

# Composing the “Qingming Capriccio”: A Composition Based on Zhang Zeduan’s the Qingming Shanghe Tu

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## Abstract

The Qingming Shanghe Tu (the picture of the Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival) is one of the most famous paintings in China. It is a painting of the Northern Song Dynasty. It is the only surviving masterpiece of Zhang Zeduan, a painter of the Northern Song Dynasty. It is a national treasure and is now in the Palace Museum in Beijing.

The music work Qingming Capriccio is composed based on the Qingming Shanghe Tu. The technical approach of the process is transferring the visual arts into auditory sense. Qingming Capriccio consists of four movements corresponding to the four parts of the painting. A number of Chinese traditional instruments are used in the music to create the atmosphere of Chinese landscape painting, such as Dizi, Ruan, Pipa, Yangqin, Guzheng, Horn, Erhu, Zhonghu, Cello, Double Bass, Cymbals, Snare Drum and Bass Drum.

The music has been performed in the theater for more than 2000 people at Qingdao University of Science and Technology in the May of 2023.

**Keywords:** Composition; Qingming Shanghe Tu; Composing based on painting

## Introduction

The Qingming Shanghe Tu (the picture of the Riverside Scene at Qingming Festival) is one of the most famous paintings in China. It is a painting of the Northern Song Dynasty. It is the only surviving masterpiece of Zhang Zeduan, a painter of the Northern Song Dynasty. It is a national treasure and is now in the Palace Museum in Beijing. The seal on the right of the scroll is the Northeast Museum (now Liaoning Provincial Museum). Because it has been robbed, stolen and sold for more than 800 years, and finally passed to the last emperor of the Qing Dynasty, Pu Yi, who was controlled by Japan in the Northeast, although he was the emperor, he had no actual power. After the victory of the Anti-Japanese War in 1945, Pu Yi was captured in Shenyang while preparing to go to Japan. The precious calligraphy and painting he carried with him were confiscated and then left in the Northeast Museum. Because it was a national treasure, it was transferred to the Palace Museum in Beijing. This is unique in the history of painting in China and even in the world and has high historical and artistic value. According to literature, Bianjing was one of the largest cities in the world at the beginning of the 12th century (Chen, 2021).

Zhang Zeduan was born in Zhucheng, Shandong Province. When he was young, he liked to play around in Bianjing. After that, he became very interested in painting. During the Song Dynasty, he became a royal painter. He was good at painting palaces, houses, etc., and also likes painting cars, boats, bridges and other objects, forming his own style characteristics.

His paintings are not well documented, and the only works that have been handed down to the world are The Qingming Shanghe Tu and The Jinmingchi Zhengbiao Tu (Shi, 2021).

The Song Dynasty was the peak stage of Chinese painting art. This stage showed many types of landscape painting, flower and bird painting, which were very diverse and had their own systems and painting methods. As an expert in figure painting Zhang Zeduan is good at expressing the feelings and states of characters with the help of the surrounding environment. Narrative paintings' space were divided by environmental scenery or furnishings in the room in the long-volume painting. The painter Zhang Zeduan carefully observed the expressions and actions of different people, and completed the work with diversified painting expressions. This reflects the aesthetic concept of realism, which is different from the "fat is beauty" of the Tang Dynasty in aesthetic sense. It is closer to the aesthetic trend of modern people in the shape of the characters. The characters are natural in body shape. Both men and women use the body shape that is neither too fat nor too thin (Yuan, 2018).

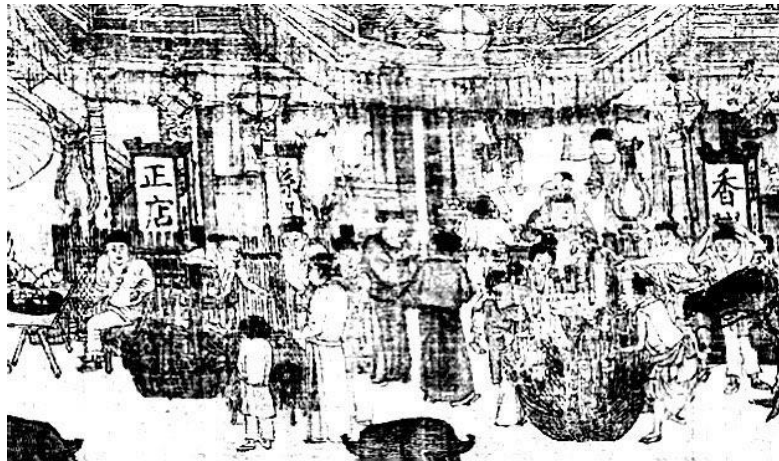
The Qingming Shanghe Tu mainly described the prosperity of Bianjing in the Song Dynasty, and recorded the urban landscape on both sides of Bianhe River according to the real situation at that time. Later generations could understand the urban landscape, the culture and politics of Song dynasty and the living conditions of people at different levels of the Song Dynasty through this painting.

It can be seen from the painting that there was the Dipu in the Song Dynasty. Di Pu was an organization that delivered official documents through land and water transportation in the Song Dynasty. The horses and weapons in the picture are related to the military system at that time. The people in the picture look tired because they haven't received the task for a long time. Waiting for the task makes them bored. This detail implicitly indicates that the economic development and prosperity reached the peak at that time, and the government was extravagant and lazy. It also revealed the reasons for the decline of the dynasty (Li, 2020).



**Figure 1** A detail of the *Qingming Shanghe Tu*

It can be seen from the painting that the market economy in the Song Dynasty was prosperous. At the entrance of the magnificent shop, there are two peddlers selling vegetables. The peddlers on the left are selling to three young people and a child. The peddlers on the right are selling to a woman and a baby sitter with a baby. This detail reflects the social form of commodity economy at that time.



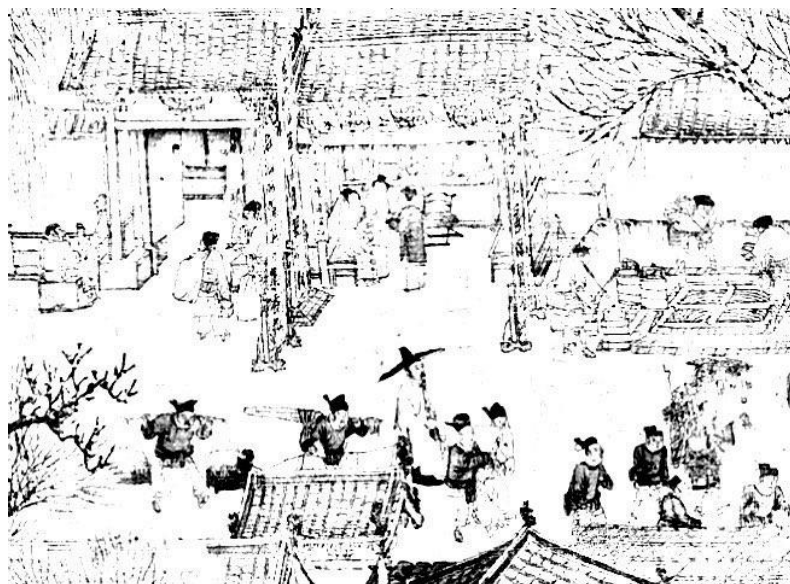
**Figure 2** A detail of the *Qingming Shanghe Tu*

In addition, different commercial buildings can be seen in the painting, such as restaurants, tavern, hotels, teahouses, etc., with a large number and scale, which was a feature of the urban economic development at that time. The restaurant industry is booming and the buildings of restaurant are beautiful. There are 122 houses in the painting, 45 of which are used for commercial operation, many of them are restaurants and taverns. Two of them are two-story buildings. There are plaques at their doors with the restaurants' name called Zhengdian and Shiqian Jiaodian which appear on the far left of the picture and the bridgehead in the middle of the picture. The tea house industry in the Song Dynasty also flourished. Tea houses are widely distributed and numerous, with distinctive buildings. In addition to selling water and tea, teahouses also provide people with a place to relax and negotiate. Therefore, the location of teahouses is very exquisite, which is generally only available in cities, and will be located near the main traffic routes and the docks with dense commercial exchanges. At that time, the competition in the teahouse industry was fierce. In order to attract customers, the teahouses with economic strength made their own teahouse buildings magnificent. They not only attached importance to the building structure, but also had exquisite interior decoration (Mu, 2022).

We can also see some changes in living habits from the painting. The hat worn by women was a political etiquette system abolished in the Tang Dynasty. However, people were used to wearing this hat when traveling long distances to protect themselves from sand and wind. In front of the woman was a cart pulled by a donkey, loaded with luggage. The donkey cart is operated by two servants, one pulling in the front and the other pushing in the back. The woman was riding on another donkey with a servant leading the donkey. There is a servant carrying a shoulder pole behind the woman. The package contains the woman's personal belongings. This woman took four servants, which reflected the prosperity of social and economic development at that time.

In front of the hospital named Zhaotaichengjia in the picture, there is a man wearing white clothes and riding a large horse. There are many servants following him. Some servants lead horses and some carry goods. It can be seen that the man is a very rich businessman. The walls and bricks of the hospital Zhaotaichengjia are luxurious, the gate is beautifully decorated, and the walls are also luxurious. From the design of the roof and the shape of the chairs, it can be known that the owner was once a senior official

To the east of the hospital Zhaotaichengjia, there is a house named Wangyuanwaijia. There are exquisite tables and chairs in his house. The position of this chair is obvious. In the past, the chair symbolized the identity of the owner, while the exquisite chair symbolized the high social status of the owner. This kind of chair can not be sit by everyone. In modern society, there is a saying in Chinese that "the first chair" refers to the chief person in charge of an organization, company or institution. This proves that the exquisite degree of decoration and carving on the chair corresponds to the identity and political status of the owner (Bao, 2021).

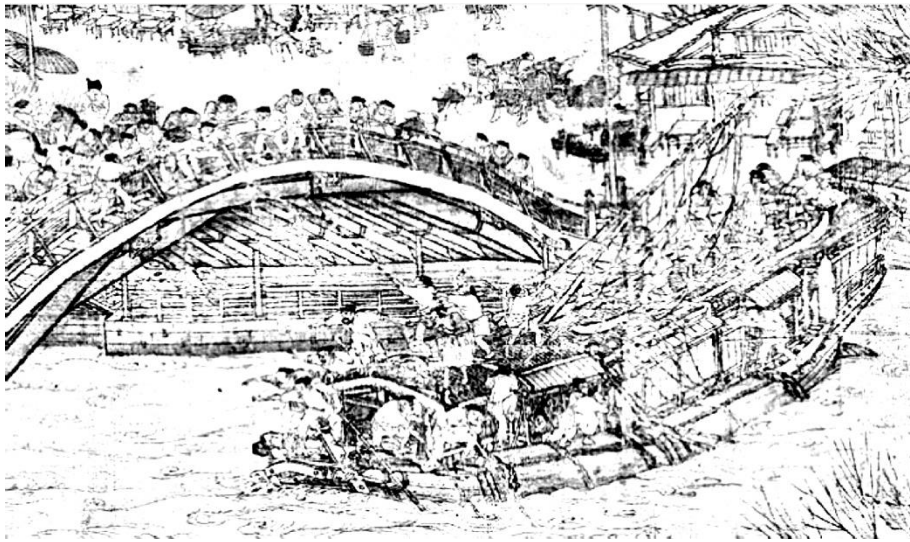


**Figure 3** A detail of the *Qingming Shanghe Tu*

The picture shows the working people at the bottom of the society, such as boatman, slaves, porters, handicraftsmen, rickshaw drivers, barbers, patients who are buying traditional Chinese medicine, and so on. They have their own unique images. Among them are several people with extremely long sleeves. They are middlemen called called Yaren. Their job is to make deals between buyers and sellers, earn commissions and price differences. The waiters in the tavern who had a low social status at that time wore a black headscarf on their head and a gray gown on their body.

The bridge part was once considered the greatest part of the painting. It shows a scene where a boat is about to hit the bridge. There is another disaster at the same time. The people at the bow of the boat and the people on the bridge look into the water together. Some studies show that someone was drowning. Some studies believe that the economy of the Song Dynasty at that time developed to a very prosperous level, so the officials at that time were lazy and

would be corrupt. The soldiers at that time had nothing to do because the court was peaceful and there was no war. However, if this state continues, the society will inevitably decline. The painter hopes to remind the emperor of the danger of the imperial court through this painting.

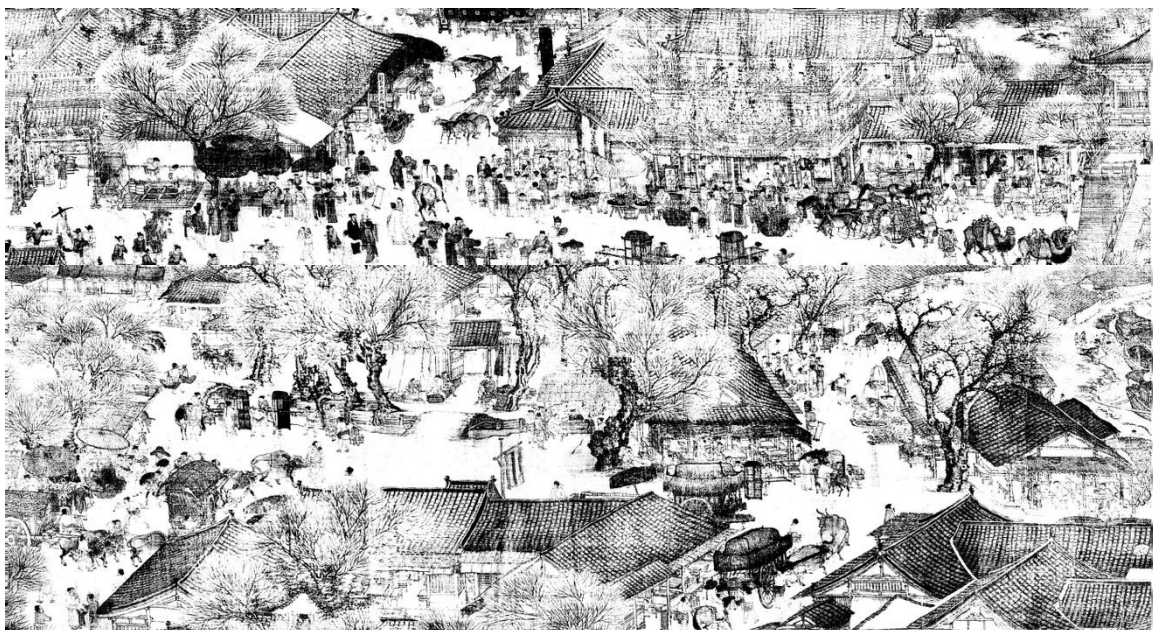


**Figure 4** A detail of the *Qingming Shanghe Tu*

The picture shows that a pedestrian met a rich man on a horse, but did not want to greet him, so he covered his face with a fan. In ancient times, when people met an acquaintance but did not want to greet him, they would cover their faces with fan. This is called *Bian Mian*. This is an ancient social etiquette

The *Qingming Shanghe Tu* is a painting with 5.287 meter-long with 0.25 meter-high. but it could be divided to four parts :

#### Part I. The Market



### Part III. The River



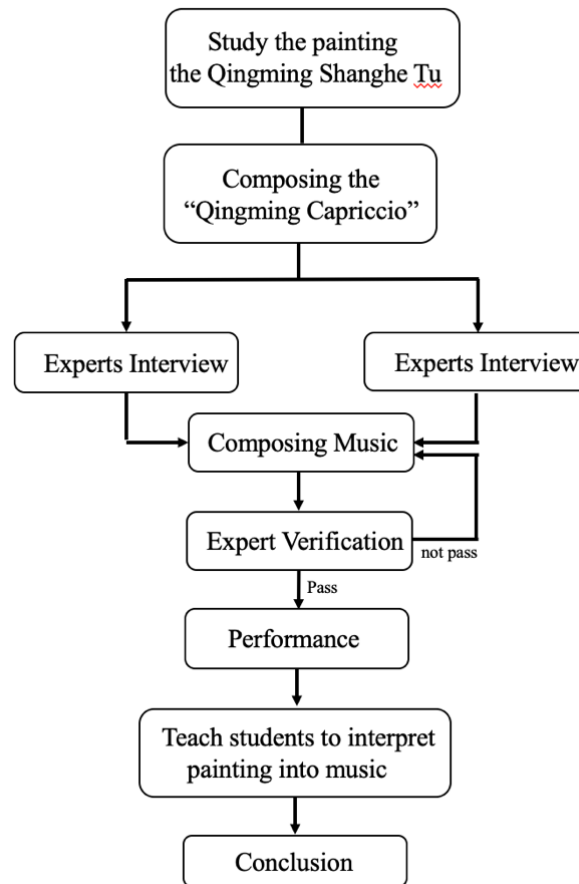
### Research Objectives

The research objectives are to study the Qingming Shanghe Tu, to interpret the content and meaning of the Qingming Shanghe Tu into musical composition Qingming Capriccio. After finishing the music composition Qingming Capriccio, to verify the composition by experts and to perform the Qingming Capriccio for public. At last, to teach student at Qingdao University of Science and Technology on art and musical interpretation.

### Research Methodology

This research is a combination with qualitative research and creative research. A musical composition will be composed for the creative research bases on PR model.

## Research Conceptual Framework



**Figure 5** Research Conceptual Framework

## Research Results

### 1. The study about the Qingming Shanghe Tu

Qingming Shanghe Tu It is a painting of the Northern Song Dynasty. It is the only surviving masterpiece of Zhang Zeduan, a painter of the Northern Song Dynasty. It is a national treasure and is now in the Palace Museum in Beijing. The seal on the right of the scroll is the Northeast Museum. Because it has been robbed, stolen and sold for more than 800 years, and finally passed to the last emperor of the Qing Dynasty, Pu Yi, who was controlled by Japan in the Northeast, although he was the emperor, he had no actual power. After the victory of the Anti-Japanese War in 1945, Pu Yi was captured in Shenyang while preparing to go to Japan. The precious calligraphy and painting he carried with him were confiscated and then left in the Northeast Museum. Because it was a national treasure, it was transferred to the Palace Museum in Beijing. This is unique in the history of painting in China and even in the world and has high historical and artistic value. According to literature, Bianjing was one of the largest cities in the world at the beginning of the 12th century

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## **2. Interpret the content and meaning of the Qingming Shanghe Tu into musical composition Qingming Capriccio**

Transforming the scene and emotions of the Qingming Capriccio into music is a comprehensive task which required the Familiarity of the painting. The overall atmosphere of music is to depict a scene of a busy city, filled with the hustle and bustle of life and various activities of characters. Music expresses this busyness and diversity through lively melodies, diverse instrument combinations, and rhythms.

The painting was divided into 4 parts based on the previous study.

20 Pipa, Zhongruan and Daruan are used in the first part, the busy scenes in the market. By using fast-paced rhythm to depict the busy scene of people in the market, imitating the hustle and bustle of people buying and selling in the market.

## Qingming Capriccio

### I. The Markets

Composer: Wang Yi

$\text{♩} = 138$

Pipa I

Pipa II

Zhong Ruan

Da Ruan

5

9

(x)

**Figure 6** Music Example of the 1<sup>st</sup> Movement of *Qingming Capriccio*

Dizi, Pipa, Guzheng, Yangqin, Erhu, Zhonghu, Cello, Snare Drum and bass Drum are used in the second part, the restaurants. The music language used Western regional modes to express the influx of various cultures during that period.

The image displays a musical score for the 2nd movement of 'Qingming Capriccio'. The score is written for a large ensemble of instruments, including traditional Chinese instruments and Western instruments. The instruments listed on the left are: Di-Zi, Pipa, Guzheng, Yangqin, Erhu, Zhonghu, Vc. (Violoncello), S. Dr. (Snare Drum), and B. Dr. (Bass Drum). The score is divided into measures, with a '15' marking indicating a specific measure number. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings, all arranged in a structured format typical of a musical score.

**Figure 7** Music Example of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Movement of *Qingming Capriccio*

Dizi, Pipa, Oboe, Horn, Erhu, Zhonghu, Cello, Double Bass, Cymbals, Snare Drum and Bass Drum are used in their part, the River. More instruments describe more emotions and stories, and the comparison between Chinese and Western instruments depicts the crisis of a ship about to collide with a bridge. Use smooth strings and woodwind instruments to depict the flow of water in the canal, and the feeling of boats crossing the water surface. Soft tones can be used to express the tranquility of the canal.

## Qingming Capriccio

### III. The River

Composer: Wang Yi

**Moderato** ♩ = 86

Di-Zi

Pipa

Oboe

Horn in F

Erhu

Zhonghu

Cello

Double Bass

Cymbals

Snare Drum

Bass Drum

**Figure 8** Music Example of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Movement of *Qingming Capriccio*

Dizi, Ruan, Pipa, Yangqin, Guzheng, Horn, Erhu, Zhonghu, Cello, Double Bass, Cymbals, Snare Drum, Bass Drum are used in the last part, the wilds. Erhu and Zhonghu are used to create the atmosphere of palaces and temples, and music can gradually become solemn and mysterious.

10

Qingming Capriccio IV. The Wilds

The image displays a musical score for the fourth movement of 'Qingming Capriccio', titled 'The Wilds'. The score is written for a large ensemble of instruments, including traditional Chinese instruments and Western instruments. The measures shown are 47 through 51. The instruments and their parts are as follows:

- Di-Zi:** Treble clef, key of B-flat major. Measures 47-51 show a continuous eighth-note pattern.
- Ruan:** Treble clef, key of B-flat major. Measures 47-51 show a continuous eighth-note pattern with accents.
- Pipa:** Treble clef, key of B-flat major. Measures 47-51 show a continuous eighth-note pattern with accents.
- Yangqin:** Treble clef, key of B-flat major. Measures 47-51 show a continuous eighth-note pattern with accents.
- Guzheng:** Treble clef, key of B-flat major. Measures 47-51 show a continuous eighth-note pattern with accents.
- Hn. (Horn):** Treble clef, key of B-flat major. Measures 47-51 show a melodic line with quarter and eighth notes.
- Erhu:** Treble clef, key of B-flat major. Measures 47-51 show a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes.
- Zhonghu:** Bass clef, key of B-flat major. Measures 47-51 show a melodic line with quarter and eighth notes.
- Vc. (Cello):** Bass clef, key of B-flat major. Measures 47-51 show a melodic line with quarter and eighth notes.
- D.B. (Double Bass):** Bass clef, key of B-flat major. Measures 47-51 show a melodic line with quarter and eighth notes.
- Cym. (Cymbal):** Percussion staff. Measures 47-51 show a pattern of cymbal rolls and accents, with a forte (*f*) dynamic marking in measure 49.
- S.Dr. (Snare Drum):** Percussion staff. Measures 47-51 show a pattern of snare drum rolls and accents.
- B. Dr. (Bass Drum):** Percussion staff. Measures 47-51 show a pattern of bass drum rolls and accents.

**Figure 9** Music Example of the 4<sup>th</sup> Movement of *Qingming Capriccio*

### **3. Expert feedback about the *Qingming Capriccio***

The experts gave positive feedback after reading the score of *Qingming Capriccio* and listening the rehearsal of the piece. Here are the summary of their feedback:

The work *Qingming Capriccio* is described as musically innovative, and the work is full of creativity and variation in its melodic conception. From the melodious folk music melody to the tension of modern symphony, the musical picture of the work is rich and colorful. Particularly praiseworthy is the emotional expression, in which the composer pushes the emotions forward through the climaxes and valleys of the music, triggering emotional resonance in the listener. Each instrument seems to be telling a deeply emotional story, which makes people deeply involved in it.

This piece is like a musical scroll, laying out ancient historical scenes and the sights of a bustling city in notes, showing the listener a glimpse of life a thousand years ago. With his unique creativity and musical talent, the composer skillfully incorporates the details, emotions and atmosphere of the historical scroll into the music, creating a vivid soundscape for us.

The harmonic technique of the work is also unique. The composer skillfully blends the harmonies of classical instruments with the timbres of modern instruments, creating rich sound layers and musical textures. The emotional expression of the piece is equally infectious. The sadness and joy intertwined in the music, and the cycle of life and death, seem to be the interlacing of historical footage. From the quiet riverbank scenery to the hustle and bustle of the city, from the peaceful scenes of life to the colorful depiction of characters, every note reveals an emotional resonance, allowing people to feel the flow of time and the weight of history in the music.

### **4. Perform the *Qingming Capriccio* in public**

This work is divided into four movements, corresponding to the four parts of the screen from left to right, which are the market, the restaurant, the river and the wild. The first movement has been performed in the theater for more than 2000 people at Qingdao University of Science and Technology in the may of 2023.

### **5. Teaching student about interpretation of music**

The teaching process has been placed at the faculty of music of Qingdao University of Science and Technology. This course, as an innovative application course, is divided into ten classes, teaching students to simulate and reproduce the entire process of using music to depict the *Qingming Shanghe Tu*. The first class is an introduction, in this lesson, students will understand how to divide a complete work into several parts and connect the visual structure in art with the musical structure in music. In order to ensure the uniformity of the course, we will divide the work into four parts from left to right. From the second class to the ninth class, complete one movement explanation and simulated writing every two classes, The last class serves as a summary of the previous learning content, and students need to complete and showcase their four movements of music in this class. These ten classes are interspersed with some tests, and finally there is a test to evaluate the learning situation of the students’.

## Discussion

The Qingming Capriccio is an academic practice and attempt that combines theory and practice. Painting is an art that can be seen but not heard, music is an art that can be heard but not seen. The creative attempt of this work has transformed visual art into auditory art. The creative attempt of this work has transformed visual art into auditory art, and attempted to explore the feasibility of creating music based on paintings and the theory of music composition techniques. Music and painting have a certain correspondence in overall structure and external form. Due to the influence of psychological synesthesia, music and painting often penetrate and influence each other. The musical structure of music can correspond to the composition of painting. Melody and rhythm were originally basic concepts in music and are widely used in painting and spatial art, such as describing building layouts with rich rhythm and smooth character lines (Jiang, 2021).

In 1868, color was originally a fundamental attribute of painting and was often transplanted into the field of music, such as "color changes in piano playing", "harmony colors", "tonal colors", "color palettes for orchestration", and so on. Just as music borrows the term "color" from painting, painting also borrows the term "tone" from music to describe the nature of color. The main color tone is called "tone". Various colors give people different feelings. Red, orange, and yellow are warm tones, equivalent to the major mode in music, giving people a warm and enthusiastic feeling; Green, cyan, and blue are cool tones, equivalent to minor tones in music, giving people a cold and peaceful feeling (He, 2019).

## Recommendation

### 1. Practical Recommendations

using music to depict or enhance a painting can be a powerful and creative approach. The combination of visual and auditory stimuli can create a multi-sensory experience for the viewer, enriching their overall perception of the artwork. Music has the ability to evoke emotions, and when paired with a painting, it can amplify the emotional impact of the artwork. The combination of visual and auditory stimuli can create a more immersive and powerful experience.

Music can provide another layer for interpretation, allowing viewers to connect with the artwork on a more personal level. Different people may perceive the combination of music and painting in unique ways, adding depth to the overall artistic experience. Combining music and painting is a form of interdisciplinary art, breaking traditional boundaries and exploring new creative possibilities. Artists who experiment with different mediums can push the boundaries of artistic expression.

### 2. Recommendation for future research

Reasonable and extensive development of music can expand the commercial value of products, especially in commercial advertising. The use of music in advertising can serve as a brand trademark. It can also play the role of a brand trademark in the same advertisement for a long time, so that the audience can know which brand of product it is advertising for at any time when they hear this familiar music, and "hear its sound, know its object", deepening consumers' impression of the product brand or corporate image, which helps to improve the brand and corporate awareness of the product. Pepsi Cola Company in the United States once broadcasted a famous British hunting song in an advertisement on a radio station, accompanied by lyrics with Pepsi characteristics. Accurately appeal Pepsi's low price and high-quality

features to consumers in the familiar and beloved music of the audience. After the advertisement aired, Coca Cola shook its dominant position in the US beverage market. Advertising songs often play an important role in expressing advertising themes in the form of music. Due to the short and rhyming lyrics, intentional repetition of words and characters, and beautiful and pleasant melodies of advertising songs, they often rely on a song that the audience is familiar with and loves to listen to translate into advertising songs, thereby achieving a unique brand appeal effect.

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