

# *Embracing Diversity in Your Studio: Pedagogical Approaches in Intercultural Piano Teaching*

By Shuk-Ki Wong

A teacher's dedication to diversify repertoire is essential to successful intercultural teaching within the studio. Not only does it expose teachers and students to new literature and culture, but it also avoids lessons from becoming systematic due to the overuse of standard repertoire. When discovering new pedagogical resources, teachers need to make good choices for their students. And yet, this process is often one of the most challenging aspects, especially if the music uses foreign musical materials. Teachers may find it uncomfortable to teach foreign music while honoring its musical heritage. For example, how do teachers build an inclusive and diverse learning environment in their studios? What are the appropriate approaches for a stylistic interpretation? How can teachers assist students in learning repertoire from another culture?

This article explores compositional background and pedagogical issues of Tsang-Houei Hsu's *Chinese Folk Tune Solo Piano Pieces for Children, Op. 34* (1980), and Shui-Long Ma's *Piano Pieces on Chinese Folk Tunes for Children* (1980). Despite being challenging for teachers to adopt appropriate pedagogical approaches in newly discovered music, they can expand their knowledge of different cultures and introduce students to fresh and exciting repertoire.

## **Tsang-Houei Hsu and His Music**

Tsang-Houei Hsu (1929-2001) is a Taiwanese Composer, and he is considered one of the most prominent figures in Taiwan contemporary classical music. Known as the 'Pioneering collector of Taiwanese folk songs',

Hsu's musical style blends Chinese and Western traditions by combining Western music idioms with Chinese folk tunes, and also blurs the boundaries between music and culture. This fusion stems from his enthusiasm in poetry and also his studies in Paris with Jacques Chailley and André Jolivet. After graduating from National Taiwan Normal University, Hsu further pursued his studies at the University of Paris, France. His training in Paris was a turning point in his compositional style—he was inspired by Chailley and Jolivet to explore Chinese music history and adopt Chinese musical elements with Western compositional techniques. Not only does he use Chinese folk tunes, rhythms, and forms in his compositions, but his music also exhibits the influence of Claude Debussy, Béla Bartók, and Chinese composer Kwang-Chi Wang.

Upon his return to Taiwan in 1959, Hsu established a number of musical organizations and conferences for contemporary Chinese music research in addition to the teaching commitments at his alma mater and several universities. In 1964, Hsu and Chinese composer Wei-Liang Shih (1926-1977), initiated the 'Folk Song Collecting Movement', which researchers collected over 3,000 Taiwanese indigenous music and Han Chinese music.

Hsu's compositional output has covered a wide variety of instrumentations and genres, which include orchestral works, chamber music, arrangements of traditional Chinese folk songs, choral works, vocal works, and piano works. He has published four sets of piano works, in which two were dedicated to young piano learners, suitable for students from elementary-level to upper-intermediate level.

## ***Der Der Tune, from Chinese Folk Tune Solo Piano Pieces for Children, Op. 34 (1980)***

Op. 34 is Hsu's first pedagogical set dedicated to young piano students. One year

later, Hsu published the second set, *Chinese Folk Tune Solo Piano Pieces for Youth, Op. 35*.<sup>1</sup> Both sets integrate Western compositional style with Chinese and Taiwanese folk tunes, and the sequence progresses from elementary-level to upper intermediate-level. The first five pieces in *Op. 34* begin with simple time, five-finger position, hands separate, absence of key signature and dynamic markings, then it proceeds to the introduction of dynamic markings, finger independence, grace notes, arpeggiated chords at the end of the first set; accidentals, octave passages, clusters, counterpoint, modulation and chromatic scales in *Op. 35*. Hsu also included the lyrics in the music to facilitate students in their learning process. This progressive collection resembles Bela Bartók's *For Children* (1908-1909) and *Mikrokosmos* (1926-1939). Both works were composed for teaching purposes; the musical materials of *For Children* are derived from folk tunes, and the sequence in *Mikrokosmos* are coordinated according to the students' technical proficiency.

*Der Der Tune*, a folk tune from Hubei province in the Central China region, demonstrates the farmers' celebration of a good harvest. It is sung in a responsorial style, which the leader alternates with the chorus. Hsu rearranged the melody by differentiating its texture and dynamic contrast to depict its call-and-response musical form. Most Chinese folk tunes are circulated aurally, which the melody is varied with ornamentation and styles among individuals.

<sup>1</sup> The third set, *Chinese Folk Tune Solo Piano Pieces for Youth "I: Grasshopper Plays a Trick on a Rooster"* remained unpublished at Hsu's death.

得 得 调

湖北民歌

1=C  $\frac{2}{4}$   
(第一次领、第二次众)

1̇ 6̇ 6̇ 1̇ 6̇ | 5 5 | 5 6̇ 6̇ 5 6̇ | 2̇ 1̇ 2̇ | 1̇ 2̇ 1̇ 2̇ | 5 6̇ 2̇ 1̇ | 2̇ 1̇ 1̇ 6̇ 6̇ |  
(得里个得里 当 啊, 当里个当里 得两得, 里得里得 郎当得呀 得里个得里

1. 5 5 | 5 5. | 1̇ 1̇ 6̇ 1̇ | 5 6̇ 5 | 6̇ 1̇ 5 6̇ | 1̇ 6̇ | 1̇ 6̇ 6̇ 1̇ 6̇ |  
(领)  
当 啊, 当 啊, 太 阳(啊) 一 出(哎) 闪 金 光,(啊) 得里个得里  
当 啊, 当 啊, 船 田(啊) 一 片(哎) 水 汪 汪,(啊) 得里个得里

1̇ 6̇ | 1̇ 6̇ 6̇ 1̇ 6̇ | 6̇ 5 6̇ | 2̇ 2̇ 2̇ | 2̇ 2̇ 1̇ 6̇ | 5 5 5 5 5 | 5 6̇ 0 |  
(领)  
当 啊, 得里个得里 当啊, 歌 声(哪) 车 声(哪) 郎里个郎 当 得)  
当 啊, 得里个得里 当啊, 水 里(呀) 秧 苗(啊) 郎里个郎 当 得)

5 6̇ 1̇ | 2̇ 1̇ | 2̇ 1̇ 1̇ 6̇ 6̇ | 5 5. | 1̇ 6̇ 6̇ 1̇ 6̇ | 5 5 | 5 6̇ 6̇ 5 6̇ |  
(第一次领、第二次众)  
传 四 方,(啊) 得里个得里 当啊) (得里个得里 当 啊, 当里个当里  
长 得 壮,(啊) 得里个得里 当啊)

2̇ 1̇ 2̇ | 1̇ 2̇ 1̇ 2̇ | 5 6̇ 2̇ 1̇ | 2̇ 1̇ 1̇ 6̇ 6̇ | 5 5 | 2̇ 1̇ 1̇ 6̇ 6̇ | 5 5. | 5 - ||  
(众)  
得两得, 里得里得 郎当得呀 得里个得里 当 啊, 得里个得里 当啊。

Fig. 1. Chinese numbered notation of *Der Der Tune*. "1=C" means C major, and time signature 2/4 is placed after the key signature. The numbers (1-7) represent the scale degree in a diatonic major scale. Lines below and dots next to the numbers indicate note values. Dots above the numbers specify raising or lowering the octaves.

**Moderato**  
Lead in the 1st time, Chorus in the 2nd time

Fig. 2. Transcription of *Der Der Tune*'s Chinese numbered notation to Western notation.



Fig. 3. Excerpt of Hsu's *Der Der Tune* rearrangement in *Chinese Folk Tune Solo Piano Pieces for Children*, Op. 34.

The musical form of call-and-response is depicted through contrasting dynamics. Teachers should encourage students to associate dynamic levels with reference to lead vocalist and chorus to convey its unique performance style.

One common issue that students experience is the alternation of chords (m. 1-8, etc.) besides the frequent change of syncopated rhythm. Instead of simply instructing students to play the correct notes, prompt them to practice the chords with the outer notes. This enables students to be mindful of the hand position prior to adding inner chord voicing.

### Shui-Long Ma and His Music

Taiwanese composer Shui-Long Ma (1939-2015) is recognized by his compositional style of infusing folk materials with Western compositional device. Ma's interest in traditional music was rooted in his childhood years in Keelung City (Northeast Taiwan) after World War II in 1946. There were a large number of immigrants from Zhangzhou (a city in Fujian province, China) to Keelung—they brought Beiguan music and traditional music to the area. Such music were widely used in entertainment, religious events, weddings and funerals.

Although Ma was immersed in a musical environment in his early years, he did not have an opportunity to receive formal music education due to financial hardship. Ma was forced to withdraw from school after his father's death when he was 17 and started working full time at a fertilizer firm. However, he met musicologist Zhe-Yang Lee (1934-1990) at the firm, and Ma was introduced to painting and music through teachers referred by Lee.<sup>2</sup> With the encouragement of his mentor Ming-Teh Chiang (1931-1994), Ma decided to pursue music and was later admitted to National Taiwan University of the Arts.<sup>3</sup>

Ma received training from Taiwan's first generation music educators: Erh-Hua Hsiao (1906-1985), Yen Lu (1930-2008) and Tsang-Houei Hsu (1929-2001). The three mentors established Ma's foundation in his compositional style; Hsu in particular, who had just returned from Paris, inspired Ma to explore Western compositional technique, which he was the forerunner in promoting twentieth-century compositional technique upon his return to Taiwan.

In 1972, Ma moved to Germany to further his education at Regensburg University, Germany, with Oscar Sigmund. While abroad, Ma was eager to promote Chinese music after reevaluating the impact of music on one's identity. The passion of honoring his own cultural heritage, and the exposure to European culture enabled Ma to explore the possibility of blending Western compositional device with Oriental musical elements.

Ma's training in Taiwan and Germany is evident in his music. His compositional output spans across orchestral works, chamber music, choral music, vocal music, solo instrumental works and music for theatrical productions. Notable works include *Sketch of*

<sup>2</sup> Painters Ming-Teh Chiang (1931-1994) and Shou-Ling Wang (1934-2019) taught Ma painting. Ma also met composer Mau-Liang Chen (1937-1997), who enriched

Ma's musical knowledge and helped solidifying his foundation in music.

<sup>3</sup> Previously known as National Taiwan Academy.

*the Rainy Harbor, for piano* (1969), *Concerto for bamboo flute and orchestra* (1981), *Searching* (2005), a concerto for zheng (Chinese plucked zither) and orchestra, *The Invisible Temple* for male chorus and orchestra (2005).

***Song of the Wagon Driver, from Piano Pieces on Chinese Folk Tunes for Children (1980)***

*Piano Pieces on Chinese Folk Tunes for Children* (1980) is a set of pedagogical works written for Taiwanese young piano learners. Ma noticed the music education in Taiwan was so westernized that such system alienated students from their own musical culture. He started collecting folk melodies in China a year prior; 32 tunes were selected and rearranged for teaching purposes. Similar to Bartók’s *For Children* (1908-1909), *Mikrokosmos* (1926-1939) and Tsang-Houei Hsu’s *Chinese Folk Tune Solo Piano Pieces for Children, Op. 34* (1980), this set is organized in a step-by-step approach—the first twelve pieces are equivalent to the 60<sup>th</sup> etude or later in Beyer’s *Elementary Method Op. 101*, number 13 to 22 are at the level of Czerny’s *Practical Exercises for Beginners Op. 599*, and advanced to the proficiency comparable to upper-intermediate-level sonatinas in the last ten pieces. Description of compositional technique and lyrics are provided to make the learning process refreshing and culturally relatable.

*Song of the Wagon Driver* is a Uyghur folk song. Originally known as *Qamberxan*, this tune was translated to Chinese and adapted by Chinese ethnomusicologist Luo-Bin Wang (1913-1996). Wang discovered the melody when he heard the humming of a Uyghur driver. He notated the tune and later, translated the original language to Chinese.

“Davançiñniği yeri qattiq tavuzi tatliq  
达坂城的石路硬又平啦，西瓜大又甜啦，  
Davançiñda bir yarım bar Qambarxan atliq  
那里住的姑娘辫子长啊，两个眼睛真漂亮，  
Qambarxanniği saçı uzun yerge tegemdu

你要是嫁人，不要嫁给别人，一定要你嫁给我，

Qambarxandin sorap beqiñ erge tegemdu  
带上你的钱财，连着你的妹妹，赶上那马车来。”

Fig. 4. Lyrics of *Song of the Wagon Driver (Qamberxan)* in Urghur and Chinese translation.

“The soil of the Dabancheng is hard,  
But the watermelon is big and sweet,  
Qambarhan’s hair is so long,  
And her eyes are beautiful and bright,  
If you have to get married,  
Please marry me,  
Bring your dowries and your sisters,  
Come in the carriage with me.”

Fig. 5. English translation of *Song of the Wagon Driver*.

The origin of this folk song is unknown. One possible origination suggested the music can be traced back to the time of Yaqub Beg (1820-1877), when soldiers created tunes to express love and romance. Dabancheng, the city portrayed in *Qamberxan*’s lyrics, is an urban district in Ürümqi (capital of Xinjiang). It is located at the southeast of Ürümqi, and is known as a ‘pass city’ between Ürümqi and Turpan.

**达板城的姑娘**

1=A 4/4

维吾尔族民歌  
王洛宾 编曲

6̣ 6̣ 6̣ 1̣ 1̣ 1̣ 2̣ 3̣ 2̣ 1̣ 1̣ 6̣ | 6̣ 6̣ 1̣ 1̣ 2̣ 3̣ 1̣ 2̣ 0 |  
达板城的石路硬又平，西瓜呀大又甜，  
3̣# 2̣ 3̣ 2̣ 3̣# 2̣ 3̣# 2̣ 3̣# 2̣ 1̣ 6̣ | 6̣ 1̣ 2̣ 3̣ 1̣ 2̣ 7̣ 6̣ 0 |  
那里住的姑娘辫子长啊，两个眼睛真漂亮。  
6̣ 7̣ 6̣ 6̣ i̇ 6̣ i̇ 6̣ 5̣ 5̣ 3̣ | 5̣ 5̣# 4̣ 5̣ 6̣ 5̣ 4̣ 3̣ - |  
你要想嫁人，不要嫁给别人，请你一定嫁给我。  
3̣ 4̣ 5̣ 6̣ 5̣ 4̣ 3̣ 5̣ 4̣ 3̣ 2̣ 1̣ 7̣ 1̣ | 2̣ 3̣ 1̣ 2̣ 1̣ 7̣ 6̣ - ||  
带着你的钱财，领着你的妹妹，赶着那马车来。

Fig. 5. Numbered notation of *Song of the Wagon Driver*.



Fig. 6. Transcription of Wang's numbered notation to Western notation.



Fig. 7. Ma's rearrangement of *Song of the Wagon Driver*. The melody begins in measure 5. Imitation of horses galloping is portrayed by the staccatos in measures 1 to 4.

In Ma's rearrangement, he portrayed the imagery of horses galloping from a distance, and getting closer to the wagon driver with dynamic changes and articulations. To achieve a stylistic interpretation, students should play the staccatos with an articulated legato touch to illustrate the grandeur of horses and Dabancheng's scenery. Students can also use the damper pedal to convey the spacious, mountainous landscape with frequent pedal changes. In the closing section (m. 23-26), the change of register and dynamics indicates the departure of the driver and horses. Students are encouraged to articulate the notes with less pedal to illustrate its musical context. Teachers are also suggested to assist students to identify 'horse galloping' rhythmic pattern, for instance, the motif in measures 15-16.



Fig. 8. Closing section depicts the departure of the wagon driver and horses with the change of register and dynamics.



Fig. 9. Rhythmic pattern of horse galloping in measures 15-16.

Studying and listening to recordings of Chinese folk songs, discovering new music learning resources will assist teachers to achieve an appropriate interpretation of Tsang-Houei Hsu's *Chinese Folk Tune Solo Piano Pieces for Children, Op. 34* and Shui-Long Ma's *Piano Pieces on Chinese Folk Tunes for Children*. Teachers are also recommended to include more diverse teaching materials in their curriculum. By offering these intermediate-level pieces to students, teachers can refresh the studio repertoire, help students discover new artistic possibilities, enhance awareness and facilitate respect of other cultures.

## Resources

"Learn Chinese Songs: For English-Speaking Music Teachers." *Chinese Folk Songs for Music Teachers*. <http://www.chinesefolksongs.com>.

"China, Shanghai and Peking, 1901-1902, collected by Berthold Laufer." *Indiana University Media Collections Online*. [https://media.dlib.indiana.edu/media\\_objects/3f462n38f](https://media.dlib.indiana.edu/media_objects/3f462n38f).

"UNESCO Collection of Traditional Music." Smithsonian Folkways Recordings. <https://folkways.si.edu/unesco>.

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