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Dialectical Fusionism and Hong Kong Contemporary Music: A Study of Chan Wing-Wah's Symphonies 5, 7, and 8

Fusionismo dialético e música contemporânea de Hong Kong: um estudo das sinfonias 5, 7 e 8 de Chan Wing-Wah

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Abstract: Hong Kong, often hailed as "Asia's World City," has long been a vibrant cultural crossroad between Eastern and Western influences. This article delves into the unique international character and individuality inherent in Hong Kong's musical landscape, with a specific focus on the compositions of Chan Wing-Wah—a prominent pioneer in the development of contemporary "art" music in the city. Our investigation navigates the aesthetic concept of "dialectical fusionism" within Chan's musical creations, offering close readings of three symphonies: "Three Kingdoms" (1995), "The Great Wall" (2005), and "This Boundless Land" (2006). By charting the contextual evolution of Hong Kong's musical style, this research provides references for contemporary Hong Kong music and its scholarly exploration, shedding light on the city's distinctive artistic identity.

Keywords: East-West influences, cultural fusion, contemporary music, music analysis, musical identity.

Resumo: Hong Kong, muitas vezes aclamada como "a Cidade Mundial da Ásia", tem sido, desde há muito tempo, uma vibrante

encruzilhada cultural entre as influências orientais e ocidentais. Este artigo investiga o carácter internacional único e a individualidade inerente ao panorama musical de Hong Kong, com um foco específico nas composições de Chan Wing-Wah – um pioneiro proeminente no desenvolvimento da música "artística" contemporânea na cidade. A nossa investigação navega pelo conceito estético de "fusionismo dialético" nas criações musicais de Chan, oferecendo leituras atentas de três sinfonias: "Três Reinos" (1995), "A Grande Muralha" (2005) e "Esta Terra Ilimitada" (2006). Ao traçar a evolução contextual do estilo musical de Hong Kong, esta investigação fornece referências para a música contemporânea de Hong Kong e a sua exploração académica, lançando luz sobre a identidade artística distintiva da cidade.

Palavras-chave: Influências Leste-Oeste, fusão cultural, música contemporânea, análise musical, identidade musical.

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1. Introduction

The 1950s marked a pivotal juncture for Hong Kong as it underwent a significant transformation, shifting its economic focus from trading to export industrialization (Liang, 1999, p. 11) (Kan, 2007, p. 30). This shift played a crucial role not only in facilitating the rapid expansion of Hong Kong's economy but also in bolstering the city's global connectivity, shaping it into what is now regarded as a prestigious international financial center, or "Asia's World City" (Gang, 2001). Hong Kong, whose unique social, economic, political, and cultural backdrops have resulted in its relatively stagnant development during the early 20th century, has then become a major meeting point between the East and the West (Liu, 2014, p. Ⅸ) (Zhu, 1999, p. 10).

This transformation heralds an important phase of the development of Hong Kong music, marked by local musicians' traveling and studies in Europe and the United States on the one hand, and the arrival of international musicians to the city on the other hand[1]. The distinctive multicultural environment within this metropolis has catalyzed a revolution in local musical styles, making this music notoriously difficult to define (You, 1990, p. 38) (Liang, 1999, p. Ⅳ). Any number of Hong Kong composers have transcended the narrow cultural affiliations of the previous time and embraced a myriad of creative approaches that reflect their diverse backgrounds derived from the newly cultivated, multicultural milieu. Hong Kong, given its long history of East-West exchanges, encourages local composers to bring together cultural elements and musical styles from abroad (an illustrative example is Richard Tsang's (1952-) composition *Spiritual Realm* (1979), which fuses dissonant modern Western sounds with essential elements of traditional Chinese melodies through improvisation, utilizing shared traits between these two musics to portray the concept

1 Hong Kong musicians who have studied abroad include: Doming Lam (林乐培, b. 1926), who began his studies in Canada in 1954 and furthered his education at the University of Southern California in the United States in 1960; Chen Jianhua (陈健华, b. 1934), who pursued studies in Europe in 1957; and Ye Huikang (叶惠康, b. 1930), who ventured to the United States twice, in 1968 and 1979, accomplishing his master's and doctoral degrees. International musicians coming to Hong Kong are: Harry Ore (夏里柯, 1885-1972), David Gwilt (纪大卫, 1932-), Ma Sicong (马思聪, 1912-1987), Lin Shengxi (林声翕, 1914-1991), Huang Youdi (黄友棣, 1911-2010), and Shi Jinbo (施金波, 1933-).

of "spirituality" (灵性) from Chinese literature and art).[2] Between the 1950s and 70s, more importantly, a significant emphasis was placed on the coexistence of multilingualism and culture encompassing Cantonese, Mandarin, and English, intermingled with diverse musical genres, including Cantonese opera, folk music, contemporary music, and pop music, in Hong Kong. This environment enabled Hong Kong composers to cultivate unique, "East-meets-West" musical aesthetics and styles.

Chan Wing-Wah is one of the first-generation Hong Kong composers to have studied abroad, at the University of Toronto for his master's (1981) and doctorate (1985), after having received his Bachelor of Art in Music from the Chinese University of Hong Kong (the first tertiary institution in Hong Kong, founded in 1963). Following his return to Hong Kong in 1985, Chan swiftly established himself as a distinguished conductor and composer, leaving an indelible mark on the history of contemporary Hong Kong music with his extensive oeuvre of over two hundred orchestral works (including ten symphonies, as well as numerous chamber works, choral music, and songs for children). The music critic Zhou Fan-fu (Zhou, 2003, p. 14) states that

> The main reason why Chan Wing-Wah was awarded the 1991 Hong Kong Composer of the Year Award was not only because his compositional techniques had been recognized by his peers, but also because his works had created his own compositional voice that reflected the spirit of Hong Kong, a cosmopolitan metropolis. He is the representative of Hong Kong music.

Throughout his illustrious 40-year career in music creation, Chan has traversed distinct compositional phases, namely "Exploration," "Return," and "Fusion," as the composer himself has identified.[3] The "Exploration" period (1979-85) features untitled orchestral music composed during the composer's student period, such as his symphonies nos. 1 (1979), 2

2 Zhu (2020, 166) provides a more in-depth discussion of Tsang's *Spiritual Realm*.
3 Interview with Chan Wing-Wah at the School of Music, Chinese University of Hong Kong (Shenzhen), June 2022.

(1981), and 3 (1985). The "Return" period (1992-6) marks the composer's homecoming to China, in which he embarked on multiple endeavors to incorporate Chinese elements into his compositions. Notable works from this phase include symphonies No. 4, "Ode to Praise" (1992), 5, "The Three Kingdoms" (1995), and 6, "Reunification" (1996). In the "Fusion" period (2005 to the present), the composer wrote symphonies nos. 7, "The Great Wall" (2005), 8, "This Boundless Land" (2006), 9 "Compassion and Cosmos" (2019), and 10, "The Great City" (2019). It is in this third phase that a novel paradigm of synthesizing Eastern and Western influences is cultivated, concomitant with a profound humanistic perspective characterized by principles of global peace, benevolence, and unity.

In this article, we aim to shed light on the distinctive musical style that has emerged in Hong Kong since 2004, offering a contextual foundation for the research and understanding of the multiculturism of contemporary Hong Kong music. In doing so, this article delves into Chan's music through the concept of "dialectical fusionism," as we would like to call it. By dialectical fusionism, we refer to the composer's purposeful effort to transcend the dichotomies of "Chinese and Western," "tradition and modernity" within his musical concepts, encompassing comprehensiveness, the manifestation of conflicts and contradictions, multi-dimensionality, and historicity. This article offers close readings of Chan's symphonies nos. 5, 7, and 8—no. 5 was the beginning of Chan's orchestral works on Chinese themes, while nos. 7 and 8 serve as his inaugural foray into the field of large-scale Chinese orchestral. To provide a comprehensive background for Hong Kong's unique internationality and characteristics, it is crucial initially to trace the trajectory of its music history from the Early to late twentieth century.

2. The Internationality of Hong Kong's Music

Prior to the British occupation in 1841, Hong Kong was an integral part of Guangdong Province. During this time, fishing played a crucial role in the local economy, while folk music, particularly

Cantonese fishing songs, was cherished and passed down as part of the Lingnan cultural heritage. The musical traditions of pre-colonial Hong Kong draw upon this cultural heritage, exemplifying the "openness" and "inclusiveness" characteristic of Lingnan culture (Yang, 2022, p. 2).[4] Notably, the cultivation of *Pipa*-accompanied Cantonese songs and folk songs, the "rap music" in Cantonese opera and *Nanyin*, Cantonese and Chiu Chow instrumental music, as well as the "eight-tone classes" and "gong and drum cabinets" are prominent manifestations of this rich musical legacy (Gao, 2009, p. 3).

Since becoming a British colony in 1842, Hong Kong culture has undergone a protracted phase of transformation, a consequence of its integration with British cultural influences. During the early phase of British colonialism, the colonial government showed little interest in fostering a music scene among the Hong Kong Chinese population. Music education was largely neglected throughout the first half of the 20th century. This negligence is evident in the annual reports of the Director of Education covering the period from 1901 to 1940, which made no reference to musical activities and music classrooms (Zhu, 1999, p. 10). Only after the conclusion of World War II and Britain's resumption of control over Hong Kong, along with the reinstatement of the British educational system, did the formal provision of musical training in public schools begin to take shape. The government embarked on a modernized educational system that introduced systematic music lessons and textbooks, for example, the *Songbook for Primary School Children* (小学生歌集) published by the Hong Kong Government Printer (1968), the Huang Youdi (黄友棣) edition of *Forty Art Songs for Children* (儿童艺术歌*40* 首) in the 1950s, and *A Song to Sing* (1955) by London University Press. However, it was not until the 1960s, when the Hong Kong British government began to establish dedicated music education institutes, that the cultivation of local music professionals started to gain momentum, laying the foundation for the subsequent growth of Hong Kong's music scene.

4 The Lingnan region's distance from the political center of the country in history has contributed to an open and inclusive attitude towards overseas cultures, forming the characteristics of "openness" and "inclusiveness". See Yang (2022).

Contemporary Hong Kong music has experienced a gradual evolution since the late 19th century, gaining significant momentum during the mid-20th century—a period marked by the city's remarkable economic progress, ultimately leading to its acknowledgment as one of the "Four Little Dragons" of Asia. Noteworthy contributions to this development were made by composers from three distinct phrases, each employing unique methods to integrate Chinese and Western musical elements and traditions (Gao, 2009) (Zhu, 1999). During the first phase (the 1930s and the 40s), Hong Kong experienced a notable influx of international composers, including Lin Sheng-Xi (林声翕, 1914-91) and Huang Youdi (1912-2010), who relocated from Shanghai, drawn by Hong Kong's status as a stable and culturally free neutral territory in contrast to mainland China. Many of them had received composition training in "Chinese New Music"[5] at the Shanghai National Conservatory of Music (founded in 1927 and later renamed the Shanghai Conservatory of Music in 1956) (Liu, 2000, p. 7). Their musical contributions and pedagogical pursuits in Hong Kong played a pivotal role in establishing these particular techniques as a prominent component of the city's early compositional style. The musical landscape of this era was further shaped by the arrival of foreign musicians based in Shanghai, notably including Italian vocalist Elisio Gualdi (b. 1905), Lithuanian pianist Harry Ore (1885-1972), and Italian-Jewish violinist Arrigo Foa (1900-81), who served as the principal of the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra and the Sion-British Orchestra (predecessor of the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra). These foreign musicians brought with them systematic music education from abroad, and their presence greatly elevated the standard of music education in Hong Kong, nurturing a generation of exceptional musicians and composers, such as Chen Jianhua (陈健华 b.1934) and Choi Sown Le (蔡崇力 b.1951).

During the second phase (the 1950s and the '60s), Hong Kong's music scene underwent a transformative phase with the return of local composers who had pursued education abroad and the arrival

5 "Chinese New Music" refers to compositions created by composers who employ Chinese musical elements while adopting European compositional techniques, styles, genres, and "musical languages" prevalent during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

of those emigrating from mainland China following the country's reform and opening up. Despite the growing internationalization of Hong Kong, the absence of formal and professional higher music institutions led certain local composers, such as Doming Lam (林乐培) and Huang Yuyi (黄育義1924-2022), to opt for overseas studies. Upon their return to Hong Kong, they took up teaching positions at tertiary institutions while simultaneously pursuing their own compositional endeavors, incorporating modern Western musical techniques into their compositional practice. The establishment of the Hong Kong Music Institute in 1950 by Shao Guang further elevated music education in the city by recruiting musicians from mainland China, including Lin Sheng-Xi and Huang You-Di, who aided the progress of music education in Hong Kong and the cultivation of local music talents (Yao, 2010, p. 284). Moreover, mainland Chinese musicians, including Ma Sicong (马思聪), Li Ling (李凌), Xia Zhiqiu (夏之秋), also played a significant role in spreading mainland China's "nationalistic" and "popular" music culture to Hong Kong through teaching music theory, vocal music, violin, and other courses. During this period, the popularity of Western modern music and mainland Chinese music surged, occasionally even surpassing that of Cantonese music (Liang, 1999, p. 275). The encounter between the distinct creative concepts of Western-trained composers and mainland Chinese musicians led to a collision of Eastern and Western music, fostering a trend of diversified musical composition in Hong Kong. The outcome was a modern urban style characterized by an emphasis on individuality, modern harmonies, counterpoint, and orchestral effects.

The third phase (from the 1970s onwards) showcases a generation of composers trained in local tertiary institutions and those returning from overseas studies, including Luo Yonghui (罗永晖, b.1949), Richard Tsang (曾叶发, b.1952), and Chan Wing-Wah (陈永华, b.1954). This group of composers has emerged as the most active and representative in contemporary Hong Kong, dedicating themselves to creating music that fosters profound dialogues between Chinese and Western elements, alongside a diverse array

of musical cultures. Noteworthy examples of their work include Luo's orchestral composition "A Thousand Chapters of Sweep" (千章扫), the chamber music piece "Song of Heaven and Earth with Qin" (天地琴歌), and the opera *Dreams End in Red Plum* (梦终红梅), Tsang's chamber music piece "The Spirit World" (灵界) and the piano piece "Fantasy of the Bell" (钟之幻想), and Chan's symphonies. In these compositions, traditional Chinese music theory is artfully distilled and intertwines with modern Western compositional techniques, resulting in highly individual expressions (Lan, 2014, p. 34) (Zhu & Cai, 2020, p. 166). This groundbreaking endeavor has propelled the notion of multiculturalism to unprecedented heights in Hong Kong's music history.

The rapid progress of music is closely linked with the enhancement of infrastructure, which offers a range of avenues for music communication to flourish. Throughout the twentieth century, Hong Kong experienced a substantial increase in the construction of numerous musical theatres and music venues, such as Lee Theatre, Hong Kong Ko Shan Theatre, and Hong Kong Cultural Centre. In reference to this development, Nicholas James, the former general manager of the Hong Kong Arts Centre, states: "Back when the Festival (of Asian Arts) began [1976] we were still looked at as the cheap place with factories where broken toys come from. Hong Kong decided to go up-market and the arts were part of that" (Scott, 1985, pp. 49-51). These cultural venues have long been the vibrant hubs for the convergence and fusion of diverse cultures and music. A notable example among these is Lee Theatre, constructed in 1925 and situated in Causeway Bay. Stood as a pinnacle of performance spaces during that era, it has hosted numerous renowned international artists over time, including Deng Lijun (邓丽君), Tang Disheng (唐涤生), Andy William, and so on. As a significant cultural nexus, Lee Theatre also distinguishes itself architecturally for its remarkable integration of Chinese and Western elements: its exterior draws inspiration from late-nineteenth-century French and Italian-style opera houses, while the interior showcases intricate Chinese-style carved flowers and dragon sculptures (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Cantonese opera performance at the Hong Kong Lee Theatre in the 1920s

Source: Hong Kong Government Archives.

Subsequent to the success of Lee Theatre, several other theaters were constructed, including the State Theatre, Ko Shan Theatre, and Broadway Theatre—the latter being the first deluxe theater on the Kowloon side of Hong Kong after World War II. The most significant development of this trend, however, came after the foundation of the Hong Kong Cultural Center in 1989, with the inception of nearly ten concert halls outfitted with professional sound systems. This expansion was complemented by the establishment of concert halls within universities and diverse performance venues. This wide array of performing spaces, as musicologist Liu Ching-Chih points out, not only facilitates the performance of music works but also fosters international communication among composers, contributing to the development of musical multiculturalism in Hong Kong (Liu, 2010, p. 584) .

During the early twentieth century, Hong Kong was often derogatorily referred to as a "cultural desert"[6] due to various impediments that hindered the progress of literature and art. These obstacles were attributed to the laissez-faire approach of the local government between 1841 and 1941, as well as the disregard for

6 See Zhang's (2002 , 298) in-depth discussion of the static state of Hong Kong's cultural development during the first half of the 20th century.

music education in primary and secondary schools (Liang, 2002, p. 25). However, as the mid to late twentieth century unfolded, the increasing acknowledgment by the Hong Kong government and other sectors of the importance of arts sparked a transformative shift from a cultural "desert" into an "oasis." Leveraging its status as an international free port, Hong Kong has emerged as a "window to the world," [7]offering a diverse and inclusive environment with a rapidly growing array of cultural facilities, bolstered by the city's economic prosperity. This unique setting provides musicians with opportunities to engage in artistic dialogues.

The development of Hong Kong music has been shaped by the cosmopolitan nature of the city, reflecting attributes of diversity, openness, and fusion. The rich tapestry of music cultures and ideas from various backgrounds has served as a well of inspiration and creative resources for local musicians and composers. The result is a dynamic musical landscape that embraces an eclectic fusion of diverse cultures, epitomizing the benefits that stem from a cosmopolitan metropolis nurtured within a multicultural ambiance.

3. Chan Wing-Wah's dialectical fusionism: a combination of tradition and modernity

To exhibit a diverse musical style that captures the unique characteristics of the cosmopolitan metropolis, many Hong Kong composers integrate traditional Chinese music elements with modern composition techniques they have acquired from Western music (Liu, 2014, p. 424). Chan's entire career as a composer, too, has been guided by a similar pursuit, as reflected in his striving to attain an "integration of tradition and modernity."

Chan's musical journey began with his participation in a Catholic church choir during his high school years, which marked his initial exposure to Western religious music. In 1975, he matriculated into the Department of Music at the Chinese University of Hong Kong,

7 The concept of positioning Hong Kong as Asia's "window to the world" was initially introduced by Chief Executive Mr. Tung Chee Hwa in his 1999 Policy Address.

where he pursued a major in composition. During his third year, he began to study composition under David Gwilt, while concurrently assuming the role of conductor for the student choir. The distinctive curriculum of the Chinese University of Hong Kong allowed him to deepen his understanding of traditional Chinese music. Within this curriculum, students focusing on Western music were required to complete the module "History of Chinese Music", while those specializing in Western music performance were mandated to learn a Chinese musical instrument. Chan's study thus encompassed the exploration of composition techniques from modern Western music as well as traditional Chinese music.

In an interview, Chan also underscored the profound influence of his study of ancient Chinese literature and poetry during his doctoral studies at the University of Toronto, which left a lasting impact on his compositional approaches:

> Throughout my Doctorate study, I kept reading and studying Chinese literature and poetry. In the process of creating my graduation project Symphony No.3 For Double Orchestra (1985), I drew heavily on ancient music literature such as The Book of Rites and the Han dynasty's four-tone scales, "*Yin Shang Ke Yu, Qing Jue Liu Zhi*" (引商克羽，清角流徵). I also traveled to Beijing to consult with Wu Jing-Lue, Lan Yu-Song, and other intellectuals. In terms of composition, I began to think deeply about the characteristics and connotative significance of Chinese music. [8]

Chan's Symphony No. 3, influenced by the renowned German composer Hans Werner Henze, showcases a unique "double orchestra" arrangement, positioning two orchestras on the left and right sides of the stage (Figure 4). Within this "Western" Gregorian-like antiphonal structure reminiscent of the Baroque period, Chan weaves in his astute comprehension of Chinese literature. Notably, in the third movement of the Symphony, he adeptly translates the essence of the Chinese philosophy of "harmonious combination

8 Interview with Chan (June 2022).

of eight sounds" (八音克谐) [9]into musical expression, accomplished through diverse instruments playing the same tone across various octaves and rhythms to create a state of harmonious coexistence.

Chan's dialectical mode of composition, characterized by the integration of tradition and modernity, aligns closely with his multicultural background and experiences. This distinctive blend distinguishes his music from both Western and traditional Chinese styles, fostering a unique East-West dialogue. In the subsequent sections, we will delve into Chan's symphonies nos. 5, 7, and 8 as exemplars to examine how his dialectical fusionism is manifested within his musical compositions.

3.1 Symphony No. 5 "The Three Kingdoms": the fusion of diversity and individuality in a double orchestra arrangement

Symphony No.5, "The Three Kingdoms" for a double orchestra, commissioned by the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra in 1995 as a sequel to Symphony No.3, stands as the centerpiece of what Chan himself dubbed his "trilogy of return" (回归三部曲) [10]and is representative of his middle compositional period. Different from the Third Symphony, the Fifth Symphony employs an asymmetrical approach to the setting of the double orchestra, with the conductor as the axis of symmetry (Figure 2). The title "Three Kingdoms" is derived from Luo Guan-Zhong's book *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, which dates back to the late Yuan and early Ming Dynasties. The first line of the book, "Empire's wax and wane; states cleave asunder and coalesce" (Luo, 1963, p. 1) prompts the composer to reflect on the fact that mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan were once one country, notwithstanding their current distinct political and social structures.[11] Furthermore, the adage in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*— "When divided, they

9 "八音克谐" refers to the harmonious music created when eight musical instruments constructed from gold, stone, earth, leather, silk, wood, gourd, and bamboo are played together. This term is derived from Shangshu, highlighting the importance of blending distinct melodies produced by these instruments harmoniously to craft beautiful music, embodying the ancient Chinese musical pursuit of harmony (Yang 2021, 102).

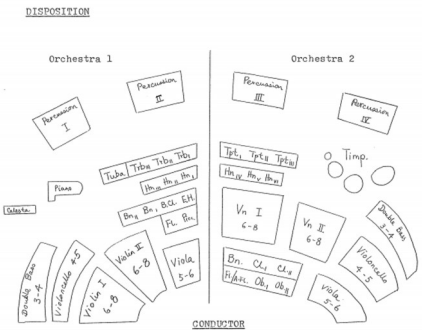
10 There is dual significance in our use of "return": 1) Chan's "return" to Hong Kong after his studies abroad; 2) the three symphonies composed by Chan, which center around the theme of Hong Kong's "return" to China.

11 See the introduction to Chan's Symphony No. 5 in Reunification, Hugo Production (HRP 7184-2).

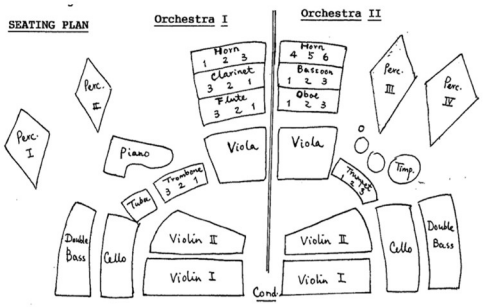
must unite"— aligns with Hong Kong's reunification with China, illustrating Chan's dialectical fusion between the "past" and the "present," that is, historical text and the contemporary context.

Figure 2 Symphony No.3 and No. 5 Orchestration

Symphony No.3:



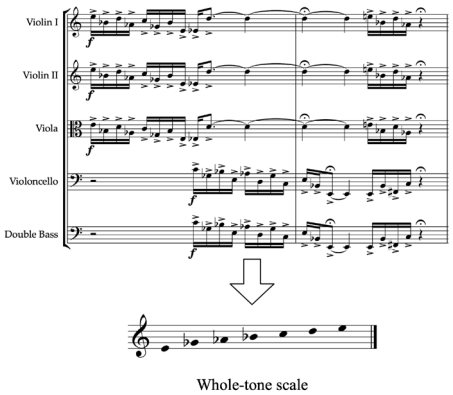
Symphony No.5:



Source: composer's manuscript.

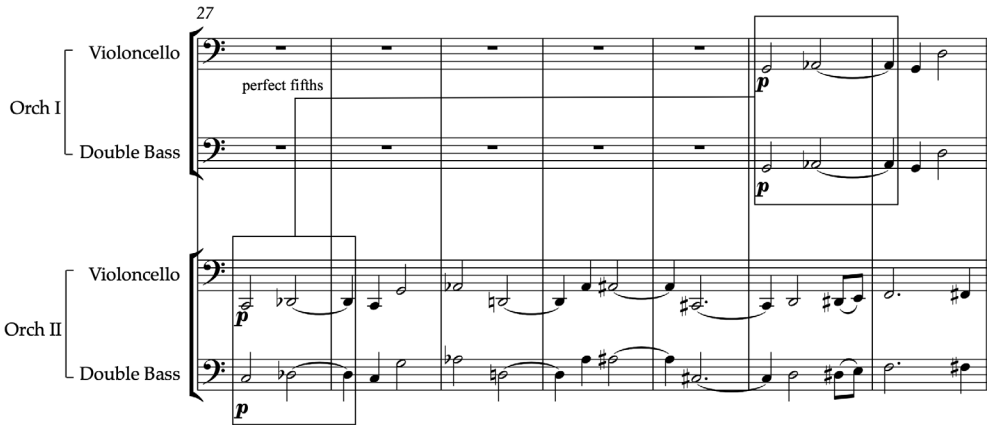
The concept of dialectical fusionism is exemplified across all movements in Symphony No. 5. The first movement features an "old-school" formal structure of ABA' with an introduction-coda frame. Dialectical fusionism is manifested in this movement in the way the composer reinvigorates the "ancient" formal structure with the "modern" sonority of whole-tone scale. Set at a moderate speed, the introduction immediately introduces a series of descending tritone sequences derived from the whole-tone scale (Example 1). In B (mm. 84-120), where a lyrical melody is foregrounded (played by the oboe in imitative sequences), moreover, tritones are layered sequentially in the woodwinds and alternate between the left and right orchestras, creating an echoing effect that gradually recedes after culminating with a climax (mm.101-110). In A' (mm. 121-158), the thematic material develops the core elements of A—the whole-tone scale—through concealed overlapping of voices. Chan further strengthens this "modern" sonority of this section with a magnificent acoustic effect achieved through the ascending whole-tone scale in the brass, the *tremolo* in the strings, the continuous triplets in the woodwinds, and the powerful beats in the percussion.

Example 1 Symphony No. 5, first movement mm.1-2



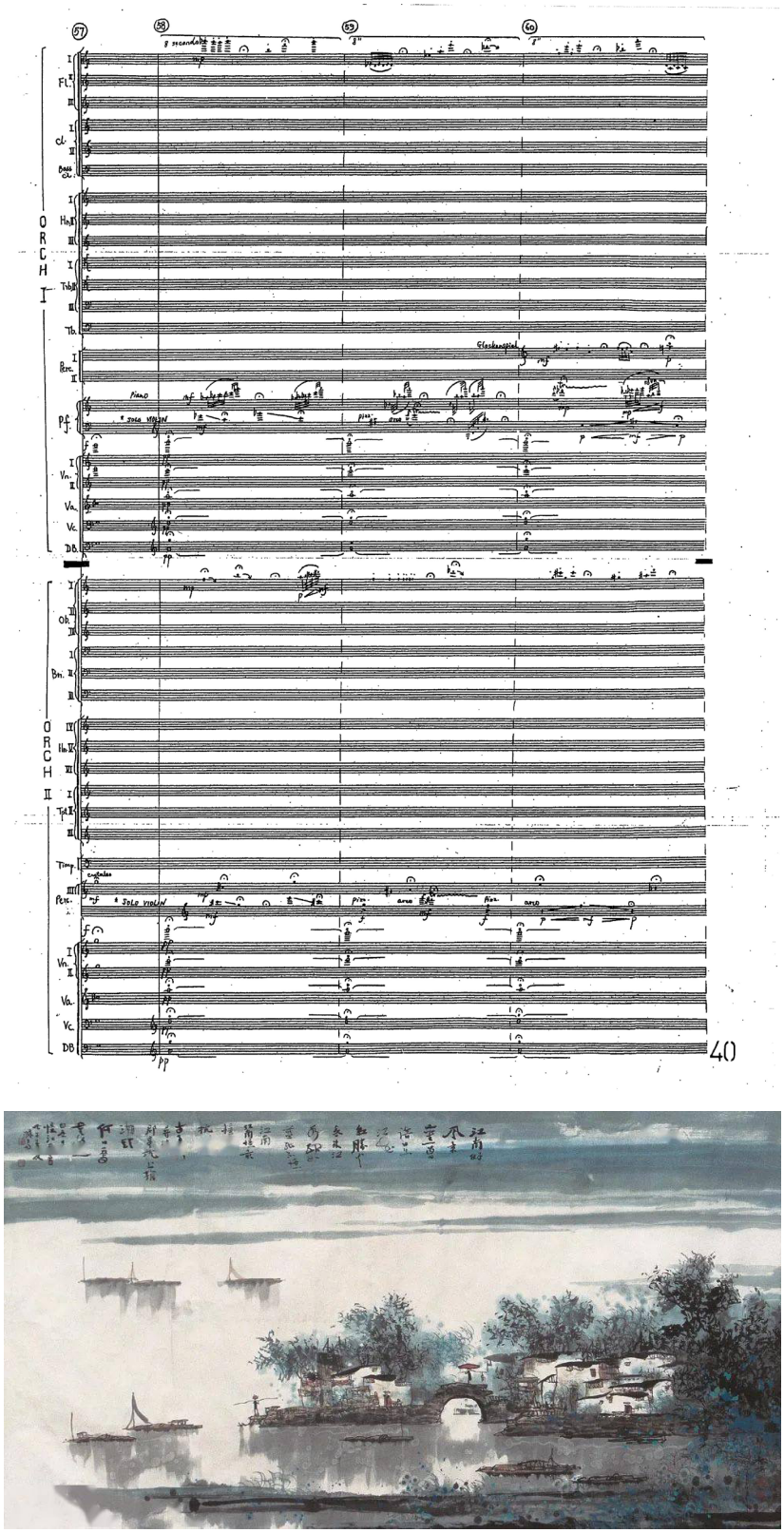
In the second movement (cast in a three-part A B C structure), dialectical fusionism is centered around the fugal theme first introduced in B (mm. 27-66, see Example 2) between the two orchestras. Towards the end of B (mm.58-66, Figure 3), the meter shifts from a 4/4 time to a *Sanban* (散板) meter, characterized by a "free-meter" temporal quality. Here, the composer intricately combines elements of both static and dynamic temporal aspects: The former is exemplified by the sustained tones produced by the string voices, arranged in fifths, while the latter is progressively introduced through the involvement of the flute, piano (ORCH I), oboe, and percussion (ORCH II). This stylized static-dynamic temporality approximates the technique of *Dianzhuang* (点状) or "free-dot textural arrangement" in traditional Chinese ink wash painting, capturing a distinctive "beauty of artistic conception." [12]

Example 2 Symphony No. 5, Mov 2, mm.27-32



12 Beauty of artistic conception is the aesthetic realm in which meaning and context, emotion and scenery, mind and matter intermingle and fit together in an artistic image. It is the basic element of artistic beauty. One of the basic categories of traditional Chinese aesthetics.

Figure 3 Comparison between Symphony No. 5, Mov 2, mm.57-60 and Zheng Shufang's (郑叔方, 1941-) ink wash painting, *Landscape Painting*

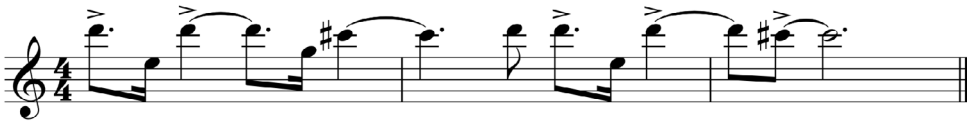


At the conclusion of this movement (mm. 113-117), furthermore, the composer utilizes imitative polyphony as a technique to establish a nuanced alternation of voices within the woodwind sections of each orchestra. Between measures 113 and 115, the two orchestras even engage in a confrontational clash characterized by highly dissonant counterpoint involving the second and fourth degrees. By employing sustained long tones in these final bars (mm. 113-117), moreover, Chan promotes a unification of all voices, symbolizing a sense of "union" following a period of conflict. The interplay between the "subject" and "response" in the fugue, as Chan describes, serves as a clear representation of the "compromise and reconciliation of different opinions."[13]

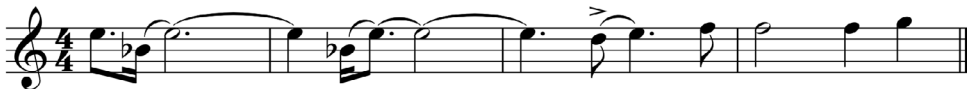
The third movement is structured with an introduction and two subsequent sections (A and B). Section A (mm.19-40) features a "short and long" rhythmic motif (Example 3) that first appeared in the first movement and reappeared in the second, providing unity across the three movements. The historicity of Chan's dialectical aesthetic is reflected in the way he harnesses this movement as a means to portray the pivotal moment of Hong Kong's sovereignty returning to China in 1997—an event he deemed one of the most important for him. Prior to 1997, Hong Kong was a British colony, and after 1998, it entered a new era post-reunification. To represent this historical transition, from measure 41 onward, Chan employs the constant alternation between 7/8 time and 9/8 time, which he elucidated as respective symbols of 1997 and 1998. Furthermore, the climactic moment in measure 113 creates a dramatic effect by employing a "beat counterpoint" between the two orchestras, with one orchestra emphasizing the 9/8 beat while the other the 7/8 beat in a one-bar distance (Example 4).

Example 3 Symphony No.5 Themes from the first and third movements

First movement theme

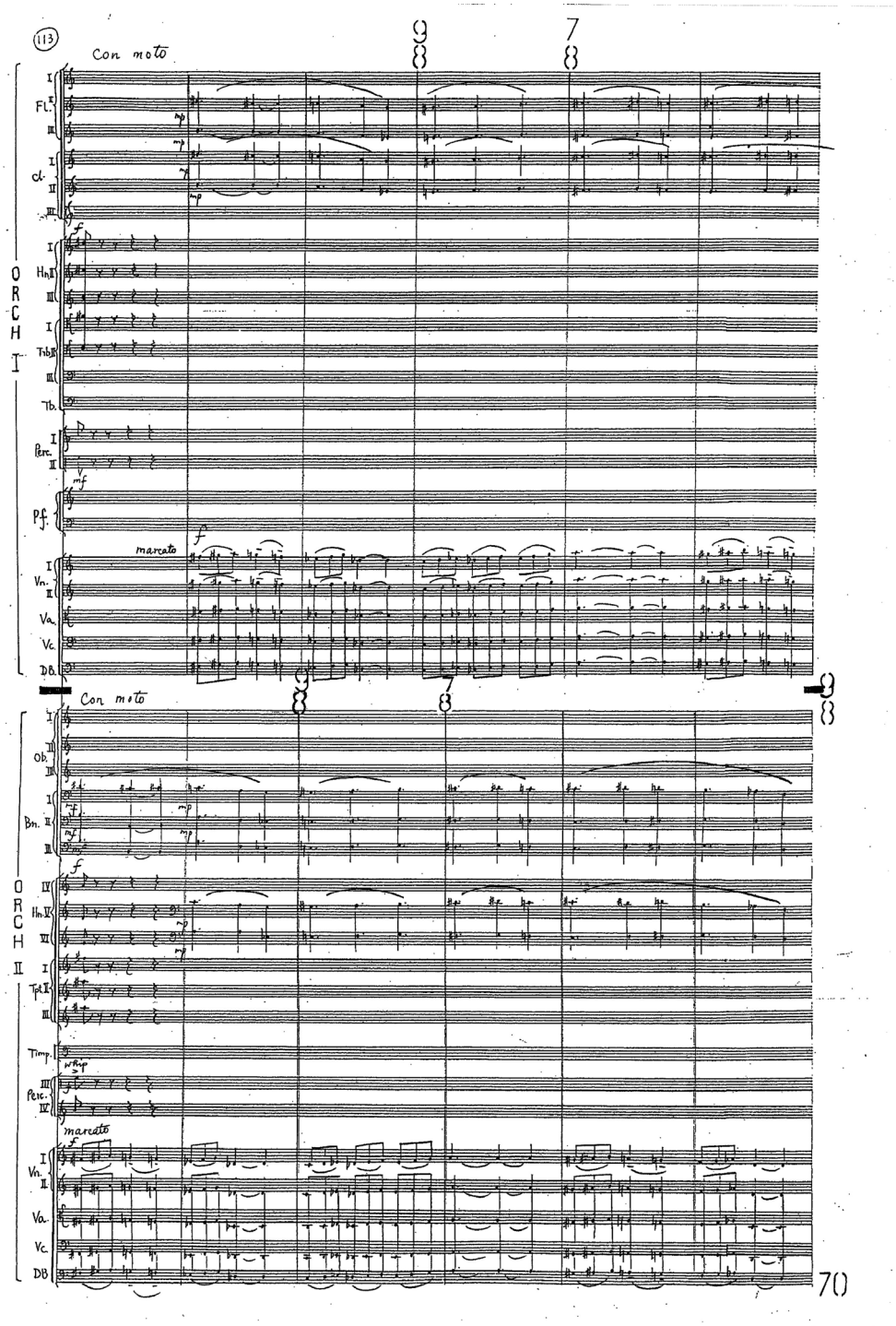


Third movement theme



13 The text is taken from the album introduction of Chan Wing-wah's Symphony No. 5(HRP 7184-2).

Example 4 mm. 113-118, Symphony No. 5, Mov 3



Source: composer's manuscript.

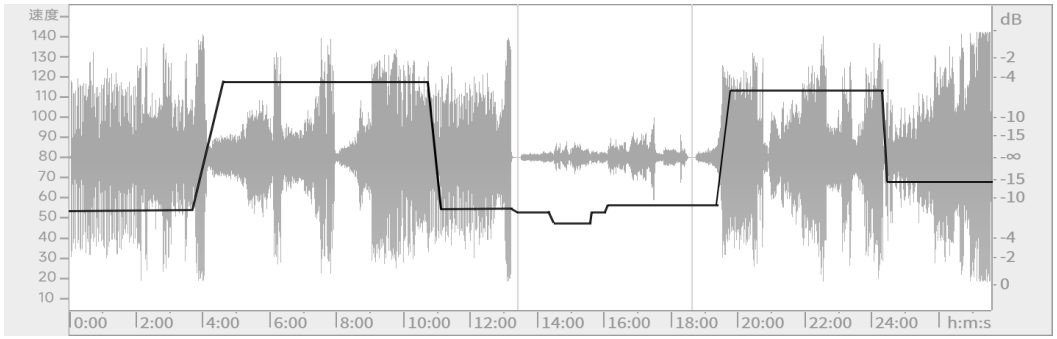
Chan's Symphony No. 5 stands as a striking illustration of the fusion between Chinese philosophical principles and Western compositional methods. By adeptly employing the distinct use of a

double orchestra arrangement, whole-tone tone rows, and drawing inspiration from classical Chinese literature, Chan presents a fusion of tradition and modernity, intertwining narratives from the past with contemporary concerns, thereby showcasing his profound dialectical reflection. In the following example, we will further illuminate a different facet of dialectical fusionism in Chan's music.

3.2 Symphony No. 7, "The Great Wall": fusion of Chinese and Western compositional techniques

Commissioned by the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra in 2004 and sponsored by The Composers and Authors Society of Hong Kong, Symphony No. 7, "The Great Wall," showcases Chan's inspiration drawn from his visits to the Simatai Great Wall in Miyun County and other Great Wall ruins. This symphonic work represents a significant shift in Chan's artistic development during his "Fusion" period, transitioning from the use of Western orchestras in his Third and Fifth symphonies to the fusion of Chinese orchestras and Western compositional techniques. Each of the three movements in Symphony No. 7 takes its title and musical content from poems of different eras, namely "One Lone Castle Wall amidst Sprawling Ranges" (一片孤城万仞山), "The Sense of Loss on the Great Wall" (塞上长城空自许), and "He Who Cannot Make It to the Great Wall Is No True Man" (不到长城非好汉). Table 1 provides an overview of Symphony No. 7, illustrating the overall structure, tonality, tempo, and dynamics of the three movements, as well as the incorporation of both Chinese and Western structural characteristics in terms of the music form.

Table 1 Structure of Symphony No.7 "*The Great Wall*"

Movement	*One Lone Castle Wall amidst Sprawling Ranges* (一片孤城万仞山)			*The Sense of Loss on the Great Wall* (塞上长城空自许)						*He Who Cannot Make It to the Great Wall Is No True Man* (不到长城非好汉)						
Measure	1-32	33 - 192	193 - 209	210 - 219	220 - 227	228 - 239	240 - 247	248 - 268	269 - 283	287 - 297	298 - 335	336 - 361	362 - 291	392 - 428	429 - 447	440 - 482
Western-style structure	Compound Ternary Form			Cyclic						Rando Form with varied theme						
Form	A B C C1 C2 A1			Intro A B A1 B1 A2 Zhu Qu Guo Qu						Intro A B A1 C A2 D						
Chinese structure	Free variation of 'Xuma' style									Associative thinking						
Tonality	C-♭A-C-F-♭B	G	C-♭A-C	d	b	d	b	d		C	F-D	F	F-D	G	F	D
Speed and strength trend graph[14]																

14 The speed and strength trend graph displays both the gray spectrum and the black velocity curve, which together illustrate the variation in velocity strength at a specific moment. A wider spectrum distribution corresponds to a stronger sound, while a higher curve indicates a faster speed of the sound.

The first movement, "One Lone Castle Wall amidst Sprawling Ranges," features a compound ternary form (A B A'). Beginning adagio, the opening A establishes an aura of solemnity and steadiness through the pronounced quarter note rhythm articulated by the percussion and wind instruments. The subsequent B features theme C and its derivatives, C1 and C2. The structural progression underlying these thematic aligns with the ancient Chinese musical variational technique known as Xuma (续麻)[15]: C^1 and C^2 respectively isolate the core motive material from the original C subjecting them to contraction and expansion; also, new materials are continuously incorporated in the course of variation. The three variants of C demonstrate a dynamic trajectory that gradually progresses from soft to loud (See "Speed and strength trend graph" in Table 1). The following A' serves as a condensed reprise of the initial A, reintroducing percussion to fortify the sonority.

The second movement, "The Sense of Loss on the Great Wall," assumes a transitional role between the preceding and subsequent movements. Structurally, it encompasses an introduction followed by five alternating sections (A B1 A B2 A). Here, the fusion of Eastern and Western elements is discernible as Chan harnesses a traditional Chinese musical identity within a Western-derived structure. The first group (A) in the movement spans eight bars (mm.220-7) and presents an augmented-triadic progression, notably realized through the Chinese instrument *Sheng*, while the second group (B) consists of a polyphonic, lyrical melody (mm.228-239). According to Li Ji-Ti (李吉提), a professor from the Central Conservatory of Music,

> In China, Section A in rondo form is often in the function of connection, and it is even called a "*Guoqu*" (过曲); different contrasting sections such as B, C, and D are the principal theme, so it is called the "*Zhuqu*" (主曲) ... At the same time, the Chinese rondo form does not require to end with an A' (Li, 2004, p. 212).

15 Xuma(续麻) is a compositional technique that involves utilizing select valuable motifs and fragments from the theme as foundational material, which are then recycled, repeated, expanded, and developed, while new elements are introduced in the process of variation, ultimately contributing to an overall structure.

In this movement, Chan merges Western cyclical structural principles with the traditional Chinese musical framework of "Guoqu and Zhuqu." The movement ends with the three appearances emphasizing the "cyclic" principle of Western compositional structure. However, A does not take on the presentation function in the structure as in a common rondo form, but rather presents successive augmented triads to form transition, thus reflecting the formal function of "Guoqu." The lyrical polyphony of B on the other hand, serving as the central component of the composition, represents the "Zhuqu," which expresses the lament that "the Great Wall on the plateau is empty of promises, and the sideburns in the mirror are already stained"—an evocative dialogue between the elder Lu You and his youthful self.

The third movement, "He Who Cannot Make It to the Great Wall Is No True Man", is cast in a rondo form (introduction + A B A1 C A2 D) and features rich developmental techniques. As conventional in a rondo, the ending D showcases heightened musical energy with its fast tempo, stark dynamic contrasts, and dramatic crescendo. The refrain A (mm. 298-335) is a double-thematic composition featuring wind instruments and percussion; after the main theme is introduced in the winds, a counter-theme enters in the Chinese music instrument *Paigu* (排鼓), whose strong beats are accentuated by the bass drum, clappers, and cymbals. It is noteworthy that, diverging from the established convention of the rondo form where the refrain frequently reintroduces identical melodic or motivic content, each A is featured by the contraction of the "wind" theme on the one hand, and the expansion of the "percussion" theme on the other hand. In this way, A gradually transforms from presenting thematic music of the winds into presenting percussion-oriented music, which ultimately becomes a transition leading to the subsequent sections (B, C, and D). This ABACAD form thus accounts for the traditional Chinese musical structure of *Lianqu* (联曲), in which percussive music (particularly gong and drum) and lyrical music are alternated and interspersed. It then presents the struggle between the two different musical styles and reflects the desire for the final peaceful unification of the musical structure.

As demonstrated, Symphony No. 7 assumes the outward form of a traditional multi-movement Western symphony cycle, while its internal structure bears resemblance to specific formal techniques inherent to traditional Chinese music. This composition incorporates Western musical paradigms in its structural design, harmonizing them with foundational Chinese compositional methodologies, underscoring a dialectical approach that permeates Chan's creative essence.

3.3 Symphony No. 8, "This Boundless Land": the concept of Datong (大同)

Chan's Symphony No. 8, "This Boundless Land," is written for organ, mixed chorus, and Chinese orchestra, featuring lyrics penned by Wu Rui-Qing (吴瑞卿). Premiered at the Hong Kong Cultural Centre Concert Hall in January 2007, this piece has since been performed in various locations including Hong Kong (2007, 2009, 2015, 2022), Beijing (2011) and the United States (2017) (Figure 4). The titles of the three movements of Symphony No. 8 are taken from the opening lines of their respective lyrics: I. "Obscurity" (混沌鸿濛); II. "Never-ending Mountain" (山不尽，连绵烽火); and III. "This Boundless Land" (苍茫大地).

Figure 4 Photo of Chan Wing-Wah himself conducting Symphony No. 8 "This Boundless Land" at the Hong Kong Cultural Centre

Source: Courtesy of the composer.

Conceptually, Symphony No. 8 echoes the creative intentions found in Symphony No. 7. The genesis of this musical creation stems from the composer's encounters with the world's oldest battlefields in Israel, Jordan, and the historic Dunhuang Yumen Pass, where prolonged conflicts persisted between Palestinians and Jews. Immersed in the vastness of the Gobi Desert, Chan envisioned the sand beneath his feet as a repository of memories belonging to valiant heroes and warriors throughout the ages.[16] It is against such evocations that Chan felt compelled to compose a symphony centered on the theme of "This Boundless Land."

In this Symphony, Chan particularly aims to ruminate on the Confucian concept of "Datong" (大同), which has been rendered in various translations as "Great Unity," "Great Community," "Great Universality," "Great Similarity," and "Grand Harmony." This concept originates from the opening passage of the "Liyun" ("Evolution of Rites") chapter of *Liji* (*The Book of Rites*) (the Han dynasty, 206 BC-220 AD)—a passage widely regarded as "one of the most celebrated in Confucian literature" (De Bary, 2001, p. 175).[17] In his discourse on the proper conduct of individuals and the ideal society, Confucius proposed "Datong" as the paramount utopian realm attainable by humanity—a profound vision of a forthcoming civilization. Musically, in the symphony, the concept of "Datong" finds manifestation through Chan's incorporations of different musical cultures—including the chorale style, the Western organ, and the Chinese orchestra—all within a singular composition.

The first movement, "Obscurity", conforms to a complex two-part (A B) form, in correspondence to the progression from "Chaos" to "Dawn". In A (mm. 75-143), the theme of "chaos and mist" is sung in parallel fourths and syncopations, alternating between the male and female voices, evoking the distinct attributes reminiscent of Gregorian Chants.[18] The perfect-fourth progression of this theme facilitates an ambivalent movement between C major and G major,

16 Interview with Chan (June 2022).

17 *The Book of Rites* is an important book on Chinese rules and institutions in ancient times. It was written by Confucian scholars under the name of Confucius around the end of the Warring States period or the Qin and Han dynasties.

18 The use of chant-style is dictated by the particularities of the city of Hong Kong. Western church music, as the musical initiation for Hong Kong composers during their school years, has had a profound influence on Chan Wing-wah's compositional style.

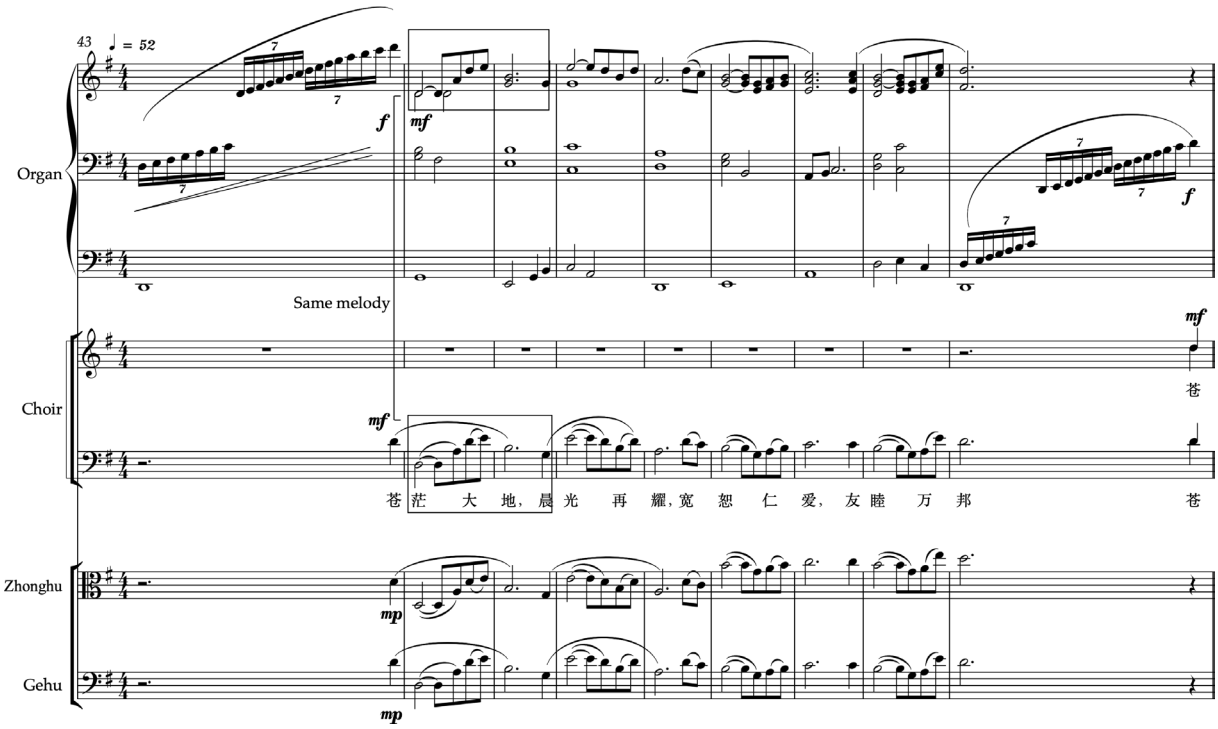
aptly engendering an acoustic resonance that encapsulates both a sense of flexibility, aligning with the primordial state of chaos requisite for the realization of "Datong." Section B (mm. 144-228), serving as a contrasting middle, unfolds through a continuous modal shift in *Jue* mode (角调), transitioning smoothly into C major, while the melody shifting to the dominant, then proceeding to C minor before concluding in C major. This progression not only accentuates the subtle changes in light and shadow characteristic of dawn but also highlights the structural utilization of *Guoque* (过阕)[19] from traditional Chinese music, which adeptly blurs the demarcation between sections.

All three movements of the symphony are introduced by the Chinese orchestra, accompanied by organ solos, strategically employed to create a harmonious fusion—or "Datong"—between Eastern and Western musical elements. At the heart of the symphony is the organ's articulation and timbral characteristics, alongside the utilization of diverse textures to complement the sonority of the Chinese orchestra. In measures 44-50 of the third movement (EXAMPLE 5), the upper voices of the organ double the male voice in the choral part, imbuing it with a distinct metallic sonority. Additionally, the middle voice of the organ offers harmonic support, enriching the vocal layers of the passage. Meanwhile, the organ's lower voice sustains a bass line, enriching the harmonies of the Zhonghu, Gehu, and chorus, resulting in a more cohesive and integrated sound. This then contributes to a climactic moment that elevates the sacred and resplendent musical imagery within the composition. During the transitional phrase in measures 68-73, the organ changed from its dominant texture, as found in A, to a triplet chordal pattern. This harmoniously unites melodic timbres performed by the winds and plucked-string instruments in a repetitious rippling pattern, subsequently leading into A' (mm. 87-109). The integration and coordination between the Chinese orchestra and the organ—East and West—results in an acoustic effect distinct from traditional Chinese orchestral music, with the organ's metallic touch offsetting the inherent "woody" sonority of

19 "Guo Que" in traditional Chinese music has the feature of blurring the distinctions between individual two-part passages and concludes the musical statement in a *crescendo* manner.

the Chinese orchestra and the latter's lack of bass. This remarkable form of complementarity between Chinese and Western timbres epitomizes the essence of "Datong" as outlined in Confucian doctrines.

Example 5 mm. 43-51, Symphony No. 8, Mov 3



Chan's "dialectical fusionism" has been a guiding force in his creation, propelling him towards new territories of musical expression. By infusing Western music structures with Chinese musical elements—formal structural, timbral, and developmental features— Chan's approach transcends mere mechanical collage, evolving into a dialectical process that embraces Eastern and Western, traditional and modern, and national and global musical elements within a multicultural context. This results in a distinctive musical language that embodies the spirit of contemporary urbanization. Through Chan's symphonies from the "Return" and "Fusion" periods, we can observe that in the former, the composer focused on inheriting compositional techniques and exploring ancient Chinese literature, while in the latter, he transitioned from technicality to humanism. In

particular, Chan's musical works in the "Fusion" period break free from the traditional patterns of both Chinese and Western music, incorporating ideals of internationality and multiculturalism, to reflect the unique cultural identity of Hong Kong.

4. Conclusions

The history of modern Hong Kong music has undergone remarkable transformations within its relatively short duration and unpredictable path. These changes have been shaped by the highly international and multicultural environment of the city, as well as the creative exploration and practice of Hong Kong composers and musicians over the past half-century. Chan Wing-Wah's symphonies, as we have endeavored to show, stand as exemplary manifestations of "dialectical fusionism", combining traditional Chinese culture with Western compositional techniques through a diverse blend of influences. This fusionism is primarily manifested through four ways: 1) Comprehensiveness, where the works are not confined by any particular traditional concept, but rather employ a dual balance of sensory experience and technique; 2) Conflict and contradiction, as musical momentum arises from tension and resolution between harmony and disharmony; 3) Multilayered Ness, music development results from comprehensive horizontal and vertical thinking involving multifactorial and multilayered processes; 4) Historicity, emphasizing human history and temporal context, aiming to underscore human development within the historical process and achieve organic integration in alignment with individual aesthetics.

Beyond their innovative musical styles, Chan's works are deeply rooted in profound humanistic concerns. Through Symphony No. 5's exploration of family and national sentiments, Symphony No. 6's theme of peaceful unification, and Symphony No. 7's expression of benevolence and love for the commonwealth, the composer unveils a personal sensitivity toward the fate of the nation, the world, and humanity itself. As noted by Music Historian Liang Mao-Chun (梁茂春), "Chan Wing-Wah's symphonic music has a strong

impact and a vigorous youthful energy. This is not only a trait of Chan Wing-Wah, but also a trait of Hong Kong music (Liang, 1997, p. 6)." Rejecting exclusive parochial cultural attachments, he draws upon his background in the multicultural environment of Hong Kong.

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