Sound and Meaning: The Case of Martial Pieces
François Picard

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As a musician, I never believed in the meaning of instrumental music, nor in its supposed programatic content. Studying Chinese music, I was, as every one, confronted to the fact that the most played pieces were alleged to be programatic, if not realistic. During these many years of collaboration with Chinese musicians, I did find outstanding instrumentalists who do believe in programatic, and other outstanding musicians who do not care. It took me almost ten years before I could show evidences of the place esthetics occupies in Buddhist rituals and music.

Through the careful study of the origin of one single instrumental piece, Jiang he shui (River waters), I was able to prove that the alleged meaning of this piece changed with times and contexts. I want in this paper to go even further, by examining the most obviously descriptive piece, the martial suites for pipa lute, Shi mian mai fu and Ba wang xie jia. I shall particularly examine the modal aspects of two sections taken respectively from these suites, Chu ge and Chuida.


Song of Chu Kingdom / The King of Chu Moves his Armor / Ambush from All Sides / Farewell to the Concubine

The Story

The story of the Gaixia 倪下酣戰 battle, in present days Anhui, took place in 202 B.C (5th year of Gaozu) between the king of Chu 楚 Xiang Yu 項羽 and Liu Bang 劉邦, founder of the Han 漢 dynasty. It is to be found in the chapter called « The Story of Xiang Yu » 項羽本紀 in the Chronicles (Shi ji 史記) written by Sima Qian 司馬遷 1.

Xiang Yu's army is surrounded.

« At night the King [Xiang] heard that, from all sides among Han army, one sung [Chu] songs; quite frighten, he said: "Has Han conquered all the population of Chu?" King Xiang stood up during the night to drink under his tent; he had a beautiful woman, named Yu 嬴, who was always with him, and an excellent horse named Zhui �苕, which he always rode; King Xiang sung therefore with sadness his generous regrets; he made on himself these verses:

My strength destroyed the mountains; my energy dominated the world
Times are no more auspicious; Zhui does not run anymore;
If Zhui does not run, what can I do?
Yu! Yu! What is your fate?

See Musical exemple 2 Chu ge qin (Xie Lin / Picard)

« He sung several stances and his beautiful woman sung along. King Xiang dropped many tears; all his soldiers cried and no one could dare to look at him. » 2
« He divided his horse into four parts which he posted on four sides si mian 四面. » 3

Finally, Xiang Yu finds himself on the bank of the Wu River 烏江. The head of the watchtower is there, and proposes to help him cross (du 渡) the river, but Xiang refuses to leave his soldiers. He offers his horse to the head of the watchtower to save the brave companion. He fights on foot, and eventually cuts his throat (ziwen 自刎). 4

Several famous episodes of this story passed from oral literature to writings, from theater to - at last? - music. The theme of the Chu song has become a proverb, down to modern musical mythology. 5 Chu ge is said to be « the song emitted by chicken (Jimingge 雞鳴歌) » 6 but the term 歌 'ge' which now means 'a song' used to be specific to Chu, the Wu 吳 region having 'ou' 薬 and the Yue 越 region having 'yin' 咸. As to the song sung by Xiang Yu, it figures in several anthologies, including the one by the Music Bureau in its chapter on songs to be accompanied by the qin zither (qin ge 琴歌). 8

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2 Sima Qian, p. 333, CHAVANNES p. 316.
3 Sima Qian, p. 334, CHAVANNES p. 318.
4 Sima Qian, p. 336, CHAVANNES p. 320.
6 Ying Shao 楊碩, quoted in notes to Sima Qian, op. cit., p. 333.
7 Yan shi gu 項師古, quoted in notes to Sima Qian, op. cit., p. 316. Voir aussi Chu Han chunqiu 楚漢春秋
8 Guo Miaoqian 郭茂倩, Yuefu shiji 楽府詩集 (Anthology of Poems from the Music Bureau), reprint Sibu congkan chubian, juan 58, reprint Shanghai, Shanghai Wenye, s. d., p. 434.

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septembre 8, 2009
The story of Liu Bang having his soldiers sing a Chu song to demoralize the enemy can be found under a poetico-narrative form in a Dunhuang manuscript dated 939, under the title Ji Bu shiyong 季布誥詠 (Poeme of Ji Bu), including a regular poem shi of eight times seven verses and a prose poem ci. Ji Bu is an historical character, a general from Chu, who appears in the Han Chronicle (Han shu 漢書).

**Analysis of the Chu poem**
Sima Qian does not mention the singing of the Chu song by the armies of Liu Bang, but only the verses by Xiang Yu sung by him and his woman. These verses are in the classical form of a quatrain with seven foots. One thing which deserves particular attention is the presence of the separation particle 'xi' in the middle of each verse. It comes from the Nine Songs (Jiuge 九歌) from the "Chu Odes" (Chu ci 楚辭) by Qu Yuan 屈原.10

One can find also some Chu songs, well identified, in the big anthology from the Music Bureau Yuefu shiji 樂府詩集, among different categories: Xianghe ge 相和歌 (j. 29, vol. 2, p. 260), j. 41 à 42, vol. 2, p. 328), qin songs 琴歌 (vol. 2, p. 434 - already evoke, it is the very song by Xiang Yu - and 436), and at last among the 'various popular songs' zayaoge 雜謠歌 (j. 83, vol. 3, p. 573).11 But this songs have not the characteristic form related to Chu songs by Qu Yuan.

**Musical versions**
Opera from 14th to 20th century, qin zither since 15th or 19th century, pipa lute since a few decades, even symphonic orchestra, one can find many musical versions, which I shall examine in some details.

*Shi mian mai fu (opera)*

*Shi mian mai fu* 十面埋伏 (Ambush from all Sides), Yuan opera by Wang Ziyi 王子一 (circa 1368)12, and anonymous Yuan opera13. The latter opera is a suite composed of ten labelled melodies (qupai 曲牌) in shangdiao 商調 mode, which form a classical suite (taoqu 套曲), preceded by a tune for wind and percussion instruments chuida 吹打 entitled Shuilong yin (水龍吟 The Water Dragon Declamation).

*Chu Han (puppet opera)*

*Chu Han* 楚漢 (after the names of these two dynasties), a drama for string puppet theater *Mu'ou xi* 木偶戲 from Quanzhou, Fujian.14

*Xie jia (Beiguan tune)*

*Xie jia* 卸甲 ([The King of Chu] Removes his Armor), Beiguan 北管 tune from Taiwan.15

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11 GUO Maoqian, *op. cit.*

12 Jiugong dacheng Nan Bei ci gongpu 九宮大成南北詞宮譜 15. 5.


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Ba wang bie ji (ballad)
Ba wang bie ji 霸王別姬 "The King Says Farewell to its Concubine", spoken ballad accompanied by sanxian 三絃 lute, a genre from Mandchouria whose first transmitted libretto dates back to 1804.16

Ba wang bie ji (opera)
Ba wang bie ji 霸王別姬 "The King Says Farewell to its Concubine", also called Xi Han Yanyi 西漢演義, a Peking opera scene written for Mei Lanfang in 1921 after the chuanqi 川奇 Qianjin ji 千金記. Also a scene in Huqin style in Sichuan opera. King Ba with his characteristical White and Black make-up and his whip is also part of a piece entitled Jiuxing shan 九星山, or Chu Han zeng 楚漢爭, by Huang Ji'an 黃吉安 (1836-1924).

Chu ge (qin)
The versions for qin 琵 zither
One finds thirteen versions for qin 琵 zither of a piece entitled Chu ge 楚歌, from the first great book from 1425 down to 1611, then only one after 1802.17 1425 First musical version, published in the Shenqi mipu 神奇秘譜 (Spiritual and Marvelous Notations) by the Ning prince 寧王 Zhu Quan 朱權 (1378-1449), 1425, vol. Zhi xia 之下, f. 33a-36b.18 It has eight numbered sections, without words, but with sub-titles, the preface tells that this piece is an ancient tune (guqü), then tells the story of the battle with Han and of the using of a Chu song to demoralize the enemy. 1491 Zheyin shizi qinpu 浙音釋字琴譜, before 1491, f. 57b-61b.19 In eight numbered sections, with sub-titles and words, preface citing the Shenqi mipu and telling the story.

1513 Xie Lin 謝林, Taigu yi yin 太古絃音 (Misterious Sounds from Great Antiquity), juan 2, f. 13a-19a.20 In eleven unnumbered sections, with words differing from the former, preface after the Shenqi mipu.

1515 Huang Shida 黃士達, Taigu yi yin 太古絃音 (Misterious Sounds from Great Antiquity). reprint from the former [Xie Lin].

1530 Faming qinpu 形明琴譜 (Notations to Increase Light), qinxia, f. 9b-15b. In eight numbered sections, with words, similar to the former [Xie Lin] 21

1539 Fengxuan xuanpin 風玄譜 (Misterious Articles from Feng Songs), juan 8, f. 49b-1556a.22 In eight unnumbered sections, without words, with sub-titles, a similar version to the one in Shenqi mipu.

1549 Xilutang qintong 西麓堂琴通, juan 23, f. 16a-20a.23 In ten numbered sections, without words, with sub-titles, a similar version to the one in Shenqi mipu.

1557 Xingzhuang Taiyin buyi 杏莊太音補遺, juan xia, f. 28b-32a. In nine numbered sections, without words, with sub-titles, a similar version to the one in Shenqi mipu. 24


17 See also XU Jian 許健, Qinshi chubian 琵史初編, Peking, Renmin yinyue, 1982, p. 95.


19 Reproduction ivi, pp. 209-211.

20 Reproduction ivi, pp. 274-277.

21 Reproduction ivi, pp. 348-351.


Tuning and mode

Chinese musicology is very quiet about the difference between 'tuning' and 'mode'. In practice, the term 'diao' can mean both, and one can generally consider that the main aspect of it is tuning. But we shall show that at least in the case of Chu songs there is a real concept of mode.

The Chu ge piece is classified among the Qiliang diao tuning 深凉调 (sad tuning), in Shangjue diao 商角调 (litteraly meaning « Tuning in the mi mode on re ») or in Chu shang diao 楚商调 (tuning in the re mode in Chu style). Other pieces in the relevant tunings as Li sao 零骚 (The Sadness of Separation) are to be played jin 緊 2 5, which means that number 2 and 5 strings must be raised (C Eb F G Bb c d, or re fa sol la do re mi). According to Xu Jian, the name Chu shang diao comes precisely from this tune, since it is a re mode, namely sol la do re mi fa. One notices a diatonic descending movement c d Bb A G G F F Eb D G G C C, which is a re mode on C.

Strangely, without having the same tuning, two pieces, Chu ge and Yangguan, share the same melodic material (beginning of section [2] in Yangguan), which in fact is the modal prelude in Ruibin diao 廿宾调. But Yangguan sandie 陽關三叠 (Three Variations on the Sun Pass) is classified by Shenqi mipu - at its end - after the Qiliang yi 深凉意 modal prelude. It is obviously a mistake. In fact, Yangguan is to be played with jin 5, which means raise number 5 string (C D F G Bb C D, also re mi sol la do re mi), like Xiao Xiang shuiyun, which is in Ruibin diao tuning.

The classification of the pieces in Qiliang diao, Shangjue diao and Chu shang diao modes

1425 Shenqi mipu

Six pieces in Qiliang or Chu shang or Shangjue modes:

Huaxu yin 華胥引 (Prelude to Dream Land) is in Qiliang mode but not classified.

Qiliang yi and Chu shang yi follow each other, and immediately after we find two pieces:

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27 Reproduction ZHA Fuxi, Qinqu jicheng, vol. 6, pp. 269-271.
30 As noticed by Xu Jian, op. cit, also Zhongguo yinyue cidian 中国音乐辞典 (Chinese Music Dictionary), art. "Chu ge" 楚歌.
31 ZHA Fuxi, Qinqu jicheng, vol. 1, p. 154-<.
32 Reproduced in ZHA Fuxi, Qinqu jicheng, vol. 1, p. 106.
33 Ivi, pp. 157-160.
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Zepan yin 澤畔吟 (Lament on the Muddy Bank) and Li sao 離騷 (The Sadness of Separation)

Shenhua yin 神化引 (Prelude to Spiritual Transformation), Zhuang Zhou meng die 莊周夢蝶 (Zhuangzi Dreams of the Butterfly) and Chu ge.

1491 Zheyin shizi qinpu

Eight pieces in Qiliang or Chu shang or Shangjue modes:

Shangjue yi34 has three pieces, the same as before but in a different order:

Chu ge, Shenhua yin and [Zhuang Zhou] meng die π/Ω.

Qiliang yi and Chu shang yi come after35 with five pieces:

Huaxu yin, this time under a heading, Zepan yin which follows Li sao, then Qu Yuan wen du 屈原問渡 and at last Yangguan sandie.

1539 Fengxuan xuanpin

Five pieces in Qiliang mode:

Qiliang yi, Li sao, Chu ge, Qu Yuan wen du, Zepan yin, Huaxu yin.

Confusion between modal names

There is a persisting ambiguity between the Qiliang, Shangjue and Chu shang modes36. The analysis shows that they share the same tuning.

One last criterion gives some light on the question of mode as related to tuning. The Shenqi mipu 1425 indicates at the end of Chu ge that one must play « the harmonics of its own tuning » (bendiao fan). If one plays the preceding diaoyi, which means Shangjue yi, one modulates completely (F E D C Bb D C), but if one plays Qiliang diao or Chu shang37, according to the very name 'Chu shang' and to the Fengxuan xuanpin edition from 1539, one stays in the same tone (Bb C D).

The Yuwu qinpu 玉梧琴譜 scorebook from 1589 gives a precious indication on the esthetical meaning of Qiliang diao as a mode. Quoting the Zixia dong kao 紫霞洞考 (Essay from the Purple Cloud Cave) in relation to the monumental scorebook - now lost - by Yang Zuan 楊鑒, from Southern Song Zhejiang school, entitled Zixia dong qinpu 紫霞洞琴譜 (Qin Scorebook from the Purple Cloud Cave), it writes:

Zixia dong kao zhi shi ming Chu shang diao ui ming wai diao Jiliang
Yun zhe pai yi tai rong Xiang Yu zhi kun Yu Gaixia ye ci diao jin er wu ge yi zhi

紫霞洞考之名楚商調一名外調漎涼
云者蓋以形容項羽之困於垓下 也此調聚二五名一徵

« The Chu re mode also bears the name of 'strange (wai) tuning of sadness (qiliang)', which means that it describes the difficulties encountered by Xiang Yu in Gaixia. For this tuning one raises both 2 and 5 strings, in relation of fifth. »38

In fact, pieces classified under Chu mode like Li sao 離騷 (The Sadness of Separation) and Zepan yin 澤畔吟 (Lament on the Muddy Bank) refer not only to sadness39, specialy to the one related to separation (a theme found in the Chu song story, and also in the Sun Pass), but specifically to Chu kingdom, and to what it

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34 Ivi, pp. 209 sq.
35 Ivi, pp. 244 sq.
36 Apart the tuning of qin zither open strings, Shangjue diao is also the name of one of the twenty-eight diao from Yanyue 燕樂 music played at the Tang court: A Bib C D E F G A (mi mode on A).
37 Reproduced in Zta Fuxi, Qinqu jicheng, vol. 1, p. 257.
38 Reproduced in Zta Fuxi, Qinqu jicheng, vol. 6, p. 90.
39 It is to be noticed that the qichu 漾楚 locution has taken the general meaning of "sad".

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is poetically the most famous for, the "Chu Odes" (Chu ci 楚辞) by Qu Yuan 屈原. In fact, if one considers the list of the pieces in Chu mode found in 1539, there is only one piece left, Huaxu yin, which is not related to "Chu". One can just add that xu 胥 is in some cases a graph equivalent to chu 楚.

The modal difficulty of Chu songs
The modal strangeness of Chu songs has become proverbial, up to the point to signify, not only exotism, but also difficulty, leading to elitism. The story about the songs called "Sichuanese from Low Quarters" (Xiali Ba ren 下里巴人) and "Spring White Snow"(Yangchun baixue 陽春白雪) has been famous, from Shen Gua (Mengxi bitan 5/102) to Mao Zedong (Yan'an Speeches). It is first to be found in the "Song Yu" chapter from Shuo Fu 㑞Ӽ Xiangyang qijiuzhuan 䍁ජॾ. Song Yu describes Chu modality in this way: « One begins in re (shang) with a strong la, then varies to a movable sol » Yin shang ke yu za yi liu zhi 引商刻羽 紮以流徵. One has to notice with astonishment how this description matches well with Chu song as played on the qin zither.

Conclusion on mode
In conclusion, there has been, as so often, and not only in China, a confusion between tuning and mode. One as to rectify: Chu ge is indeed in Qiliang and Chu shang modes, like Zepan yin, Qu Yuan wen du and Li sao, as well as Huaxu yin; but this mode - at the same time sad and related to Chu kingdom - differs from Shangjue used in Shenhua yin and Zhuang Zhou meng die. The Chu song sung by Xiang Yu and put into music at the beginning of Xie Lin's Taigu yi yin from 1513 is but just a variant from the modal prelude in Qiliang. This identification allows us to rectify a mistake which would lead to oddness: the fourth note, on string 1, must not been played with the finger on point eleven like the former note (E), but on open string (C).

Interpretations
The Chu ge piece is extraordinary seldom played, I could find only one published recording of it, played by Yao Bingyan 姚炳炎 (1921-1983).40 No transcription of this or other interpretation has been published either, except for a few very short extracts.41 On the other hand, Yao Bingyan is the one who has made a recording of an other piece in Qiliang diao mode, Huaxu yin.42 After my oral communication in Venice, I went to Shanghai in December, 2001, and at last could obtain from my friend Dai Xiaolian 戴曉蓮 a copy of the handwritten manuscript of Chu ge as performed by her great-uncle Zhang Ziqian 張子謙.

San Chu ci (zheng)
San Chu ci 散楚辭 alias 散楚 (Poem about Chu Dispersion), for zheng 箏 zither, in the Hakka tradition, Hanyue genre from Guangdong Province.43 This is a melody according to the 68 ban (strokes) type. There are a few other tunes related to the same battle of Chu: Bie ji 別姬 "Farewell to the Concubine",44 Wujiang ziwen 烏江自刎 "Suicide on the Wu River".45

41 XU Jian 許健, Qinshi chubian 琴史初編, Peking, Renmin yinyue, 1982, p. 95.
44 Li Ling 李凌, Guangdong yinyue 廣東音樂, Peking, Zhongguo wenlian, vol. 1, 1986, p. 120.
45 Ivi p. 144-145.
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The pipa versions

The theme of the Chu vs. Han battle appears in the two martial suites *Shi mian mai fu* 十面埋伏 (Ambush from all Sides) and *Ba wang xie jia* 霸王卸甲 (The King of Chu Removes his Armor). There are to be found in most of the scorebooks for *pipa*, and in all the main ones, except in the Pinghu school. One must distinguish between *Shimian*'s structure, a suite composed of various different tunes, and *Ba wang*'s structure, a suite composed from variations on the same melody, of which *Chu ge* is but one.

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<tr>
<th>Northern School</th>
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<th>Pinghu School</th>
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<tr>
<td>Wang Junxi</td>
<td>Hua Qiuping</td>
<td>Li Fangyuan</td>
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<td>Yang Yinliu</td>
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<td>Li Tingsong</td>
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*Shi mian mai fu* (pipa)

*Shi mian mai fu* 十面埋伏 (Ambush from all Sides). Attributed, without historical reference, to a famous poet, Bo Letian (Juyi) 白樂天 (居易) (772-846). In fact, one finds only a reference by this poet to the fact that he would have listen to a music describing a battle and played on the *pipa*.

*Ba wang xie jia* (pipa)

*Ba wang xie jia* 霸王卸甲 (The King of Chu Removes his Armor). Attributed to a Tang dynasty musician. Wang Youding 王獻定 (1598-1662), *Sizhaotang wenji* 四照堂文集 (Writings from Sizhaotang), has an entire chapter dedicated to Tang Yingzeng 湯鷹曾, entitled *Tangpipa zhuan* 湯琵琶傳 (The Tang Pipa Player), where he tells in details the performance by this musician of a piece for *pipa* entitled *Chu Han* 楚漢.

47 *Chu ge* is a section of the *Ba wang xie jia* suite.

1762 Yisuzi 一素子, MS. This scorebook, not specialized for *pipa*, counts eight "ancient" pieces, among which *Ba wang xie jia*, also called *Si* 四 *mian mai fu*, for *pipa*, and six "modern" pieces.

1790 Ju Shilin 鞠士林, *Xianxu youyin* 閒敍幽音, dating from the period going from 1796 to 1820, probably from 1790, published in 1819 and with a MS. from 1860, counts the two martial suites. But the authenticity of this scorebook remains to be under discussion.

1818 Hua Qiuping 華秋萍 (1784-1859) left a scorebook with pieces organized according to two schools: the "Northern School" *Zhili* 直隸 (Hebei) from Wang Junxi 王君錫, from Yanjing city, split into different genres: 49 "Western" pieces (*xiban* 西板) including the civil (*wenban* 文板) and military (*wuban* 武板) repertoires; five great pieces (*daqqu* 大曲); one varied piece (*zaqu* 雜曲); the "Southern School" pieces from Chen Mufu 陳牧夫, from Zhejiang, belong to the civil and military repertoires, to the "various pieces" (*zaban* 雜板) repertoire and to the five great pieces *daqqu*. The fusion of Northern and Southern schools has a major importance. Among modern players relevant to it, one must mention the two great music scholars Cao Anhe 曹安和 (born in 1905) and

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Yang Yinliu 楊燕渃, (1899-1984). Ba wang xie jia belongs to the "great pieces" in Chen Mufu (South) and Shi mian mai fu to the "great pieces" [the only one of this type] in Wang Junxi (North).

1895 Li Fangyuan 李芳園, Nanbeipai shisan tao daqu pipa xin pu 南北派十三套大曲琵琶新譜 (New Scores for Pipa for the Thirteen Great Suites from Southern and Northern Schools) does not include the two martial suites.

1926 Shen Haochu 深浩初 (1889-1953), Yang Zhengxuan pipa pu 餘正軒琵琶譜 includes the two martial suites Ba wang xie jia and Shi mian mai fu.49

1942 Wang Yuting 汪昱庭 (1892-1951). The reference versions of both Ba wang xie jia and Shi mian mai fu are these ones, published by the Central Conservatory of Peking, both according to the performance by Li Tingsong 李廷松 (Shanghai 1906-1976), Wang Yuting's most preferred disciple.

1982 Li Tingsong's own interpretation under his own name has been published by his son, Li Guangzu.51

Wujiang hen (Symphonic Poem)

Composed by Yang Liqing 楊立青 (born 1942), composition professor at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, the symphonic poem Wujiang hen 烏江恨 (Regrets by the Wujiang River) has been inspired by the abundantly quoted pipa piece Ba wang xie jia. This piece, not very much considered by its own composer, has won a Second Prize and its recording has been published in 1986.52

Comparative analysis of "Chu ge" sections from the Ba wang suite

Wang Yuting 1942 #10 section; Li Tingsong 1986 #10 section; these versions, both by Li Tingsong, are the same.

Shen Haochu 1926 section 9, is different, also being a variation on the same melody. The #10 section (Bieji) in Shen Haochu does not differ from #9 Chu ge by Li Tingsong; Ju Shilin does not include Chu ge.

Chu ge (xun)

A few years after Liberation (1949), Chen Zhong 陳重 (born in 1919 in Pudong, Shanghai's suburb) wrote, in collaboration with Du Ciwen 杜次文 (a flautist born in Peking in 1939) an arrangement for the xun 窓 globular flute and the zheng 箫 zither of the Chu ge 楚歌 (Song of Chu Kingdom), extracted from #10 section from Ba wang xie jia, as found in Wang Yuting's version played by Li Tingsong. The new piece is composed of modulating sections. First section (meas. 1-24) comes directly from the pipa piece, omitting meas. 14-17 and 24-34. There is a pentatonic modulation to the upper fourth (re mi sol la do to re fa sol la do). B section modulates in the same way (re fa sol la doto re fa sol sib do). C section is a chromatic descending lament ending on a lower quinte in minor mode (la or re mode). After a short zither solo transition, the last section goes back to a shortened A section. From pentatonic system and its modulations, one has come to diatonic modality: G minor, going to dominant (D minor) and back. Or better, as there is no sensible, which caracterizes tonality, it is a re mode on G. The diatonic descent (meas. 75-77) A-G-F-E-D is only a passing effect, although it furiously relates to diatonic modality and furiously reminds the diatonic descent in the qin versions.

Is is therefore possible to conclude that there is a strong reminiscence and permanency of a particular modal feeling related to the "Song of Chu Kingdom", found in early days in the Chu shang diao.

The score (unpublished, 1984/06) distinguish various sections:


52 Cassette Zhongguo changpian HL-514, side A, Shanghai Symphonic Orchestra, directed by Cao Peng 曹鹏, with Ke Ming 柯明, pipa solo.

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Comparative analysis of "Chuida" sections from the Shimian maifu suite

1790 Ju Shilin p. 14

#2. Chuida 吹打 "Wind and Percussion Music"

1926 Shen Haochu p. 59

#5. Chuida kaimen 吹打開門 "Open the Door to Wind and Percussion Instruments"

1982 Li Tingsong p. 34

#7. Chuida 吹打 "Wind and Percussion Music"

Li Tingsong yanzou pu 1982 #7 section is almost identical to Wang Yuting #2 (Minzu yueqi p. 16, also played by Li Tingsong)

The piece is divided into two groups A and B of thirteen two-beat measures, grouped in five-four-four. The central group (meas. 6-9 and meas. 19-22) modulates to the fifth by substitution of degree.

Ju Shilin #2 does not include A group. Notably, this simplification allows not to modulate, while keeping the same fundamental notes.

Shen Haochu #5 (staff notation) and Wang Yuting #2 (staff notation) are very close to each other, but Shen Haochu is written twice slower and with only one sharp instead of two in the other sections, as is the case in the other versions. There is a modulation, which goes to G A B D E, (1 = G), written fa sol la do re 4 5 6 1 2.

Between Shen Haochu (A - B) and Li Tingsong (A - B - B) there is a simple adjunction in the latter of a repeat from the second part (meas. 14 to 26).

If one examines the simplest version, the one by Ju Shilin, from which all the others come, one notices that the modulation does not concern only secondary notes, but the tune itself, whose main note (initial and terminal) is the first degree (do / 1), in the rare aspect of do re fa sol la do 1 2 4 5 6 1. The examination of several thousands tunes did not lead me to the identification of the original tune, a task which was not done by either of my (many) predecessors. One can find however a few tunes which feature the same scale/mode materials, including Dafan'er/ Daifan'er 打番兎 帶番兎.53

Conclusion

One single theme: the battle between Chu and Han, has travelled throughout China, passing through several genres: puppet theatre, opera, ballads, songs, instrumental music for the qin, the pipa, to finish (?) with symphony and modal/tonal arrangement. What remains from meaning? Not the melody itself, except for recent adaptations. The search after other musical characteristics would be in vain. But there is a quasi-constant in all the versions of the "Song of Chu Kingdom": the use of special and rare modes. In the same way, the instrumental effects used to describe the battle sounds - which we find also in Japan in the Heike biwa genre (平家琵琶), related to the battle between Heike and Genji clans - appear to be specific to the pipa martial repertoire and can not bear by themselves "the meaning".

Annexes

Sub-titles (qin)

1425 Shenqi mipu in eight sections
1. Yi bie jiang dong 懷別江東 "Farewell Thoughts at the East of the River"
2. Qi yu tun tai 氣欲吞泰 "Desire of Annexing Qin"
3. Ye jian tie di 夜聞鐵笛 "Metal Flute in the Night"
4. Baqian bing san 八千兵散 "Disperion of 8000 Soldiers"
5. Yingxiong qi xiao 英雄氣消 "The Energy of the Heroes Fells"
6. Qibie yuji 泣別虞姬 "Sorrow for a Farewell to the Concubine"
7. Yinling shi dao 陰陵失道 "To Lose One's Way at Yinling"
8. Wujian bu du 烏江不渡 "No Passing of the Wu River"

1491 Zheyin shizi qinpu in eight sections
1. Yumei chu sai 御枚出塞 "Passing the Wall in Silence"
2. as 1425
3. as 1425
4. Chentu shi nian 麓土十年 "Ten Years of Dusty Soil"
5. as 1425
6. as 1425
7. as 1425
8. as 1425

1513 Xie Lin, Taigu yi yin in eleven unnumbered sections
0. The very text of Xiang Yu's song as quoted by Sima Qian and the Yuefu shiji, continued by: Ci fu mu shi jun wang shi nian zai jiang chang 辭父母事君王十年在彊場
1. as 1425.1
2. Chang qu kai sai 長驅開塞 "Passing the Wall in Silence"
3. Tieyi chentu 鐵衣塵土 "Dusty Soil and Metal Dresses"
4. Hetai qiu feng 禾黍秋風 "Cereales and Autumn Wind"
5. as 1425. 3
6. as 1425.4
7. as 1425.5
8. Yuji qibie 虞姬泣別 "Sorrow for a Farewell to the Concubine" See 1425.6
9. Bajian sheng 拔劍聲 "Sounds of Arms" See 1425.6
10. as 1425.8

**Sub-titles (opera)**

*Shi mian mai fu (opera)*

*Shi mian mai fu* 十面埋伏 (Ambush from All Sides), anonymous opera from Yuan dynasty\(^{54}\).

This opera is a suite (*taoqu* 套曲) of ten labelled tunes (*qupai* 曲牌) in *shangdiao* 商調 mode. The names are not related to the action or content.

0. *Chuida* 吹打 *Shuilong yin* 水龍吟 "The Water Dragon Declamation, for Wind and Percussion Instruments".
1. *Dianjiang chun* 點絳唇
2. *Hunjiang chun* 混江龍？？
3. *You hulu* 油葫蘆
4. *Tianxia le* 天下樂
5. *Nazha ling* 哪吒令
6. *Queta zhi* 鶴踏枝
7. *Qing ge'er* 青歌兒
8. *Liye qing* 柳葉兒
9. *Ji sheng cao* 葉生草
10. *Zuan sha* 質煞

**Sub-titles (pipa)**

*Shimian maifu (pipa)*

1942 Wang Yuting 13 sections

1. *Lie ying* 列營 "The Camps"
2. *Chuida* 吹打 "Wind and Percussion Instruments"
3. *Dianjiang* 點絳"Attribution of Roles to the Officers"
4. *Paichen* 排陣 "The Army in Order"
5. *Zoudui* 走隊 "The Army is Marchin On"
6. *Maifu* 埋伏 "Ambush"
7. *Jiming shan xiaozhan* 雞鳴山小戰 "Skirmish at Jiming Hill"
8. *Jiuli shan da zhan* 九里山大戰 "The Battle of Jiuli Hill"
9. *Xiang wang baichen* 項王敗陳 "King Xiang Yu is Defeated"
10. *Wujiang ziwen* 烏江自刎 "Suicide on Wu River"
11. *Zhong jun zou kai* 眾軍奏凱 "Reports of Victory"

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F. Picard
12. Zhuijiang zheng gong 諸將爭功 "The Officers Contending for Merits"
13. Desheng hui ying 得勝回營 "Triomphant Return to Camp".

1926 Shen Haochu 18 sections

1. Lie ying 列營 "The Camps"
2. Leigu 雷鼓 "Thunder Drums"
3. Zhang hao 掌號 "Take the Horns"
4. Fang pao 放炮 "Install the Cannons"
5. Chuida kaimen 吹打開門 "Open the Doors to the Sounds of Wind and Percussion Instruments"
6. Dianjiang 點絳唇 "Attribution of Roles to the Officers" (1942 #3)
7. Paichen 排陣 "The Army in Order"
8. Maifu 埋伏 "Ambush"
9. Xiaoan 小戰 "Skirmish"
10. Da zhan 大戰 "Great Battle"
11. Nahan 喂喊 "Battle Shoutings"
12. Zhong wei 重圍 "The Camp is Surrounded"
13. Zhuan hao 改號 "Change Horns"
14. Bai Bei 敗北 "Win on North"
15. Gu jiao sheng 鼓角聲 "Drums and Horns Sounding"
16. Wujiang 烏江 "At the Wu River"
17. Zou kai 奏凱 "Victory"
18. Shou chen hui ying 收陳回營 "The Armies Return to Camps"

Ba wang xie jia (pipa)
1942 Wang Yuting 16 sections

1. Yinggu 營鼓 "Drums in the Camp"
2. Shengzhang 升帳 "Dress the Tents"
3. Dianjiang 點絳 "Attribution of Roles to the Officers"
4. Zhengdui 整隊 "The Army in Order"
5. Dianjiang 點絳 "Attribution of Roles to the Officers"
6. Chuchen 出陳 "The Officers Get Out"
7. Chuchen 出陳 "The Officers Get Out"
8. Jiezhan 接戰 "Nearing the Battle"
9. Gaixia gan zhan 埼下酣戰 "The Drunken Battle at Gaixia"
10. Chu ge 楚歌 "Song of Chu Kingdom"
11. Bie ji 別姬 "Farewell to the Concubine"
12. **Gu jiao jia sheng** 鼓角甲聲 "Drums and Horns Sounding"

13. **Chu wei** 出圍 "To Get Out of the Surrounded Camp".

14. **Zhui bing** 追兵 "Pursue the Soldiers".

15. **Zhu qi** 逐騎 "Pursue the Horse".

16. **Zhong jun guili** 眾軍歸里 "All the Armies Go back".

1926 Shen Haochu 11 sections

1. **Yinggu** 營鼓 "Drums in the Camp"

2. **Shengzhang** 升帳 "Dress the Tents"

3. **Dianjiang** 點綽 "Attribution of Roles to the Officers"

4. **Zhengdui** 整隊 "The Army in Order"

5. **Paichen** 排陳 "The Army in Order" (Shimian 4)

6. **Chuchen** 出陳 "The Officers Get Out"

7. **Jiezhan** 接戰 "Nearing the Battle" (1942 #6)

8. **Gaixia** 埭下 "Gaixia" (1942 #7)

9. **Chu ge** 楚歌 "Song of Chu Kingdom" (1942 #10)

10. **Gu jiao jia sheng** 鼓角甲聲 "Drums and Horns Sounding"

11. **Zhong jun guili** 眾軍歸里 "All the Armies Go Back".

**Bie ji** 別姬 "Farewell to the Concubine" is missing.

### Recordings

**Shi mian mai fu** (pipa)

Wei Zhongle 衛仲樂 (Shanghai 1908-circa 1998) has played *Shimian* as soon as 1928 and recorded it in 1935 for Pathe/Baidai. His recording of 1961 was published as a cassette *Guoyue jingcui, Wei Zhongle jiaoshou yanzou yuequ xuan*, vol. 1, Shanghai wenhua Luyin luxiang zhongxin SH 8505, face B, track 4, time 10'00".

Li Tingsong has recorded *Shi mian* around 1960, record Zhongguo changpian XM.912, republished in *A Musical Anthology of the Orient, China*, vol. 32, Musicaphon-Unesco BM.30.SL.2032 (1985), face A, track 5, reprint Unesco-Auvidis D 8071 (1996), track 2, and *Chine : musique classique*, Ocora C559039, track 4 (reprint CD1988), time 8'34".

Lin Shicheng 林石城 has recorded *Shi mian* many times on records, cassettes and CD published in China, Hong Kong and France. Cassette *Yang Zhengxuan pipa pu* 養正軒琵琶譜 Renmin yinyue, vol. 1, 8026 L006, track A2.


Wang Weiping 王維平 (Xi'an, 1963), CD *China. Wang Weiping*, pipa lute, Ocora C 560128 (1988), track 5, time 5'26".

**Ba wang xie jia** (pipa)
Wei Zhongle has recorded *Ba wang* en 1954, Li Fangyuan version, published on cassette *Guoyue jingcui, Wei Zhongle jiaoshou yanzou yuequ xuan*, vol. 2, Shanghai wenhua Luyin luxiang zhongxin SH 8506, face A, track 1, time 10'20".


Lin Shicheng has recorded *Ba wang* many times on records, cassettes and CD published in China, Hong Kong and France. Pacific Audio and Video PCD 6206, track 11, 1999.

Lui Pui-yuen (Lü Peiyuan Shanghai), *Hong Kong Instrumental Music*. Unesco Auividis D 8031, (pub. 1974-1990), track 1, time 7'10".


Wang Weiping (Xi'an, 1963), CD China. *Wang Weiping*, pipa lute, Ocora C 560128 (1988), track 6, time 9'09".

**Commentaries**

If we compare the various commentaries written about those pieces, we will easily be convinced that, event among the ones who believe that Chinese music is descriptive by nature, there is very little description ever found, if not of sounds. Of course the belief in music as telling stories or depicting landscape in deeply rooted in Chinese culture, we can now appreciate how the musicians have managed allways to go back to the very nature of music: sound.

**Liu Senmin, speaking of Yao Bingyan**

The two kingdoms, Chu and Han, were at war with each other and the Han soldiers besieged the Chu's in Gaixia. King Liu Bang of Han adopted Zhang Liang's scheme to instruct his soldiers to sing the folk songs of Chu round the camping troops of Chu. On hearing their native tunes, the morale of Chu's army sagged and were soon routed. This short and concise piece is rich in the distinctive characteristics of Chu's music.


**Isabel K.F. Wong, speaking of Lui Pui-yen**

1. Shi mian mai fu (Ambuscade From Ten Sides)

   Belonging to the "martial piece" category of the traditional repertoire, this famous portrait presents realistically an historical battle whichoccurred some time from 206-203 B.C. during the war between the forces of the King of Chu and those of the eventual founder of the Han dynasty (206 B.C-23 A.D.). The first part of the piece depicts the military maneuvers of the Chu army, complete with fife ad drum and cannon fire. The second part depicts the ambush of the Chu army by its opponents and the skirmishes which eventually escalated into full battle, which resulted in the Chu forces defeated. As a programmatic description of battle, this piece uses the whole gamut of percussive effects for the pipa to represent artillery fire as well as a series of unusually long and distant portamenti to represent the wailing of the wounded.


**Wang Qun, speaking of Li Tingsong**

2. Shimian maifu (The Great Ambuscade) Pipa solo. Performer: Li Tingsong

   This is a large-scale pipa work popular since the latter half of the Ming dynasty. There is a detailed account of a performance of the pipa work *Chu Han* by Tang Yingzeng ¥∆NYø in the chapter called *Tangpipa zhuan* ¥ˆµ=µ¨ (The Pipa Player Tang), contained in *Sizhaotang ji* ¥•∑" (Collections of Sizhaotang) by Wang Xianding [sic for Youding] ¥¥¬é¥° (1598-1662), of the Ming dynasty. This work, *Chu Han*, is believed to have been the early version of *Shimian maifu*. The written music of this work first appeared in the *Pipapu* (Pipa Notations) of Hua Quiping. Thevarious editions of the work differ as regards the divisions and sub-titles of the music, which is usually divided into 18 parts, including "Lining up
Shimian maifu is for the most part an eulogy in honour of the victor of the war between Chu and Han-Liu Bang, the founder of the Han dynasty. The piece opens with the pipa imitating the powerful and martial sounds of drums in the high register, followed by the dramatic effects produced by the means of modulations and transitions. Imitations of the typical sounds of ancient battlefields - bugles, cannons, horses- evoke the mighty image of the Han army. The work focuses on the "Ambush", "Skirmish at Jiming Hill" and "Battle of Jiuli Hill"; with unique and characteristic techniques of the pipa, and highly versatile rhythmic features, the music conveys a magnificent and coherent pageant of ancient warfare.

Mr. Li's performance of Shimian maifu is coherent as a whole and knits passion and narration into one, differing from some of those ordinary practices which produce isolated and far-fetched interpretative frames according to the successive sub-titles.


Alain Swietclick, speaking of Li Tingsong

Consacré à la musique classique instrumentale chinoise, ce disque enregistré par les Chinois eux-mêmes propose les pièces les plus connues du répertoire, en particulier le chef d'œuvre de tout joueur de luth pipa, l'archi-célèbre "Embuscade", œuvre très descriptive (analogue à notre Bataille de Marignan de Janequin), où l'on entend chocs d’armures, chevaux… [...] Les exécutants sont excellents et très expressifs (si vous aimez la Fantastique ou la Pastorale, vous serez en terrain connu!) Deux reproches: les joueurs de pipa sont trop rapides […]


François Picard

4. Ambushed from All Sides (Shimian maifu)

Pear-shaped lute (pipa) : Li Tingsong (1906-1976).

Recorded around 1960; record Zhongguo changpian XM.912.

One of the bravura piece of the "military repertoire ", that recalls the origins of the instrument which was brought into China by the soldiers in Central Asia. Shimian maifu was published in the first collection for pipa, that of Hua Quiping, in 1818. The contrasts of timbre, registers and types of attack, the vast dynamic range and the variations of speed illustrate the fundamental concepts of Chinese music, concepts that were developed especially in percussion ensembles, and that are far removed from an alleged melancholic romanticism. Li Tingsong, another musician from Suzhou, began at sixteen to study the pipa with the great master Wang Yuting (1892-1951). He then played in clubs in Shanghai, and mastered the erhu, the zheng and the sanxian. He had an immense influence and a refined style with nevertheless a very great virtuosity.


5. Shimian maifu (All-side Ambush). Traditional

This suite, which is drawn from the first important collection of pieces for solo pipa, that of Hua Quiping (1818), is representative of the so-called "military" pipa repertoire at its best. It was inspired by the struggle between the two "battling kingdoms", Chu and Han, and depicts the latter's final victory. A wide variety of techniques is used to evoke the armies pereparing, arms clashing, horses riding, violent hand-to-hand fights, defeat, and victory. beyond mere descriptive music, there is a two-way communication between sound and meaning, music and noise, technique and expressive power. Wang Weiping plays according to the master Liu Dehai's score, but she has entirely revised the intention, expression, nuances and contrasts.


6. Chu ge (Song of Chu Kingdom) Σ “ q

by Chen Zhong 陳重, globular flute xun 瑜, Yang Lining 楊麗寧, zheng 筝 zither

This is one of the pieces which best brings out the nostalgic sound ot the ocarina. This arrangement by Chen Zhong and Du Ciwen is taken from the sixth section of the famous suite for the lute "Ba wang xie jia" (The King of Chu Takes off his Armor).

John Thompson, Introduction to Zheyin Shizi Qinpu

In qiliang (cold; in misery) mode most pieces have themes related to death. The second and fifth strings are raised from standard tuning (making 5 7 1 2 4 5 6, transposed to 2 4 5 6 1 2 3); main cadences are on 2, secondarily on 6.

12. Qu Yuan Wen Du (#41; Qu Yuan Asks for Advice)

This title is found in 13 handbooks to 1802, all melodies apparently related. Wen du literally means to ask to be ferried over a body of water, but this has become a standard expression for asking for advice. Qu Yuan (332-295 BC; see below) was famous as an upright minister not properly appreciated. His suicide at the Miluo River is still commemorated in the Dragon Boat Festival of the 5th of the 5th lunar month.

The following is extracted from Giles, A Chinese Biographical Dictionary,

Qu Yuan… caring no longer to live… went out to the bank of the Miluo river. There he met a fisherman who accosted him, saying, "Are you not his Excellency the Minister? What has brought you to this pass?" "The world," replied Qu Yuan, "is foul, and I alone am clean. There they are all drunk, while I alone am sober. So I am dismissed." "Ah!" said the fisherman, "the true sage does not quarrel with his environment, but adapts himself to it. If, as you say, the world is foul, why not leap into the tide and make it clean? If all men are drunk, why not drink with them and teach them to avoid excess?" After some further colloquy, the fisherman rowed away; and Qu Yuan, clasping a large stone in his arms, plunged into the river and was seen no more…"

Zheyin Shizi Qinpu makes no attribution; Zha Fuxi says it has Song dynasty folk origins. Here is the original preface:

The Rare-Sounds Immortal says, as for this melody, it is not known where it originated. It is not in the Royal Ancestor's Handbook. It is thought that while the sage (Qu Yuan) was exiled to the barbarous Southern region, not knowing where to go, he asked a fisherman to take him (across the river), and so this was created.

Section sub-titles are:

1. Expelled to the barbarous South
2. The wilderness ferry is a dangerous obstruction
3. The old fisherman asks his name
4. (Qu Yuan) reports his bitterness
5. A lonely person in exile
6. The gentleman's grief extends 10,000 miles (; as he worries about his king)
7. (Sounds of) the delicate Canglang river
8. The ever-changing situation
Scores

Musical exemple 1 Chu ge qin (Shenqi mi pu / Picard)
Musical exemple 2 Chu ge qin (Xie Lin / Picard)

F. Picard

septembre 8, 2009
Song of Chu Kingdom 楚歌

Chen Zhong, Du Ciwen, 1986

Musical exemple 3 Chu ge xun (Chen Zhong - Du Ciwen)
Musical exemple 4 Shimian chuida (Ju Shilin / Shen Haochu / Li Tingsong)
Musical exemple 5 Shimian chuida Ju/Dafan'er (Ju Shilin / Sunan shifan luogu qu #55)