Tan Dun’s *Eight Memories in Watercolor, Op. 1*: Strategies for Pianists and a Version Comparison

D. M. A. Document

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Abstract

The well-known Chinese composer Tan Dun wrote his piano suite *Eight Memories in Watercolor, Op. 1* while studying at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing in 1978. A programmatic piano suite, each short, unique movement in *Eight Memories* integrates traditional Chinese folk music and western modern technical skill. Tan’s rich musical interests, innovative approach, and culturally eclectic compositional style endow his opus with a high aesthetic value.

The purpose of this document is to help the reader understand the stylistic variety in the different movements that make up *Eight Memories*. The variety results from his individual musical style and the historical time period in which he lived during the time of its composition. The document aims to take the reader into Tan’s world in order to help the reader gain a deeper understanding. This deeper understanding will especially aid a pianist who plans to perform this suite. Therefore, it is necessary and important to analyze this composition and compare different versions of the score. A comprehensive understanding of this suite can help pianists perform the suite better by providing a variety of solutions to the diverse challenges this composition presents. Through the study of Tan’s *Eight Memories*, readers learn about Tan’s perception of the music, as well as the changes that have occurred in modern Chinese piano music over the past forty years.
Based on an analysis of Tan’s piano suite *Eight Memories in Watercolor*, Part I introduces Tan’s life and his three compositional periods and provides an overview of his piano works, as well as the stylistic features of *Memories*. Part II deals with Tan’s strategies, the stylistic features of *Eight Memories* by providing background information about every piece of this piano suite, including the Chinese style of melody, as well as rhythm and the other musical elements Tan uses in *Eight Memories*. Part III discusses the challenges of performance from different four aspects, including grace notes, phrasing, voicing, balance, finger articulation and pedaling. The final section compares different five versions of this piano suite. In order to improve understanding, performers can choose the most valuable elements from these different versions.
Dedicated to my parents and my wife
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Eight Memories in Watercolor, a piano suite that integrates folk music and modern technical skills, demonstrates composer Tan Dun’s unique musical voice. The suite was composed when Tan Dun studied at the Beijing Central Conservatory of Music in 1978, and in this period Tan entered into the field of creative professionals. This suite is concrete evidence from which we can understand the creativity of this composer.

The creative characteristics of this suite are the main focus of this document’s study, which focuses on Tan’s use of traditional musical elements. Tan’s Eight Memories in Watercolor is a deeply personal composition that sets the tone for many of the compositional devices that he would use in his later works. Although he was merely twenty years old at that time, he already had developed a very personal and unique style.

In this document, I aim to provide knowledge about and elaborate on Tan Dun’s life, his music compositional periods, and an overview of his piano works. I will also explain the background of Tan’s creation of Eight Memories in Watercolor and the Chinese influence on melody, rhythm, and the other musical elements employed throughout the piece.
1.1 Tan Dun’s Life

Tan Dun was born on August 18, 1957, in Changsha, Hunan Province, China. He received no schooling or early musical training. For several years he planted rice in a commune. After working as a violinist and arranger at the local opera theatre in Beijing, he was admitted at the age of 19 to the composition department of the newly reopened Central Conservatory of Music, where he studied with Zhao Xindao and Li Yinghai and encountered Western classical music for the first time. Tan and his fellow students discovered a wide range of formerly suppressed 20th-century music, from Schoenberg to Boulez; they were also stimulated by visits from a number of guest composers. Tan soon became recognized as the leading composer of the Chinese “New Wave,” the generation of artists, writers and composers that came to prominence in the new atmosphere of cultural pluralism in the early 1980s. However, his music aroused much debate and political controversy; for a brief period in 1983 it was branded “spiritual pollution” by the Chinese government, and performances were banned. In 1986, he moved to New York, where he completed his studies at Columbia University with Chou Wenchung, Mario Davidovsky, and George Edwards, receiving the Doctor of Musical Arts in 1993.

Among his numerous awards are the Glenn Gould International Protégé Award, the Grawemeyer Award (in 1998 for the opera *Marco Polo*), and commissions from such organizations as the Edinburgh Festival and the Metropolitan Opera. He won the Academy Award for Best Original Score for the film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* in 2001. He also received the Anthony Asquith Award for Film Music, also known as the BAFTA Award for Best Film Music, given by the British Academy of Film and
Television Arts (BAFTA), for the same score.¹ By now, Tan has received numerous other prestigious honors, including a Grammy, Musical America’s Composer of the Year, the Bach Prize of the City of Hamburg, and Moscow’s Shostakovich Award.

Tan Dun’s music has been played throughout the world by leading orchestras, opera houses, international festivals, and on radio and television. As a composer/conductor, Tan Dun has led the world’s most esteemed orchestras including the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, the London Symphony Orchestra, the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, the New York Philharmonic, the Berliner Philharmonic, the Orchestra National de France, the BBC Symphony Orchestra, among others.

As a global cultural leader, Tan uses his creativity to raise awareness of environmental issues and to protect cultural diversity. In 2010, Tan served as “Cultural Ambassador to the World” for World EXPO Shanghai, and in 2013, UNESCO appointed Tan Dun as a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador.² In 2008, Tan Dun was commissioned by the International Olympics Committee to write the logo music and award ceremony music for the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008. In 2014, Tan Dun was appointed as Honorary Artistic Director of China National Symphony Orchestra.³

Tan Dun has made recordings for Sony Classical, Deutsche Grammophon, EMI, Opus Arte and Naxos. His recordings have garnered many accolades including a

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Grammy Award (*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*) and Grammy nomination (*The First Emperor, Marco Polo; Pipa Concerto*); Japan’s Recording Academy Awards for Best Contemporary Music CD (*Water Passion after St. Matthew*) and the BBC’s Best Orchestral Album (*Death and Fire*). Tan Dun’s music is published by G. Schirmer, Inc. and represented worldwide by the Music Sales Group of Classical Companies.  

1.2 Tan Dun’s creative stages

To analyze a composer’s creative stages, we need to have a deeper understanding of his/her living environment, music styles and other aspects. We can divide Tan Dun’s works into three different stages.

1.2.1 The first creative stage: The Central Conservatory period (1978–1985)

Tan Dun’s unique composition style the fact grew up during the tumultuous Chinese Cultural Revolution. During 1966-1976, many of the nation’s younger generation, including Tan Dun, was sent to the countryside in order to work in the fields with the peasants and learn the importance of hard work. During this period, Tan made arrangements of native songs and spent a significant amount of time collecting and studying folk music around the Hunan area. In 1976, the Cultural Revolution ended with the death of Chairman Mao. Many restrictions on Western art were relaxed and the

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political tensions between China and the West decreased. During this period, composers resumed the freedom on creation of art to compose their own work to serve people without fear of punishment from the government. As seen in *Memories*, he adopted four Hunan folk songs into this piece.

Before the age of twenty, Tan Dun never had the opportunity to be exposed to western classical music. However, once introduced to the world of classical music after he entered the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, he immediately became “a slave of western classical music by Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, and Liszt.” In this period, most of his works were composed while studying at the Central Conservatory. Specifically, *Li Sao*, his first symphony in 1979-1980, which was less imitative, technically more advanced, and more personal than the symphonies produced by Chinese composers of the older generations. It was awarded a prize in the First National Competition of Orchestra Works in 1981. According to western classical music standards, the piece was considered outdated and imitative of the style of 19th-century romanticism. Tan Dun’s string quartet *Feng-Ya-Song*, based on ancient Chinese poetry, was awarded a prize in the Dresden International Weber Chamber Music Competition in 1983. Tan Dun’s *On Taoism* won the Bartok International Composition Competition in 1989. He introduced listeners to his “sound world”: the sounds he remembers from when he was growing up in a remote village in China. He wrote the piece to honor his

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grandmother, to commemorate her death, and to preserve the sounds of village life in China that are vanishing from the soundscape of the 21st-century world. This work is one of the most significant in this stage. Furthermore, it played an extremely important role in his admission into the doctoral program at Columbia University.  

In this period, Tan Dun tried to incorporate some western music compositional techniques into his work. As a result, he and several of his other classmates were introduced to more avant-garde music through the British composer Alexander Goehr. The students studying at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing became slaves to what they perceived as “new music” from composers such as Bartók, Messiaen, Boulez, and Stockhausen.

His major works during this first creative stage (1978-1985) include:

- Eight Memories in Watercolor (Piano Solo) (1978)
- A Child’s Diary (Piano Solo) (1978)
- Eight Memories in Watercolor (Guitar Duo) (1979)
- Li Sao (Orchestra) (1979-1980)
- Feng-Ya-Song (String Quartet) (1982)
- Fu, Fu, Fu (Chamber Ensemble) (1982)
- Self Portrait (from Death and Fire) (Orchestra) (1983)
- Symphony in Two Movements (Orchestra) (1985)
- On Taoism (Soloist: Voice, Bass Clarinet, Contrabassoon and Orchestra) (1985)

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11 Ibid., 6.
1.2.2 The second creative stage: The Columbia University period (1986–1989)

This stage is a transitional period for Tan Dun. We can hear clearly the combination of Chinese national elements and western modern compositional techniques in most works composed in this period. *Eight Colors for String Quartet*, composed in 1986, was the first piece Tan Dun wrote after coming to New York. It shares the dark, ritualized singing; dramatic form; and attention to tone color and dynamics found in his pieces written in China. This string quartet marks his first contact with the concentrated, lyrical language of western atonality. It combines the exotic timbres of the Peking Opera with Second Viennese School atonal.

Tan arrived in the United States on January 4, 1986, with the purpose of studying composition under the direction of Mario Davidovsky and Chou Wen-chung at Columbia University.¹³ He was introduced to new kinds of music at Columbia University, much like his first experience with western music at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing.

The major works of this second creative stage (1986-1989) include:

- *Eight Colors* (String Quartet) (1986)
- *In Distance* (Chamber Music) (1987)
- *Silk Road* (Soloist: Soprano and Orchestra) (1989)
- *Nine Songs* (Soloist and Orchestra) (1989).¹⁴


1.2.3 The third creative stage: Tan’s productive period (1990–Present)

From 1990 to the present is considered Tan Dun’s mature period. His music of this period gives greater freedom and disposal to a variety of forms such as orchestral (Orchestra Theatre, 1990), opera (Tea: A Mirror of Soul, 2002), organic music (Earth Concerto for Stone and Ceramic Percussion with Orchestra, 2009), concerto (Hero Concerto, 2010), and oratorio and chorus (Water Passion, 2000). This period was extremely productive for Tan; he had completed over 60 works by 2015.

In Water Concerto for Water Percussion and Orchestra in 1998, Tan Dun utilized water as a special and important instrument in this organic music and audiences are greatly surprised to hear many different kinds of sounds produced by water. Since the completion of this music, we can see water employed in many of his works, such as Water Music, 2004.

Tan Dun expresses the compositional inspiration of this piece as follows:

In Hunan, water was a daily thing with our life. Every day we washed everything with the river. All the old women, they always went to [the] river for laundry, making a beautiful sound, very rhythmic. So I transpose those memories for beautiful laundry sounds, and swimming sounds, body popping sounds, water dancing sounds, water teasing wounds, water popping sound, into my orchestrations.¹⁵

While in New York City, Tan had the chance to meet many influential composers. One of the most important friendships that he made was with John Cage. This relationship was so significant that later on in Tan’s career, after Cage’s death, he wrote a special work titled C-A-G-E, which is played entirely inside the piano and applies the

fingering techniques from the Chinese traditional plucked instrument Pipa. *C-A-G-E* is significant because it explores nearly all possible resonances that can be produced on the piano. This piece memorializes the many pieces written for prepared piano by Cage.\(^{16}\)

His major works during this “productive period” (1990–Present) include:

*Orchestra Theatre* (Orchestra) (1990)

*Elegy: Snow in June* (Soloist: Cello and Orchestra) (1991)


*Orchestral Theatre II: Re* (Soloist: Bass, Chorus and Orchestra) (1992)

*Circle with Four Trios, Conductor and Audience* (Large Ensemble) (1992)


*Intercourse of Fire and Water* (Yi1) (Soloist: Cello and Orchestra) (1994)

*Out of Peking Opera* (Soloist: Violin and Orchestra) (1994)

*Ghost Opera* (Soloist: Pipa and Orchestra) (1994)

*Concerto for pizzicato Piano and Ten instruments* (Soloist: Piano and Orchestra) (1995)

*A Sinking Love* (Soloist: Soprano and Orchestra) (1995)

*Marco Polo* (Opera) (1995)

*Concerto for Guitar and Orchestra* (Yi2) (Soloist: Guitar and Orchestra) (1996)


*Overture: Dragon and Phoenix* (from Heaven Earth Mankind) (Orchestra) (1997)

*Jubilation* (from Heaven Earth Mankind) (Orchestra) (1997)

*Requiem and Lullaby* (from *Heaven Earth Mankind*) (Soloist: Soprano or low Bass or children’s chorus, Chorus: Soprano or low Bass or children’s chorus, string instrument and Orchestra) (1997)

*Concerto for Six* (Chamber Music) (1997)

*Heaven Earth Mankind* (Symphony 1997) (Soloist: Cello, Bianzhong Bells, Chorus: Children’s Chorus and Orchestra) (1997)

*Song of Peace* (from Heaven Earth Mankind) (Soloist: Bianzhong Bells, Chorus: Children’s Chorus and Orchestra) (1997)


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Peony Pavilion (Opera) (1998)
Concerto for String Orchestra and Pipa (Soloist: Pipa and Orchestra) (1999)
The Gate (Orchestral Theatre IV) (Soloist: Female Peking Opera singer, Western Operatic Soprano, Japanese Puppeteer) (1999)
Concerto for String Quartet and Pipa (Concerto) (1999)
Crouching Tiger Concerto (Soloist: Cello and Orchestra) (2000)
Crouching Tiger Concerto for Erhu and Chamber Orchestra (Soloist: Erhu and Orchestra) (2000)
Eternal Vow (from Crouching Tiger Concerto) (Soloist: Cello and Orchestra) (2000)
Dew-Fall-Drops (Piano Solo) (2000)
Water Passion After St. Matthew (Oratorio and Chorus) (2000)
Yi°: Concerto for Orchestra (Orchestra) (2002)
The Map: Concerto for Cello, Video and Orchestra (Soloist: Cello and Orchestra) (2002)
Seven Desires for Guitar (Guitar Solo) (2002)
Tea: A Mirror of Soul (Opera) (2002)
Four Secret Roads of Marco Polo (Soloist: 12 Cellos and Orchestra) (2004)
Secret Land (Large Ensemble) (2006)
The First Emperor (Opera) (2006)
The Fire (Piano Concerto) (Soloist: Piano and Orchestra) (2008)
The Fire (Piano Sonata) (Piano Solo) (2008)
Earth Concerto for stone and ceramic percussion with Orchestra (Organic Music) (2009)
Eroica (Internet Symphony) (for orchestra) (Orchestra) (2009)
Symphony for Strings (Orchestra) (2009)
The Love (Violin Concerto) (Soloist: Violin and Orchestra) (2009)
Eroica (Internet Symphony) (for Symphonic Band) (Ensemble) (2009)
Symphonic Poem of 3 Notes: La-Si-Do (Orchestra) (2010)
The Banquet Concerto (Soloists and Orchestra) (2010)
Hero Concerto (Soloist: Violin and Orchestra) (2010)
Chiacone — after Colombi (Cello Solo) (2010)
Martial Arts Trilogy (Soloist: Violin, Cello, Piano, Chorus and Orchestra) (2011)
Atonal Rock n’ Roll: Of Youth (Orchestra) (2012)
Concerto for Orchestra (from Marco Polo) (Orchestra) (2012)
The Tears of Nature (Percussion Concerto) (Soloist: Percussion and Orchestra) (2012)
Symphonic Poem on Four Notes (B-A-C-H) for organ and orchestra (Soloist: Organ and Orchestra) (2012)
Nu Shu: The Secret Songs of Women- Symphony for harp, 13 micro films, and Orchestra (2013)
The Triple Resurrection (Soloist: Violin, Cello and Piano and Orchestra) (2013)
The Wolf Soloist (Contrabass Concerto) (Contrabass) and Orchestra (2014)
Farewell My Concubine (Orchestra: for Piano, Peking Opera Singer and Orchestra) (2015).17

1.3 Overview of Tan’s piano works

Tan Dun has composed a total of eleven major piano works:

1. Eight Memories in Watercolor (Piano Solo) (1978)

Chapter 2: Eight Memories in Watercolor, Op. 1

_Eight Memories in Watercolor, Op. 1_ was composed when Tan Dun left Hunan in 1978 to study music at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing. His first opus, _Tan’s Eight Memories in Watercolor, Op. 1_ evokes a watercolor style, and listeners can find a much deeper comprehension behind the notes in each piece in the opus. Tan Dun summarizes his sentiments towards this significant work in the U.S. edition of _Eight Memories in Watercolor_:

_Eight Memories in Watercolor_ was written when I left Hunan to study at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing. It was my _Opus One_. The Cultural Revolution had just ended, China just opened its doors, I was immersed in studying Western classical and modern music, but I was also homesick. I longed for the folksongs and savored the memories of my childhood. Therefore, I wrote my first piano work as a diary of longing.¹⁸

The title of each piece of _Memories_ depicts an image or tells a story. The ability of Tan Dun to paint a picture or tell a story through music is a testament to his genius.

“Missing Moon” makes a small statement of regret, whereas “Staccato Beans” presents a simple, direct, bouncing-with-energy childhood game. “Herdboy’s Song” is full of

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dissonant ornamentation, and “Blue Nun” provides a folk melody using the simplest expression even as it centers on the traditional key of E minor. “Red Wilderness” opens and closes in stillness, but its center evokes a brief maelstrom of danger and uncertainty. “Ancient Burial” suggests the emotions of anger and loss. “Floating Clouds” depicts a lively picture of clouds floating in the sky. The final piece of the opus is “Sunrain,” a vigorous dance that brings a happy ending to the suite.

“Staccato Beans” (No. 2), “Herdboy’s Song” (No. 3), “Blue Nun” (No. 4), and “Sunrain” (No. 8) are directly based on Hunan folksongs. Tan Dun composed original melodies for the other four songs.

Choreographers Chiang Ching and Muna Tsend set the entire opus to modern dance. Pianist Fou Ts’ong got to know Tan’s work through Chiang and performed four of the pieces. In 2001, Tan Dun met Lang Lang, who told Tan Dun he wanted to premiere the complete *Eight Memories in Watercolor, Op. 1* in his concerts, an opportunity for which Tan said he was very grateful. As a result, Tan made slight revisions to the work, renaming titles, rearranging the order of the pieces, and revising the overall structure according to Lang Lang’s suggestions.

Tan himself describes *Eight Memories of Watercolor, Op. 1* as a “diary of longing,” inspired by the folk songs of his culture and the recollection of his childhood. This suite, originally titled *Eight Sketches in Hunan Accent*, had its world premiere in the
Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, in Washington, D.C., on April 12, 2003, performed by Lang Lang.19

2.1 No. 1 “Missing Moon”

The title of this piece is “Missing Moon,” which refers to a special metaphor in traditional Chinese culture. In traditional Chinese culture, the moon has always been related to one’s longing, peace, gentleness even harmony for family and home. The full moon especially is regarded as a representation of the unity of the whole family. Tan celebrated his first moon festival at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing on September 17, 1978, and it is likely that he wrote “Missing Moon” to celebrate this important Chinese traditional holiday.

Traditional Chinese music developed through its own music theory system and was built upon a pentatonic scale. There are five scale steps: gong 宫, shang 商, jiao 角, zhi 徵, yu 羽. They correspond to the notes of the western scale: do, re, mi, sol, la. Each of these five scale steps in the Chinese pentatonic scale may serve as the tonic of a pentatonic mode. Therefore, there are five basic pentatonic modes: gong mode, shang mode, jiao mode, zhi mode and yu mode (figure 1).

Figure 1. Chinese pentatonic scale modes

This piece is in binary form. The following is the formal structure of “Missing Moon.” This lyrical piece has a singing melody in a steady tonality of Eb Yu, Ab Shang and F# Yu (Figure 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Intro.</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Coda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>a’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mm.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2-5</td>
<td>6-7</td>
<td>8-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonality</td>
<td>Eb Yu</td>
<td>Ab Shang</td>
<td>F# Yu</td>
<td>Eb Yu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. The formal structure of “Missing Moon”
We can see clearly from the music that section B of this piece tends to represent material from section A (Figure 3 and 4).

Figure 3. “Missing Moon,” mm. 2-7 (Section A)
The pentatonic scale harmonics, used throughout the piece, to give this piece a Chinese sound. The introduction of this piece is in a *rubato* tempo. It is an imitation of a Chinese instrument, the *guzheng*, which is a traditional string instrument (Figure 5).
The *guzheng*’s origins can be traced back over 2200 years to China’s Qin Dynasty. The guzheng has been significantly popular in Shanxi, China’s western region. During the Tang Dynasty, the guzheng had 13 strings with movable bridges and was introduced in Japan, Korea, and other countries. It produces captivating, rich tones and is capable of full romantic expression.

There are a number of methods for playing the guzheng. In addition, a variety of sounds can be produced through the guzheng by flicking, tapping, shaking, pulling, strumming, lifting, stroking, sliding, wiggling, or chopping the strings. These playing techniques can conjure up a variety of sounds, including: thunder, water, running, etc.\(^20\) By sweeping the fingers slightly across the strings, the instrument gives smooth tones that sound like moving clouds and flowing water; moving the fingers across the strings with some force, the instrument generates sounds like a mountain crumbling or strong and fierce waves hitting the shore. Whatever the tones—plaintive, vehement, high or low—

the guzheng is extremely expressive. The particular playing techniques fully demonstrate the unique characteristics of this instrument. It is appropriate for solo, ensemble, and accompaniment.

Because of the unique musical quality and elegant shape of the guzheng, the instrument is especially favored by musicians both inside and outside China. Moreover, guzheng techniques can be easily and quickly learned. Traditionally, the guzheng has many different playing styles from various regions of China, such as Shandong, Henan, Zhejiang, Chaozhou, and Shanxi. Today, the guzheng is played in many styles: traditional, classical, jazz, fusion, pop, hip-hop, and more. Guzheng players also have adapted techniques from the piano and harp. The most common modern guzheng has 21 strings which are traditionally tuned as four octaves of one pentatonic scale type.21

An imitation of the guzheng can be found at the beginning of “Missing Moon,” where four sixteenth grace notes, Gb-Eb-Db-Bb, emulate the sliding technique for the right hand (Figure 6).

Figure 6. “Missing Moon,” mm. 1

---

In section A (from bar 2), the *ostinato* found in the high voice serves as an accompaniment part, while the melodic voice is in the left hand. The grace notes written for the left hand emulate the technique of pushing the strings with the left hand to make a dreamlike sound. This pushing technique is one of the most important techniques used by those who play the guzheng. In bar 2 of “Missing Moon,” the grace notes D, C, and A are pushed to Eb, Db, and Bb (Figure 7).

![Figure 7. “Missing Moon,” mm. 2.](image)

In “Missing Moon,” Tan Dun employs many second chords, including both major and minor. These second chords always appear in groups to form a special dissonance. In the introduction of “Missing Moon,” the melody begins from a relatively high register descending to a lower register, symbolizing moonlight shining down upon the earth as it spreads all over the ground like pouring water (Figure 8).
In the beginning of this piece, grace notes followed by the arpeggiated chord with the fermata sign in the left hand provide another example of the piano being used to imitate the guzheng (Figure 9). This situation appears one more time at the end of this piece (Figure 10).
2.2 No. 2 “Staccato Beans”

The title “Staccato Beans” is perhaps the activity that best matches the music in *Eight Memories in Watercolor*. The “beans” here symbolize children and staccato beans are clearly a metaphor for energetic children. One can picture a watercolor painting of endlessly energetic children.

“The Staccato Beans” is in a ternary form. The following is the formal structure of this piece (Figure 11).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a</td>
<td>a1</td>
<td>a2</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>b1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>3-12</td>
<td>13-22</td>
<td>23-25</td>
<td>26-34</td>
<td>40-43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>44-52</td>
<td>53-61</td>
<td>62-65</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| D Yu   | G Yu | D Yu |

**Figure 11. The formal structure of “Staccato Beans”**

The theme of this movement comes from a Hunan folk song titled “My New Sister-in-Law,” which originated in the town of JiaHe (Figure 12). JiaHe is located in the southwest part of Hunan. “Staccato Beans” in D Yu pentatonic mode is in the same key as the “My New Sister-in-Law.” It can be compared with the melody and mode of “Staccato Beans” (Figure 13).

---

Although Tan borrows the melody of “My New Sister-in-Law” from that in “Staccato Beans,” he made some changes to some musical devices. One example is the melodic repetition one octave higher after the melody has been represented in the lower register. Another is that Tan adds a left hand accompaniment pattern for the piano version.

In this piece, Tan employs different modes in same Gong system to different parts (Figure 14). In Chinese pentatonic mode, Bb Gong and G Yu belong to the same Gong system. In section a2, the right hand plays the melody, while the left hand the accompaniment. The melody and the accompaniment are respectively in G Yu pentatonic and Bb Gong mode. The purpose here is that Tan Dun emphasizes the importance of Bb.
2.3 No. 3 “Herdboy’s Song”

“Herdboy’s Song” is a very lyrical, visual, and romantic work. This piece has a very smooth singing melody with chromatic polyphonic writing as the background. In it, it seems that Tan Dun paints a musical picture of his hometown.

The following is the formal structure of “Herdboy’s Song” (Figure 15):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intro.</th>
<th>a</th>
<th>a1</th>
<th>a2</th>
<th>a3</th>
<th>a4</th>
<th>a5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6-7</td>
<td>8-9</td>
<td>9-10</td>
<td>10-12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A Yu

Figure 15. The formal structure of “Herdboy’s Song”

“Herdboy’s Song” is composed entirely without bar lines. It is to be played freely with *rubato*, which is a feature in various styles of Chinese music, such as Guqin music (Figure 16), Beijing Opera (Figure 17), etc.
Figure 16. The *rubato* opening of Guqin music *A Night of Flowers and Moonlight by the Spring River*

Figure 17. The *rubato* opening of Beijing Opera *Wu Jia Po*
This feature of “Herdboy’s Song” also emulates the free singing style of the Shan Ge (Figure 18). Shan Ge has a lot of styles, however Tan Dun used the Hunan style of Shan Ge in this piece. It is mostly sung outdoors and is another outlet for young people to show their admiration for each other.23 The left hand always imitates the melody of the right hand, so we could see the left hand as the echo of the singing throughout the whole of this piece (Figure 19 and Figure 20).

![Figure 18. Shan Ge, Morning, m. 1](image1)

![Figure 19. “Herdboy’s Song,” m. 1](image2)

![Figure 20. “Herdboy’s Song,” m. 7](image3)

“Herdboy’s Song” borrows the melody of a love song from HengDong, titled in Hunan as “Grass is Greener on the Other Hill” (Figure 21).24 Although this piece does not cite the entire melody, it does share similarities in the melodic line, rhythm, and key center. In the “Grass is Greener on the Other Hill,” the principle notes are A-C-E; while in the “Herdboy’s Song,” the main pitches are A-C-E-G, which is in the Yu Pentatonic scale that is frequently used in Hunan folk songs (Figure 22).25

Figure 21. Hunan folk Song “The Grass is Greener on the Other Hill”26

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Figure 22. “Herdboy’s Song,” mm. 3-4

At the end of every phrase, there is a scoop up to a high note, which emulates the Chinese traditional way of singing the ends of phrases, called Tuo Qiang (拖腔). This style of singing is mostly heard in Hunan folk songs (Figure 23).

Figure 23. “Herdboy’s Song,” m. 5

2.4 No. 4 “Blue Nun”

The title in the G. Schirmer version is “Blue Nun,” while the title is “Story Time with Mom” in the Chinese version published by People’s Music Publishing House, Beijing and Shanghai Conservatory of Music Press, Shanghai. The title was changed to “Blue Nun” when the piece was re-published in 2003.\(^\text{27}\) The melody of this piece also borrows from the melody line of Tan Dun’s hometown folk song called “A Girl from the

Country is coming into Town. Originally composed as a duet, it tells the love story of a man from the town who wants to marry a country girl. Tan borrows the melody and basic harmony but simplifies the rhythm (Figures 24, Figure 25, Figure 26).

Figure 24. Hunan folk Song, “A Girl from the Country is coming into Town”

Figure 25. “Blue Nun,” mm. 1-16

Figure 26. “Blue Nun,” mm. 34-44

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28 Ibid.
“Blue Nun” is in ABA ternary form. The following is the formal structure of this piece (Figure 27).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Trans.</th>
<th>A’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>a1</td>
<td>b1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a2</td>
<td>b2</td>
<td>a3</td>
<td>b3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a4</td>
<td>b4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 1-4 | 5-8 | 9-12  | 13-16 |
| 17-20 | 24 | 25-28 | 32 |
| 33  | 34-37 | 38-44 |

Figure 27. The formal structure of “Blue Nun”

In the first four pieces of *Eight Memories in Watercolor*, all are built on Yu pentatonic mode scale. Section B is a variation of section A (Figure 25), and later the theme of section A comes back to section A’. Tan Dun switches the E Yu pentatonic (Figure 28) in section A to A Yu pentatonic (Figure 29) in section B (Figure 30). At the same time, in section B, Tan Dun enriches the texture of melody and accompaniment parts with a higher register compared to section A. In a3 of section B, Tan Dun once again moves both parts to a higher register.

Figure 28. E Yu Pentatonic Mode
From Figure 28 and Figure 29, one sees that there are common notes E, G, A, D, allowing an opportunity to transpose smoothly from E Yu to A Yu in measure 16 (Figure 30).

Compared to E Yu pentatonic and A Yu mode, E Yu has a unique B note and Tan makes use of this to allow the E Yu pentatonic to return naturally in section A’. Measure 33 serves as a transition with a reappearance of the note B allowing for a smooth return of E Yu mode (Figure 30).
Polyphonic writing appears in measure 9 (Figure 24) and mm. 34-41 at the end of this piece (Figure 25).

In much of Tan’s music, multiple melody lines are combined through various musical devices, such as contrasting key, rhythm, melodic direction, phrasing, and character to make the melody more vivid. We find a great example in this piece in mm. 17-32 (Figure 26) with thematic polyphony. The left and right hands contrast with each other in several ways. Firstly, the left hand and right hand use different rhythm patterns to make the general texture similar to long-short-long-short. Secondly, the directions of the
melodies for both hands are in opposite or oblique motions. Lastly, the melody in the left hand seems to act as an ornament to the right hand.\textsuperscript{29}

\subsection*{2.5 No. 5 “Red Wilderness”}

The development of Chinese piano music and music education experienced serious frustration and even regression during the period of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). During this time, all forms of art associated with western culture were forbidden by the Chinese government, but eight revolutionary models of Chinese \textit{yangban} shows, which consisted of six modified Beijing Opera pieces and two Chinese ballets with strong political content, were created amidst the change in the political environment.\textsuperscript{30} All of these works were designed to celebrate Chairman Mao, the Communist Party, or the Chinese Army, and the victory of civil revolution. The government stated that no Chinese citizen would be allowed to listen and learn western music, including western instruments. New musical compositions were banned, unless they served a political purpose or received permission from the government. Chinese composers chose to create piano pieces from traditional Chinese music instead of creating new compositions. Everything related to the west was considered bourgeois and therefore was punishable in China.\textsuperscript{31} All music institutes were forced to close, and finally, all

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{30}Shigu Zhang, “Chinese and Western Influences Upon Piano Music in China” (DMA diss., University of Arizona, 1993), 41.
\textsuperscript{31}Le Kang, “The Development of Chinese Piano Music.” \textit{Asian Culture and History} 1.2 (July 2009): 22.
\end{footnotesize}
pianos were either sealed or destroyed by the Red Guard. Piano music, considered western, was forbidden by the Chinese government.32

During the period of the Cultural Revolution, many young people were sent to the countryside to study with peasants about farm work. They worked in the wilderness everyday and were separated from their ideals. In “Red Wilderness,” Tan wanted to express this kind of helplessness, bewilderment, and loss of their future.

“Red Wilderness” is in rounded binary form. The following is the formal structure of this piece (Figure 32).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>a1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-6</td>
<td>7-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>A Yu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>a2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-19</td>
<td>20-27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>E Gong</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 32. The formal structure of “Red Wilderness”**

In a manner similar to the beginning and end of “Blue Nun,” Tan also wrote “Red Wilderness” in a polyphonic style. This piece starts with the theme emphasizing the notes C, G, and A (Figure 33). Then it expands and develops this theme (Figure 34) in section B. In section B, transposition occurs from the A Yu pentatonic to the E Gong in section B (Figure 35), and section B employs thicker texture and a more dramatic writing style compared to section A. At the end of this piece, Tan uses a special ending, which is a B7 chord with added chromatic dissonances (Figure 36), giving the piece a vague ending.

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32 Ibid., 21.
Figure 33. “Red Wilderness,” mm. 1-3

Figure 34. The Theme of “Red Wilderness”

Figure 35. “Red Wilderness,” mm. 13-17
Another important feature of this piece are the series of intervals built on a 2\textsuperscript{nd} that are filled in the middle voice in bars 4-11 and bars 18-27 of the ending part, resembling raindrops (Figure 37). Tan gradually enriches the texture of the middle voice from a single note to two notes and, finally, to three notes in order to reach the climax in part B (Figure 35). This repeating pattern in the middle voice is used to accompany and replenish the melody.

This feature is very similar to Debussy’s \textit{Pagodes} from \textit{Estampes} (Figure 38 and Figure 39).
Tan was born in Changsha, Hunan Province, China, a geographical location that had significant implications for his compositional style. Hunan is known for its distinct Xiang-Chu culture.\(^3^3\) Xiang is the nickname for Hunan province and Chu is the name of the kingdom that was located at Hunan. In 700-800 BCE, China was divided into different kingdoms until the foundation of the Qin Dynasty 221 BCE and Chu was one of the biggest. In order to maintain a separate identity, each kingdom kept its own cultural

\(^{33}\) Wanju Xiong and Ting Li, “A discussion on the True Meaning of Xiang-Chu Culture,” *New West*, no. 2 (February 28, 2009): 95.
independence in as many ways as possible. Each kingdom developed its own dialect, eating habits, currency, philosophy, and music. The Chu Kingdom had a long, rich history and at one point or another it governed the provinces of Hunan, Hubei, Chongqing, Henan, Shanghai, and parts of Jiangsu.  

The Xiang-Chu culture is well known for its belief in ghosts and spirits. Nuo drama was one of the most important rituals in Xiang-Chu culture. Often, singing and dancing accompanied these rituals. Over many years, Nuo drama became less religious and spiritual and turned into an art form intended for enjoyment. It even included popular songs and a much wider variety of musical instruments. It eventually lost all of its original spiritual meaning and was treated as entertainment to accompany festivals, such as the annual New Year’s celebrations.

Tan was influenced by Xiang-Chu culture in that he employs some features and emotions of Nuo drama in “Ancient Burial.” This piece expresses the scene of sacrifice or funeral and aims to create sad and profound emotions.

“Ancient Burial” is in ABA ternary form. The following is the formal structure of this piece (Figure 40).

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34 Hua Sun, “Three Topics on the Capital of Chu Kingdom,” Journal of Central China Normal University (Humanities and Social Sciences), no. 4 (August 27, 2005): 60.
Tan provides a major second ostinato D-C at the beginning of “Ancient Burial” (Figure 41), present in every measure, mostly in inner voices, to imitate the sorcerer’s steps and the funeral procession’s movement onward. The theme enters in the high voice of m. 2.

**Figure 40. The formal structure of “Ancient Burial”**

```markdown
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intro.</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>A1</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Trans.</th>
<th>A1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>4-8</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>13-16</td>
<td>17-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19-20</td>
<td>21-26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

**Figure 41. “Ancient Burial,” mm. 1-6**
In section B, the theme alternately appears in both high and low voices creating a much thicker texture than the A section, which rightly sounds like the climax of this piece (Figure 42).

![Musical notation]

Figure 42. “Ancient Burial,” mm. 9-12

In the last two measures, a second ostinato similar to the opening, appears again but this time A-G instead of D-C (Figure 43). Tan constructs a sense of unease by constantly changing tonality.
Chime bells are one of the oldest Chinese large-scale percussion instruments (Figure 44). Chime bells are made of bronze and have multiple bells ranging from small to large, which require the coordination and teamwork of many people to play harmonies. Chime bells were the instruments used by the ruling class in the royal court and represent status and power.  

Figure 43. “Ancient Burial,” mm. 25-26

Figure 44. Chinese ancient percussion instrument chime bells

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In the view of many Chinese performers, this sound sequence imitates the sound of a chime bells. Tan’s imitation of the chime bells can be found in section B of “Ancient Burial,” where Tan makes abundant use of the double fourth and fifth chord (Figure 45). These chords are deployed mostly in the bottom voice of the left hand, using the sound of the chime bells to create the feeling of an ancient funeral.

![Figure 45. “Ancient Burial,” mm. 9-15](image)

In “Ancient Burial,” another important feature, the use of uncertain modes, is somewhat blurry, such as in the first phrase of this piece from measure two to the first note of measure four (Figure 41), Tan Dun uses the notes as follows: D, E, F, F♯, G, A, B, in which F belongs neither in the mode, nor in the downbeat. D, E, F♯, G, A, B are
the significant notes. There could be two different kinds: hexachord mode, D Gong with qingjiao, and hexachord mode, G Gong with biangong (Figure 46 and Figure 47). From these two examples, we realize the modes of this phrase may be either D Gong with qingjiao or G Gong with biangong. If the following parts, the black note G (Figure 46) is not emphasized, the mode would be D Gong, in which note G is qingjiao note. On the other hand, if the black note F♯ (Figure 47) is emphasized, the mode would be G Gong, in which F♯ is biangong note. Tan does not emphasize either of the F♯ or G notes, so the mode of this phrase is extremely ambiguous to the listeners.

**Figure 46. Chinese hexachord mode, D Gong with qingjiao**

**Figure 47. Chinese hexachord mode, G Gong with biangong**

Another example can be seen in measure four to five (Figure 48). This phrase ends in note A, so it should be in A Gong mode, but due to the fact that the tonic is not stable enough, we can also say that this phrase is in G♯ Jiao Mode.
2.7 No. 7 “Floating Clouds”

In “Floating Clouds,” Tan depicts one more beautiful picture of his hometown. Musical images of floating clouds, blowing winds, singing birds, and a waterfall are evoked through Tan’s musical language. The consistently moving line of broken chords imitates the movement of clouds.

“Floating Clouds” is in binary form with an introduction at the beginning and a coda at the end. The following is the formal structure of this piece (Figure 49).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intro.</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Coda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2-7</td>
<td>8-13</td>
<td>14-18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 49. The formal structure of “Floating Clouds”

This piece has a similarity to “Ancient Burial” as the tonal center is constantly changing, making use of the blurry mode. The broken chord pattern seen throughout helps to create an image of floating clouds (Figure 50).
One important characteristic is multiple modes mixed together in both hands. A good example is measure 4 to 6 (Figure 51).

In measures 5 to 6, the notes in the highest voice are C, Eb, F, G, Bb. In these notes, Eb to G is a major third, so we could be sure that the mode of this voice is Eb Gong, particularly when this note is placed on the downbeat of measure 6. Next, we can analyze the middle voice from measure 4 to the first two beats of measure 5. In this part, there are C, Eb, F, Ab four notes in total. In these notes, Ab to C is a major third, and also
the last note is C, so we could say that the mode of this voice is C Jiao. In the same way, the mode from the last two beats of measure 5 to measure 6 is C Yu. As a whole, these three bars are in multiple modes, which are Eb Gong, C Jiao, and C Yu.

2.8 No. 8 “Sunrain”

The title “Sunrain” in the English version has a totally different meaning from the title “Happiness” in the Chinese version. This piece paints an image of celebration of the Water Splashing Festival, which occurs every April in Hunan province and is the most important traditional festival of the Dai people (See Figure 2.13). The title “Sunrain” is a metaphor for this festival. In this festival of Dai people, the buckets of water represent rain and one always hopes for the sun on this happy holiday.

Figure 52. Water Splashing Festival of the Dai People
“Sunrain” is in ternary form with an introduction in the beginning and a coda at the end. The following is the formal structure of this piece (Figure 53).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-6</td>
<td>7-24</td>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>30-41</td>
<td>42-47</td>
<td>48-55</td>
<td>56-60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G Zhi</td>
<td>G Gong</td>
<td>G Zhi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 53. The formal structure of “Sunrain”**

The main theme of this piece also borrows from the melody of Tan Dun’s Hunan hometown folk song called “Shepherd’s Song” (Figure 54).

**Figure 54. Hunan folk song, “Shepherd’s Song”**

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In the view of many Chinese pianists, this sound sequence imitates the sound of a Chinese Gong and Drums. Tan Dun wants the audience to experience fun and an energetic atmosphere at the beginning of “Sunrain” with four strong chords (mm. 1-2) imitating the Chinese Gong, followed by a light staccato pattern (mm. 3-6) imitating Chinese Drums (Figure 56). In mm. 3-6, the left hand accompanies the right with a broken fifth staccato pattern that imitates playing on different parts of the drum. The whole texture together creates a very exciting sound enticing the listener to dance or at the very least tap one’s foot.
Measure 28-29 are one of the transitions in “Sunrain,” employing crescendo. In
the left hand, there is a F♯ in order to indicate a switch in modes from G Zhi to G Gong
in the following parts (Figure 57).
In China, gong and drums are always used as a combination set (Figure 58). This instrument combination is one of the important elements of Chinese folk music and is often played on significant occasions like festivals, banquets, weddings and funerals. The gong and drum are widely used in the music created by the Miao people.

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Another important instrument imitated in this piece is the Lu Sheng. It is also the instrument of the Miao people. It is the voice leading in parallel forth that resembles the playing style on the Lu Sheng. The Lu Sheng is a reed-pipe wind instrument made of bamboo. The Lu Sheng has five to six long pipes in order to play polyphonic music (Figure 59). The timbre of the Lu Sheng has a wide range of sounds, and often played during special occasions like festivals, funerals and weddings. In the Miao culture, young men play the Lu Sheng in order to court women and show their admiration.
Canonic writing, a technique borrowed from western music, is used in mm. 30-37 of “Sunrain,” where both voices contain parallel fourths to imitate the playing style of the Lu Sheng (Figure 60).

Figure 60. “Sunrain,” mm. 30-41
Chapter 3: The Challenges of Performance

3.1 Grace notes

Keyboard instruments provide many opportunities for composers to produce different sounds. In this suite, Tan Dun utilizes grace notes in some pieces to imitate the sound of Chinese folk instruments. However, this point creates technical difficulties for the performer. One is required to play the grace notes in a specific way to produce specific sounds.

In “Missing Moon,” Tan uses grace notes in many measures to imitate the sound of the guzheng. The beginning part of this piece exhibits many grace notes imitating the sound of a guzheng when played with a sliding technique (Figure 6). In order to have the correct sound, the hand should be close to the keyboard playing with a light touch without making an accent on the grace note. The way to perform these grace notes is different from the traditional and regular technique. With the sliding technique of the “guzheng,” one must not play the sliding notes too fast, and correspondingly, a pianist should take care to play the grace notes slower on the keyboard. Similar situations are also found in the measure 2 in “Missing Moon” (Figure 7), the measure 2 in “Herdboy’s Song” (Figure 61), measure 2 in “Red Wilderness” (Figure 33), and measure 3 in “Ancient Burial” (Figure 41).
Similarly, there are compound grace notes existing in measure 1 (Figure 62) and measure 14 (Figure 63) of “Missing Moon,” measure 21-23 of “Red Wilderness” (Figure 64). Tan Dun utilizes these compound grace notes to show the glissando effect of the guzheng. The glissando feature of the guzheng is that it is played fast with a short volume to imitate the effect of running water, like falls. For this point, the players should concentrate the power on the tip of the finger and the fingers play from note to note with fast speed.
3.2 Phrasing, voicing, and balance

When practicing a piece, the performer should decide which voice needs to be accentuated. If we play all of the voices equally without any differences among them, the sound becomes pale, as compared to having color and line. Convincing music with brilliant tone requires intelligent voicing and control with balance. Sometimes, the player needs to use different methods to gain desirable voicing, including different strength, various touches, special fingering, and pedal.

“Floating Clouds” presents a significant challenge for the performer in controlling the sound, in particular the four sixteenth notes grouped as the accompanying pattern in the left hand that run through the whole piece (Figure 65). Playing these sixteenth notes evenly with a dynamic of P is a challenge. A dynamic of piano is considered much more difficult to play than f as the appropriate control between relaxation and tension of the fingers is essential. In “Floating Clouds,” the treble voice should be dominant over the bass voice. In spite of the p sound in the accompanying part, every note still should be played clearly with legato. For this part, the thumb is always used to play the last note of
every phrase. In order to produce the desired effect, one should appropriately relax the thumb, avoid unnecessary accents, and employ a small rolling motion with the wrist.

![Sheet music for Floating Clouds, mm. 1-6](image)

**Figure 65. “Floating Clouds,” mm. 1-6**

“Blue Nun” offers more challenges for voicing and balance (Figure 30). Tan applies counterpoint writing technique in this piece. There are two voices respectively in the left and right hand in theme A and A’ respectively. Ideally, these two voices should be played with different tone colors so that one can easily determine the different voices. In these two voices, the melody played by right hand is definitely more significant than the left hand. Therefore, the sound from the treble voice should be brought out clearly. The arm and fingers should be very relaxed and flexible.

Phrasing is one of the most important elements for interpreting a piece, and it can be quite individualized because breathing and feeling are different for each performer. However, phrasing should be natural. One must determine where one can breathe based on the musical phrase. Be mindful of long phrase lengths striving for a result not unlike a mother softly telling a story to her children.
Additionally, in theme A’ (Figure 26), the voices from both hands maintain almost the same status. Two voices sound like two singers singing in rounds. The performer should pay attention to the entrance of every phrase in both hands, so the listener can recognize the introduction of each new phrase. Measure 33 can be seen as a short transition. Tan uses the whole rest with the fermata sign in the right hand. Interpretively, it is better to use *decrescendo* and *ritardando* in the left hand. The performer should take care to not make a sudden change in tempo and dynamic. It is a significant challenge for the performer as there are only six notes in this transition to complete the switch of emotions.

### 3.3 Finger Articulations

The modern piano provides many opportunities to make differences in tone color through different articulation methods. The piano can produce as much variety of sound as a performer’s fingers, articulations, and imagination allow. For example, a bright sound can be produced by lifting fingers higher, whereas conversely, performers can place fingers more heavily on the keys to gain a darker sound. The composer does not impose a specific tone color, so it is up to the performer to imagine and design different sounds using changes to finger articulations to transform the sounds of other instruments (brass, woodwind, percussion, even orchestra effects) to the piano.

The first example (Figure 13) shows a finger articulation method that seems to match a characteristic in the piece. As discussed in chapter 2, “Staccato Beans” is marked *allegro scherzando*. Tan provides a slur and staccato, two opposite signs in the same
measure, to make a big contrasting sound. The slur, which is the smallest phrase in the music, is about making the connection between notes within a line, and is usually played in legato. One should relax the wrist and concentrate the power on the finger. In addition, the performer should pay attention to the second note and play without accent. In other word, the performer should lift the hand during the process of playing the second note. However, the following staccato note should be more sparkling and lucid. For this sound, the performer should tap shortly and lightly by using the tips of fingers in the upright position.

In “Staccato Beans,” there are some intervals with staccato signs (Figure 14). These staccato intervals should be played in a concentrated yet light fashion without any hesitation. The performer should practice the exact distance between the two notes with a relaxed wrist, and the fingers need strong support from the joint nearest to the palm.

The first measure of “Ancient Burial” provides a good example of the specific finger articulation used to imitate the sounds of Chinese folk instruments like chime bells (Figure 41). Tan uses D-C-D-C for this pattern to imitate chime bells, creating the image of an ancient funeral. “Ancient Burial” requires one to play these successive notes with low and deep finger articulations to imitate the heavy and stately sound produced by chime bells. Tan adds tenuto marks on the notes in the middle voice in order to imitate the sound of the chime bell. The performer should keep the fingers close to the keyboard to play deeply, so the sound can be heard much longer.
3.4 Pedaling

Pedal markings are rare in Tan’s *Eight Memories in Watercolor, Op. 1*, which means that one must use the pedal at his/her own discretion, at the same time taking into account the volume of the instrument, the acoustics, the context of the music, and the size of the hall.

Basically, one uses pedal to create a variety of sounds, such as a bright and accentuated sound, an overlapping and muddy sound, a misty and obscure sound as in impressionistic music, a sharp sound as in contemporary music, or a sound with special effects. Although there are no indications for pedal use in this suite, there are clues to design pedal use in order to create a variety of moods.

For example, there are passages where the pedal can help provide more brightness and power to a note with an accent. In this case changing the pedal quickly and pedaling directly on a note that has an accent.

A good example that demonstrates the use of the accent pedal is in “Staccato Beans” (Figure 13). In this piece, short and shallow pedaling on the accent notes can emphasize the accentuated, rounded sound with a marching rhythm. In the a2 section (Figure 14), deeper and longer pedals are recommended. However, short pedaling should return for the accent notes in measures 35-41 (Figure 66).

![Figure 66. “Staccato Beans,” mm. 34-41](image-url)
There are some examples that benefit from a thick, turbid sound with the aid of the pedal. In the end of measure 1 in “Missing Moon,” there is a fermata sign on the chord in the left hand, one can sustain the pedal for the entirety of the measure even in the right hand (Figure 67).

![Figure 67. “Missing Moon,” m. 1](image)

In this measure of “Missing Moon,” Tan Dun emphasizes a significant contrast from *forte* to *piano*. It is best not to change the pedal between the *f* and *p* in order to enhance the dramatic effect. However, it is recommended to change the pedal slowly after the note with the fermata sign in the left hand for a clearer sound.

As there are two voices in “Blue Nun,” it is best to be careful when addressing the pedaling (Figure 25, Figure 26). One can use a half sustaining pedal to increase the soft mood of this piece.

It is difficult to give direct and specific suggestions for pedaling technique as it is subjective. It must be understood that pedaling is one of the most important parts for the purpose of displaying one’s own ideas. The performer should listen to the sound carefully before deciding how deep or how long to deploy the pedal and how often to change the pedal to obtain the highest quality sound. In conclusion, the performer needs to be adroit
enough to adjust the pedaling depending on the particular instrument, the acoustics of the room, and the size of the recital hall. Of course, different ways of pedaling are necessary depending on whether a performer is playing in a small practice room or a large recital hall.
Chapter 4: A Version Comparison of *Eight Memories in Watercolor*

4.1 A summary of the versions

Five publication versions of *Eight Memories in Watercolor* are collected chronologically by the publication of the time sequence as follow (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publishing time</th>
<th>Editor</th>
<th>Book title</th>
<th>Publishing company</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 1987 (First Edition)</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>Piano Solo Memories</td>
<td>People’s Music Publishing House, (PMPH), Beijing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2001 (First Edition)</td>
<td>Yintong Ren, Zhijue Chao</td>
<td><em>Selection of Chinese Piano Works</em> (Four)</td>
<td>People’s Music Publishing House (PMPH), Beijing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2011 (First Edition)</td>
<td>Qing Wang</td>
<td><em>Piano-China Volume</em></td>
<td>Shanghai Conservatory of Music Press, Shanghai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2015</td>
<td>Weiyao Fei</td>
<td><em>A Century of Piano Solo Works by Chinese Composers</em></td>
<td>Shanghai Music Publishing House, Shanghai</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. A summary of five publication versions of *Eight Memories in Watercolor*
4.2 A version comparison

4.2.1 The differences between the 1987 version and the 2001 version

Among the five published versions of Eight Memories, both versions in 1987 and 2001 are published by People’s Music Publishing House. However, in 1987, this piece was published independently before it was included in Selection of Chinese Piano Works (Four) in 2001. By comparing these two versions, the performance instruction (signs, tempo marks) are the same except in two places: (a) the 2001 version provides clearer fingerings (Figure 68, Figure 69) and (b) more signs about performance method are added in the 2001 version, such as in bar 4 in No. 4 “Floating Clouds” (Figure 70).

![Figure 68. “Blue Nun,” mm. 13-18 (1987 version)](image1)

![Figure 69 “Blue Nun,” mm. 13-18 (2001 version)](image2)
4.2.2 The 2011 version and the 2001 version

By comparing the 2011 Qing Wang version and the 2001 version, the musical content is almost the same except for three differences in piece No. 1 “Missing Moon.” These three differences are:

1. The first long note in the left hand of the first measure is different. It is Ab in the 2001 version, whereas it is Bb in the 2011 version (Figure 71).

2. In the 2001 version, the last chord in the left hand of the second line is an interval of a 3rd, as compared to being a chord in the 2011 version. There is one more B double flat note in the 2011 version (Figure 72).
3. In the 2001 version, the second note in the left hand of the second bar is a Db, while it is a D♭ in the 2011 version (Figure 73).

4.2.3 A comparison of the titles and tempo instructions

Because the 1987 version and the 2001 version are published by the same press, the People’s Music Publishing House, and the 2011 Qing Wang version is almost the same as these two versions, these three can be combined into one version. We can call it the domestic version. G. Schirmer’s version (G.S.) and the 2015 Weiyao Fei edition have some differences compared to the domestic version regarding instructions for tempo, markings, and other elements.

The titles of each piece in the G.S. version and the 2015 versions are identical. However, the significant difference between these two versions and the domestic versions are the titles, particularly the sequence of the titles. Tan Dun reversed the titles of the fifth
piece, “Ancient Burial,” and the sixth piece, “Red Wilderness,” in the G.S. version comparing to the domestic version. In the 2015 version, Tan Dun gave the different Chinese and English names for piece four to meet aesthetics standard of domestic and abroad audiences. Table 2 demonstrates the difference.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pieces</th>
<th>Domestic Version</th>
<th>G.S. Version</th>
<th>2015 Version</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>秋月</td>
<td>Missing Moon</td>
<td>秋月</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Missing Moon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>逗</td>
<td>Staccato Beans</td>
<td>逗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Staccato Beans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>山歌</td>
<td>Herdboy’s Song</td>
<td>牧童之歌</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Herdboy’s Song</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>听妈妈讲故事</td>
<td>Blue Nun</td>
<td>忧郁的尼姑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Blue Nun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>古葬</td>
<td>Red Wilderness</td>
<td>红色荒野</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Red Wilderness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>荒野</td>
<td>Ancient Burial</td>
<td>古葬</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ancient Burial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>云</td>
<td>Floating Clouds</td>
<td>浮云</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Floating Clouds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>欢</td>
<td>Sunrain</td>
<td>太阳雨</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sunrain</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Titles in different versions

In table 3 we can see the differences in tempo and expressive indications at figure 70. It is clear that the tempo instruction of the G.S. version is exactly the same as the 2015 version. The domestic version only provides tempo instructions, while the
expressive indications and music style, as well as the tempo instructions are given in the G.S. version. It can be interpreted that the G.S. version endeavors to provide much more information about Chinese musical style for non-Chinese performers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Piece</th>
<th>Domestic Version</th>
<th>G.S. Version</th>
<th>2015 Version</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Missing Moon”</td>
<td>Adagio rubato</td>
<td>Adagio con dolore</td>
<td>Adagio con dolore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Staccato Beans”</td>
<td>Allegro</td>
<td>Allegro Scherzando</td>
<td>Allegro Scherzando</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Herdboy’s Song”</td>
<td>Licenza Pastorale</td>
<td>Larghetto pastorale</td>
<td>Larghetto pastorale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Blue Nun”</td>
<td>Andante</td>
<td>Andante</td>
<td>Andante</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Red Wilderness”</td>
<td>Lento</td>
<td>Lento</td>
<td>Lento</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Ancient Burial”</td>
<td>Adagio</td>
<td>Adagio Funebre</td>
<td>Adagio Funebre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Floating Clouds”</td>
<td>Andante Simplice</td>
<td>Andante Simplice</td>
<td>Andante Simplice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Sunrain”</td>
<td>Allegro</td>
<td>Allegro vivace</td>
<td>Allegro vivace</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3. Tempo instructions in different versions**

4.2.4 *The domestic version and the G.S. version*

There are also many differences in the aspect of notational symbols between the domestic version and the G.S. version. One major difference is the use of accents. The use of accents is mainly manifested in “Staccato Beans.” In the domestic version, the melody part of the *staccato* uses notes with slurs and staccato indications (Figure 74). In the G.S. version, the last two notes of every phrase have added accent signs (Figure 75). In this point, the 2015 version is the same as the G.S. version. Additionally, the theme of
“Staccato Beans” comes from a Hunan folk song titled “My New Sister-in-Law” (Figure 12). If this Chinese folk song is sung in a Hunan dialect, the end of every phrase would be given accents naturally. Therefore, the G.S. version is more in line with the characteristics of the Hunan language and musical style.

Figure 74. “Staccato Beans,” mm. 1-5 (domestic version)

Another difference in the editions is the second part of “Sunrain” (Figure 56) in which both parts imitate the sounds of the Lu Sheng. In the domestic version there are no accent signs in either hand whereas in the other editions the first note of every measure is given an accent (Figure 76, Figure 77).
The second difference between the domestic and G.S. version is the realization of the arpeggiated figure, particularly in “Herdboy’s Song.” Tan uses different playing methods of an arpeggio to imitate the guzheng. In the domestic version, all arpeggios are to be played from bottom to top (Figure 78), while in the G.S. version, there are two playing methods for arpeggio playing: from the bottom note to the top and inversely from top to bottom (Figure 79). In the performance of the guzheng, both hands always play in opposite directions and, therefore, the G.S. version is more authentic.
The third difference is the use of staccato. “Sunrain” is the final piece of *Eight Memories of Watercolor*. There is a big difference between the two versions of “Sunrain.” In the domestic version, every note in the left hand is written with a staccato indication starting in measure 3 (Figure 80), while those in the right hand have no staccato sign until measure 30 (Figure 81). In the G.S. version, the melody in the right hand is given staccato signs from the very beginning (Figure 82). By comparing these versions, one can see a big contrast between the notes without staccato signs in the first half and the use in the domestic version of staccato notes in the second half. As the last
piece of this composition, the G.S. version constructs a more vivid scene by implementing the notes with staccato throughout the whole piece.

Figure 80. “Sunrain,” mm. 1-6 (domestic version)

Figure 81. “Sunrain,” mm. 25-36 (domestic version)
The last difference between the domestic and G.S. versions is music construction through the different placements of the repeat sign. In the domestic version, there are no repeat signs in “Staccato Beans” (Figure 74) and “Sunrain” (Figure 80). However, in the G.S. version, these two pieces have added repeat sign. In particular, Tan indicates that the second time “Staccato Beans” is to be played faster, suggesting that performer should play with more energy the second time (Figure 75 and Figure 82).
4.2.5 *The 2015 version and the G. Schirmer version*

The 2015 version is much closer to the G.S. version compared to the domestic version. However, there are still some different features outlined as follows:

Firstly, the 2015 version resembles the G.S. version, which also has a repeat sign in “Staccato Beans” and “Sunrain.” On the other hand, the placement of the repeat sign is a little different in “Staccato Beans” in these two versions. In the G.S. version, the repeat sign is found in measure 62, while the 2015 version has the repeat sign in measure 61. In other words, one would need to play one additional bar in the G.S. version as compared to the 2015 version (Figure 83, Figure 84).

![Figure 83. “Staccato Beans,” mm. 58-65 (G.S. version)](image1)

![Figure 84. “Staccato Beans,” mm. 61-65 (2015 version)](image2)
Secondly, bar numbers are provided in the 2015 version (Figure 85, Figure 86).

![Figure 85. “Herdboy’s Song,” mm. 9-10 (2015 version)](image)

![Figure 86. “Blue Nun,” mm. 21-28 (2015 version)](image)

Thirdly, in the G.S. version, in “Missing Moon”, the fermata sign in the left hand in mm.14 has been added one more compared to the 2015 version (Figure 87 and 88).
Fourthly, in the 2015 version, the C in the right hand has no natural sign in measure 16 of “Red Wilderness” (Figure 89), but does in the G.S. version (Figure 90).
Fifthly, in the 2015 version, there are new instructions for performance. The editor adds the “m.d.” instruction in some bars in “Floating Clouds” as a reminder for performers (Figure 91).

Sixthly, in the 2015 version of “Floating Clouds” there are no staccato signs on the Bb and Eb notes in the right hand of bar 5 (Figure 92, Figure 93).
In the first version published by People’s Music Publishing House in 1987, there is no editorial information provided by the publisher. The second version was released by G. Schirmer, Inc. in 1996. G. Schirmer, Inc. is an American classical music publishing company based in New York City, founded in 1861 by Gustav Schirmer and B. Beer. It publishes sheet music for sale and rental and represents some well-known European music publishers in North America. At the beginning of this version, there is an informative introduction with background information about this suite. Additionally, through comparing these two versions, we find that G. Schirmer, Inc. has included many revisions compared to the first version. In the fourth version of this suite, also published by People’s Music Publishing House, which is included in Selection of Chinese Piano Works (Four) in 2001, the contents are almost the same as the 1987 version. The 2011 version edited by Qing Wang has three obvious differences in “Missing Moon” compared to the version published by People’s Music Publishing House (previously explained in

40 Ibid.
this chapter 4). The last version, published in 2015 by Shanghai Music Publishing House, states in the foreword:

This edition is more authentic. To the extent possible, all the works included in this collection have been approved by the composers themselves so as to ensure the authenticity of this edition. The music scores we have adopted are all final versions authorized by the composers themselves. In case of composers who are no longer with us, we sought authentication from their family members or descendants, or pianists who had received instructions from them. As for those works that have been published overseas, we have obtained permission from the publishers to reprint them in this collection.

We have also acquired information from the composers or their family members about the background and the conception of the compositions so as to provide better guidance for performers and students.\(^\text{41}\)

There is also a statement in the afterword:

And each piece of work was newly engraved, checked and proofread dozens of time, and approved, in the end, by the composers or the descendants of deceased composers. We wish to give special thanks to all the composers and the descendants of the deceased composers whose works appear in this collection for their efforts in making these volumes possible.\(^\text{42}\)

In conclusion, the 2015 version published by Shanghai Music Publishing House and the G. S. version are the most valuable and reliable versions, which can be chosen to practice this piano suite.


\(^{42}\) Ibid.
Conclusion

Through the study of Tan Dun’s *Eight Memories in Watercolor, Op. 1*, I was able to gain a better understanding of Tan as a painter and storyteller. Through all of his piano works, Chinese folk melodies or Chinese instruments play a vital role. *Eight Memories in Watercolor* was composed when Tan was only 19 years old and studying at the Central Conservatory of Music.

His later works for piano, in comparison to this early work, focus on other performance methods. A good example is *C-A-G-E*, which was composed in 1993. Described by the composer as a “fingering for piano,” it is dedicated to the memory of John Cage, a friend and mentor to Tan. *C-A-G-E* explores all the possible resonances of the piano. This piece is performed without using the keyboard. Many of the fingering techniques found in *C-A-G-E* borrow from those of the Chinese plucked string instrument, the *pipa*. This piece only uses the four pitches C, A, G, and E in all the different registers of the piano. Another example is *Traces*, composed in 1989. In this piece, Tan uses A-C-D as the only pitch materials, and he includes many rests in which the listener can hear clearly the sounds of the natural environment.

In conclusion, throughout his life, Tan Dun’s musical world has been continuously expanding. In spite of so many influences, Tan Dun was able to maintain his own personal style, which he had developed starting at a young age. *Eight Memories*
*Eight Memories in Watercolor* reveals the successful synthesis of diverse musical elements including Chinese and Western instruments and styles. Tan’s musical originality and craftsmanship were greatly influenced by Chinese folk music and western contemporary music. These influences help explain why *Eight Memories in Watercolor* has become part of the standard repertoire in piano recital halls around the world, and why recordings of the piece are growing in popularity.
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