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## **CHINESE PAINTING THEORY AS AN INSPIRATION: VLADIMIR TRMČIĆ'S TWO MUSIC CREATIONS ON CHINESE PAINTING\*\***

**Abstract:** This paper examines Serbian composer Vladimir Trmčić's two works inspired by Chinese painting theory during the Southern and Northern Song dynasty. An in-depth analysis of the "Chinese characteristics" expressed or hidden in the composer's works will be conducted in the context of the composer's knowledge on China. Its aims are, firstly, to gain a deeper understanding of "Chinese music" as understood by Serbian composers; secondly, to provide a "blueprint" for motivating the development of music composition on the both sides; and finally, to demonstrate the new way of communication formed in the field of ideology so as to open up the horizons of cross-cultural studies in a wider context.

**Keywords:** Inspiration, Vladimir Trmčić, Chinese painting theory, cross-cultural studies

### **Introduction**

In recent years, under the implementation of the China-Central and Eastern European Cooperation Policy, the Composers' Forum and their tour to China have activated effective channels for composers from Central and Eastern

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European countries to get a further understanding of China. This is an initiative undertaken following the active call of national policy to link China with other countries in Central and Eastern Europe with respect to musical and cultural exchanges and cooperation, which has yielded fruitful results –several pieces have been composed on Chinese elements after the composers' first-hand experience of music culture in China.

What should be emphasized, however, is that this is not the first time that Serbian composers have used Chinese material in their work. The earliest attempt, surprisingly, of combining Chinese elements in music composition, was made in 1997 by Miloš Zatkalik (1959), who composed a piece and applied a passage from an ancient Chinese classic to his work.

The Young Serbian composer Vladimir Trmčić has been interested in Chinese painting since his doctoral studies, and has composed two musical works based on it in 2013 and 2016 respectively, the latter of which was the composer's doctoral graduation project. These compositional practices are all in line with the composers' own taste in material for their works, as opposed to the subsequent musical works that were supported by the relevant Chinese state policies.

This paper will consider in detail Vladimir Trmčić's two musical compositions inspired by Chinese painting theory and will explore the Chinese elements presented in these compositions. First of all, the introductory section will give a brief account of the history of China's relations with Serbia (earlier with Yugoslavia), as well as the cultural exchanges between the two sides, in order to form an overview of the general communication. A specific analysis of two musical works will be made to highlight the "Chinese elements" in accordance with Chinese painting theory. Finally, the topic will be placed within a wider context, taking into account the current practice of foreign composers using "Chinese elements" as inspiration, so as to restore the overall creative environment and to demonstrate the new way of communication formed in the field of ideology, which opens up, to the greatest extent possible, the horizons of cross-cultural studies in a broader context.

### **Early diplomatic relations between China and Serbia**

The Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (in the aftermath of the Second World War to 1992), situated on the Balkan Peninsula in Southeast and Central Europe, won great popularity in China in the last century with the release

of the war film “Walter Defends Sarajevo”.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the history of diplomatic relations between China and Yugoslavia, and later between China and Serbia, their contacts have remained relatively stable in terms of international cooperation, economic development and political position. Particularly in recent years, Serbia, with the implementation of China’s national policy – “The Belt and Road” and the “China-Central and Eastern Europe Cooperation”, launched under the leadership of Chinese President Xi Jinping, practicing cultural soft power as a key aspect, has been more visible as its representative.

Official diplomatic contacts between China and Serbia were established as early as around 1880: the Serbian monarch sent a friendly diplomatic letter to the Qing emperor through his minister in France, announcing Serbia’s independence, which is available in the diary of a diplomat of the late Qing Dynasty, Xue Fucheng (薛福成, 1838–1894)<sup>2</sup> – *Diary of a Mission to Britain, France, Italy, and Belgium*, according to which:

the country of Serbia<sup>3</sup> [...] as then the League of Nations at the Congress of Berlin settled the issues of Eastern Europe, and publicly proclaimed Serbia as an independent country, Milan Obrenović as king, and Belgrade as the capital city<sup>4</sup> [...] the king was crowned and received the title. I was asked to submit this letter of credence that was presented to our emperor, with all the words in the most respectful manner.<sup>5</sup>

This is the earliest historical record of diplomacy in written form between the two countries.

China’s diplomatic relations with Yugoslavia, in modern times, have been somewhat complicated, however, primarily due to the changes in the inter-

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<sup>1</sup> Released in 1972, the background track of “Bela Ciao” was adapted into the Chinese language and was sung all over China.

<sup>2</sup> Xue Fucheng: official in Qing Dynasty, diplomat, served as the Chinese ambassador to Britain, France, Italy, and Belgium.

<sup>3</sup> Serbia nowadays in Chinese is pronounced as Sai Er Wei Ya, while in the book Serbia is written as Sai Er Fei Ya.

<sup>4</sup> Belgrade nowadays in Chinese is pronounced as Bei Er Ge Lai De, while in the book is written as Bo La Ge Cheng.

<sup>5</sup> The original text is (in Chinese): 又塞尔斐亚国……于是柏林大会各国同盟底定欧洲东界事务，公立塞尔斐亚为自主之国，立密朗（Milan Obrenović）为国君，都柏拉格城……称其国君已晋加王号，特具国书奏明大皇帝，清为代奏等语，情辞亦极恭顺。参见：薛福成《出使义比四国日记》长沙，岳麓书社，1985年，第201页 [Xue Fucheng, *Diary of a Mission to Britain, France, Italy, and Belgium*, Changshan, Yuelu Press, 1985, 201]

national situation. The main theoretical studies in previous years focused on the impact of the Soviet Union's political stance with regard to Sino-Yugoslav relations at the time, arguing that the establishment of diplomatic relations and the subsequent 'frozen' phase between the two sides, was directly caused by the Soviet Union's layout and strategy in international politics. The Serbian researcher Jovan Čavoški, however, added to these views after years of studies, stating that:

Right from the start, Sino-Yugoslav relations had been continuously influenced by the foreign policy dynamics that existed between Beijing and Moscow, and they were always evolving in the shadow of the bilateral relationship the two communist giants shared. This tendency remained true well into the 1980s. The rise of the Sino-Albanian relationship in the early 1960s was also part of the deteriorating ideological dispute with both Belgrade and Moscow and it had a direct impact on Yugoslavia's security on its southern borders. The beginnings of Sino-Yugoslav relations were not only connected with the ongoing normalization of Soviet-Yugoslav relations, but they were also directly influenced by the inroads both China and Yugoslavia were making towards nations like India, Burma, Indonesia, and Egypt. Therefore, the intense political struggle for trust and influence among these countries was another significant dimension of the Sino-Yugoslav relationship and it put considerable strain on the Third World as a whole.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Jovan Čavoški, "Between Ideology and Geopolitics: Sino-Yugoslav Relations and the Wider Cold War, 1950–1970s", in: Huang Lifu (黄立蒞), Wang Junyi (Hu.王俊逸), Li Rui (李锐) (Eds), *New Sources, New Findings: The Relationships Between China, the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Forum, 2014, 388–391.

For his views on Sino-Yugoslav relations, also see: Jovan Čavoški, *Shaping Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment; The Sino-Yugoslav Struggle for Leadership in the Third World during the 1950s and 1960s*, in: Martin Previšić (Ed.), *Breaking Down Bipolarity-Yugoslavia's Foreign Relations During the Cold War*, the series of *Rethinking the Cold War*, Vol. 11, Berlin, De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2021, 81–101; Jovan Čavoški, "Overstepping the Balkan boundaries: The lesser known history of Yugoslavia's early relations with Asian countries (new evidence from Yugoslav/Serbian archives)", Routledge, 7 August, 2011, 1–20; Jovan Čavoški, "Почеци дипломатских односа Југославије и Кине и успостављање југословенско кинеских дипломатских односа, 1954–1955" [Beginnings of diplomatic relations of Yugoslavia and China and the establishment of Yugoslav-Chinese diplomatic relations 1954–1955], in: Čedomir Popov, Dragoljub R. Živojinović, Slobodan G. Marković (Eds), *Два века модерне српске дипломатије*, Belgrade, Балканолошки институт САНУ и ИЕС, 2013, 285–301.

The overall trend of Sino-Yugoslav relations, accordingly, was not only due to the influence of the Soviet side, but was also strongly linked to the corporate international political landscape in those days.

Early diplomatic relations between China and Yugoslavia, in over a decade, went through a process of establishing, developing, freezing, and restoring. More specifically, diplomatic relations between China and Yugoslavia were formally established on 2 January 1955, with Wu Xiuquan<sup>7</sup> (1908–1997) as the first Chinese ambassador to Yugoslavia and Vladimir Popović as the first Yugoslavian ambassador to China,<sup>8</sup> after which diplomatic relations were broken off in 1958 in line with the disagreements on the part of the Soviet Union, before gradually being restored after 1968. Returning to the topic of cultural musical communication, the holistic Sino-Yugoslav exchange is strongly influenced by the external political environment and the state of mutual interoperability corresponding to this. That is to say, the early cultural musical exchange between China and Yugoslavia was mainly politically orientated and instantly reacted on the basis of the countries' bilateral relations.

### **Chinese and Serbian humanistic encounters**

The earliest encounters between Chinese civilization and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe were linked to the “Silk Road”.<sup>9</sup> The “Silk Road”, which endured in history for over 2000 years, has been given a fire-new meaning today. Thousands of years ago, large quantities of silk, tea, porcelain, and other goods symbolizing Chinese civilization were delivered to Europe, effectively connecting the Eastern and Western civilizations.

Economic and trade cooperation, of course, is a vital prerequisite for the interchange between East and West, but what was also left behind this “Silk Road”, was a glorious and brilliant civilization: the cultural basis of the “Silk

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<sup>7</sup> Wu Xiuquan: a militarist and diplomat of the People's Republic of China, served as the first Chinese ambassador to Yugoslavia from 1955 to 1958.

<sup>8</sup> 伍修权:《回忆与怀念》北京,中央党校出版社,1991,第295页 [Wu Xiuquan, *Reminiscences and Memories*, Beijing, Central Party School Press, 1991, 295]

<sup>9</sup> Original (in Chinese): 丝绸之路. Generally referred to as the Land Silk Road, it is broadly speaking divided into the Land Silk Road and the Maritime Silk Road. The Silk Road originated in the Western Han Dynasty (202–8 BC), when Emperor Wu sent Zhang Qian on a mission to the West to open up a land route starting from the capital Chang'an (now Xi'an), through Gansu and Xinjiang, to Central and West Asia, and connecting to the Mediterranean countries. In 1877, the German geographer, Richthofen, noted the “Silk Road”, a term that was soon accepted by academics and the public.

Road” was to develop political and economic cooperation between Asia and Europe on the back of a rich cultural heritage, to strengthen dialogue and communication with a more open and inclusive attitude in further promoting the widespread dissemination of the “Silk Road” culture and even, to a certain extent, global cultural exchanges, and to rightly and positively stimulate mutual understanding and knowledge among the peoples of the countries along the present-day “Belt and Road”.<sup>10</sup> Humanistic exchanges, inheriting the connotation of the “Silk Road”, have gradually assumed the role of a hub for cultural exchanges and cooperation mechanisms between one another.<sup>11</sup>

Humanistic exchanges between China and Central and Eastern European countries began as early as the 1950s, during which teaching Chinese as a foreign language was the pioneer manifestation. Many Central and Eastern European countries have offered Chinese language courses and sent international students to each other since then. The staff of the Chinese embassies abroad required a knowledge of the language of the country where they were posted and a number of sinologists from Central and Eastern European countries (the Serbian sinologist Radosav Pusić<sup>12</sup>), as well as Chinese scholars, specialized in the history of Central and Eastern Europe (Ma Xipu,<sup>13</sup> etc.), have come to the fore. The Serbian language course was established at the Beijing Foreign Studies University in 1962. In recent years, through official initiatives, such as building planning platforms and enriching the connotation of civil exchanges, China and the CEE countries have formed a

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<sup>10</sup> 张斯奇:《“一带一路”背景下中国中东欧关系发展研究——以“16+1”合作框架为依托》,山西大学2017届硕士学位论文。第21页 [Zhang Siqi, *The Research of the Development of CEE-China Relations in the background of “One Belt and One Road” – Based on “16+1” Cooperation Framework*, Master dissertation, Shanxi University, 2017, 21]

<sup>11</sup> 陈斌:《“一带一路”倡议下中国与中东欧人文交流研究》山西大学硕士论文,2017年,第19页 [Chen Bin, *A Study of Humanistic Communication between China and Central and Eastern Europe under “The Belt and Road”*, Master dissertation, Shanxi University, 2017, 19].

<sup>12</sup> Radosav Pusić: Ph.D., Full-time professor at the Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade, one of the few sinologists in the world to have studied ancient Chinese culture, with a specialization in ancient Chinese philosophy.

<sup>13</sup> Ma Xipu (马细谱, 1938): one of the most authoritative experts who is versed in studying Balkan History, and East European History in China. Published works: *The Rise and Fall of Yugoslavia* (《南斯拉夫兴亡》); *Balkan, History in the 20th Century* (《巴尔千年简史》) etc.

model of exchanges and cooperation in the humanities that focuses on cultural, personnel and ideological exchanges and is characterized by all-round, multi-level and cross-field exchanges.<sup>14</sup>

In terms of economic output, Serbia is a modest country in the Balkans. However, from a geographical point of view, it is strategically critical – at the crossroads of East-West communication. It is claimed that Serbia has been influential to several major strategic global forces since its birth,<sup>15</sup> Serbia is therefore a key player in the political and economic policy of the “South-East European camp”.<sup>16</sup> Sino-Serbian relations, in particular in the Yugoslavian period, were shackled by the international political landscape and did not progress significantly. In contrast to this, a growing exchange between China and Serbia, guided by the “Belt and Road” initiative, has made Serbia an equal partner with China.<sup>17</sup> Sino-Serbian relations have gained a real momentum after China launched its “16+1” and “One belt one road” initiatives, in 2012 and 2013 respectively.<sup>18</sup> The conclusion and signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on Jointly Promoting the Construction of the Belt and Road by China and Serbia have given rise to their cultural, political, and economic exchanges: multiple types of Chinese companies in Serbia; HBIS (short for Hebei Industrial & Steel Corporation) has acquired the iron and steel plant in Smederevo; since 2017, China and Serbia have implemented a

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<sup>14</sup> 宋黎磊：《中国-中东欧国家人文交流：合作进程、影响因素与前景》当代世界，2020年第4期，第18页[Song Lilei, “Humanities Exchanges of China and Central and Eastern European Countries: Cooperation Processes, Influencing Factors and Prospects”, *Contemporary World*, Vol. 4, 2020, 18].

<sup>15</sup> 布拉尼斯拉夫·乔尔杰维奇：《中国和欧盟在“一带一路”战略框架下的政策协调：现状及前景——塞尔维亚的视角》，欧洲研究，2015年第6期，第31页（第28-32页）[Branislav Djordjevic, “Policy Coordination Between China and the EU in the Framework of the Belt and Road Strategy: Current Situation and Prospects – A Serbian Perspective”, *European Studies*, Vol 6, 2015, 31].

<sup>16</sup> 杨舒：《中国国家主席习近平出访三国：塞波乌按下“一带一路”快进键》国际商报，2016-06-22。转引自李瓊珞：《“一带一路”视野下的中塞合作》高校马克思主义理论研究，2018年第4期，第142页[Yang Shu, “Chinese President Xi Jinping Visited Three Countries: Serbia, Poland and Ukraine Pressed the ‘Belt and Road’ Fast-Forward Button”, *The International Business*, 22 June 2016, in Li Yingluo, “Sino-Serbian Cooperation in the Context of ‘One Belt, One Road’”, *Marxist Theory Research in Higher Education*, Vol. 4, 2018, 142].

<sup>17</sup> Branislav Djordjevic, op. cit. 31.

<sup>18</sup> Florian Bieber, Nikolaos Tzifakis (Eds), *The Western Balkans in the World – Linkages, and Relations with Non-Western Countries*, London, Routledge, 2020, 61.

mutual visa waiver agreement for ordinary passport holders, making Serbia the first European country to grant visa waivers to China (statistically, the number of Chinese tourists visiting Serbia has doubled year-on-year since the visa waiver agreement was signed).<sup>19</sup>

As mentioned previously, the Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms are crucial initiatives to advance humanistic exchanges between China and CEE countries. The Confucius Institute in Belgrade and the Confucius Institute in Novi Sad were officially established in 2006 and 2015 and have been active in offering Chinese language courses and organizing Chinese culture-related activities in Serbia; the University of Belgrade has a Chinese language program and sends international students to China annually; in addition, the Beijing Foreign Studies University, the Shanghai Foreign Studies University and the Guangzhou Foreign Studies University also have a Serbian language program and send international students to Serbia on a regular basis. The number of Chinese students, studying full-time in Serbia, is steadily growing (including undergraduates, master students and doctoral students). The “Belt and Road” initiative, from the point of view of China, is a pivotal platform to being integrated in international relations and achieving global development. For Serbia, on the other hand, it is a golden opportunity to infiltrate the Asian market, upgrade its own economy and intensify its national influence.

### **Vladimir Trmčić's Two Musical Compositions on Chinese paintings**

Vladimir Trmčić, an active young Serbian composer, who currently teaches at the University of Kragujevac, received his Ph.D. from the University of Arts in Belgrade in 2016 with his doctoral composition, entitled *Late Autumn*, a landscape for alto-flute, two harps and two accordions (*Pozna jesen*, pejzaž za alt-flautu, dve harfe i dve harmonike). As early as 2013, furthermore, Vladimir Trmčić composed a piece for two harps on the theme of Chinese paintings, *Autumn Landscape in the Mist* (*Jesenji pejzaž u magli*), from which it can be seen that the composer seems to have an affinity for autumn, but in fact, the choice of the autumn theme is very much related to the composer's understanding of Chinese painting theory in the Northern and Southern Song Dynasties.

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<sup>19</sup> 李满长:《“一带一路”助力塞尔维亚再工业化》学习时报, 2017年5月8日第001版, 第2页 [Li Manzhang, “One Belt, One Road’ to help reindustrialize Serbia”, *Study Times*, May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2017, 2].



In an interview with the composer,<sup>20</sup> he stated that he became interested in Chinese paintings one day when he saw a book on Chinese paintings in the home of his relative. In the process of leafing through, the vast and far-reaching mood of landscape painting gave him the urge to compose and, after careful research, he decided to compose musical compositions on Chinese paintings. Regarding the application of Chinese painting theory in his works, he indicated that it was not intentional practice, and he himself had not thoroughly studied Chinese culture, so there are actually no explicit “Chinese elements” in his compositions.

### *Chinese painting as a source of inspiration*

Chinese painting, as one of the concrete manifestations of art, was a status symbol of the ancient Chinese literati. Chinese painting originated from Chinese characters, which in the early days, were combined with drawing and appeared on pottery and bronzes. Later, with the emergence of silk fabrics, painting on silk became a fashionable trend. During the Han Dynasty (汉朝, BC 202–DC 220) and the Wei and Jin Dynasties (魏晋南北朝, 220–420), the influx of foreign cultures and the impact of local culture created a situation in which the emphasis on religion was the main focus of the painting, and landscape painting and flower and bird paintings also appeared. This was followed by a mainstream of landscape painting and flower and bird paintings in the Song Dynasty, during which many painters had a transcendent comprehension of painting, contributing to the formation of a painting ideology at the time.

Vladimir Trmčić’s musical works mainly reflect the pictorial concept of landscape painting during the Song Dynasty, drawing inspiration from the paintings of the Northern Song painter Guo Xi (郭熙), who excelled in landscape painting and painting theory. He summed up his aesthetic ideology for the four seasons of the landscape and the Three Distance Methods of landscape composition, which are precisely the basis for the composer’s creations.

What are the Three Distance Methods (三远法)? The reply is, the mountain has three distances: “when viewed from the bottom towards the top, high distance is shown (高远); when viewed from the front, a deep distance is born (深远); and when we look at the mountain from the opposite hill, it is called straight distance (平远).”<sup>21</sup> Guo Xi believed that landscape painting requires

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<sup>20</sup> The interview was conducted via zoom on June 8th, 2022.

<sup>21</sup> The original (in Chinese): 自山下而仰望山巅，谓之高远；自由前而窥山后，谓

a balance of height, depth and straightness. The Three Distance Methods emphasize different directions, as a visual means of spatial expression to embody the spatiality of “far”: “high distance” symbolizes the difference of level; “deep distance” pursues the difference of horizontal distance. Only when the “three distances” are gathered can a painting be called a masterpiece.

It was on the basis of Guo Xi’s theory of the *Three Distance Methods* that the composer created these two pieces. As can be expected, the musical works have little connection with Chinese music, and the composer did not rigidly apply Guo Xi’s theory of painting, but rather combined it with the musical works. What the composer wanted to express is that how to embody the painting theory of Chinese Northern and Southern Song based on his personal style and in what way the two completely different subjects could be combined to reflect the concept of ideas in the form of music.

#### *Autumn Landscape in the Mist*

Before giving careful consideration on his doctoral project, let’s take a look at his work from 2013, which was an experiment before he created his doctoral work. Trmčić, at the time, had conceived the idea of creating musical works on the basis of Chinese painting theory. The work, in other words, can be considered an early attempt to apply the idea of Chinese painting to music composition.

The composer deliberately portrayed an autumn scene in the mist, so the haze sense of landscape painting springs up unbidden. In terms of the Chineseness of the work, it should be attributed to the arrangement of the instruments. The work is composed of two harps, whose sound is similar to that of the Zheng (箏), an ancient Chinese instrument. The music and the compositional approach, however, have no connection with traditional Chinese music. The composer, as mentioned above, was inspired by the landscape paintings of the Northern and Southern Song dynasty, so that his musical work pursued the effect of visual association with timber, texture, and instruments, together, so as to shape an imaginary autumn.

The source of inspiration was taken from the Chinese painting theory, though, it is a musical work based on the framework of the Program Music with modern compositional techniques, which will not be discussed here. Only the hidden “Chinese nature” (Chineseness) will be explored in the paper.

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之深远；自近山而望远山，谓之平远。See: 鲁博林编著：《林泉高致》南京，江苏凤凰文艺出版社，第80页 [Lv Bolin, *Lin Quan Gao Zhi*, Nanjing, Jiangsu Phoenix Literary Publishing Press, 80].

The basic form of the work is presented below:

a	b	c	c1	b1	a1	b2	c2
1–19	20–27	28–36	37–48	49–71	72–94	95–106	106–124

The overall structure consists of three fundamental sections: a, b, and c (a in monophonic form, b in chordal form, and c in tremolo form). The first six sections are in inverted form, in which the axial symmetric form is superimposed (a1 is the axis, and the front and rear materials are formed incomplete symmetry). The tonality is rather vague with no use of the traditional Chinese mode. It primarily relies on the rich texture of the harp to achieve the tonal transformation. The sound of the harp is akin to that of the Zheng, so the first few independent notes of the piece reminded me of Chinese music, as ancient Chinese music or music played on traditional instruments generally emphasizes single notes.

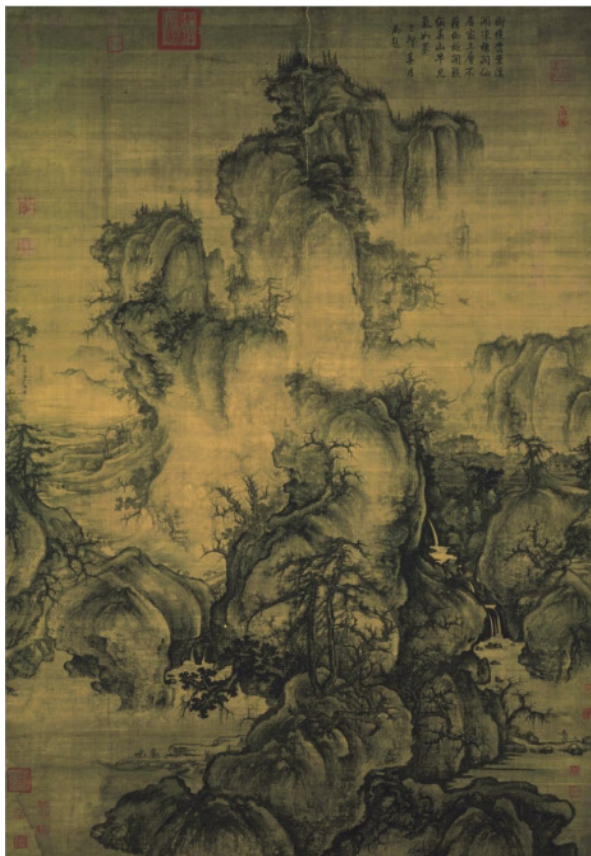
To tell the truth, it is relatively obscure to relate this piece to the Chinese painting theory, as there is, either aurally or after a specific analysis of the work, no association with Chineseness. In accordance with the composer's conception of creating the work, it is simply allowing the listeners to make their own associations, and, as the title of the piece implies, the music depicts a scene of autumn in the mist. The composer's 2016 work, on the other hand, reveals Chinese painting theory in a clearer way.

*Late Autumn, the landscape for alto-flute, two harps and two accordions*

The title of the work, *Late Autumn, a landscape for alto-flute, two harps and two accordions*, illustrates the source of inspiration, which, according to the composer, was a response to Guo Xi's *Early Spring* (早春图). There are two correspondences: spring and autumn, early and late. The composer's use of autumn as the theme of both compositions is the opposite of Guo Xi's painting, and a reflection of his theory: the sense of disparity.

*Early Spring* is one of Guo Xi's most representative paintings, completed in 1072, and belongs to the late period of Guo Xi's artistic output. This painting depicts early spring slowly waking up from winter, and embodies Guo Xi's *Three Distant Methods*: the "high distance" is represented by a distant mountain peak, painted from an elevated perspective; ancient temples under the cover of mountains and forests, winding mountain streams and deep winding mountain paths and waterfalls that flow down express the "deep

distance”; Guo Xi used the real of the near scene and the virtual of the far scene to form a contrast of “straight distance”.<sup>22</sup> As the composer stated, the musical composition aims to present the image of late autumn, using some of the philosophical views of Guo Xi as inspiration, and theoretical foundations.<sup>23</sup>



**Photo 1:** Guo Xi, *Early Spring*

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<sup>22</sup> 殷艺萍:《探析郭熙早春图的艺术特色》中国美术研究,2021年12月,第69页 [Yin Yiping, “Explore the artistic characteristics of Guo Xi’s Early Spring”, *Study of Chinese Fine Arts*, December 2012, 69].

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Vladimir Trmčić, *Teorijska studija o doktorskom umetničkom projektu, Pozna Jesen, pejzaž za alt-flautu, dve harfe i dve harmonike*, Fakultet Muzičke umetnosti, Beograd, 2016, 15 [Vladimir Trmčić, *Theoretical Study in his doctoral artistic project: “Late Autumn”, landscape for alto-flute, two harps and two accordions*, Belgrade, Faculty of Music, 2016, 15].

The musical work, *Late Autumn*, has five parts, the first four of which are sub-descriptions of the entire late autumn scene, namely the composer's elaborations on each scene.<sup>24</sup> The last part, however, is the overall layout, which summarizes all the sub-descriptions and presents a whole. Thus, the scene portrayed in the musical composition is elaborately designed in good detail by the composer and determined by the listener's association and imagination. The composer's intention is not simply to describe the picture of late autumn but to use the idea of the painting and the scene embodied as the inspiration to create a musical work in his own style. The five parts are: *Far Mountain in the Mist*;<sup>25</sup> *Clouds over the Mountain Top*;<sup>26</sup> *Dead Tree with a Distant Mountain*;<sup>27</sup> *Landscape with a Mountain, a Tree and a River*.<sup>28</sup>

In this regard, the musical piece opens with an analogous portrayal of the "high mountain" of *Early Spring*, where the mountain is in the distance, surrounded by layers of mist, and appearing as if hidden, only highlighting the ethereal feeling with no contrast emphasized. The second part focuses on the clouds that surround the mountain, and behind the clouds there seems to be a beam of sunlight coming down directly. In the middle of this picture, there is a tree, which is the subject of the third part of the painting (and musical work), highlighting the contrast with the first two parts; the texture is richer, and the color is darker. Then comes the portrayal of the river, reflecting the mountain in the distance, the clouds on the hills, and the lonely tree. The final section is a holistic presentation of all the natural elements that appear in the previous sections, meaning that the music integrates each thematic motif of the first four parts, not simply by combining them, but by understanding and experiencing the ideas conveyed within a larger context.<sup>29</sup>

It can thus be concluded that the main natural elements of the piece include mist, mountain, cloud, tree, and river. The composer draws on these five elements to highlight the *Three Distant Methods* in Guo Xi's *Early Spring*, which is an attempt to translate Chinese painting theory into a musical composition. The compositional techniques, according to the composer, are mainly from Olivier Messiaen (1908–1992),<sup>30</sup> who was a great admirer of na-

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Serbian text: *Daleka planina u magli*.

<sup>26</sup> Serbian text: *Oblaci nad planinskim vrhom*.

<sup>27</sup> Serbian text: *Mrtvo drvo sa dalekom planinom*.

<sup>28</sup> Serbian text: *Pejzaž sa planinom, drvom i rekam*.

<sup>29</sup> Vladimir Trmčić, op. cit., 17.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 17.

ture, and impassioned about transforming natural elements into melodies, which, aurally, would produce a certain associative effect.

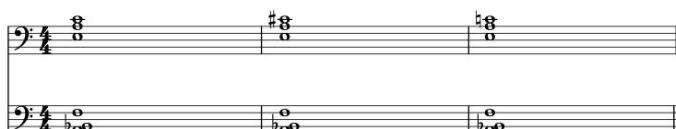
Here below are examples of the musical motifs of the five elements that appear in the piece (Example 1):<sup>31</sup>

**Example 1:** Vladimir Trmčić, *Late Autumn*, musical motifs

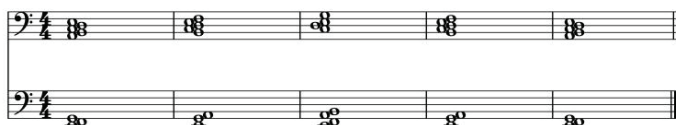
1) Fog motif



2) Mountain motif



3) Cloud motif (beginning)



4) Tree motif



5) Motif of the river



<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 19.

As one can see from the above, the composer used a musical texture to portray the basic form of the musical elements. The melody, for instance, of the mist motif is smooth and has no big leaps between intervals, while the river motif brings out the dynamics of the flowing water. All these motifs, in their multiple appearances in the course of the composition, went through different types of variations. So the musical color and texture are determined by the change of motifs color, the change of instrumentation, the internal arrangements of the chords, the change of the tonal orientation as well as, the position of the performers on the stage- “accordions and harps are placed so that one of them is in the foreground and the background. From right to left, harp 1, accordion 1, harp 2, accordion 2, with the auto-flute in the middle, which greatly expands the sound panorama.<sup>32</sup>

The so-called *Three Distant Methods* are applied to the second, third and fourth sections of the musical work. If we regard the first part as an introduction, the second section then represents the *high distance*, the *deep distance* becomes visible in the third part, and the fourth part obviously stands for the *straight distance*. Moreover, the only place where the traditional Chinese mode is applied is in the second section (mm. 53–54), according to the composer, it is written in the E Phrygian mode with a minor tendency of pentatonic, which occurs in the harp section (Example 2).<sup>33</sup>

The musical work *Late Autumn* is a combination of both visual and auditory sensations, which shows no apparent “Chineseness”. The composer’s aim is not to create a musical composition with Chinese characteristics, but to use it to portray the scene of the autumn in his mind. Different musical elements are applied to present multiple visual effects, thus creating a vast, far-reaching artistic conception. It is focused on transporting the musical elements into the visual imagination. Realized as a cycle forming five movements form, this composition displays an imaginary landscape, painted with music. Some of the features of Chinese landscape painting can be noticed in the applications of music colours and textures, so as to build a musical flow expressed in the painting. The aforementioned five musical motifs are the foundation of the piece and the overall musical landscape is shaped by transforming and changing them. This is similar to the works of the Impressionists, where the five musical elements are intertwined in the piece, from the mountains in the distance to the rivers in front, everything leaps out on the scroll.

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<sup>32</sup> Vladimir Trmičić presented a seating arrangement of the performers on the stage at his doctoral project. Ibid., 23.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 31.

**Example 2:** Vladimir Trmčić, *Late Autumn*, 2<sup>nd</sup> movement, tempo=60, segment, mm. 51–54.

e, Phrygian mode

The image displays a musical score for a segment of Vladimir Trmčić's 'Late Autumn', 2nd movement, measures 51-54. The score is written for five instruments: Flute Alto (Fl. alto), two Horns (Ap. I and Ap. II), and two Arms (Arm. I and Arm. II). The key signature is one flat (B-flat major/D minor), and the mode is Phrygian (indicated by 'e, Phrygian mode'). The tempo is 60. The score includes various dynamics such as *pp*, *p*, *mp*, *mf*, and *f*, along with performance instructions like *gliss.*, *vibrato*, and *morendo*. A box with the number '6' is placed above the first staff. The score is numbered '12' at the top left and '51' at the beginning of the first staff.

**Conclusion: Chinese elements as a source of inspiration for music creation**

Since the Western composer, Gustav Mahler (1860–1911), composed the well-known work *Song of the Earth* in line with the Chinese Tang poems and premiered it in Munich, Germany in 1911, it has become a classic case of Western music masters applying traditional Chinese culture as a carrier for their compositions. Many Western composers have followed suit, either by drawing on traditional Chinese music or modeling their music on traditional Chinese culture, or even by permeating it with ideas, allowing more space for musical works to shape spiritual civilization.

The dialogue between East and West in the form of music has become a craze, leading to the development of international music creation with the unique charm belonging to Eastern civilization. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, more than a dozen Western composers<sup>34</sup> have shined in the genre of Chinese Tang

<sup>34</sup> Harry Partch: *17 Lyrics of Li Po*; Albert Roussel: *Chinese Odes*, Op.12, 35–47;



poems, collaging it with their individual styles to form a musical composition that blends East and West. The Chinese composer, Ye Xiaogang (叶小纲, 1955), composed a symphonic vocal suite of the same name, *Song of the Earth*, which forms a juxtaposed diptych with Mahler. As a Western composer, Mahler created a musical work based on Chinese Tang poems without some knowledge of Chinese, which naturally differs from the portrayal of a native Chinese composer who is imbued with traditional Chinese culture. There is no superiority or inferiority, Mahler “advances in order to retreat”, indicating his pain and disappointment at spiritual disillusionment, while Ye Xiaogang “retreats for the sake of advancing”, with positive attitudes toward life, in which one can experience the different sadness and joyfulness. The importance of musical dialogue, therefore, is highlighted, that is, music is a vital reference to understanding intercultural differences so that acceptance and communication can be enhanced.

There are, of course, not a few examples of music and painting inspiring each other. Music is the art of time, appealing to the sense of hearing; painting, on the other hand, is the art of space, resorting to the sense of sight. One expresses things in the form of movement and fills the mood with time; the other condenses vivid situations in a moment and unfolds images in space. Music excels in “describing emotions”, and painting wins by “describing objects”. However, they are consistent in that they express the subtle and complex emotional changes in the artist’s mind and his feelings about the objective world. Music and painting, while carrying forward their respective characteristics, also attempt to break through their own limitations. Painting could be managed to serve people to hear the flowing sound of music; while music could be integrated to make people see the images, which is one of the benchmarks of music composition that local Chinese composers have markedly strengthened in recent years. Fruitful results have been achieved: Zhao Lin’s (赵麟, 1973) symphonic poem *A Thousand Miles of Rivers and Mountains* inspired by the hereditary painting of the same name, passed down from the Northern Song Dynasty painter, Wang Mengxi (王孟希, 1096–

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Alexander Tcherepnin: 谱中国诗词七首 (*Seven Songs on Chinese Poems*, Op. 71); John Alden Carpenter: 水彩画·四首中国音诗 (*Water-Colors*); Benjamin Britten: 中国歌 (*Songs from the Chineses*); Charles Tomlinson Griffes: 中国和日本古诗五首 (*5 Poems of Ancient China and Japan*); Constant Lambert: 李白诗八首 (*Eight poems by Li-Po*); Arthur Bliss: 四季歌谣 (*Ballads of Four Seasons*); Peter Warlock: 在溪边 (*Along the stream*); Krzysztof Penderecki: 第六交响曲·中国诗歌 (*Symphony No. 6*); Anton Webern: 艺术歌曲 (*Lieder for Voice and Orchestra*).

1119), which is a reunion of ancient and modern times, bears witness to China's dazzling civilization for thousands of years.

If we look at the music creations in the internationalized context between China and Central and Eastern Europe, the parallelism between music and painting has only gradually emerged under the China-Central and Eastern Europe policy, with the visit of composers from sixteen Central and Eastern European countries to China as the main manifestation. In 2017, the Lithuanian composer Ramunas Moteikaitis (1976) composed a work entitled *Whispering Pines, for Erhu, Yangqin and Pipa*, inspired by the paintings of the Southern Song painters, Li Tang (李唐, 1066–1150) and Ma Lin (马麟, date of birth and death unknown), and many other compositions related to Chinese culture, history, and customs.<sup>35</sup> This musical composition practice is an organized and purposeful combination of Chinese culture and the different backgrounds of Central and Eastern Europe, with the aim of strengthening mutual exchange and understanding at the level of Chinese-Central and Eastern European music culture. The Serbian composer, Vladimir Trmčić, on the other hand, has made a spontaneous entry into traditional Chinese culture, which is relatively rare in today's international compositional environment, and this has led to a lack of Chineseness in his works.

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<sup>35</sup> See footnote 34.

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## Summary

Since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the dialogue between East and West in the field of music has become highly influential, leading to the development of international music creation with the unique charm belonging to Eastern civilization. Many Western composers have followed that line, either drawing on traditional Chinese music, or using traditional Chinese culture as a blueprint, or even infiltrating it with ideas to give musical works more space to shape the spiritual civilization. The exchange between China and Serbia in the field of composition has been gaining prominence with the implementation of China-Central and Eastern European policy. To date, several musical creations with Chinese characteristics have been composed by Serbian composers and premiered worldwide. However, the Serbian composer Vladimir Trmčić, who incorporated Chinese elements into his work, is an act of serendipity.

This paper, first of all, briefly narrated the background of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Serbia (early and Yugoslavia) and the early Sino-Serbian humanistic exchange, so that a general overview of communication could be formed. It gave priority to two of the composer’s musical compositions inspired by Chinese painting theory, namely, Guo Xi’s *Three Distance Methods*. The “Chineseness” expressed or hidden in these works was explored. More importantly, a wider context of foreign composers taking “Chinese elements” as inspiration was considered in order to clarify the overall creative environment and open up the horizons of cross-cultural studies.