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## CHINESE NATIONAL TRADITIONS IN THE MUSICAL POETRY OF THE PIANO CONCERT "THE FOUR SPIRITS" BY CHEN YI

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### КИТАЙСЬКІ НАЦІОНАЛЬНІ ТРАДИЦІЇ В МУЗИЧНІЙ ПОЕТИЦІ ФОРТЕПІАННОГО КОНЦЕРТУ «ЧОТИРИ ДУХИ» ЧЕНЬ Ї

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Жанр фортепіанного концерту посідає одне з чільних місць у творчості сучасних китайських композиторів. Інтерес до нього зумовлений: інтеграцією китайської культури у західний музичний світ, засвоєнням жанрової системи європейської музики, усвідомленням універсальності фортепіано як провідного музичного інструмента, поступовим опануванням його музично-технологічних і виражальних засобів у композиторській і виконавській площинах, а також можливістю адаптації національного музичного матеріалу і створенням самобутньої національної фортепіанної музичної культури.

Питання розвитку жанру фортепіанного концерту у музичній культурі сучасного Китаю висвітлюються переважно китайськими дослідниками. І хоча вже зроблено чимало, але багато творів, написаних протягом останніх років, лишаються недослідженими. Одним з них є фортепіанний концерт «Чотири духи» відомої сучасної китайсько-американської композиторки Чень Ї (нар. 1953). Концерт був написаний у 2016 році, світова прем'єра відбулася 18 листопада 2016 р. в Пекіні. Виконавці – Китайський філармонічний оркестр, диригент Юн Лонг, солістка Клара Янг, прем'єра у США відбулася 8 грудня 2016 р.

Метою статті  $\epsilon$  визначення впливу давніх національних вірувань на музичну поетику сучасного китайського фортепіанного концерту.

Фортепіанний концерт «Чотири духи» є прикладом тенденції поєднання загальноєвропейського та національного, з переважанням національного. У концерті це виявляється на змістовному рівні, через образну систему

китайської міфології, а також через музичну мову, шляхом стилізації та цитування народних мелодій, поширених у різних регіонах Китаю.

Основний виклад матеріалу. Чотири духи  $\varepsilon$  основою китайської міфології. У прадавніх китайських легендах та уявленнях вони представляли чотири священні тварини: синій дракон на сході, чорний хуанву (поєднання черепахи і змії) на півночі, білий тигр на заході і червоний фенікс на півдні. Зображення цих тварини надихнули композиторку на створення чотиричастинного фортепіанного концерту, у кожній з частин якого відтворюється уява про ту чи іншу символічну істоту.

У лірично-енергійній музиці першої частини концерту стилізовані китайські народні пісні з Центрального Китаю. Таємничий настрій та образність другої частини відтворені сонористичним звукописом. Драматичні образи третьої створюються зіткненнями регістрів у партії фортепіано, що підсилено оркестровкою. Ця стрімка частина виступає зв'язкою до фіналу. Четверта частина є жвавою і надзвичайно енергійною, її тематичний матеріал запозичений з народної мелодії Південного Китаю. У всіх частинах фортепіано та оркестр перетворюються на органічне ціле, символізуючи національний дух китайської культури.

*Ключові слова*: фортепіанний концерт, китайська міфологія, чотири духи, звуковий образ, Чень Ї.

## КИТАЙСКИЕ НАЦИОНАЛЬНЫЕ ТРАДИЦИИ В МУЗЫКАЛЬНОЙ ПОЭТИКЕ ФОРТЕПИАННОГО КОНЦЕРТА «ЧЕТЫРЕ ДУХА» ЧЕНЬ И

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Жанр фортепианного концерта занимает одно из важнейших мест творчестве современных китайских композиторов. Это обусловлено интеграцией китайской культуры в западный музыкальный мир, осознанием универсальности фортепиано для адаптации национального музыкального материала. В статье впервые анализируется одно из недавно созданных призведений современного китайско-американского композитора Чень И – фортепианный концерт «Четыре духа» (2016). Цель статьи – определить влияние древней китайской мифологии музыкальную на фортепианного концерта «Четыре духа», написанного Чень И. Методология исследования предполагает применение методики музыкально-теоретического анализа произведения для изучения его музыкальной драматургии и программного содержания.

Анализированный концерт органчески соединяет общеевропейские и национальные черты, когда национальное доминирует над европейским. В концерте это прявляется на содержательном уровне, через образы китайской мифологии, а также в музыкальном языке, путем стилизации и цитирования народных мелодий, распространенных в различных регионах Китая. Обращаясь к основам китайской мифологии, Чень И в четырехчастном цикле сюитного типа воссоздает представление о четырех священных животных, символов китайской культуры: дракона, хуанву, тигра и феникса.

В лирико-энергичной музыке первой части концерта композитор стилизирует китайские народные песни из Центрального Китая. Таинственное настроение и образность второй части воспроизведены сонористическим звучанием оркестра. Драматические образы третьей части, являющейся связкой к финалу, возникают путем столкновения регистров фортепиано, подчеркнутых средствами оркестровки. Четвертая часть является быстрой и энергичной, ее тематический материал основан на народной мелодии Южного Китая. Во всех частях фортепиано и оркестр превращаются в органичную целостность, символизируя дух китайской культуры. Выводы. Уникальные национальные традиции, в частности древняя мифология китайского народа, послужили источником оригинальных музыкальных идей и их самобытного воплощения в творчестве современных китайских композиторов.

*Ключевые слова*: фортепианный концерт, китайская мифология, четыре духа, звуковой образ, Чень И.

# EFFECT OF NATIONAL TRADITIONS ON THE CONTENT AND STRUCTURE OF THE PIANO CONCERT "THE FOUR SPIRITS" BY CHEN YI

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Genre of the piano concert holds a prominent place in the works of contemporary Chinese composers. The interest is due to the integration of Chinese culture into the Western music world, the awareness of piano versatility for national musical material adaptation. Article analyses *for the first time* one of the most recently written works of the contemporary Chinese-American composer Chen Yi – the piano concert "The Four Spirits" (2016). The *purpose* of the article is to determine the effect of ancient Chinese mythology on the content and structure of the piano concert "The Four Spirits", written by Chen Yi. The *methodology* uses musical and theoretical analysis method to study work's musical drama and program basis.

The concert analysed combines organically pan-European and national features, when the national dominates over the European. This is manifested in the concert at the content level, through Chinese mythology images, as well as in the musical language, by stylizing and quoting folk melodies common in various regions of China. Referring to the basics of Chinese mythology, Chen Yi reproduces in the 4-part cycle of the suite type the imagination of four sacred animals, symbols of Chinese culture: dragon, xuanwu (a combination of turtle and snake), tiger and phoenix.

The composer stylizes in the lyrical and energetic music of the first part of the concert the Chinese folk songs from Central China. Mysterious mood and imagery of the second part are reproduced by the sonorous orchestral recording and spatial layers in the piano-solo part. Dramatic images of the third part, which is a link to the final, arise due to collisions of piano registers emphasized by means of orchestration. The fourth part is lively and energetic; the thematic material is borrowed from the folk melody of Southern China. The piano and orchestra are transformed in each part into an organic whole, symbolizing the spirit of Chinese culture. *Conclusion*. The unique national traditions, in particular the ancient mythology of the Chinese people, became the source of the original musical ideas and their original embodiment by the modern Chinese composers.

Key words: piano concert, Chinese mythology, four spirits, sound image, Chen Yi.

Introduction. The piano concert genre holds one of the top places in the contemporary Chinese composers work. Interest in this genre is due to several factors. First of all, it is introduction of the Chinese culture to the Western music world, the assimilation of the European music genre system, the awareness of piano universality as a leading musical instrument, the gradual mastering of its technological and expressive capabilities in the composer's and performing planes, as well as the possibilities of adapting national musical material and, consequently, developing the national piano music culture.

There are three main trends of combining general European and national in the piano concertos written by Chinese composers:

- 1) emphasis on European features it is represented in the reproduction of the traditional structure of the concert cycle, the preponderance of contemporary musical language and linguistic effects of works of the leading European composers of XX century;
- 2) emphasis on national features it is represented in the embodiment of the rhythm-intonational and modal specifics of Chinese national music, in the reproduction of timbre sounding of folk instruments and their playing techniques, as well as in the manifestations of ideological concepts of Eastern philosophy, primarily because of the programming phenomenon;
- 3) synthesis of the European and national features it is represented in the presence and organic unity of both components, with the domination of a component, which adds to the European genre of national flair.

The issue of the piano concert genre development in the musical culture of modern China and the works of contemporary Chinese composers are more closely covered in the studies of Chinese authors. Although much work has already been done, a considerable amount of works remains left unread, in particular those written in recent years.

We select one of these works for analysis in our article. This is a piano concert "The Four Spirits" by the well-known contemporary Chinese composer Chen Yi (born 1953). The concert was written in 2016, the world premiere was held on 18 November 2016 in Beijing, performers – the Chinese Philharmonic Orchestra, conductor Yong Long, soloist Clara Yang; USA premiere took place on 8 December 2016 (Chen Yi., 2016, p. 2–3, p.165).

**The purpose** of the article is to determine the effect of ancient national beliefs on the content and structure of the contemporary piano concert "Four Spirits" written by Chinese composer Chen Yi. The **methodology** uses musical and theoretical analysis method to study work's musical drama and program basis.

Results. Chen Yi was born in Guangzhou in the musical family; she began to learn playing violin and piano back in childhood. In 1966, as a result of the cultural revolution, the family was expelled for forced labour. In 1970, Chen Yi returned to Guangzhou and worked within a period of 1970 –1978 as a concertmaster in an opera band. In 1986, she graduated from the Beijing Conservatory and moved to the United States, where she studied composition at Columbia University and received her Doctorate Degree. Since 2006, she lives in Kansas City and teaches music and dance at the Conservatory, she is a visiting professor at the universities of the United States and China. In 1991, she founded a bilingual magazine – news-bulletin *Music from China*, and currently, she is one of its co-publishers (Chen Yi. URL: https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Чэнь\_И\_(skripachka), Chen Yi. URL: http://composers21.com/compdocs/chenyi.htm).

Chen Yi wrote many works in the symphony and chamber and instrumental music in various genres (symphonies, solo instrumental concerts, play cycles, etc.). Despite her permanent residence in the United States, she often visits China; she is interested in national culture, writes music for traditional Chinese instruments, and includes songs from Chinese poets (Lao Tzu, Lee Bo, Du Fou, Van Wei, etc.) in her choir and chamber vocal works (Chen Yi. URL: http://composers21.com/compdocs/chenyi.htm).

"The Four Spirits" Piano Concert is an example of a second trend to combine pan-European and national, when the national predominates over the European one. The concert represents it at the content level, through the attraction of the Chinese mythology images, and in musical language by stylizing and quoting folk melodies common in various regions of China.

Images of the four spirits constitute the basis of Chinese mythology. They represented four sacred animals in the ancient Chinese legends and representations: a blue dragon in the East, a black xuanwu (a combination of turtle and snake) in the North, a white tiger in the West and a red phoenix in the South. The images of these

animals inspired the composer to create a four-part piano concert, each part of which reproduces the imagination of a particular symbolic animal.

The Chinese folk songs from the central part of China are stylized in the lyrical and energetic music of the first part of the concert. Mysterious mood and figurativeness of the second part are reproduced with the dormant sound and sound-spatial stratifications in the piano-solo part. Dramatic images of the third part are created through collisions of registers in the piano part, which are amplified by orchestral means. This quick short part serves as a link to the finals. The fourth part is fast, lively and extremely energetic; its thematic material adapted from the folk song of the Southern China. In each of the parts, the piano and orchestra transform into an organic whole, symbolizing the national spirit of the Chinese culture.

With regard to the concert parts analysis, it should be noted that it follows with its external parameters the signs of cyclicity with a contrasting comparison of parts that are typical of the European model genre of solo instrumental concert, sonatas and symphonies. However, the content of each part and the principles of cycling are so original that they have nothing to do with the genre's European model.

The first part's music, which has an original program title of "The Blue Dragon in the East", the image of the Dragon is embodied as one of the main characters of ancient Chinese mythology (Chen Yi. (2016) P. 1654). This image personified in the main theme of the part, which is repeatedly performed in both soloist and orchestra parts, as well as reproduced in the elevated music scale of the entire part.

The main theme presented in the piano solo part for the first time. It sounds powerfully and heroic, covering the entire audio space. The intonational basis of this topic is a multi-directional movement based on the sounds of pentatonic, with the formation of a broken melodic line (measures 2-3). The melody terseness is emphasised by uneven metric pulsations (2/4 - 3/4 - 2/4 - 4/4) and displacement of shock accents due to the breakage of the rhythmical values of the measure's thesis and rhythm syncopation, creating a sense of freedom and spontaneous improvisation. The extremely high register of the theme presentation in endless quarto-quintet chords makes it impossible to determine the mode basis, although the tone is determined quite clearly - it is a sunny, radiant, beaming C-dur. Dynamic and dashed-articulatory accentuation of each sound of the theme create the effect of sonority, creativity, staying above the world of all living things. The theme sounds on the background of a multi-voiced cluster chord taken at the lowest piano tones and held with the pedal (measure 1). Contrast matching of registers is filled with technical passages through the entire piano board from the lowest tones (measure 4). All components of the theme characterize in someway the image of the Dragon, its presence on earth and in the sky, and even reflect movements during flights over the earth.

In soloist part the intonation mini-blocks of the theme are held once more, and now to the final arpeggio, the loud trill is added at c4 sound and the next, third holding of the entire material (A) begins together with it, during which the intonational core of the theme is entrusted first to the orchestra instruments and

sounds in the party of the trumpet, the timbre of which is associated with brilliance and grandeur, and passages through the entire board remain with the piano part. The theme, distributed between the soloist and the orchestra, expands in ascending chromatic motion with small rhythmic durations. This movement is directed to the fourth octave, creating a figurative and illustrative effect of the dramatic Dragon removal into the heavenly heights.

The soloist part deprived of the intonational core becomes a bearer of brilliant virtuosity, it dominates over all orchestra instruments, as the Dragon dominates over people, and the thematic elements of the theme sound not consistently, but simultaneously. The first element becomes warmer and melodious due to the alignment of the rhythm, increased durations, articulation change, and applying timbre of the high strins, and the second element expands to several cycles and remains unchanged.

Subsequently, this theme undergoes through holding throughout the entire part, receiving different sounds – features of scherzo, march, etc.), it is the main content of the music. The second virtuoso-passage element begins to distinguish itself from this theme and starts its independent existence. It is entrusted to the soloist only, and its loud passages stand out temporally in the middle of the chamber music of the orchestra and orchestral tutti.

The initial theme becomes the intonational basis for other thematic formations that arise in this part, underlying the figurative world of music with additional emotional shades. This is the marching-anthem theme (B), based on both intonation elements of the original theme, presented in other combinations. The core of the theme seems to be broken in half before the interruption of the second passage element. This theme holding is also entrusted to the soloist, and the background includes pedal sounds in the parts of high strings and brass bands (violin, horn). The marching features of the theme are amplified in the process of presentation, when the rhythmic figures with dashed rhythm and repetition of march rhythmic intonations are added to the main intonation core.

The appearance of another intonation variant of the original theme (C) in the part of first and second violins is not initially perceived as an important milestone in the formation of the part's form. The link to the original theme is somewhat veiled here, since the non- semitonal motifs are presented in the opposite direction. However, it is perceived as one of the following variants of the original theme. Only later, when this theme starts developing, it becomes apparent that it is completely independent. Rapid emotional growth leads to the fact that the development of the theme reaches a bright culmination, and the soloist and orchestra appear in full splendor.

A sudden emotional and dynamic breakthrough, with the unmistakable presentation of the inverted version of the theme with high strings and wooden wind instruments accompanied by the choral sound of brass bands (measure 139), as well as the subsequent return to the original theme in the soloist's part (measure 148)

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finally makes it possible to understand, how different these two themes are regardless of the intonational basis commonality.

The reprise performance, among which there is no march version of the theme, is added with two slow solo – in the soloist's part and the first violin. They are the stylized images of Chinese songs and symbolize the image of the country that has created a distinctive philosophy and original musical culture.

In general, the first part has the signs of monotheism, and the form combines features of tripartite with the synonymy elements. The initial theme may serve as the main part, the scherzzo theme –connecting theme, the march theme – lateral part. Part development is based on the reverse variant of the theme, reprise includes the main and connecting themes, which are accompanied by song themes-solo. The latter functions as codes.

The second part "The Black Xuanwu in the North" (Black Turtle in the North), is an embodiment of the Black Turtle's image. Music transmits the greatness of this creature, which in Chinese mythology represents the celestial warrior and is usually depicted with a snake on the armor, and in the life philosophy it is known as an animal symbolizing longevity. The second part written at a slow pace, the music has many ostentatious motive repetitions, and melodic phrases sometimes seem awkward, as if simulating the movements of the turtle in nature. In general, the music part creates a mysterious impression, as the Black Turtle is a guide to the unidentified Land of the Dead.

The music of this part reflects one of the main principles of the Chinese people national philosophy, which involves particular aestheticism and sophisticated beauty of the main ideas and images.

There are two musical themes at the heart of the part forming two separate sections. The first one represented in the soloist part. It is based on the idea of allness, and deprived of melody features, it combines all the piano board registers from the lowest to the highest one, and sound-spatial comparisons and background layers arise instead of the integral melodic line. The textual transparency of the sonorist soundtrack becomes even more pronounced in the presentation of the second theme (measure 38). This theme has a motivated instinct, and the piano dominance leads to the almost complete removal of the orchestral instrumentation, the accompanying function of which is taken by the soloist. Returning to the first theme at the end of the part (D) provides a form of reciprocal tripartite, and texture-dynamic growth – signs of dynamization of the reprise section.

The third part "The White Tiger in the West", is the most dramatic of all parts of the concert. It reproduces the image of the White Tiger – the king of all animals and the patron saint of the West, where the Country of the Dead is located. The music embodied the impulsiveness and courage of this creature, the swiftness of its movements and the horror it brings with its appearance on people.

The music of the part is mono-effective. It starts at a high point of emotional stress, and this condition is maintained from start to finish, increasing with the last measures. An important role in the reproduction of this state is played by the ostinato

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repetition of constructions in the line of the lowest bass voice (like basso-ostinato) and the static, obsessive repetition of motifs in melody.

The music reproduces the behavioural features of the Tiger as a natural and mythological creature. Piano accented interpretation in the main theme of the part transmits the mighty tiger movement, cluster chords between the performances of the theme reproduce its jumps, and glissando sounds in parts of brass bands (measures 79-90) depict the threatening squeal of the animal.

The main theme is based on terse rhythm intonation, however, this simplicity is not an expression of primitiveness – it is associated with the accented interpretation of the piano and ostentatious repetition. The required sound and background effects when combined with high and bass voices emerge through matching of the extreme, boundary registers, *ff* dynamics and marked articulation (*marcato*).

During several mid-holdings (measures 46-62), a high melodious voice moves downward, into contraoctave. This gives the theme a more threatening sound, but does not change the main essence of the image, since the ostinato movement does not stop.

When returning the theme to the third octave register ( $\mathbf{C}$ ), it is caught by the orchestra instruments – only strings group at first (measures 75-90), then strings and brass bands (horns and pipes, measures 91–98), performing it together with the soloist. At the end of the part, when the wave of emotional growth captures the entire sound space (measures 99–106), the theme is removed from the piano and is presented by all orchestra instruments, while the soloist plays the chords reproducing the jumps of the Tiger.

In the same section, when returning the theme (C), bass-ostinato counterpoint undergoes some intonational changes. However, it continues to transmit the energy of the continuous motion, and when the theme is removed from the soloist's part, this voice is entrusted to the bass instruments of the orchestra (cello, double bass, fagott).

The single wave of emotional growth leads to the highest degree of tension in the last measure and the breakdown of sound on the crest of culmination.

The fourth part "The Red Phoenix in the South" reproduces the image of a beautiful bird freely flying over the earth. The image of a Bird is personalized in the extremely moving theme of the soloist, based on passage technique, simulating free movement during the flight. The image of the Earth is reproduced in a songful melody theme, which is based on a wide range of directional jumps and presented with sounds of greater rhythmic duration. This theme is attached to the theme of the Bird, it is performed by one of the orchestra instruments (oboe-solo, measures 8–12). Consequently, the traditional songful Chinese melody interacts organically with the material written in modern musical language, forming poly-stylistic and polynomial stratifications.

The theme of the Bird in its original form, as a reproduction of the image of a flight, returns twice more, and each time it appears as the culmination of the next wave of figurative and emotional growth. Extremely dynamic musical presentation in both waves, the sublime and dramatic sound of the soloist and the orchestra symbolizes the element of Fire, the representative of which is the Red Bird.

The first such wave (A) is characterized by melodic lines dissociation, which is entrusted to orchestra instruments, constant connections and withdrawals of voices. It creates the impression of individual outbreaks of flames over which the Bird flies (measures 64–66, 68–71). The second wave (B) is an obvious demonstration of how the fire grows, as if from a tiny sprout (measures 79–83, soloist's part) to a grandiose pattern of bright blinding fire light (C). The appearance of the Bird theme (measures 145–148, 152–155) in the piano part causes the true apotheosis of the orchestra's sound in *tutti*, which is perceived as a grand code throughout the concert, before the final chord of which the rapid passage of Bird theme appears again (measures 177–178).

Conclusion. "The Four Spirits" (2016) — piano concert by the famous contemporary Chinese-American composer Chen Yi, is an example of an influence on the contemporary musical composition concept of ancient national beliefs that have been formed beyond the musical traditions and belong to the socio-cultural sphere, which includes ancient ritual, mythology, religion, philosophy and literature. Traditional national symbols of Chinese mythology are reinterpreted throughout the concert in terms of contemporary art attitudes and acquire original embodiment in the figurative and dramatic conception of a large cyclic canvas. The emergence of a specifying program title for the entire concert and its individual parts becomes an additional key to content understanding, which is disclosed in an associative way, through the perception of a particular mythologized being.

The musical poetry of the concert parts combine traditional pentatonic, characteristic of Chinese folk songs and instrumental works of oral tradition, with modern writing principles and methods of composition construction. Folk song material, intonationally styled on the basis of national modal structures, is introduced in an extra-national context, resulting in poly-modal mappings, the interaction of diatonicism and chromaticism, the appearance of quarter-tone sounds, etc. Different types of textures are also styled in a modern manner: this is heterophony of variational complications and simplifications, kluster accordion, imitational sub-vocalism, etc., providing vertical specific qualities, and sounding with special phonism. Piano part accented-virtuoso interpretation becomes of a great significance and the opposition of soloist to the sound of the orchestra, as well as soloist and orchestra transformation into an organic whole on the basis of these oppositions.

Despite the fact that Chen Yi addresses to four-part cycle and the European type, the content and structure of each concert part, as well as cycle in general, is influenced by traditional Chinese ideas and views related to ancient religion, philosophy and culture. Each part is a reflection of the symbolic being image, and the musical material reproduces its characteristic external features – stature, manner to move, type of behaviour, voice, as well as the element represented by each creature. The shape of each part is made up of a sequence of the material presentation characterizing its hero.

## CHINESE NATIONAL TRADITIONS IN THE MUSICAL POETRY OF THE PIANO CONCERT "THE FOUR SPIRITS" BY CHEN YI

Consequently, the unique national traditions, in particular the ancient mythology of the Chinese people, became the source of the original musical ideas and their original embodiment by the modern Chinese composers.

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