

Dà Hú Jiǎ 大胡笳

The Long Nomad Reed Pipe《神奇秘譜》



第一拍
漢室將衰兮四夷不賓動干戈兮征戰頻
哀父母生育我見離亂兮當此辰紗牕對
鏡未經事將謂珠簾能蔽身一朝虜騎入
中國蒼黃處處逢胡人忽將薄命委鋒鏑
可惜紅顏隨虜塵



蔡琰 Cai Yan's story

Tells the story of **Cai Yan**, daughter of Cai Yong (133-192). (c. 170 or 178–215 or 249), a Chinese composer, poet, and writer who lived during the late Eastern Han dynasty of China; she lived twelve years as a captive of the Xiongnu until 207, when the warlord Cao Cao, who controlled the Han central government in the final years of the Eastern Han dynasty, paid a heavy ransom to bring her back to Han territory.

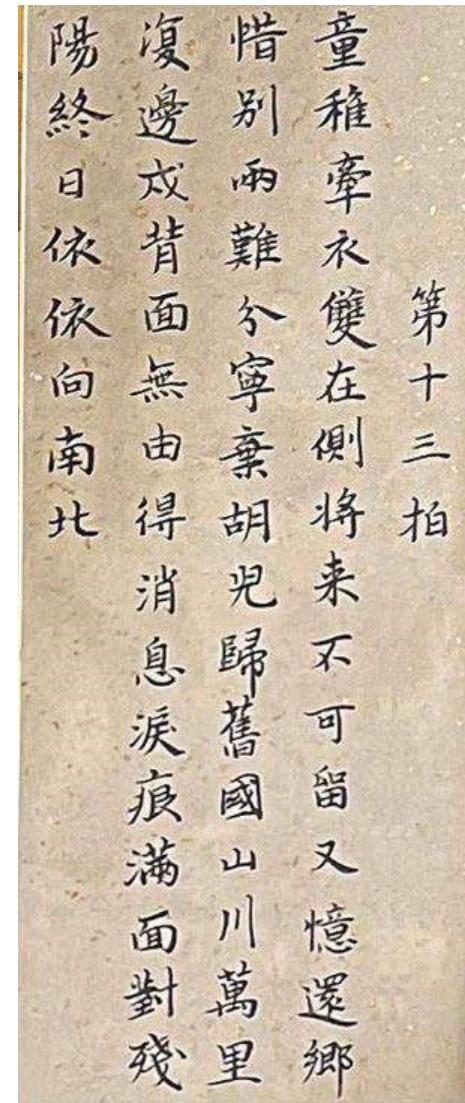
Although it has been said that Cai Yan himself composed this song, its authorship is still up for debate among scholars. However, the music is "often credited to the great Tang dynasty qin player 董庭蘭 Dong Tinglan (695-765)."



劉商 Liu Shang (710-785)

The piece has 18 sections organized as episodes that open with ‘words’ extracted from the long poem 胡笳十八拍圖 Hújiā shíbā pāi tú “**The 18 Blasts of the Nomad Reed Pipe**,” written ca. 770 CE by 劉商 Liu Shang (710-785), a Tang Dynasty poet who lived during the reign of Emperor Xuanzong (712-756).

The piece stamped by the poem lines evokes the sentiments of desolation, solitude and despair. Thus, moved by it, we can hear the sand, wind, frost and sleets drawing on the surface of the soundboard, for example, the following picture:



The 18 Blasts of the Nomad Reed Pipe

My recreation, or Dapu, is based on the poem's appreciation concerning the meaning of the words in the English version, especially the verses that are affixed at the beginning of every section.

I translated them into Portuguese to apprehend also the meanings in my native language. To get a fulfil comprehension of the excerpts, I considered the whole line of each referred stanza.

I pay my attention to the essential and **representative images** that hover over this piece: the frosted wind, the yellow sands, and the nomad sky. Also, the **profound emotions** that are expressed constantly, such as grief, mourning, despair, and redemption by motherhood (until it turns melancholy).

《紅顏隨虜》

「忽將薄命委鋒鏑，可惜紅顏隨虜塵」

*“pobre de mim! uma mulher indefesa
arrastada ao pó dos bárbaros.*

*Alas, a helpless woman carried away into
the aliens' dust.*

Analyzing Structure

The piece has an **episodic** and **recursive** organization, always returning to the exact opening phrase and the same melodies, gestures and rhythmic cadences.

The most characteristic gesture resembles the **sweeping wind** of the open strings **around the fifth string** animated by 沸 (fú), consisting of seventeen values (or plucks) to which three more are sometimes added or suppressed, making twenty pluckings that lead to the fifth string back.

This gesture uses the **whole open strings**. We can see four structures compound by two string sets: 1st to 4th and 4th to 7th strings. They are fitted together in a “dispute” around centrality around the fourth and fifth open strings intersected by second open string (add 4th or 7th).



Analyzing Structure

The first set usually is combined by four first string fitted into **one beat**, with an accent in the fifth string just after, followed by the second set rhythmically fitted into two beats, resulting in this:

1st set	2nd set
1 beat	1 beat / 2 beat
{ 1st 2nd 3rd 4th }	{ 4th 5th } / { 6th 7th }

*When we hit the fifth string at the end of consecutive twenty pluckings, it acquires the function of suspending movement and dissolving tensions.



Analyzing Structure

Following this technical approach, I would say the **DNA** of this piece is contained in this sequence (the three added pluckings on the sixth and seventh strings included), plus the **initial lament at the beginning**, especially the **thrice repeated double-stops** that end the first section.

It extensively uses Qin techniques, repeated and recombined to create different soundscapes providing different paths that lead to highlighting the fourth and fifth strings as central. Among many, we highlight 沸 fú (eight), 長鎖 zhǎng suǒ (thirteen) techniques, by extension, 背鎖 bèi suǒ (ten).

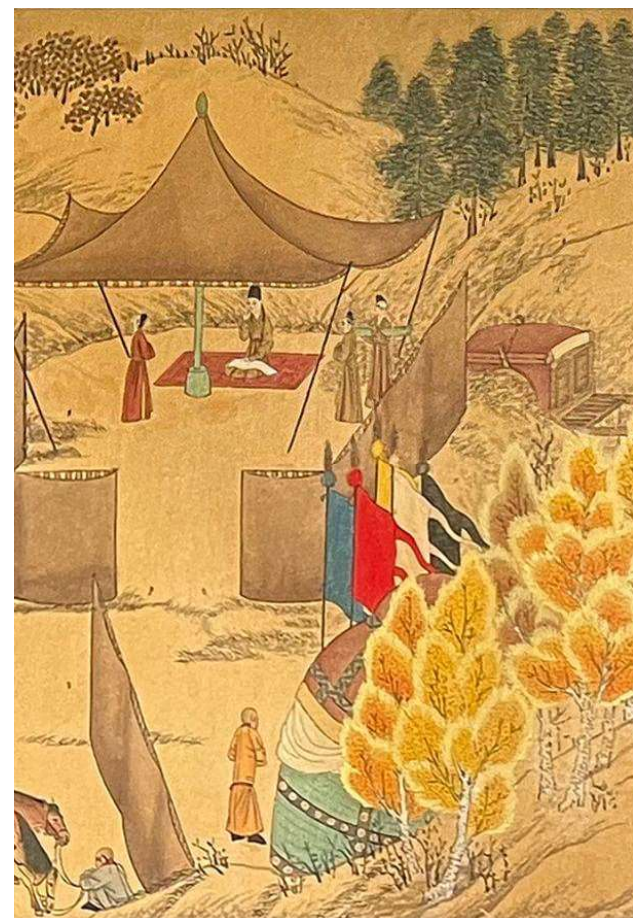
Also it has many cadential rhythmic formulas, mainly at the end of sections as 招撮三聲 qiācuō sānshēng (fourteen) in several combinations, sometimes sewing together periods or phrases that differ in meaning and direction—they are twenty-eight.



Analyzing Images

The first **sweeping wind** of the open strings animated by 沸 (fú) has ten occurrences, appearing at the beginning of each section, from the third onwards to the fifteenth section (except the eighth and thirteenth sections, which have characteristic elisions):

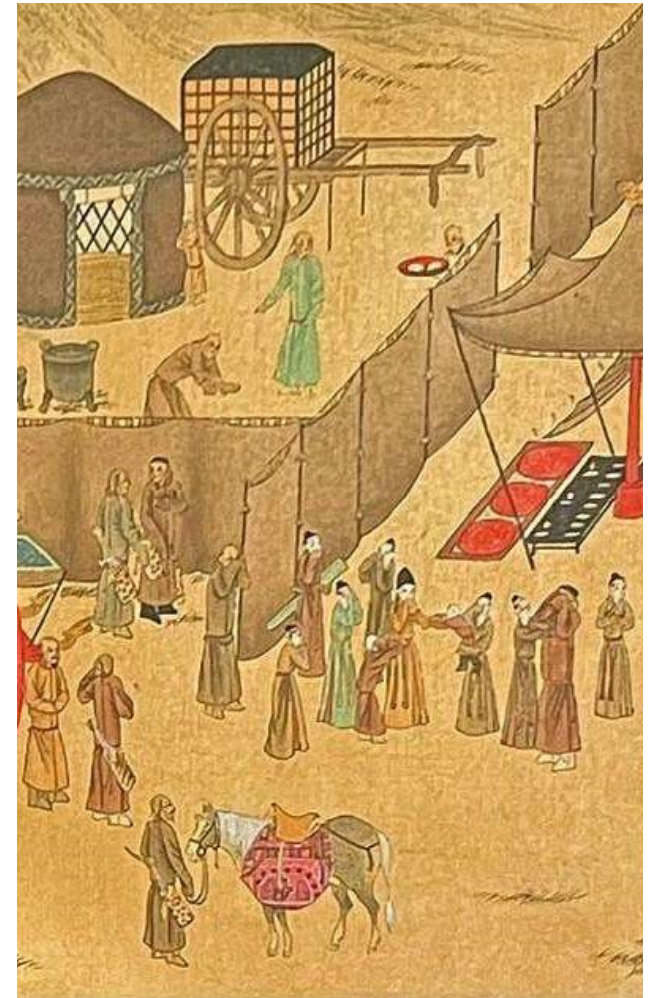
The first case occurs around the second string, connects the seventh to eighth sections alternating ring finger to thumb between 10 and 8.5 hui, reaching the lowest range of qin, revealing the darkest soundscape and colour of the piece, followed by a 'stretched pedal' to regain energy until the ninth section where the piece change to higher ranges and hui positions—**darkness against lightness**.



Analyzing Images

The second one has a **coloristic modulation** through the fifth string, alternating the uses of the set of the first four strings to the following three. This is very particular and refined to be noticed that section thirteen is structured in a combination of harmonics and pressed notes containing almost the same **sorrowful pitches** (in connection with the previous section twelve) of section eight.

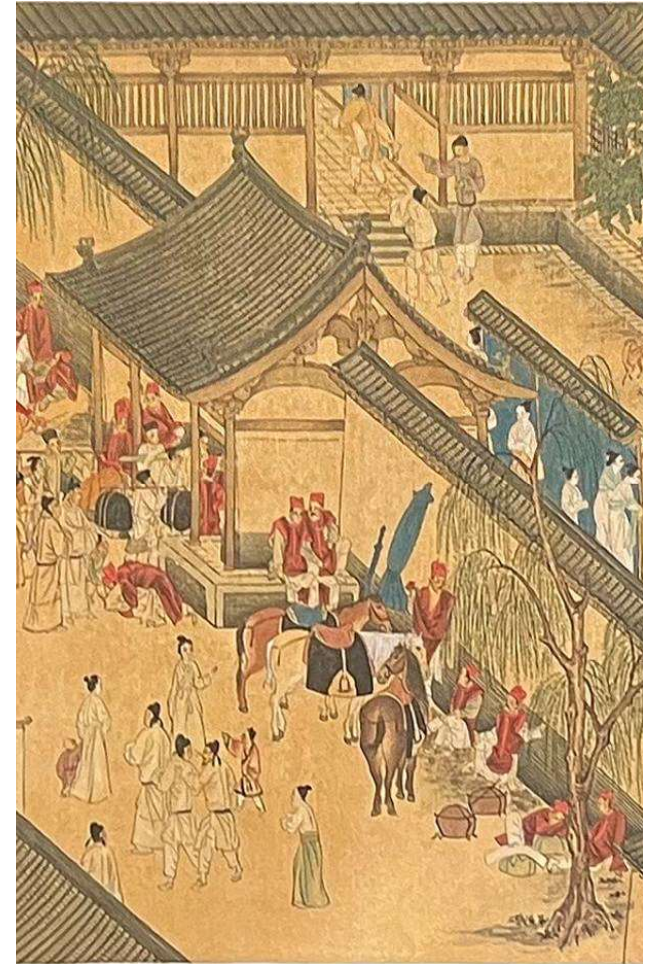
While sections seven (eight) to nine are referred (by the poem) to the nomad sky (the stars, moon, the milky way), dreaming and writing with blood wishing to return home, sections twelve (thirteen) to fourteen are circumscribed by deepest emotions concerning Cai Yan's children left behind under the nomad sky. 'Stood in the doorway' between South and North, **she experiences unbearable feelings!**



conclusion

In a general, I tried to be more **flexible with musical time** to value the images behind the music, more reflective than painful, as someone that by writing provides their cure. The reading of the poem transmits to me the utter need to survive despite all the misery she had to face.

That's why I did not need to attend to a rigid rhythmic pulse. However, I restrained myself from playing at a free tempo (the rhythmic cadences helped me with that). In every section, I put my fingers on strings to feel the mournful heartbeat trying **to revive herself**, who she was, to escape death..



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