted vibrato intervals include a whole tone, 3/4 tone, sliding 3/4 tone, sliding 1/4 tone, sliding semitone and sliding semitone, which are very rich, and the form evolves from a nervous movement to a continuous sliding movement. In addition, Qin Wenchen also imitated the elastic rhythmic characteristics of the "Nogura" style of singing, which gave the "Long Melody" a rather improvisational color. The third is the use of contrapuntal rhythm, a syncopated rhythm in which short tones are used to support long, sustained tones. The contrapuntal rhythm, with its pulsating dynamics, is an important feature of the Long Tune, and each long tone of the "Long Tune" is preceded and supported by a short note of contrapuntal character [13].

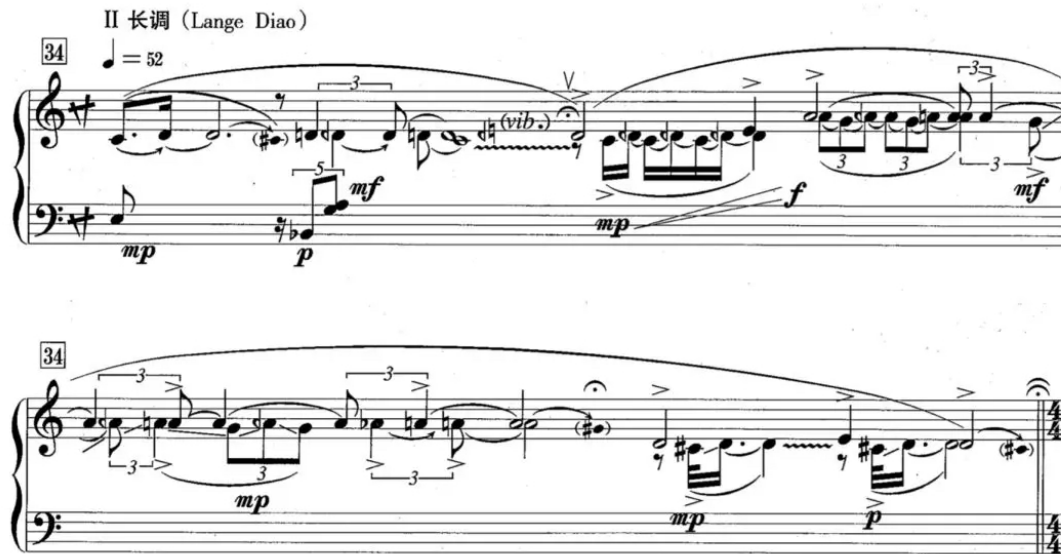


Fig. 4 The fragment score of Lange Diao [9]

In terms of playing technique, the "Long Tune" focuses on the use of ascending and descending glissandos to create the delicate vibrato described above. For example, the decorative C flat 3/4D trill at the end of the D long. The actual performance is in C (10th string) by rapidly plucking the strings back and forth. Largo—the fragmentary trills of the "long tone" are complex and difficult to play in various ways.

2.1.4 Stille und Sonnenlicht

The third section of *Stille und Sonnenlicht*, which follows the Long Tune, is also a rewriting of the Long Tune. The third section, *Stille und Sonnenlicht*, is also a rewriting of the Long Tune, in which Qin Wenchen uses a bowing technique, restoring the modern zheng as a bowed instrument [14]. 35-44 measures are taken from the Long Tune, and use a shorter, five-tone chunky sound, which is a development of the Rustling. The player needs to stroke the strings with the left hand and use the bow with the right hand to play all the strings within the upper and lower limits of the blocks, and the pentatonic string setting will naturally produce blocks of significant pentatonicity. In measures 35-44, Qin Wenchen's blocks are shorter in duration, discontinuous, and separated by rests, as in *Rustling*; in measures 36, 38, and 39, the same abstract "inverse division" form is used, but the white space and vibrato modifications give this section an ethereal sense of color that is "fleeting," as Qin Wenchen puts it in his introduction. As Qin Wenchen says in the description of the work, "it is a childhood fantasy". The heart of the piece lies in the 45 "measures" (actually a block of time), a piece of improvised music in which the composer uses pure blocks of fourths, not strictly notated, sliding with the bow, see Figure 5 for details. The sound of the bow traveling across the strings is akin to that of a marimba, and the composer improvises at an undetermined tempo, framing only the intervals of the block and whether or not it is scraped. The block lasts 81 seconds, during which three counter-crescendos are added to delineate phrases, and can be described as flesh-and-blood, shape-and-soul.

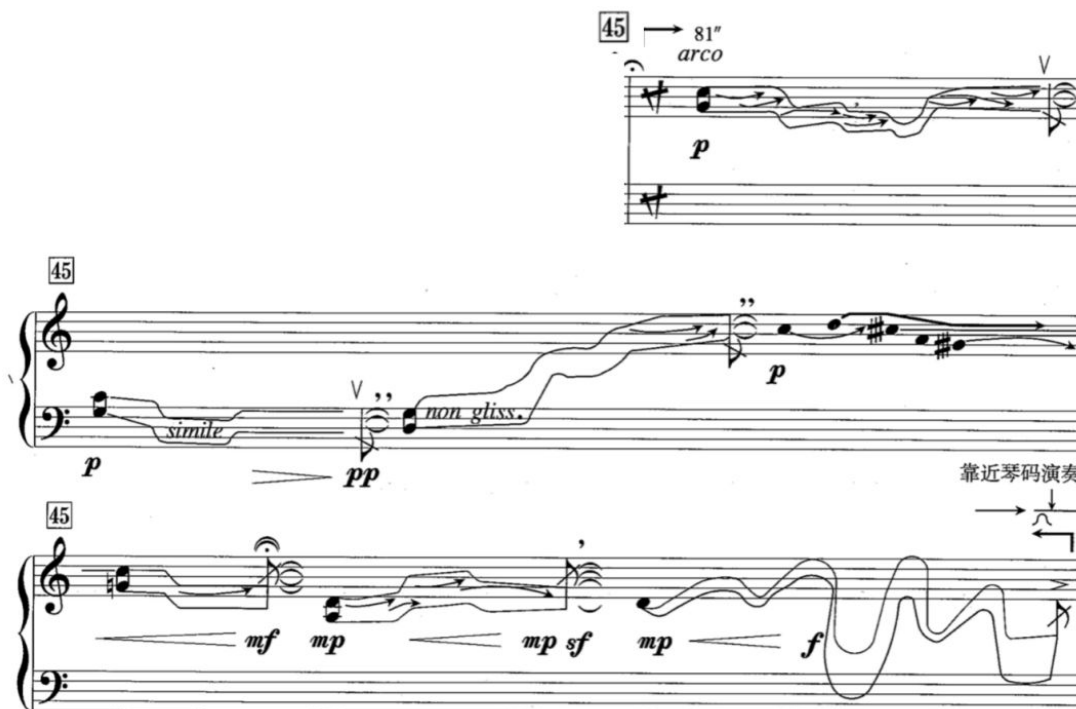


Fig. 5 Non-strict notation in 45 measures [9]

The tone of a bowed string instrument is related to the faceplate, the backplate and the vibrating cavity. When playing pitches in the lower register, a clear and sustained resonance peak can be observed near 100Hz (97~102), which has an obvious modifying effect on the bass block. As Lachenmann did with the cello, Qin also varied the bowing position to produce differentiated timbres. As with all bowed instruments, the sound is grittier closer to the yardstick and more transparent away from it [15].

2.1.5 Ziehende Wolken

The fourth section, Ziehende Wolken, is the largest, and ends with a sliding tone block, creating a small cave-like "diatonic" movement. 51 bars in, Qin Wenchen's use of contrasting polyphonic weavings of dotted lines gives the work a new impetus after the first climax in Silence and Light [15]. In the right hand, the familiar rayed melodic form is played on empty strings, using nine different sounds, all of which are taken from the (0257) collection, the prototype of which is found in the tenth time block of "Walking Clouds". The tones in the same block are superimposed sequentially, creating a "sense of light" as they increase in intensity. The left hand plays a fixed pattern using the post-code rocking finger technique, with the thumb fixed and the index and ring fingers taking turns to play, which is characterized by a smooth and audible subtle sense of beat, and is one of the signature fingerings of the guzheng and pipa, etc [8].

As in Figure 6, the guzheng percussorizes in measures 53 and 54, with the playing of the two additional zither codes and synchronized knuckle tapping on the code or on the backboard of the zither. The tapping is attenuated and has an echo-simulating quality. The sustained, dense patterns in this section tighten the tension of the music, and in measure 59, after an intense accelerated finger waggle, four downward sweeps follow. The use of stops to modify the sweeps is comparable to cracking. bars 60 to 64 are freely structured and more poetic, and bar 63 briefly borrows sequences to construct the melody, but appears to be a non-sequitur.

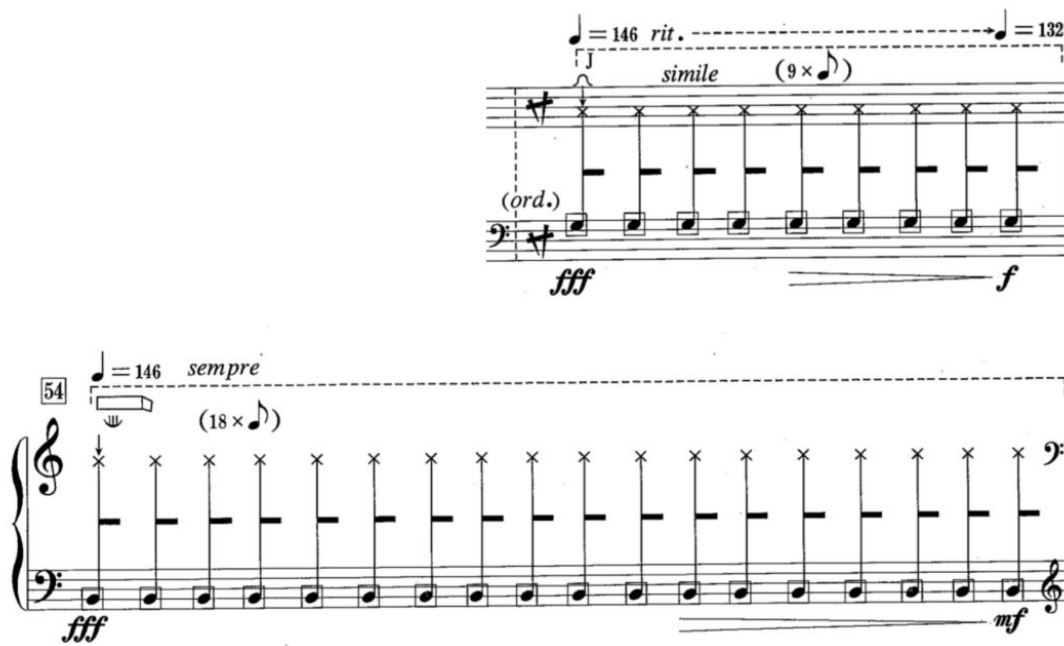


Fig. 6 53,54 bars of guzheng percussionized sheet music [9]

As shown in Figure.7, time block 71 is the passage of sound, and once again the composer uses pressed-string-based glissandi to simulate an echo effect; the slides in pitch are not strictly notated, and the crescendo glissandi are connected by dotted lines, once again leaving the specifics of the music to the performer with the brushstrokes of opportunity. Afterwards, the listener is once again separated from the music by time [13].

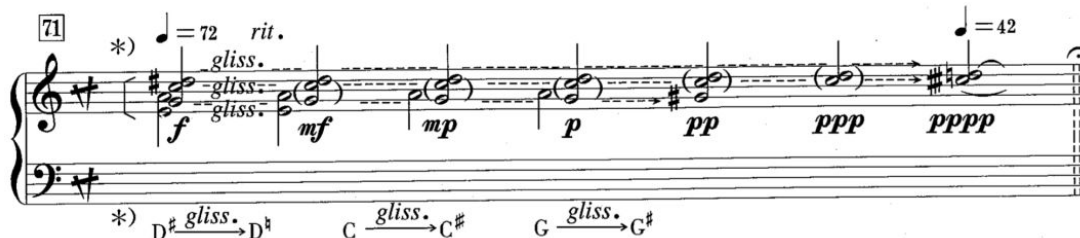


Fig. 7 Passage of time. [9]

2.1.6 Lied auf den

Lied auf den is a chess game that ends with the composer scraping the strings back and forth with a coin to mimic the wiping of the sihu. The left hand plays on the D-feather pentatonic modulation and the D-shang yanle modulation, as the sound of the wiping strings falls away at the end of the meadow [9].

From the above stacked introduction, it is clear that Shadow of the Sun IV is a rich work. It contains an exploration of timbre, an exploration of the new face of the zither, but also an exploration of improvisation, of chance, of "time", of the musical semantics of "time". This search has fascinated many composers - and more broadly, many artists - in the 20th century [15]. I have briefly shared Grisey's three-layered theory of temporality. The second layer is the influence of improvisation on the temporality of the work, which varies according to the performer's habits, states, and perceptions, and is thus "opportunistic" in nature. In Shadows of the Sun IV, Qin Wenchen amplifies the obscure "chance" through the use of additional keys, non-strict notation, and technique. This gives the work an unintentional poetic quality. The other intentional poetic aspect of the work comes from the work's imitation of the music of the steppe. The scene of the people in the grassland is the composer's unforgettable memory, which, like the sun that sank yesterday, has not disappeared but sunk into the subconscious level of "under the grassland". Therefore, we can see in Qin Wenchen's works such imagery as footsteps, grassland, long tune, etc., which are abstract and plausible, a refraction of

memories rather than a recreation of modeling. In the same way that psychologists use dreams or abstract art to induce people to turn away from active imagination, the perceptible abstractions that appear in Qin Wenchen's and others' works have the same associative potential for the experienced listener [16].

3. Conclusion

Expanding on the topic, the article also delves into the broader concept of artistic exploration and pushing boundaries. It examines how the composer's use of unconventional techniques and materials in "Shadow of the Sun IV" challenges traditional norms and conventions in music composition. By incorporating elements like the cello and coin rubbing, the composer breaks free from the confines of traditional instrumentation and explores new sonic possibilities. Furthermore, the article explores the significance of the composer's childhood memories and their influence on the composition. It delves into the power of nostalgia and how it can shape artistic expression, allowing the composer to tap into a deeply personal and emotive space. Through the lens of childhood recollections, the music takes on a whimsical and ethereal quality, inviting listeners to embark on a journey of imagination and introspection. Additionally, the article discusses the broader implications of the composer's experimental approach. It highlights the importance of embracing innovation and embracing diverse influences in the creation of art. By incorporating elements from different musical traditions and exploring unconventional techniques, the composer not only expands the boundaries of traditional guzheng music but also contributes to the evolution of the broader musical landscape.

Modern Western musical thought has had a profound influence on the evolution of contemporary guzheng music. Pioneering compositional techniques have brought about significant changes in the aesthetics and performance of Chinese guzheng music. Traditional guzheng music emphasized "rhythm" and "static" in its interpretation, but the influence of Western musical thought has gradually eroded the traditional tonality and aesthetics, leading to a shift in the aesthetic realm. The increasing complexity of guzheng compositions in terms of weaving and sonority, as well as the incorporation of new timbres, have made the guzheng a highly popular instrument. This has not only revealed the potential of the guzheng but also expanded its possibilities, allowing the instrument to be viewed from a new aesthetic perspective. As a result, there is still ample room for the guzheng to be utilized in the realm of "conceptual art," potentially altering its status among musical instruments.

In the future, the guzheng has the potential to transcend its role as a mere carrier of tones or emotions and become a representative of ideas. This opens up the possibility for guzheng music to be explored in different forms and through various means of expression. It is believed that the guzheng can be further integrated with other artistic disciplines such as visual art, video, and dance. By collaborating with these disciplines, guzheng music can create unique and immersive experiences that transcend traditional boundaries. The fusion of guzheng music with other art forms not only enhances the artistic value of the instrument but also expands its reach and appeal to a wider audience. By breaking away from traditional constraints, the guzheng can find new avenues for creative expression and contribute to the development of contemporary art. This interdisciplinary approach allows for the exploration of new sonic possibilities, visual aesthetics, and choreographic movements, creating a multi-dimensional and holistic artistic experience. In conclusion, the influence of modern Western musical thought has propelled the guzheng into new artistic territories. By embracing innovative compositional techniques and collaborating with other artistic disciplines, the guzheng has the potential to transform from a traditional instrument into a versatile medium for conceptual art. This evolution not only enriches the world of guzheng music but also contributes to the broader landscape of contemporary art.

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