Out Into the World: Chinese Film Music After The Cultural Revolution

A Thesis

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By

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ABSTRACT

In 2001, *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* by Ang Lee, with musical score by Dun Tan, won the Oscars for Best Foreign Language Film and Best Original Score. This was really a break for Chinese films and film music outside China: Before *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, although Chinese films already had a firm position and got wide reception in the world, Chinese film music did not get the same important attention, even when composed by the most highly regarded musicians, such as Jiping Zhao. Through general analysis of the brief development of Chinese films and film music after 1979, the thesis will compare the film music of the two celebrated Chinese composers: Jiping Zhao and Dun Tan. I will discuss the differences between their works which cause different reactions internationally, and will also address the implications of world-wide reception -- both positive and negative -- for the future identity of Chinese film music.
Dedicated to My Grandfather and My Parents

献给我的阿公和爸爸妈妈
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It was a huge challenge for me to write this thesis in a non-native language. It is a result of effort in overcoming a number of difficulties. I am sure I gradually getting used to thinking, arguing and writing in Western fashion and becoming more confident in my study in the United States. Moreover, I really want to say that this thesis would never have come to anything without the help and encouragement of many people.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2001, *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* (Wo Hu Cang Long 卧虎藏龙) by Ang Lee (李安), with musical score by Dun Tan (譚盾), won the Oscar Best Foreign Language Film and Best Original Score. It was really a break for Chinese films and film music outside China: Before *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, although Chinese film got a high reputation at many other important international film award ceremonies, none of them got the Oscar. Even if Chinese films already had a firm position and got wide reception in the world, Chinese film music did not get the same important attention, even when composed by the most highly regarded musicians, such as Jiping Zhao (赵季平).

This fact raises interesting questions about Chinese films and film composers, and particularly for the two most celebrated Chinese film composers, Dun Tan and Jiping Zhao. What are the differences between their works which cause different receptions when they go out into the world? And more broadly, why, until *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, did Chinese films succeed a lot in the world but their film music did not? What are the implications of world-wide reception -- both positive and negative -- for the future identity of Chinese film music?

The present thesis aims to provide answers for these questions. It begins with a summary of the current research situation on Chinese film music, noting the deficiencies they have regarding the above questions, and the reasons for writing a thesis on this topic.
The second chapter traces the historical background of Chinese films and film music, as articulated in scholarship up to the present time. The third chapter summarizes the main reasons given by scholars for the high reputation of certain Chinese films around the world. The fourth chapter compares film music of Jiping Zhao and Dun Tan in order to elucidate their different styles. The fifth chapter briefly discusses the influence of *Crouching Tiger* in particular on those later Chinese films and film music which have gained an international reputation. The conclusion presents, through a brief discussion of the meaning of "traditional culture," a view of Chinese film music which wants to go out into the world.
CHAPTER 1

Reasons and Methodology of Writing This Thesis

My original ideas about this topic are from a group of statistics in Forbes Magazine. It showed the number of Chinese films which won international film awards in the 20th Century, from 1935 to 1974, Chinese films won 66 awards, none of which was for film music; from 1977 to 2001, Chinese films won three hundreds and fifty-six awards, including all A Class International Film Festivals and Awards, but 10 of which were for film music (except Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon film music). If we review the eleven film music awards carefully, there are six awards for the music of travelogue, 4 awards for the music of narrative film.¹ It is very clear to see that, before 2000, comparing the Chinese films which won nearly all the most famous international film festivals, Chinese film music had another complete different destiny, even if these won some prizes for best film music, but they had neither much domestic praise nor international reaction after that.

Besides, the Chinese films such as Yello Earth (Huang Tu Di 黄土地), Red Sorghum (Hong Gao Liang 红高粱), Raise the Red Lantern (Da Hong Deng Long Gao Gao Gua 大红灯笼高高挂), To Live (Huo Zhe 活着) and Farewell My Concubine (Ba Wang Bie Ji 霸王别姬), continually won these most important international prizes. But their film music which were all composed by one composer, Jiping Zhao who got extreme high

¹ In this thesis, I only discuss the music for the narrative films
reputation in China, didn’t receive any important prizes or nominations in the Western world. However, when the film *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* came out, its music composed by Tan Dun won eight international awards, including the Oscar for Best Original Score.

Therefore, we might ask: "Expressing same traditional culture, why did Chinese films win many awards in the world but Chinese film music did not, before *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*?" Presuming the reason to lie with the scores themselves, and not with circumstances, we might ask: For the two famous Chinese film music composers: Jiping Zhao and Dun Tan, why did only the latter’s works understood and accepted by Western audience and film festivals? (It doesn’t mean winning prize is better than not winning) In order to know the reason, we should analyze Dun Tan’s unique characteristics by comparing it with the previous Chinese films and their music, to see the similarities and differences.

Generally speaking, the development of Chinese film and film music is the reflection of ideology and contemporary culture. We cannot see film music just from the musical angle, and should consider it against the background of society:

To begin with, film music is just one part of film, which is the product of cooperation between contemporary culture and technology. And also the development of culture and technology is closely connected with the change of society. So in order to

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2 Zhao Jiping only won one international film music prize which was already mentioned above. But there was nearly no reaction about the award in China. Besides, when talking about his most representative work, the music for this film was rarely mentioned.
analyze deep film music, we must discuss this issue not only come from a musical perspective, but also I will regard to film, ideology, and social background and so forth.

Second, film music is also the mental product and individual expression of composers. But the concepts of composition, ideas of aesthetics, styles and techniques of them are no doubt "figured" by the social environment. Just as French critic and historian Taine mentioned in his book *Philosophie De L' Art*, the style of an art work first belongs to the characteristics of the author's works, and are among many artists' styles in the same period, but should be attributed to the contemporary condition and social background. The change and development of society affected composer. After 1978, China re-modernized and re-opened itself to the world. Its social environment became more free and diverse. The Conscious dominant of Ideology weakened and desire for entertainment grew. The environment where Chinese film composers were living and getting educated changed a lot, which no doubt influenced their film music.

As the long time effect of only caring about the songs in films instead of soundtracks in the broader sense, academic research on film music during the past twenty years as an independent topic is still a budding subject in China.

Tianli Zeng (曾田莉), a professor of the Beijing Broadcasting Institute (Beijing Guangbo Xue Yuan 北京广播学院) is one of the major scholars of film music in China. In her article which describes the brief history of Chinese film music, she divided the

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3 The name was changed into Communication University of China (Zhong Guo Chuan Mei Da Xue 中国传媒大学) in 2004.
whole development into four periods: 1905-1949—The period of birth and first exploration; 1949-1966—Seventeen Years after the founding of the People’s Republic of China—The period of gradual maturation; 1966-1975—Ten years’ period of Cultural Revolution; 1976-Present—New Period. Zeng Tianli showed the individual characteristics of each period by presenting the representative films at that time. She finally drew the conclusion that the development of Chinese film music is closely related to changes in Chinese society.

In another important paper which pointed out the current situation of Chinese film music, Xuanhua Yang (杨薰华) summarized four major characteristics of Chinese film music during the past twenty years by using specific examples: specialization and profession of composers, multiple styles of musical creation, modernization of techniques, and globalization of communication.

For comparison with the development of Western film music, Dan Luo, (罗丹) professor of the Beijing Film Academy(Beijing Dian Ying Xue Yuan, (北京电影学院) listed reasons for different characteristics in musical expression between Chinese and Western film music according to concept, sources and materials, and cultural content. In the end, he argues that the main problem of current Chinese film music is the

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phenomenon of "faultage"—meaning, essentially, a lack of deeper cohesion between modern composition and traditional music.⁵

There are other papers and monographs that consider Chinese film music from the view of orchestration, application of traditional musical styles, individual composers' lives and their works. But the three papers discussed above give us the clearest sense of the structure and general characteristics of Chinese film music within the past twenty years. Unfortunately, none of these papers discusses the questions raised in the present thesis. Here, the issue is neither "success in winning a prize is the only proof of good quality" nor "one composer's film music is better than another's."

For the two most influential Chinese film music composers, Jiping Zhao and Dun Tan, I hope to explain (1) the similarities and differences of Chinese traditional musical elements as used in their works, by comparing their individual life experiences; (2) the reception of their works by both Chinese audiences and Western audiences; (3) the debate over the authority of traditional culture in Chinese films music. Then I try to find out the causes for sharp contrasts in receptions in the world; and finally, to find a way to make Chinese film music keep cultural identity, while going out of China, and getting the understanding and reception in the Western world.

Since I was born after 1978 I am familiar with this period and in particular with Chinese culture, ideology, and film after 1990. Studying in the United States since 2005, I have had the chance to look back at what happened in Chinese film music of this period

from another angle---standing in the environment of Western culture, which can give me some new ideas or new inspirations from some old thoughts. I consider this topic important and necessary because it reflects on Chinese contemporary history and also the encountering and interaction between Western culture and Chinese traditional culture.

Before jumping into the main part of the paper, there are three terms I want to clarify:

First, when I mention the "Western world", I mainly mean the audience and film market in the United States. Because of the strong power and effect of America in the world, although a lot of professional film making people in other countries, especially in Europe, exclude the Hollywood film industry and its effect, a film awarded the Oscar can be thought a success both in artistic and commercial terms and also can widely and quickly spread throughout the world. No doubt Chinese films have already demonstrated their excellence many times at the majority of main European and Asian Film Festivals during the past years. But they could rarely touch the Oscar, which is the representative of supreme award in film industry. Thus, pursuing the acclamation and acceptance in the market of United States and the Oscar is one of the goals among Chinese film makers. For film music, although Cong Su already acquired the Oscar Best Original Score in 1989 as a secondary member of the composition group of film composers for The Last Emperor, this award cannot be considered part of the identity of Chinese composers writing a Chinese style of film music. Even if so many reasons why Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon might have won Oscar, which may include the facts of politics or
international affairs, we should emphasize that the success of this film and its music in Oscar and the Western world film market is not an accident, but the result of deliberate intercession between Chinese traditional culture and Western culture.

Second, the word “Chinese films” here mainly has two sub-meanings: First, it refers to the films in mainland China. Second, it refers to the co-operation among mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. These two types of Chinese films are deeply affected by the change of the Chinese society after the Cultural Revolution. Those films which are independently produced by Taiwan or Hong Kong will not be discussed in this paper because they were not deeply affected by the Cultural Revolution.

Third, the film musical works of Jiping Zhao mentioned in this paper only refers to the ones in the most famous Chinese New Folk-Custom films, which is suitable for making a sharp contrast of receptions between the films and film music in the Western world.6

CHAPTER 2

The General Background of Chinese Films and Film Music after the Cultural Revolution

2.1 The General Background of Chinese Film after The Cultural Revolution

If we want to know what changed in Chinese society during the past twenty years from 1978 to now, we should know what the situation was before that.

China had many times' renovations during the past one hundreds and fifty years. As a country which has had five thousands years' history, China began its gradual process of modernization and opened to the world by the force of Britain after the First Opium War (鸦片战争) in 1848. But it was interrupted by the eight years Second Sino-Japanese War (抗日战争) and four years Civil War. When the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, China went back to the process of development but in a very slow speed, and even head backwardness during the Cultural Revolution. When it ended in 1978, China modernized and opened its door again to the world, which meant that every area of China would widely meet the challenge of the Western culture. From that point on, the development of modern Chinese culture actually became an exploration of how Chinese
traditional culture going to the world with protecting its own tradition while adjusting with Western culture. No doubt, Chinese film and film music could not avoid this problem. Understanding clearly the development and characteristics of these cultural expressions after 1978 is a key point in knowing modern Chinese music and Chinese culture more generally.

To some degree, Western cultural influence always comes inevitably with technological and economic development on Chinese society. After China failed in the first Opium War in 1840, Chinese progressive people at that time proposed that China must "learn merits from the West to conquer the West". (师夷长技以制夷) They started to learn the advanced technologies of the industry from Western countries. Later this renovation gradually extended to wider areas, which challenged the authority of Chinese traditional culture. Musical tradition is one part of them. In the estimation of Andrew F. Jones, "forcible translation of indigenous musical idioms into universal terms" has been "an inescapable component" of Chinese music for much of the twentieth century.¹ From that we can see, the mediation between Chinese and Western culture in music is a long process since the later period of the nineteenth century. But this process was interrupted by the two damaged war during the first fifty years of the twentieth century. When China went to the era of the People's Republic, the country communicated with the Western world in a very limited way because of the ideology, comparing to the Republic era.

Especially, the ten years of Cultural Revolution were really a tough time in Chinese history. It caused stagnation of Chinese society twenty years falling behind the world. During this period, the Chinese film industry was only used as a tool of propagandizing political ideology and its functions of entertainment was nearly criticized and offensive. It was emphasized “to make art and literature a component of the whole revolutionary machine, to make them a powerful weapon for uniting and educating the people and for attacking and destroying the enemy, and to help the people to fight with one heart and one mind.”\(^2\) The sources for films in this period were almost all from the “Model Revolutionary Theatrical Works”:\(^3\) *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, *The Red Lantern* (Hong Deng Ji 红灯记), *On the Docks*, *Shachiapang* (Sha Jia Bang 沙家浜), *On the White-Haired Girl* (Bai Mao Nu 白毛女), and *Red Detachment of Women* (Hong Se Niang Zi Jun 红色娘子军). From the screenplay to the design of characters, they always had the same style: the political homiletic narrative, the figural extreme which is often described as “Lian Pu”, (京剧脸谱 Peking mask, directly showing the personality, like evil or goodness on the face according to make up) fixed ways of shooting righteous figures and villain.

\(^2\) Mao Tse-tung on Art and Literature, Peking, 1960, p.76.
\(^3\) At the behest of Jiang Qing Min, a former actress and the fourth wife of Mao, traditional Chinese opera, the most popular art form in China, was banned during the Cultural Revolution and replaced by state propaganda productions devoted to Maoist doctrine. These revolutionary operas, or yang ban xi, depict a much simplified world: the good guys were farmers and revolutionary soldiers, singing and dancing under the spotlights, while the bad guys were landlords and anti-revolutionaries with dark make-up. They were beautifully kitsch extravaganzas, incorporating the most modern techniques of cinematography, song and dance. It was the only cultural activity allowed in China for ten years. International Festivals of Films on Arts, *Yang Ban Xi* (Eight Model Works) [http://www.artfifa.com/en/par-titre/view-896.html]. April 16th 2007.
For the Chinese film industry which always closely connected to politics and ideology, 1978 was a year of big turning points—a release from the "Art only for and belonging to Politics". As everyone knows, 1978 was a milestone for China. The 11th National conference voted that China should go into a "new innovative period" with the goal of "Modernization" again in very area of the society. That long time which was full of durance and inhibition brought endless sources for the Chinese new arts. Those people who had greatly suffered affliction from the past finally got the freedom of expressing exactly or semi-exactly their ideas and hopes. As Hong Yin, the scholar in Tsinghua University said: "During the beginning of this new period, every Chinese person watched around 28 films in 1979, mainly Chinese films. This record may never be surpassed in the history of Chinese films. Because it is not only created by the films themselves, but also is made by the special period that will be never repeated."4

The Chinese films in the new period5 can be divided into many periods. Such period-divisions are directly and obviously based on political and economical development, and Chinese scholars have similar opinions.

Hong Yin generally divided Chinese films into two periods: the "Various Thought in New Period" and the "Transformation of Film Marketing in Post New Period".

5 The concept of “New Period” was shown after the Cultural Revolution ended in 1978. It was the time when the China Communist Party stopped using the principle of “For the Struggle of Class”, turning the key point of government work to the Chinese modern economical development. So current China is still in the period of “New Period". 
According to Hong Yin’s division, the former period is from the end of 1970s to the middle of the 1980s. During this time, Chinese films underwent a deep transformation from the principle of "Arts only serve the Politic and Ideology" to expressing various thoughts. From those points of freedom of screenplay creation, space of various characteristics, and the extending demanding in public, Chinese films had the much release than ever before. Yin Hong emphasized that before the new period, Chinese film is mainly a political product, but in new period, it is art.  

Another scholar, Yuan Zhang, called the time from the end of the 1970s to the middle of 1980s "Art Film in Emergence Period", and the time after 1985 "Art Film in the Syncretic Period".

At the time the Cultural Revolution just ended, Chinese environment of art was the era of “Scar Literature” (Shang Heng Wen Xue 伤痕文学). The most famous films in this genre produced by the fourth generation directors are:

*Love on Lu Shan Mountain* (Lu Shan Zhi Lian 卢山之恋) by Zumo Huang (黄祖模) 1980

*The Legend of Tianyun Mountain* (Tian Yun Shan Chuan Qi 天云山传奇) by Jin Xie (谢晋) 1980

*The Small Street* (Xiao Jie 小街) by Yanjin Yang (杨延晋) 1981

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6 Hong Yin’s discrimination about the identities of politic and art in Chinese films is too general. But I think the main mean of his opinions here is to emphasize that Chinese films after revolution are not for pure political purpose.
*Hibiscus Town* (Fu Rong Zhen 芙蓉镇) by Jin Xie (谢晋) 1986

Deeply affected by the "Scar Literature" (Shang Heng Wen Xue 伤痕文学), all of these films had similar characteristics in plot: The leading actor or actress was a member of Chinese Communities Party. They all appeared on the screen as an ideal figure of Chinese Party but suffered cruelly from the Gang of Four. Although there was a huge break in the area of thought control, technically speaking, the way of producing film was still followed by the old tradition.

Yuan Zhang points out, after the pain of the "Scar Literature Film", the fourth generation directors began questioning the self-introspections of Chinese historical culture. When the fifth generation directors came to dominate the Chinese film industry, they completely moved away from ordinary film themes, and toward new areas. They strengthened the introspection of Chinese traditional culture, but on the other hand, they agreed with the duality of traditional culture.

In his paper *The Change of Chinese Films in the New Period*, He also specifically discusses the economic reasons for the development of Chinese film in this period. Even if the political environment eased a lot in the early 1980s, the market was still government controlled. Any kind of film in the studios could be bought by the China Film Publishing Company for a price of 700,000 RMB. Under such conditions, the directors could release their ideas regarding either style or content without worrying about the reaction of audiences, and this encouraged much exploration and creation of

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7 From International Movies Database.
Chinese films at this time. Here, what I want to add is, besides the fact of support by the government and also the economical system which made Chinese films in this period greatly developed, the lack of technological advances in television and DVD is another important reason which did not hinder the film industry. Facing the high demand of Chinese audiences, directors did not worry about the competition with other media. Further more, this period also marked a big change for Chinese film producers, coming to an environment of political freedom and more chance to communicate with the world, after a long time of oppression. They had a passion and desire to observe and experience both traditional and exotic culture. This is also a very important aspect of Chinese film industry had a climax of exploration and creation at this time.

In the "Transformation of Film Marketing in Post New Period" especially after the political movement "Tiananmen Square" in 1989, the Chinese government strengthened censorship of ideology on all kinds of publications, causing Chinese literature and art, including films to avoid issues such as democracy, policy, human rights and so on. This policy largely limited the sources of screen scripts. As a result, the "Mainstream Melody Film", which was supported by the government, and showed their official ideology and thoughts, dominated the majority of Chinese films during this time.

Meanwhile, the Chinese government allowed more and more Hollywood films to enter the Chinese film market. Most of these were entertainment films, and able to have a huge impact on audiences. The Chinese film and soundtrack market was gradually occupied by them, which had a huge impact in Chinese film industry. Meanwhile, China
opened the door to foreigners and more and more overseas Chinese people came back. All of these brought in exotic techniques, equipments, ideas and so on, which affected artists and the creation of Chinese art and literature. The Chinese film system also reformed—Before this time, the industry was limited to producing a few films every year by some limited national film studios. The function of film was also changed: the demands the market replaced the requirement of ideology, and elements of entertainment in Chinese films increased.

On the other hand, as the Chinese economy continued to develop, the demands for entertainment increased, and film was gradually considered the art product of entertainment. Most stories in these films reflected in detail things that happened in Chinese people’s daily lives.

Using the "He Sui Pian" (新 年 节 新 Year Celebrations Movies) directed by Xiaogang Feng (冯小刚) as the representative: This kind of film often tells objectively recreational stories surrounded by topics of the public’s lives without the air of animadversion, but more accusations about past politic ideology. This phenomenon reflects how the politic sense of contemporary Chinese people diminished in importance. For these kinds of films, the realistic meaning and political sense are more and more faded, instead functioning as art and entertainment, emphasizing sensory excitement.

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8 This kind of film refers to the one which is especially produced for the New Year time. Most of them are comedy and have many movie stars join. Chinese Movies Database, http://www.dianying.com/ft/topics/typeandgenre.php, May 16th 2007.
With the whole historical and social background of China, Chinese films not only had a renaissance after the Cultural Revolution ended in 1978, but also began to find an important position in the world films industry.

2.2. The General Background of Chinese Film Music after The Cultural Revolution

As a large part of film, the development of Chinese film music has always accompanied the history of Chinese films. In the beginning, music was just a tool for driving away the noise in theatres, or keeping film away from blankness and emptiness, while current film music has developed to the point where it can be enjoyed independently away from the pictures, and has gradually come to be regarded and discussed by critics and scholars. In the same way as Chinese films, their music was also released from the inhibition on routine techniques and artistic style which were only serviced for the political purpose.

As the time after Cultural Revolution ended, many graduates who were educated in the conservatories in China and other countries added to the diversity of film music composers, which brought the fresh air to the existing conservative atmosphere of the Chinese film music industry. They changed the styles of film music which now had the function of accompanying the film, explaining pictures, and emphasizing deeper
meanings of the themes inside films. Meanwhile, combining the modern techniques of music, they assimilated largely traditional musical elements to various local color of film music.

The prestige of winning awards is also an important motive for impelling the development of Chinese film music. At the beginning of 1980s, the Chinese government decided to establish two major national film awards, including the awards for film music after the Cultural Revolution⁹. It not only encouraged composers to explore film music, but also make audiences attach importance to it, helping Chinese film music to spread in popularity in later times.

As the renovation of the Chinese economical system pervaded deeper to every part of society, Chinese film industry changed from the planned economical system into the market economical system, which made the reception of the audience of first importance. The release of film productivity also brought more free space to the film music. In order to satisfy the tastes of audiences, various musical elements, like western classical music, rock, rap, electronic music are planted into it, which makes Chinese film music gradually turn to multiple styles while attracting more audiences to.

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⁹ In 1980, the “China Public Film Flower Awards” was re-established, and in 1981, the “China Golden Rooster Film Awards” was established.
CHAPTER 3

Chinese Films Go Out Into the World After

The Cultural Revolution

The twenty years after 1978 was also a profitable time for Chinese films gaining a high reputation in the world, both in art and business. Before 1978, the western world barely knew Chinese films. In the history of world film, there was almost no position for Chinese film, only a limited space for Japan and India. Between 1950 and 1980, there were only thirty international awards for Chinese films. But after the film Yellow Earth won the prize of the Swiss Locarno International Film Festival, within only twenty years, Chinese films got hundreds of international awards. The awards cups of nearly all Class A international film festivals have the name of Chinese films. Even in the Academy Award which always is the monopoly of Western languages, Chinese films had nominations many times, and the film Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon by Ang Lee got the Best Foreign Language Film in 2001. A concept of “International Chinese film” gradually shaped and became popular in mainland China, and it supplies the best chance for Chinese directors to balance the inconsistency between art and commerce, and the communication between tradition and exotic world. According to Hong Yin, “not only China already got the acceptance in the world as a country, but also the important
positions of Chinese films were admitted by the world film field.”¹ Thus, any texts about the history of world film cannot avoid talking about Chinese films.

The most influential Chinese films in the western world can be divided into two categories, which show different styles of Chinese traditional cultures. The first category is the films directed by the fifth generation directors, especially Yimou Zhang (张艺谋) and Kaige Chen, (陈凯歌) from the middle of 1980s to the middle of 1990s. The second category is the films, as *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* represent, expressing ancient Chinese and Martial Arts cultures from 2000 to the present.

### 3.1 The Chinese Films by the Fifth Generation Directors

—Chinese New Folk-Custom Film

The first category of Chinese films created by the fifth generation directors during this period is the Chinese New Folk-Custom Films. (*Xin Min Su Dian Ying* 新民俗电影) Most of them present the folk culture in the Northwest of China. This area, with its grand old traditions accumulated for thousands of years, attracted the fifth generation directors’ eyes. Their films emphasized self-questioning with a sober and deep feel, not only in the contemporary political surface, but also in the Chinese traditional culture. Compared with

the former directors, the fifth generation directors were fairly young, and very active in their thoughts of creating art. They graduated from academic institutes which had strong backgrounds in film training, while experiencing the Cultural Revolution. So they were much more open-minded on the content of screenplay, more accepting of the thoughts of western film, and were fearless to express the phenomena which were forbidden to be shown and the deleterious side of old Chinese tradition. The most representative Chinese films of this era are: *Yellow Earth, Red Sorghum, Raise the Red Lantern, Ju Dou, and Farewell My Concubine.*

Chinese modern film scholars attribute three main reasons why these Chinese “New Folk-Custom Films” got high reputations.

3.1.1 Ideological Aspect

Most Western people, who have the “universal view”, not only observe the Eastern historical absolutism from the perspective of Western human rights, but also evaluate contemporary Chinese social reality according to the Western democratic system. Therefore, they can accept Chinese films which are often allegories about Eastern absolutism. Fredric Jameson once pointed out:

“Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic-necessarily project a political dimension in the form of
national allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society.\textsuperscript{2}

Western scholars read the content of Chinese films as the ideological allegory.

Hong Yin summarized the allegory of these Chinese films as "The Allegory of Iron House"\textsuperscript{3} (Tie Wu Zi Yu Yan 铁屋子寓言), which was created by the famous Chinese author, Hsun Lu, who explained this allegory in his preface of Call to Arms (Na Han 呐喊):

"Imagine an iron house without windows, absolutely indestructible, with many people fast asleep inside who will soon die of suffocation. But you know since they will die in their sleep, they will not feel the pain of death. Now if you cry aloud to wake a few of the lighter sleepers, making those unfortunate few suffer the agony of irrevocable death, do you think you are doing them a good turn?"\textsuperscript{4}

The "Iron House" was a symbol for traditional Chinese culture and society which expresses the deep spirit of tragedy and the ideas of fatalism.\textsuperscript{5} This allegory that was reflected in Chinese films during this period and common traits in these movies were a big closed "house" in the northwest of China, which had "high


\textsuperscript{5} Said by Li, Oufan, an American Chinese scholar
walls” surrounding it, and many “locked doors”. One or more “elders” represented the old and conservative culture. These people were the class which dominated and oppressed others. There was also a weak person, usually a woman, who symbolized new thoughts and freedoms, realized her miserable destiny, and tried to resist the elders and old traditions but finally failed and died. The three elements mentioned above built up the main plot of Chinese films between 1985 and 1994, which are always tragic. The themes of the Chinese films in this period penetrated Chinese cultural self-questioning much more than the films in the “Scar Literature” period.

3.1.2 Cultural Aspect

For these Chinese New Folk-Custom Films, we can see similar scenes which are exotic and fresh for Western audiences: all of the stories happened in unique environment such as Yellow River, Yellow earth, big closed houses, and small bridge across the brook in the northwest of China. Within these closed and inhibited places, many folk-custom activities, like Peking Opera and Red Guard in Farewell My Concubine, Shadow Plays in To Live, traditional weddings in Yellow Earth, and funerals in Ju Dou, Big red lanterns and many wives and concubines with one man in Raise the Red Lantern, show the spectacular Chinese folk-customs to the surprised Western audiences. Combined with stories hinging on sex, adultery, abnormal love affairs or guilt and penalization, and using a unique cinematography and mise-en-scene, focusing on relationships between people
and environments, all of these elements made the Chinese films recognizable and became the symbols of Chinese films to the world.

However, there is not only newness and surprise about these exotic scenes. As for the Cultural styles, the stages are strange for Western audiences, nut it can easily be shown that these folk-customs shown in these stories, themes, plots or even the details, are very familiar in the West, often resulting in their identification. This is the identification of strangeness, gaining satisfaction and resonance of their own cultures from Eastern stories. The best example is the film *Ju Dou*, directed by Zhang Yimou. It is a story telling adultery and patricide. Many conservative Critics consider the actions of patricide as the revenge in a male society. The rules of male society are first represented by the father, and then taken over by his son.6 But others disagree. Lin Yong argues:

"The story doesn't have the exact historical background. What kind of culture and nation did father and child represent? A child killed his father because of the simple reason: Oedipus complex, unfortunately, which can be easily misunderstood by re-establish the rules of male society. Those critics can not, or do not want to confess that the patricide of Oedipus complex style in *Ju Dou*, is the exact demonstration of Western culture affect the contents of Chinese contemporary films. This action does not re-establish the rules of Chinese traditional male society, or protect the traditional feudality; it does plant the Western culture into "Chinese culture".7

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7 Ibid.
Therefore, both Western film critics and the public can easily recognize the apprehensible cultural identity, gaining a satisfaction for their aesthetic reception, like the film theorist Bill Nichols showed: “They (films from different cultures) parallel the paths by which objects from other cultures have been assimilated to our own aesthetic tradition or made to stand as typifications of that other culture”.\textsuperscript{8} He called this “Strange familiarity”—Experience the strange, and discover sympathy. For Western audiences, these Chinese films represent the “other”, but an “other” that can be accepted and understood. Consequently, western audiences assume that these marvelous Eastern folk-customs represent their cultural identity.

3.1.3 Aspects of Style and Structure

Bill Nichols writes:

“Films from nations not previously regarded as prominent film-producing countries receive praise for their ability to transcend local issues and provincial tastes while simultaneously providing a window onto a different culture. We are invited to receive such films as evidence of artistic maturity—the work of directors ready to take their place within an international fraternity of auteurs—

and of a distinctive national culture—work that remains distinct from Hollywood-based norms both in style and theme.”9

Western audiences, who are already bored of the Hollywood style, hope they can find variation in Eastern films. Therefore, Chinese films, and how to narrate a story which happens in the mysterious Eastern background is often seen as a style of art. Generally examining those Chinese films that have already been accepted globally, they are trying to have an individual expression which is anti-routine. This style mainly reflects:

First, break the routine of ending with “happy ever after”. Such as films by Zhang Yimou Zhang and Kaige Chen, they give up the traditional Hollywood narrative style “conflict—resolution”, and “Good will be rewarded with good, evil with evil”, and often end with disavowal of the main roles, and showing the understanding of life tragedy.

Second, giving up the editing style of Hollywood which is an exaggerated, discontinuous and dramatic montage, instead, the directors adapt stable long shooting and connecting pictures with gentle montage, and the style of Chinese traditional water-ink paintings which is abstract and flat, to express the extensity. It just happens to appeal to the same Western audiences who want to see difference in Eastern culture.

Further more, many Chinese films shoot in substantial places, and use non-professional actors and actress, they record the psychology of ordinary people in ordinary lives, which is in sharp contrast with “Hollywood’s delicacy affection and fantasy”.

9Ibid.

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The great success of Chinese New Folk-Custom films led to later Chinese film directors being devoted to producing films in the same style. However, such kind of films connected closely with the style of Chinese aboriginal tradition. Their excessive uniform style: similar background of story, similar experience of main roles in the film and repetition of aesthetic ideas, made Western audiences gradually feel bored and led to misunderstandings: Is the current China still very conservative and closed? Do all Chinese women have such low class in the society now? Is the Chinese economy still laggard today? The Chinese New Folk-Custom Film gradually lost its vitality and freshness, and didn’t last a very long time. However, it was still a milestone for the explorations of Chinese films communicating with the world.

3.2 The Second Category of Chinese Film—Chinese Martial Arts Films

The second category of Chinese films is the Chinese Martial Arts Films. *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* is the best representative of this kind. For many Chinese in the United States and around the world, Ang Lee’s film *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* marks an important critical and commercial breakthrough for Asian and Asian film makers who wish to go to Hollywood. In the North American market, where audience generally spurn subtitled films, *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* became the highest grossing foreign-language film ever in North America, and was the first foreign-language

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film to break the US $100 million in the North American market. (Variety, 2 Mach 2004) It was also enthusiastically received at major international film festivals, and earned numerous nominations and awards, especially the ten Academy Award nominations, breaking the previous record of seven held by Italy’s Life Is Beautiful, and four Academy Awards in 2001 including Best Foreign Language film and Best Original Score. On the one hand, a kind of cultural nationalism lured Chinese viewers to root for the film to triumph in Hollywood. On the other hand, the film’s success evoked suspicions of stereotyping, exoticism and traditionalism and pandering to a Western gaze in the Eastern world. Again, as I mentioned at the beginning of my thesis, I am not going to say Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon winning Oscar is successful in Western world\textsuperscript{11}, and is much better than previous Chinese films which won other international film awards. Besides, they do share the most important similar reason of winning: globalization and make Western audience find resonance despite the foreignness. Furthermore, I want to add some extra facts that this film includes but others do not.

\textsuperscript{11} If awards can serve as reliable indicators of a film’s “success”, Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon is not only an American success story but also a truly “global” film. It picked up awards for best director and best film at the Twentieth Heng Kong Film Awards; Best picture at the Taiwanese Golden Horse Awards; Best director and Best Foreign Language Film at the Golden Globes; Academy Awards for Foreign Language Film, and many other international film awards. Kenneth Chan, “The Global Return of the Wu Xia Pian (Chinese Sword-Fighting Movie): Ang Lee’s Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon,” Cinema Journal 43, no.4 (Summer 2004): 3-17.
3.2.1 The Original Work

*Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* is an example of “Martial Arts literature” brought to the scene. Unlike previous Chinese films which narrated the story in the northwest of China in the modern time, the screenplay of *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* originated from the same name Chinese Martial Arts novel by Wang Dulu, which tells a legend of the fantastic Martial Arts world in ancient China.

If we look at the history of Chinese modern literature, in most Chinese people’s minds, the best representatives of traditional Chinese Martial Arts Novel (Wu Xia 武侠小说) are the novels by Yong Jin (金庸), which emphasized the greatest martial art and the “knight-errantry” (侠义精神 The Code of Xia). Most common plot typically features a young male protagonist in ancient China, who experiences a tragedy (e.g. the loss of a family or an old master), he then goes through exceeding hardship and arduous trials, to learn. Eventually the protagonist emerges as a supreme martial arts master unequalled in China, who then proffers his skills chivalrously to mend the ills of the “Jianghu (江湖 The World of Martial Arts)” world. Another common thread could involve a mature, extremely skillful hero with an equally powerful nemesis with whom he has had misgivings, and the storyline would meander to a final showdown between the protagonist and his nemesis.

The previous films discussed are of a different tradition. Within these stories and people, there are also some infelt expressions of love, suffering, struggling and humanity.
But they all give the major position away to the “experiences of knight-errantry” (or Code of Xia).

Dulu Wang (王度庐), the author of the original work *Crouching Tiger and Hidden Dragon* is an early time novelist of Chinese Martial Art Literature. He is one of the first people who wrote novels combing errantry and love tragedy, which had a strong effect on later generation novelists of Chinese Martial Art Literature. We barely see those amazing martial arts in his novels, and the main characters are not the great heroes of country. They are just the ordinary people who fight for their “right of love” and the weaknesses themselves are easy to figure out. Wang Dulu is not a master of describing martial art and knight-errantry, but is superior in expressing infelt emotions of characters. He completely grasps their conflict in the cockles of hearts, struggles of humanity, and the complex condition between love and hate, which show vividly the real person.

Different from the repressive emotions of love and humanity in many traditional Chinese Martial Art novels, *Crouching Tiger and Hidden Dragon* is fully filled with expressions of human emotions much deeper than before. In the film, we can see two different styles of expressing love and desire: One is in the Chinese traditional way which is implicit and indirect, like the relationship between Mubai Li (李慕白) and Xiulian Yu (俞秀莲). They knew and learnt martial art together, longing for each other for many years, but they never told each other of their love until one of them died—this kind of style is fresh for western people; another one is direct and fervid, the love between
Jiaolong Yu (玉娇龙) and Xiaohu Luo (罗小虎), who can give up everything for only love, which is familiar with Western culture. Such familiar and unfamiliar expression draw the two different cultures together which give Western people either freshness or resonance.

On the other hand, a male is always the main character in traditional Chinese Martial Art Literature, and women are only the supporting roles. But in Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon, it is full of feminism. The director Ang Lee said: “Usually, the world of martial art is always for the man. But things became different in Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon. There are two women, Jiaolong Yu and Xiulian Yu, whose positions have the equal or more important than men. They are very positive and recalcitrant to the tradition. They can choose their destiny, rarely depending on others.”\(^1\)\(^2\) In the novel, Shulian Yu is the head of the bodyguard headquarters which is always occupied by men. Jiaolong Yu, who is the aristocrat and supposed to be weak and submissive originally, is able to resist the marriage that was arranged by her family, pursuing her ideal life and love, and defeat all of the swordsmen in the fight of the inn. Comparing these women to women in the previous films, they are much more independent, which is much more closely related to the ethical concept of modern western culture.

\(^1\)Tingting Song, “Going to the World of Dragon: Interview of Ang Lee,” Journal of Beijing Film Academy, (April 2002).
3.2.2 The Visual Art

One of the most striking points for western audiences in the film Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon is the visual art. On the one hand, the film perfectly combines great Chinese landscapes with fancy and magical Chinese martial arts such kinds of Chinese traditional culture is totally different from what the Western audience has ever watched before---neither the dark and unenlightened side nor very abstract part of Chinese philosophical ideas.

The cinema photographer of this movie, Peter Pau, is one of the top cinematographers in Hong Kong. After his graduation of Filmmaking at San Francisco Art Institute in 1983, he directed his first feature The Temptation of Dance and Misty in the 90s. Pau has been working with the top directors such as John Woo (The Killer), Tsui Hark (Double Team, Love in the Time of Twilight, The Chinese Feast), Ronny Yu (Bride With White Hair, Bride of Chucky, The Phantom Lover, Warriors of Virtue) and Patrick Lussier’s Dracula 2000.13

Another important role of visual art is the Martial Art choreographer, Yuen Woo-ping (袁和平). As the renowned and one of the most successful and influential figures in the world of Hong Kong action cinema, he had a similar life and working experience as Peter Pau: They both had multiple cultural backgrounds both in China and overseas. Before Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon, Yuen already had many successful Martial Arts choreography in international films. The success of his action work, on the following

year’s hit *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, made him a highly sought after figure in Hollywood.

Before choreographing the martial arts in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, the style of Yuen’s action works emphasized the reality, paying more attention to the effect of making audiences feel excited, which then leads to action and violence, and lacks of elegance and peacefulness. But in this film—the Chinese knight-errant possesses seemingly magical powers, literally flying through the air as they jump across roofs, run up walls, stand on the bamboo, and move with superhuman ease. Such imagination, which was never shown in Chinese films before made western audiences, who were used to the strong figures of Jackie Chan and Stallone, feel amazed. Those colorful scenes of montage and fantasy give Western audiences an aesthetically pleasing experience while also satisfying their curiosity for the ancient Chinese traditional culture.

### 3.2.3 The Director

The most important difference between *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* from previous Chinese films is the cultural background of the film team: The main differences between this crew and the majority of the Chinese fifth generation directors who were born, grew up and educated in China is that, most of this film team is made up of Chinese Diaspora.¹⁴ Besides the cinema photographer and Martial Art Choreographer

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¹⁴ A diaspora is a transnational ethnoscape created when a people disperses, willingly or unwillingly, from an original homeland and resettles in other locations. Christina Klein, “Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon: A Diasporic Reading,” *Cinema Journal* 4, Vol. 43 (August 19, 2004):18-42.
already mentioned above, the director of the film *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, Ang Lee also has the strong multiple cultural and education backgrounds. Born in Taiwan and got an MFA at New York University in the United States, he then made some highly acclaimed art movies in Taiwan, including *Pushing Hands*, (Tui Shou 推手 1991) *The Wedding Banquet*, (Xi Yan 喜宴 1993) and *Eat Drink Man Woman*. (Yin Shi Nan Nv 飲食男女 1994) In 1995, Lee went to Hollywood and directed the Oscar Award-winner *Sense and Sensibility*. After that, he completed *The Ice Storm* and *Ride with the Devil*.

These multiple cultural background experiences make Ang Lee capable of grasping thoroughly the taste of both Western and Eastern audiences. As the music composer of this film Dun Tan said: “When the East wants to communicate with the West, it is impossible unless Eastern culture can find a way which can be understood by the West. Ang Lee knows the taste of Western audience, especially American audience.”

On the other hand, when *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* came out in China, most Chinese audiences felt very disappointed because of its superficial expressing of the Chinese Martial Arts. But if we carefully watch the film, we may realize what Ang Lee really wants to show is not only the Chinese martial arts, but also the humanities which is closely related to the Western audience. He once said:

“What I am concerned is about the issues about family, love, tradition and culture, especially when we put these issues put into a specific place. I believe that they will be

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the topic which can be attracted both Western and Eastern culture. Making *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* is the first time I make a film in mainland China, and it is also the dream since I was a child—Under the land of China, make a Chinese Martial Art showing the traditional culture and emotion."16

Ang Lee uses the Hollywood style which is already familiar in the West, to make up the *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, an ancient Chinese story. The delicate designs of Martial Arts combined with the marvelous Chinese natural scenes show the mysterious pictures of China to the Western audiences which they had never seen before. But they can still find the same humanities in a strange country. Although, the style of *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* is totally different from the previous Chinese New Folk-Custom films, their overall successes in the worldwide area are the demonstration of finding similarities in the strangeness of culture.

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CHAPTER 4

Chinese Film Music Goes Out into the World After

The Cultural Revolution

In light of the success of Chinese films during the past twenty years, Chinese film music met another different destiny when Chinese film went abroad. Jiping Zhao, the composer who composed nearly all of the most famous Chinese New Folk-Custom films, had gained prestige in China, but did not achieve the same prestige as the Chinese films he composed for. On the other hand, Dun Tan won international prizes for the music of *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*. Of course, we cannot say whether winning neither is better than not winning, nor can we show the reasons why one won but not the other. Being rewarded in the world could have many reasons beyond art, but at least, we could say that music of *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* can be accepted and understood by a Western audience. We may ask what individual styles and characteristics of Jiping Zhao and Dun Tan’s work have caused the different reactions both inside and outside of China, considering that the two are representing different generations of composers for film music.
4.1 Jiping Zhao’s Film Music

4.1.1 Jiping Zhao’s Life and Experiences

Jiping Zhao was the most famous Chinese fifth generation film composer after the Cultural Revolution. He was born in Xi’an (西安), Shan Xi Province (陕西省) which is in the northwest of China. Jiping Zhao described his hometown, one of the oldest cities and the capital in many dynasties of ancient China, in this way:

“Xi’an is the city of the key of the Silk Road, connecting Chinese civilization and the way to Europe. On one hand, I was immersed in the Chinese traditional music for a very long time; on the other hand, I learnt Western musical system when I was a child. Therefore, in my mind, there was a “Silk Road of Music”, syncretizing the traditional aesthetics and advanced musical language.”\(^1\)

Jiping Zhao’s father, Yunwang Zhao (赵云望) was a very famous Chinese traditional water-ink painter whose works had a great effect on him. When he remembered his childhood, he wrote:

“I grew up at the side of my father’s painting desk. I always felt the rhythm, melody and space of imagination inside his Chinese traditional paintings. It was not guided

\(^1\) Xi Bu Website, “Interview Jiping Zhao,” http://nbjy.nxnet.cn/nxzuopin/12003242456%E5%BC%A0%E5%BC%BA/ping/06.htm. May 1, 2007
spontaneously. The nature coherent between picture and music gave me the first inspiration of the later musical work for film.”

His father not only gave him the evocation of style, color, structure of art, but also instilled the idea of “The best art is from our traditional culture”. Jiping Zhao said:

“I studied in the systematical western musical training in conservatory. But after I graduated, they sent me to the institute of traditional drama and music. When I felt frustrated that I could not go to the orchestra or opera and dance institute which I was educated for, my father said to me: ‘Our culture has abundant sources for your future work. Only if you dominate them very well at first, can western musical education work for you’” Even if I could not understand what he said at that time, I still concentrate my study on Northwestern local drama and folk music. Now, I’ve caught his meaning finally.”

4.1.2 Jiping Zhao’s Film Music

A strong base in compositional training, plus a devotion to studying Northwestern traditions and musical cultures, which later became the endless sources of his compositions, makes Jiping Zhao perfectly match for the work of Chinese New Folk-Custom Film. Thus he became the master of film music at that time.

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In those Chinese New Folk-Custom Films, Jiping Zhao uses plenty of Chinese Northwestern local elements: In the film *Red Sorghum* (Hong Gao Liang 红高粱) he uses thirty pieces of Suo Na (唢呐 Chinese traditional instruments, trumpet-like wind instrument, often playing in the wedding or funeral) to show the straightforward and bold styles of the rustic people in the northwest of China; In the film *Ju Dou* (菊豆), he features the traditional instrument Xun (埙 wind instrument, similar with ocarina) along with an unaccompanied nursery rhyme given by a child to create a sense of loneliness and an air of inhibition and hopeless in the film; In the film *Farewell to My Concubine* (Ba Wang Bie Ji 霸王别姬), he makes Jing Hu, (京胡 string instrument playing mainly in Peking Opera) Pipa (琵琶 Chinese traditional pluck instrument) and Castanets (Xiang Ban 响板 percussion in Peking Opera) in front of the grand Western orchestra, expressing the dual drama both on the stage of art and stage of life; In the film *Raise the Red Lantern* (Da Hong Deng Long Gao Gao Gua 大红灯笼高高挂), he adapts the northwestern folksong sung by a women’s choir and surrounded by the pressing accompaniment of orchestra symbolizing the women’s struggling in the choking and closed house… Many Chinese audiences, especially young people think that the traditional music used in these films are too old to show. Actually, we can not say Jiping Zhao’s film music is old-fashioned because he uses much pure Chinese traditional musical elements rather than modern music. Just like he described his own music “I can use the modern technique as the ‘weapon’, but the essential part must be the Chinese traditional culture. Excavating
them and giving them a ‘modern cloth’ can be called renovation”, he threw away the old ideas of composing film music which simply accompanied the pictures on a surface level. Instead, he combined traditional musical elements with the modern concept of techniques, planting their innovation into the traditional cultural soil.

For example, in the theme of film music *Farewell My Concubine*, Jiping Zhao employed a Jing Hu (small fiddle 京胡) to represent one of the two main characters, Cheng Dieyi (程蝶衣) who is addicted to Peking opera, in combination with the whole Western orchestra representing real society. The dissonance of Jing Hu against the orchestra, plus free counterpoint with the Peking Opera percussion playing “Ji Ji Feng” (急急风), expresses Dieyi Cheng conflicts with the whole society, indicating his tragic life. Besides, into the set of Western mode, Jiping Zhao imported Peking Opera tunes (Jing Ju Qu Pai 京剧曲牌), accompanying with the Beijing dialect, making the music fully surrounded by national atmosphere. In the Film *Ju Dou*, which tell a tragedy of a child killing his father in a closed house, the dramatic conflict of the story is already full filled by the film’s entirety, leaving little space for music. Jiping Zhao boldly used the style of line drawing (Bai Miao 白描) in music, making the sung nursery rhyme the core, repeating it four times in variations based on the non harmonic mode, and only utilizing a Xun (globular flute 虍) without any accompaniment. This instrument sometimes appears, sometimes doesn’t; sometimes whimper, and sometimes is calm. It feels like a ghost.

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floating back and forth in the closed house. The alternation between pictures and music "shaped a circle structure the repeating the theme music, unifying the whole structure into a basic emotion and driving the development of the plot."5

We can conclude that the reason why Chinese New Folk-Custom films can be accepted and understood by a Western audience is because the audience is able to "find the similarity in strangeness"; therefore, we may also put this reason into the opposite comparison with Jiping Zhao: For the same goals of expressing Chinese traditional music, Western audience are hard pressed to find the resonance in Chinese New Folk-Custom film music.

According to reviews of the music of this Northwestern style series films, it is not difficult to notice that the use of traditional Chinese music in Jiping Zhao's works is also the gradual development of his exploration of the recognition and technical renovation of film music. When Jiping Zhao first touched the film music area, he often directly adapted the original traditional music into his work. In the Yellow Earth (Huang Tu Di 黄土地), Jiping Zhao's first film composition, the music materials are all from the Northwestern folksong "Xin Tian You" (信天游), which is the most representative culture of northwest of China. Musically speaking, there are two phrases in a stanza, showing simple structure and direct meanings. The timbre of the first phrase is usually high and bright while the timbre in the second phrase is slowly ended from high to low as the conclusion. Such "from high to low" structure used in the "A Girl Song" (女儿歌) 5Jing Zhu, "An Analysis of Jiping Zhao's Film Music," Education of Arts, no.6 (2004): 24.
singing by Qiao Cui (翠巧) in the film, exclusively expresses her desire for freedom in contrast to the miserable state of her real life.

Figure 1: “A Girl Song”

With gradual technical maturity of film music, Jiping Zhao not only used local musical materials to show the film styles, but also made them harmonize with film’s pictures, styles, and plot, interweaving tightly together. In order to explain his style of film music in detail, now I will set the film music of Raise the Red Lantern as the example:

This is a story about the miserable destiny of women in Chinese old society, set in the northwest of China in the 1920s. Lian Song, (颂莲) a college girl who has been married off by her stepmother with tremendous frustration, found herself reduced to a small enclosure at the beck and call of her husband. Despite being given a maid and luxurious surroundings, she feels trapped inside the cheerless walls. Upon her arrival, she realizes that she must keep one step ahead of her rivals, the three other wives. She also learns of her husband’s tradition of lighting a lantern outside the house of the wife with

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whom he intends to spend the night. The story then unfolds by the thread of each wife trying to keep their husband staying at night by various tactics, including deceit, libel and destruction. Finally, two of women die in the struggle, and the main character, Lian Song became crazy. The central themes of this magisterial film are the power of ritual over the freedom of the individual and the sexual and social repression of women in feudal China.

In one interview, Jiping Zhao talked about the source of inspiration for the music of *Raise the Red Lantern*:

“When I wrote the music of *Raise the Red Lantern*, I went to Shan Xi province. It began to snow the day after my arrival, causing me to come down with a serious fever. When I laid in the big house (Qiao Jia Da Yuan 乔家大院) where the film was being made, music filled my mind becoming the percussion music of the Peking Opera which later I made into a circulating style in the film. And I also felt like I heard a women’s wisp croon which make me feel that there are some atmosphere of ghosts in the big house. I think that is the destiny of those women, in this film, who are in the closed house and cannot escape from it. After I recovered from the fever, I quickly caught the feelings of music and wrote them into a score. Once the director Yimou Zhang came, I told him my idea. He said: ‘Yes! Yes! That is the exact feeling I want to find!’”

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In *Raise the Red Lantern*, Jiping Jiping nearly gave up utilizing Western orchestra, instead using only some strings as the accompaniment in the music which ends the whole film. The eerily threatening character of the music—a threat perceptible only on a subliminal level—serves to underscore the somber events in the lives of the head of the household and his four wives. The two themes of this film music are the Peking Opera percussion playing "Ji Ji Feng (急急风)" and the female chorus singing Peking opera style "Xi Pi Liu Shui (西皮流水)". During the two hour-length of the film, the two themes are repeated many times. Also, short pieces of Peking opera and transverse flute (Di Zi 笛子) in diegetic style\(^8\) play a role of hinting at the plot.

Only judging from the point of music, we may think the music for *Raise the Red Lantern* is too simple and abstract to understand. But if we examine the sources of this music, exploring internal cultural meanings, we can understand the composer’s delicate designs for the film.

The Peking Opera percussion plays “Ji Ji Feng” (Hurried Wind 急急风) many times in this film. However, a western audience who doesn’t know the function of this percussion may feel it is noisy and boring. Originally, the percussion plays as the assistant of the performer’s action, regulating the rhythm of their performances. In Peking Opera, “Ji Ji Feng” is often used in the beginning of the drama as an introduction, trying to tell the audiences to pay attention. It is also played to express the characters’

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\(^8\)Sound whose source is visible on the screen or whose source is implied to be present by the action of the film It often has three resources: voices of characters, sounds made by objects in the story, music represented as coming from instruments in the story space, Dictionary, [http://dictionary.reference.com/](http://dictionary.reference.com/). May 1, 2007.
running, struggling or fighting, causing the tension. Here Jiping Zhao used percussion at the beginning of the film, showing that the good play will open its curtain, meanwhile, indicating the dramatics of conflict. Every time when the master decided which wife he wanted to stay with that night, the red lantern will be raised in that house. Accompanying the raising of the red lantern, “Ji Ji Feng” also “raises” the tension and conflicts between the four wives.

What the women chorus sings in the film is the music revised from “Xi Pi Liu Shui”. (西皮流水) If we only listen to the melody, it is hard to understand its significance in the film. “Xi Pi” (西皮) is one of the major arias in Peking Opera. It often features lively and bright style, a compact and rapid rhythm, usually expressing happy, powerful or indignant emotion. “Liu Shui” (流水) is one of the meters for Peking Opera arias which also is played in a rapid and smooth rhythm. Usually, this melody is often played by instruments, but in this film, it was sung by a women chorus, especially designing for Lian Song and the third wife Shan Shan (梅珊), the endless women chorus’s “Xi Pi Liu Shui” with singing “Ah” (啊) and “Li-Ge-Long”, accompanying by the hurried “Ji Ji Feng”, symbolizes all of the weak groan and struggle in their tragic lives, reflecting the suffocative experiences in that closed house.
Figure 2: Xi Pi Liu Shui (西皮流水)

Also, in this film, several sections of Peking Opera play an important role to impel and hint at the plot even though most of them appear as the diegetic music, sung by the third wife Shan Mei in Raise the Red Lantern. The choice of these sections is not random, but with specific purposes—the lyrics of each sections are closely related to the content of the film. There are two important sections that Shan Mei sang at the beginning, middle and end of this film.

The first piece appears in the scene Lian Song looking at the performance of Shan Mei after she lost the chance of “Raising the red lantern”. What she sings here is a part from the Peking Opera “桃花村” (Tao Hua Cun, 又名“花田错”, The Bride Napping) It tells a story that in Song Dynasty, a girl named Yan Yu (玉燕) wants to marry a young man named Ji Bian (卞机). But before the wedding, a bandit broke down their door and wanted to rob the bride. After much struggling, Yan Yu and Ji Bian finally got together.

The lyrics of the music that Shan Mei sang here, tell that the Yan Yu’s maid asked Ji Bian to calm down, and think about a method for saving Yan Yu:

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非是我反复叮咛把话来讲，只怪你呆头呆脑慌慌张张。今夜晚非比那西厢待月，你谨提防，莫轻狂，关系你患难鸳鸯永宿在池塘。已然借请生波浪，怎能够粗心大意再荒唐。鼓打二更准时往，桃花村口莫彷徨。不要高声也不要嚷，你必须眼观六路耳听八方。不但要仔细听，你还要仔细想，是不是有人拍巴掌。响一声，你还一掌，响两声，凑近身旁。倘若是你响她也响，那就是来了我西厢带路的小红娘。你把我当做诸葛亮，听我的吩咐上战场。

As the time when Shan Mei sang this song, Lian Xiu was already deprived of the chances of “raising red lanterns” because she lied that she was pregnant. The lyrics “已然借请生波浪，怎能够粗心大意再荒唐” (There already have been a disaster, how can you be so careless and make such mistake) indicates Lian Song told the lie in order to struggle against the second wife, Yun Zhuo (卓云); “不要高声也不要嚷，你必须眼观六路耳听八方” (Don’t shout and don’t angry, you must calm down and observe the current situation carefully) and “你把我当做诸葛亮，听我的吩咐上战场” (You must listen to me, and I will help you to back to the battle) implies that the third wife Shan Mei wants to cooperate with Lian Song to fight against the second wife Zhuo Yun.

The second piece appears two times in the film. The first time is in the scene in the third wife, Shan Mei's house when she and Song Lian plays the "Ma Jiang" Game with Doctor Gao and his friend. Lian Song surprisingly discovered that Shan Mei and Doctor
Gao were playing footsie under the table while they were playing the game on the table. The background music is the Peking Opera "Yu Bei Pavilion" that Shan Mei sang from a record. It is a story where a man named You Dao Wang suspected his wife Yuehua Meng was unfaithful to him and wanted to divorce. But finally the misunderstanding was solved according to other people's demonstrations. What Shan Mei was singing on the record here is the scene in which Yuehua Meng was shocked and her heart broken when she heard the news that his husband wanted to divorce her. She despaired in expressing her innocence and criticized her husband's ruthlessness with singing:

一见休书如刀绞，(散板)只为归家哪——宵。行至中途风雨暴，碑亭避雨起祸苗。
随后又来一年少，两厢无言坐一宵，清清白白贞自保，哎呀，儿的娘啊，这是他疑心起风潮。(快板)自幼父母娇生养，盈盈十五嫁王昌，既读诗书不自想，奴岂是柳絮随风狂。风雨不汲取难量，暗室何必日月光。阴谋毒计良心丧，休书好比杀人场。手模胸膛想一想，无义的王魁就比你强。

There are two different types of rhythm in this music. The first one is "San Ban" (散板, Free metre) which is used in this piece. Its melody and rhythm vary according to the changes of lyrics, emotions and speed. Here, using this music in "San Ban" meter with lyrics telling her innocence affords much food for reflection. The innocence expressed in
the lyrics is an ironic counterpoint to the fickleness happening between Shan Mei and Doctor Gao in this scene. As Lian Song realizes what has happened, the background music changes into the lively Peking Opera percussion music “Ji Ji Feng”, like saying the story is not over—Just as one expected, the next scene is telling the truth of the “House of Death”—two former wives “commit suicide”\(^{10}\) because of their unfaithful actions—Together with the plot, this piece of music indicates the final fate of Shan Mei.

The second time of this piece with “Kuai Ban” (fast meter 快板) singing the complaint of the husband appears in the scene with after Shan Mei had been executed in the "House of Death". Song Lian lighted all of the red lanterns in Shan Mei’s house and played this music which caused other people to be scared and misunderstand that there must be Shan Mei’s ghost in the house. Different from the previous time, the music changed from diegetic to non-diegetic style, with increasing the dynamic of music from woman solo to women chorus which applies colors to drawing the tragic atmosphere. The lyrics "暗室何必日月光" (There is no light in the dark house) and "休书好比杀人场" (The divorce statement is like a knife to kill a woman) is not only the direct description of the destiny of Shan Mei and Lian Song who already had, but also signifies the miserable final results of all of the powerless women who had no independence in Chinese old society.

\(^{10}\) According to the later plot of the film, the women who died in the “House of Death” were actually killed by the master. But in order to avoid to telling the truth, the master said they were “suicides".
Besides, the non-musical element—the sound of tapping feet for massage by using a small wooden hammer also plays an important role in *Raise the Red Lantern*. As we already seen, raising red lanterns and tapping feet are the most important two elements for the winner of staying with husband. The former one is a visual language while the latter is a monotonous but impressive acoustic. It is like an alarm which is closely connected with people's nerves. When it begins to sound, everybody in the film and also the audience outside the film want to find where it is from—who won the women's fight tonight. It is also like an invisible shackle chaining up those women to contort their humanities, forcing them to meet the endless tragic suffering.

Economy is another noticeable style of Jiping Zhao. It is not only means using less instruments, but also refers also to tune, volume and so forth. We can find the evidence of this style from Chinese traditional aesthetic ideas. Different from the Western style of painting which is delicate in details, Chinese traditional aesthetics thinks that the spirit is much more important than the shape. When we look at the Chinese traditional water ink paintings, they usually portrait a person or a scene just by drawing the general structure, catching the inside spirit of these objects such as eyes, and leaving the related environment as space. Jiping Zhao embodies this traditional aesthetics in his music. The music will not be simple and crude by reduction, but rather more exclusively focused on showing the meanings of pictures and plots in a direct or indirect way. The film *Raise the Red Lantern* lasts two hours, but the length of music is only around twenty-one minutes, including the beginning and ending music. Within the main body of the film, diegetic
music occupies eleven minutes which is more than half the total amount and non-
melodical part—the Peking Opera percussion playing “Ji Ji Feng” is one minute long.
Further more, the non-diegetic music in the film can only be heard in a very limited
volume. Therefore, from the point of Western stylistic film music, it is much more
“frugal” than ordinary film music. However, such simple but profound musical elements
create a unique dramatic atmosphere to help this film show its themes: feudalistic
violence on the humanity of Chinese women and their miserable fates in the old society.

Generally speaking, from the point of the communication between music and film,
Jiping Zhao’s Raise the Red Lantern was an excellent work. His music supplies a deep
cultural background and atmosphere to this film, and its charisma is the high harmony of
Chinese modern techniques and traditional cultural aesthetics. However, different from
other pure music, film music functions in support of the film which make the audience’s
imagination of film music limited to the content of film. In other words, as music which
cannot be seen and touched, is much more abstract than visual art, it can be even more
difficult to understand the significance of film music than the film. Even if the audience
feel the aesthetic perception that film music gives, they can not understand the resonance
of the film unless they know the inside cultural significance of film music, just as we
cannot understand the use of the trombone in German choral music to symbolize of
God’s majesty if we do not know the meaning of “tuba” in Latin and German. Similarly,
a Western audience might only feel fresh and curious when they hear Peking Opera
singing in Raise the Red Lantern, without catching the resonance and interpreting the
significances if they do not know the meanings of them—it is hard to find similarity in strangeness in their Western “Horizon of Expectation”.

4.2 Dun Tan’s Film Music for *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*

4.2.1 Dun Tan’s Life and Experiences

Compared with Jiping Zhao who almost spent his whole life in China, Dun Tan’s experience seems more complex, which makes his musical styles completely different from Jiping Zhao’s.

Born on 18 August 1957 in Si Mao village in central Hunan, Dun Tan spent his early childhood with his grandmother in the countryside, experiencing firsthand the shamanistic culture of a rural Chinese village. He remembers his childhood as being closely surrounded by the “music of wedding and funeral, ritual, drama and so forth”, and he was deeply impressed by these folk music performances.\(^\text{11}\)

In the mid-1970s, during the Cultural Revolution, Dun Tan was sent to live among the peasants of the Huangjin commune, sharing the backbreaking work of rice-planting for two years. Like many thousands of other young people, he was subject to Mao's dictum that educated youth and intellectuals must be re-educated by the peasants, and thought he would be forever committed to agricultural life. Music offered a form of liberation. Tan began to collect folk songs and music from his peasant neighbors, and

although only 17, became a kind of village conductor leading musical celebrations and rituals from weddings to funerals. In Dun Tan's own ad hoc arrangements, played by the villagers on whatever folk instruments or household items (including cooking pots) were available, the music sometimes achieved fantastic aural effects.\footnote{Dun Tan Online, “Dun Tan’s Biography,” http://www.tandunonline.com/biography/default.asp?id=2, May 3, 2007.}

In 1978, Dun Tan went to the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing. After the restricted horizons of the Cultural Revolution, Chinese conservatory students were suddenly confronted with centuries of Western musical innovation. They eagerly studied musical idioms from Schoenberg, Stravinsky to Boulez, imitating and discarding one style after another, and Dun Tan was one of them.

In January 1986, Tan Dun was offered a fellowship at Columbia University in New York, at the invitation of composer Wen-Chung Chou. That September, he began to study for a Doctor of Musical Arts degree with Wen-Chung Chou, Mario Davidovsky, and George Edwards. He was now introduced to a much vaster spectrum of music -- and indeed of life -- than he had known while still in China.

**4.2.2 Dun Tan’s Film Music**

Besides composing music for the film *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, Dun Tan actually has a number of other types of orchestral works. Even if his major works are not the film music, all reflect a similar characteristic: Expressing Chinese traditional music and culture in Western style. He once said: “At all times, I want to bring the
Chinese most traditional musical tune and culture to the world according to my practice of music.” Comparing Jiping Zhao’s “Tradition is the main body, and Western style is the assistant”, Tan Dun’s horizon of tradition is more international. He said he could not be satisfied with doing Peking Opera, traditional drama and so forth in his hometown for his whole life. Thus he went to Beijing and had the horizon of China nationwide. But it was not enough either. Finally, He went to New York, studying at Columbia University, and got a universal horizon. Immersing in the city which has the atmosphere of multiple cultural background, Dun Tan tried to interpret his home cultural topics in an avant-garde way. Although he went back to a classical style when he composed for the film Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon, it is still a fresh way to express Chinese traditional culture with his endless imagination of music.

If we say the style of these Chinese New Folk-Custom films that Jiping Zhao composed for utilizes a musical style based on the northwestern Chinese traditional culture, there is no such pre-existing specific style of music in Chinese Martial Arts film. For Dun Tan, there is more free space to create his personal musical interpretation about Chinese Martial Arts.

The film music of Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon definitely combines the rich cultural textures of China with the powerful dramatic musical rhythms of the West. The Westernized elements of the music guide Western audience through the drama emotionally while the traditional Chinese elements root Western audience in the world.

that the film is creating. While “the latter elements are not without emotion, / they do add more to the atmosphere than to the drama itself.”14

On the other hand, being a Chinese Martial Arts film, the whole style of *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* is totally different from previous films in this genre. When Dun Tan talks about the style of music which fits to this film, he said:

“We should look at Martial Arts as the traditional art in China - not the fatal, bloody, violent impression that Hong Kong films have given a Western audience before. We would look at it philosophically, culturally, and with a human touch. I found that to be very interesting. So once he (Ang Lee) picked the script, I had to find something that could bridge both action and romance in music. Then we said that we have to have a bridge here. Who is the bridge? We both immediately said: ‘Yo-Yo Ma!’ Therefore, Ma Yo-Yo became the bridge between Western and Eastern cultures.”15

Comparing with Dun Tan’s other musical works, the film music in *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* is much simpler and purer. He accompanies grand Western orchestra sometimes with only two to three major instruments in the main role. Also, he puts the cello playing by Yo-Yo Ma (马友友) in the most prominent position from the beginning to the end.

In *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, the theme music is mainly played by Cello, and variously repeated by Xiao (Vertical Flute 萧) and Hu Lu Si. (葫芦丝 a kind of vertical

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flute made of gourd used in South China). Unlike other traditional Chinese Martial Arts films which focus on the Martial Arts and its errantry, Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon pay much attentions to love and humanity. Therefore, the theme music of this film has the styles of hidden bitterness and profound significance, like telling a sad story a long time ago. Dun Tan talks about the source of this musical inspiration:

"With the opening landscape of the Chinese villages I realized this was a dream and a part of China that doesn’t exist anymore. This raised incredible feelings in me; most of that emotion went into Ma Yo-Yo’s cello solos. Also it was the calligraphy of the martial arts in this picture. Ang Lee’s martial arts or the movement in this story is like calligraphy, Chinese brush writing....As soon as I saw this I was immediately inspired."

Even though the cello played by Yo-Yo Ma is definitely a Western strings instrument, we may feel his playing is quite differently from the ordinary way of playing cello--He combines cello playing with the many technique of playing Chinese traditional strings instruments, especially the Pipa (pluck lute 琵琶). As the Chinese ancient poem describing how the Pipa plays and sounds: "The bold strings rattled like splatters of sudden rain (大弦嘈嘈如急雨), and the fine strings hummed like lovers' whispers (小弦切切入私语). Chattering and patterning, patterning and chattering (嘈嘈切切错杂弹), as

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16 Rudy Koppl, “A Conversation with Dun Tan,” Music from the Movies, no.31-32 (winter, 2001)
pearls, large and small, on a jade plate fall (大珠小珠落玉盘).”¹⁷ It requires a press, a twist and a push on the high frets to create melodies and ornaments in the left hand. Other techniques used are the tan, (弹) a rightwards pluck with the index finger, lun, (轮) “wheel”, a pluck the string alternately and continuously with all the fingers in rapid and smooth succession, tiao (挑), a stroke in the opposite direction with the thumb, and gun, (滚) literally "roll", strokes are repeated in quick succession resulting tremolo in the right hand. When Yo-Yo Ma plays the cello, he absorbs the technique of playing Pipa, emphasizing on pressing, twisting and pushing on the left side. Such playing makes this Western instrument express unique Eastern styles, and “makes the whole style of the film music implicative and peaceful, portraying the color of film.”¹⁸

The music for the actions of the Martial Arts in the film is one of the most striking points in Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon. Before Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon, most scenes of Martial Arts actions in Chinese films employed either strong melodic music or kept complete silence. However it beating drums are frequently used to describe battle scenes or fights in Western films, such as the scene of the duel between Achilles and Hector whose result was directly related to the fate of the whole country in the film Troy. The first strong beat of bass drum came suddenly, opening the curtain of this piece of music, the Bongos (Shou Gu 手鼓) played lowly but in rhyme (I think you mean

¹⁷Chinese ancient poem in Tang Dynasty, by the poet Bai Juyi (白居易).
rhythm) and were irregularly interrupted by the non-harmonic beat of the Bass drum. This accompanied the actions of both Achilles and Hector who were vigilant and occasionally attacked to each other. As the density of the Bass drum’s beatings increased, the tension between the two heroes was aggravated. With the sudden coming of a woman’s solo, filled with misery, Achille’s spear pierced Hector’s body and the latter fell down and died.

Dun Tan himself talked about the source of inspiration for making music in a percussive style for Chinese Martial Arts:

“When they shot the two women fighting on the top of the roof I was there. It took place at three in the morning in a suburb of Beijing. It was extremely cold, minus ten degrees. Thus I got a percussive or hard feeling about the scene. At the location Ang Lee had a lot of fires burning because it was so cold. He was around these fires watching his tiny camera monitors to see what was happening. In the meantime there was this huge robot or crane flying people around, it was quite surreal because this was in a wild suburb in the middle of Beijing. Suddenly you are seeing this huge cinema factory in the middle of nowhere. The night fight scenes as well as the forest fantasy scene were the two parts that inspired me most when writing the score.”

Here in Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon, Dun Tan not only uses melodic music, but also utilizes pure drum beatings to express the sense of fight, especially the fight of

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women. But it differs from that of *Troy*, in that there is no bloody and violent sense inside the beatings.

Figure 3: Bass Drums for "Night Fight"

In the scene of "night fight", Hu Lu Si plays gently at first, creating the quietness of night. But suddenly, this peaceful atmosphere is interrupted by the quick crescendo of a bass strings band and drum beatings. A chief who is Jiaolong Yu rushes lightly on the roof. Accompanying by the quiet beatings of Castanets (Xiang Ban 响板), she slips into the house and steals the Green Destiny sword. As one person discovered her and shouted:

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“A thief”, the Bass drum and Bongos come briskly and rhythmically, making the Castanets the intermission between powerful drum beats. Then the two women, Jiao Long Yu and Lian Lian rise and fall, flying among roofs and fight hand to hand in a small square. Drum beatings do not exaggerate the nervousness and danger, but emphasize the rhythm of the two persons’ actions. As they fight more and more fiercely, the rhythm of drum beatings becomes faster and dynamics increases, and this scene of “Night Fight” reach the climax with dense drum beatings. In the end, Jiaolong Yu gets a chance to escape, and the drum beating gradual slows down by playing Castanets.

Their second fight is in Xiulian Yu’s home. Different from the previous one where these two people fight only by hand, this time they all use weapons. Thus at the beginning of the music, the string instruments’ play create a strained feeling. But when the fight begins, the music goes back to the pure rhythmic drum beatings without over heightening the atmosphere of tension. When Mubai Li and Jiaolong Yu fight outside, the music turns to another sense. Accompanying their freely flying through the bamboo forest which is either tense or peacefully, the inside of these two people’s hearts cannot calm down: Jiaolong Yu wants to escape from Mubai Li but cannot succeed while she is struggling with whether or not she need to reconcile with him. Mubai Li wants to make Jiaolong Yu his disciple but he cannot forgive that she hurt Xiulian Yu, and her master is his enemy. Responding to such complex emotions, the Xiao (vertical flute 覽) plays a sorrowful melody while strings instruments interrupt with a non-harmonic style which creates indistinct intranquility and uncertainty.
In the scene of “Going to the South”, Dun Tan uses Bongos as the base of rhythm while playing a Chinese bamboo transverse flute in the melody which does not have a vital feeling either. First, the Bamboo flute plays a melodic music which is full of the musical style in Southern China and indicating the place where the story goes on. When Jiaolong Yu begins to fly up and down, fighting with those men in the inn, the style of music that flute plays changes into something sweetly and lively, going together with the Bongos rhythmically, to highlight Jiaolong Yu’s brisk actions.

In the end, Jiaolong Yu let Xiaohu Luo make a promise, and she herself jumps into the cliff on the Wu Dang Mountain. (武当山) The whole film ends in a beautiful but wordlessly sorrowful atmosphere. The music “Farewell” for the ending is mainly played by Yo-Yo Ma, backing the theme music. Accompanying with rhythmic drum beatings, the melodious and deep sound of cello combine with the plaintive crooning of Er Hu, (二胡 Chinese two strings fiddle) like the euphemistic confide of love between Mubai Li and Xiulian Yu, Jiaolong Yu and Xiaohu Luo, sighing about the heartrending destiny among the four characters in the film.

Besides, the song “A Love Before Time” sung by the Chinese pop star CoCo Lee (李玟) is definitely the product of Entertainment and Business’s demand. The music sounds melodic and memorable but with the complete style of Western pop music.

When asking Dun Tan what he learnt from the Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon, he replied:
"The most important thing I learned is to try and see things from a different angle. Four years ago when the news came out that Ang Lee was going to make a martial arts film people thought: what is he doing? Actually no one knew what kind of angle Ang Le was going to take in this film. After he made the film, people saw it and said: ‘Oh my God, that is what he was thinking of.’ Martial Arts in film have been developed in Hong Kong for the last twenty years, but have gone nowhere. Not until Ang Lee made *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* was there a new conclusion. He planned his film quite well from a worldly cultural point of view and showed Martial Arts to the world in a completely different way."^{21}

Despite being a Chinese Martial Arts film, the whole style of *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* does not emphasize the danger and violence of the Martial Arts world. It just gives its audience a fantastic atmosphere of Chinese mystery and poetry without a horrible and bloody feeling inside. Its music cooperates with the film’s visionary air, describing elegantly those swordsmen flying up and down in the air while gracefully crooning a love story and sighing sadly at their pitiful destiny.

Furthermore, it will be a sharp contrast if we compare the time that music occupies in the films *Raise the Red Lantern* as opposed to *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*. The latter has the total length of one and half hours, and music occupies one and quarter hour with rarely any diegetic music inside. Dun Tan mentioned that Ang Lee required using large-scale music in this film, saying "These martial arts parts have been musically

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matched within an accuracy of every second, and every second has been choreographed. When I took these parts from picture to score, Ang Lee told me that I can not even be off one half of a second when they are moving around.  

Also, even if the music of *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* is more pure and frugal comparing with Dun Tan’s later film music works and also most of other Western film music, it has richer Western orchestration and more kinds of musical styles than *Raise the Red Lantern*. Of course, judging whether a piece of film music is excellent cannot be evaluated by the length of music played in films. But it is obvious that the music of *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* is closer to mainstream Western film music style. Both Jiping Zhao and Dun Tan utilize many Chinese traditional musical instruments and musical styles in their film music, but Dun Tan’s usage does not have such a deep and complex cultural background inside, and his music combines with the story of *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* in a direct way, which is easier to communicate with a Western audience. Although he employs Cello as the major role and a large-scale Western orchestra as the accompaniment, the essence of his music is based on Chinese traditional culture, which makes a Western audience “find similarity in the strangeness” in *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*.

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22 Ibid.
CHAPTER 5

After the Success of *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*

It was front-page news in China when *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* won four Oscars. Like the impact of the film *Yellow Earth* winning numerous international prizes during the 1980s, Chinese films seemed to find a new way to communicate with the world at the turn of century because of the success of this film. Even if there is debate about “whether *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* truly shows the culture of Chinese Martial Arts and ancient China”, later Chinese films such as *Hero* (Ying Xiong 英雄), *Ambushed All Around* (Shi Mian Mai Fu 十面埋伏), *The Promise* (Wu Ji 无极), and *Banquet* (Ye Yan 夜宴) all imitated the style of *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, which they thought might not only better satisfy a Western audience’s curiosity of Chinese traditional culture, but also make big money at the box office. Was the result of their work as good as they expected?

Unfortunately, later Chinese films could not match the high enthusiasm of Western audiences for *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*’s style and gradually garnered less attention.¹ Here, I cannot analyze all the reasons causing this phenomenon because they are very complex. However, the statistics clearly show that without exploring new styles,

¹ See Appendix D.
but only imitating a previously successful format is not a wise idea for Chinese films that want to bring Chinese traditional culture to the world.

On the other hand, Dun Tan continued to compose music for *Hero* and *Banquet*. Different from the musical style of *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* which is pure and fantastic, these two later film scores are designed with magnificent vigor in order to show the theme “the whole country and peace in the world”, using a larger-scale Western orchestra and a large Chorus. In addition, Dun Tan added multiple cultural musical elements to his music, and his films’ musical groups involved more celebrities from the music industry, both from classical and pop, West and East. Their participation no doubt increased the level of attraction and proved to be an able method of attracting a larger audience.

For example, in the film music of *Hero*, the theme was played by the famous violinist Itzhak Perlman, who has already played for many pieces of famous Western film music. In order to create the musical style of “Qin Xuan Zi” (秦弦子) an ancient Chinese instrument that was lost in history, Dun Tan changed the strings of the violin into the strings of an Er Hu (two strings fiddle), which sounds like the mixed sound of an Er hu and a Ma Tou Qin. (马头琴 Horse-Head fiddle, used in the Mongolian area)

Accompanied by a huge Western orchestra, Perlman plays the desolate and deep feeling that closely ties into the grand but tragic atmosphere of this film. During the scene in which the Qin army (秦国军队) attacks the Zhao army (赵国), Dun Tan uses Men Bass
Chorus and Japan's Taiko Drum to express the formidable power of Qin's army. During the scene in Hu Yang Forest, the two women Manyu Zhang (张曼玉) and Ziyi Zhang (章子怡) fight for their love and jealousy between country and individuals—they are running through the forest by flying in and out of trees. Perlman's violin, Taiko Drum beatings and soprano singing by a Dong minority girl, (侗族) creates a wispy but sorrowful feeling, working in harmony with the romantic pictures.

In the film Banquet (Ye Yan 夜宴), the plot is very similar to Hamlet by Shakespeare. Here, we might get a sense that the three films: Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon, Hero and Banquet all have an atmosphere of tragedy but with different inside meanings. Therefore, Dun Tan's music responds to the tragic feeling of these films in different ways: In Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon, the tragedy is about individual love between two couples. Cello plays the love story with a profound and plaintive sadness; In Hero, which is the struggle between individual emotions and the destiny of country, the tragic atmosphere generated by Perlman's "Eastern style" violin and grand-scale Western Orchestra, has a more solemn and stirring style; In Banquet, the tragedy exists between a royal family that looks perfect on the surface, but hides the desire and conflict of love, ambition, jealousy, and revenge inside. The theme music is mainly presented in solo piano by the famous young Chinese pianist Lang Lang (朗朗), with repeated singing by Qing Er (青儿 The young girl who is the fiancée of the prince in the film) and the famous tenor Teng Ge'er (滕格尔) without any accompaniment. Besides the tragic spirit,
the music greatly emphasizes the feeling of loneliness among every character in this film. In addition, the fighting scenes are also a striking point in the films *Hero* and *Banquet*—Dun Tan largely utilizes drum beatings to describe them, which remind us of the same technique used in *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*.

Another noticeable characteristic of the music is that the films *Hero* and *Banquet* rarely use Chinese traditional instruments, giving Western instruments the main role in the music. In contrast to Jiping Zhao, who directly adapts traditional musical elements as the source for his materials and gives traditional instruments the main role in his film music, Dun Tan nearly gives up on the usage of Chinese traditional instruments. Instead, he employs large-scale Western orchestras, reforms the Western solo instruments into "Eastern styles," and abstracts Chinese music from the actual materials—drawing out the spirit instead of the form. As a result, we cannot point out where the music is from exactly, but still can feel that it has a Chinese style. Musically speaking, these three films feature Dun Tan's individual creativity while approaching a Western style, particularly the Hollywood style of film music that emphasizes presenting melodic narrative and exaggerating descriptions of emotion to affect the audience. Therefore, it is no surprise that Dun Tan’s film music can be understood and accepted by Western audience. However, it does cause suspicion about the authenticity of “Chinese tradition” in Dun Tan’s music.

In reality, Dun Tan is just one of many contemporary Chinese composers who had enjoyed a long education and living experiences overseas. It is now common to see these
young Chinese composers write China-related musical topics in a Western style, either in film scores or other types of music, that are popular and well-known outside China. However, can such "reformed" music actually be representative of Chinese traditional culture? Wen-Chung Chou, the most famous Chinese composer in the United States and one of Dun Tan's teachers at Columbia University, is disappointed by Dun Tan and his contemporaries. "They reflect the intellectual ambience in China today," he said. "But they are not in the habit of going to libraries, doing real research or debating issues. I'm disappointed. It's not the kind of situation I wanted." In his opinion, the success of Dun Tan at the Oscars and other international awards is not a surprise, but has come, perhaps, too much and too soon. He sees no virtue in combining cultural artifacts in a superficial way, without a deep understanding of the cultural legacies involved. And he finds slim improvement in some of the work of his former students over the musical style of a century ago. ² In essence, Wen-Chung Chou is worried that there might be a trend of Chinese traditional music gradually losing its original style as it heads out into the world.

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CONCLUSION

As we explore the identity of recent Chinese film music, the question of tradition becomes increasingly pressing. What is traditional culture? Does it mean keeping old styles and not allowing change? Can we call something “Chinese traditional music” if there are some Western and modern elements and styles in it? I will begin by considering these questions and their implications.

Even if traditional culture was created by our ancestors long ago, no part of culture, including music, can be kept the same without any change—we might not have realized this phenomenon in the past because change used to come more slowly to Chinese culture due a long-standing sense of reverence and protection for China’s old and traditional culture. However in recent times, especially after the Cultural Revolution, the process of change has rapidly accelerated. Chinese traditional music not only needs to face the change of Chinese society but also has to balance the impact of Western culture and globalization. Here, I agree with Tan Dun’s opinions about Chinese traditional music: “When something new appears in traditional music, we cannot always check whether we already had it in the past.”\(^1\) It is impossible for Chinese traditional music to deny its evolution. Instead, “In order to understand traditional music, it is not only necessary to

understand its classical and folk origins, but also necessary to understand its modern evolution. It has great vitality, and is not static.” Jacques Maquet (1972:10) observes, “In any culture, the origin of a trait matters little; it is its integration in the social heritage of a group that makes it an authentic element of its culture”. Therefore, “what matters is not any concept about the changing of form, but whether or not we preserve and develop the mood (or spirit) of the original piece”.2 The performance of the most famous Pipa’s piece, “Shi Mian Mai Fu” (Ambush on All Sides,十面埋伏) today is not the same as when it was played one hundred year ago; even in the current day, different schools of Pipa play different styles of this piece. All we can try to do is to keep the essential spirit of this piece of music, without scrutinizing the way it is presented. Still, it is not easy to catch the spirit. Just like Wen-Chung Chou required “a spiritual digestion of one's legacies”, one must understand Chinese traditional culture through an extended period of exploration and discovery.

It is impossible to resist the cross-cultural communication in the world today. For China, a country that has a five-thousand-year history, there have been questions about how to deal with the relationship between its traditional culture and Western culture since the middle of the nineteenth Century (after the First Opium War in 1848). Thus, the topic of Chinese film music developing internationally is only one specific issue within a much larger framework.

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As Hong Yin pointed out, the idea of "Chinese films going to the world" means that they are available to the world, or at least to the mainstream markets of the world. He argues that Chinese films need to explore the overseas market. As for this process of exploration, the films often must find acceptance from various international festivals, thus acquiring a passport of internationalization. With regards to technique, Chinese films also have no choice but to revise themselves in accordance with international standards in the areas of ideology, culture, aesthetics and so forth, in order to first be accepted by overseas festivals and then by Western audiences. Chinese film music also must also make similar adaptations.

However, because of the specific characteristics and functions that music has, particularly film music, Chinese film music faces some new problems that Chinese films did not have. The works of Jiping Zhao and Dun Tan compared in this thesis can be considered as the two most representative styles of Chinese film music in the process of going to the world. The lessons of their exploration are as follows:

No matter what kind of Chinese film music goes to the world, keeping the characteristics and connotation of traditional culture is the most important thing. This is the principle and foothold for Chinese film music in the world. In regards to it, there is no difference between Jiping Zhao and Dun Tan’s film music.

Besides keeping an element of traditional culture in Chinese film music, Chinese composers have to feature traditional culture in a way that Western audiences can

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“understand”. In other words, directly showing traditional culture without any reform is impossible, because deeply understanding a culture requires a very long period of time. However, the point which Dun Tan did not realize is that, the success of this “shifting” has to be based on deep digestion of traditional culture. Chinese film music must find a balance between Chinese traditional culture and Western culture. We can think that both Jiping Zhao and Dun Tan are looking for this middle ground. According to different critics inside and outside China, and my own personal observation, Jiping Zhao’s film music is adept at expressing Chinese traditional culture, but is hard to understand by Western audiences; Dun Tan’s film music goes further in the area of international acceptance. Some Chinese scholars have the criticism that Dun Tan’s music is simply “Shocks the West by using the East and shocks the East by using the West”.

Although I do not agree with this opinion, it does illustrate an important point: there must be “shifting” during the cross-culture communication and Dun Tan achieved that. Therefore, their explorations are still in process, and need to be further evaluated and discussed.

In order to find the right equilibrium, Chinese film music must have the exact certainty for the “degree” between traditional culture and Western culture, for which we might borrow the idea from a school of Chinese ancient philosophy: the “Doctrine of Mean” (Zhong Yong 中庸) which emphasizes the need to rely on principle while keeping impartial and appropriate (不偏不倚 恰如其分). However, just as the ancient Chinese strategist Sun Zi (孙子) said: “Know the enemy and know yourself, and you can fight a
hundred battles with no danger of defeat”, in order to handle the “degree” exactly, one must have an understanding of both Chinese traditional culture and Western culture. This is the key and basic condition for Chinese film music going to the world.

Ultimately, the fact that Dun Tan succeeded might seem to point to some persuasive aspects of his work that not only led to foreign acclaim, but also kept in line with the trend of development throughout the world. Still, we cannot say that he has found “the best way” for Chinese film music to communicate its’ traditional culture to the world. The path of evolution and expansion is a lengthy process that may never end. However, as China’s influence gradually increases throughout the world and Western audiences gain a deeper understanding of China, we can remain optimistic and confident about the future of Chinese film music. We shall have to wait and see what surprises future Chinese film music composers will give us in their quest to balance East and West and communicate with the world.
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APPENDIX A

CHINESE NARRATIVE FILM MUSIC RECEIVING INTERNATIONAL FILM MUSIC AWARDS BEFORE 2001

1988

*Love Hurts* (Ku Cang De Lian Qing 落藏的恋情)

Festival des Trois Continents—Best Original Score, by Shaotong Zhang (章绍同)

1990

*Five Girls and One Rope* (Wu Ge Nv Hai He Yi Tiao Sheng Zi 五个女孩和一条绳子)

Festival des Trois Continents—Best Original Score, by Jiping Zhao

1991

*Qing Yong* (秦俑)

Hong Kong International Film Awards—Best Original Score, by Joseph Koo, James Wong, and Romeo Diaz

1998

*Teenagers* (Nan Hai Nv Hai 男孩女孩)

Russian International Children’s Film Festival—Best Film Music, by Shaotong Zhang

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1 From the website of International Movies Database.
APPENDIX B

INTERNATIONAL FILM MUSIC AWARDS FOR THE FILM MUSIC OF

*CROUCHING TIGER HIDDEN DRAGON*

1. ASCAP Film and Television Music Awards
2. Academy Awards Best Music Original Score
3. BAFTA Awards Anthony Asquith Award for Film Music
4. Chicago Film Critics Association Best Original Score
5. Flanders International Film Festival (Belgium) Georges Delerue Prize
6. Grammy Awards Best Score Soundtrack Album for A Motion Picture, Television or Other Visual Media
7. Los Angeles Film Critics Association Best Music Score, 8. Hong Kong International Film Awards Best Original Films²

² Ibid.
APPENDIX C

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM AWARDS FOR THE CHINESE NEW FOLK-CUSTOM FILMS FROM 1985 TO 1995

1985

*Yellow Earth* (Huang Tu Di 黄土地) by Kaige Chen

Hawaii International Film Festival—Best Feature Film

Locarno International Film Festival

Prize of the Ecumenical Jury—Special Mention

Silver Leopard

1987

*Red Sorghum* (Hong Gao Liang 红高粱) by Yimou Zhang

Berlin International Film Festival—Golden Berlin Bear

1991

*Ju Dou* (菊豆) by Yimou Zhang

Amanda Awards, Norway—Best Foreign Feature Film (*Arets utenlandske spillefilm*)

Villadolid International Film Festival—Golden Spike

Academy Awards, USA—Best Foreign Language Film Nominated
Cannes Film Festival—Golden Palm Nominated

1992

*Raise the Red Lantern* (Da Hong Deng Long Gao Gao Gua 大红灯笼高高挂) by Yimou Zhang

BAFTA Awards—Best Film not in the English Language

David di Donatello Awards—Best Foreign Film (Miglior Film Straniero)

Independent Spirit Awards—Best Foreign Film

Kansas City Film Critics Circle Awards—Best Foreign Film

London Critics Circle Film Awards—Foreign Language Film of the Year

Los Angeles Film Critics Association Awards—Best Cinematography

New York Film Critics Circle Awards—Best Foreign Language Film

Venice Film Festival—Silver Lion, Golden Lion Nominated

Independent Spirit Awards—Best Foreign Film Nominated

Academy Awards, USA—Best Foreign Language Film Nominated

*Qiu Ju Goes to Court* (Qiu Ju Da Guan Si 秋菊打官司) by Yimou Zhang

French Syndicate of Cinema Critics—Best Foreign Film

National Society of Film Critics Awards, USA—Best Foreign Language Film

Vancouver International Film Festival—Most Popular Film

Venice Film Festival—Golden Lion
Independent Spirit Awards—Best Foreign Film Nominated

1993-1995

*Farewell My Concubine* (Ba Wang Bie Ji 霸王别姬) by Kaige Chen

Boston Society of Film Critics Award—Best Foreign Language Film

Cannes Film Festival—Golden Palm, FIPRESCI Prize

Camerimage—Silver Frog, Golden Frog Nominated

Los Angeles Film Critics Association Awards—Best Foreign Film

National Board of Review, USA—Best Foreign Language Film

New York Film Critics Circle Awards—Best Foreign Language Film

Political Film Society, USA—Special Award

Golden Globes, USA—Best Foreign Language Film

BAFTA Awards—Best Film not in English Language

Academy Awards, USA—Best Cinematography, Best Foreign Language Film Nominated

Cesar Awards, France—Best Foreign Film (Meilleur film étranger) Nominated

London Critics Circle Film Awards—Foreign Language Film of the Year

Mainichi Film Concours—Best Foreign Language Film³

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³ Ibid.
APPENDIX D

THE OFFICE BOXES OF CHINESE FILMS WHICH WENT OUT INTO THE WORLD AFTER 2000

*Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* (Wo Hu Cang Long 卧虎藏龙) by Ang Lee 2000

In United States  $128,067,808 (Until July 29th 2001)

*Hero* (Ying Xiong 英雄) by Yimou Zhang 2002

In the United States  $53,583,486 (Until November 21st 2004)

*Ambushed All Around* (Shi Mian Mai Fu 十面埋伏) by Yimou Zhang 2003

In United States $11,041,228 (Until April 3rd 2005)

*Banquet* (Ye Yan 夜宴) by Xiaogang Feng 2005

Global $22,205,648 (Until February 2006)\(^4\)

\(^4\) Ibid.