

The Mimicking of Instruments in Arrangements and Transcriptions  
for Piano of Chinese Traditional Music

by

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## ABSTRACT

This research paper is an explanatory document for the lecture recital presented by the author. The lecture recital focused on the mimicking of instruments in arrangements and transcriptions for piano of Chinese traditional music. There are five Chinese music instruments discussed in the paper, namely *guzhin*, *zheng*, *erhu*, *suona*, and *pipa*. This document provides an introduction to the five instruments, including their origin, historical background, and physical characteristics. Then it discusses the selected traditional pieces for these instruments and compares them to their corresponding piano arrangements. The traditional pieces are *Three Stanzas of Plum Blossoms* (arranged by Jianzhong Wang), *Liu Yang River* (arranged by Jianzhong Wang), *Moon Reflected on the Er-quan Spring* (arranged by Wanghua Chu), *A Hundred Birds Paying Homage to the Phoenix* (arranged by Jianzhong Wang), and *Flute and Drum at Sunset* (arranged by Yinghai Li). The comparison and the discussion of the technical issues in certain passages will help the pianist to create a fitting sound when performing the works.

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## Introduction

In the mid-20th century, Chinese traditional music became an important source in piano works by Chinese composers. The pieces that are examined in this study represent the efforts of several Chinese composers to arrange traditional music for piano, while applying their own ideas of how to set this material. Many of these pieces were performed by Chinese pianists and gained popularity with audiences. Even today, the transcriptions and arrangements of traditional music are an important part of the repertoire of many Chinese pianists.

The technical demands of the works in this study are not high, making them appropriate literature for many Chinese intermediate pianists who frequently perform them in their recitals and competitions. However, when I listened to the live performance of these pianists and some of the recordings, one thing occurred to me often and provokingly: the original sound and character of the Chinese instruments are lost or misinterpreted at times. I do not suggest that the pianists must imitate the sound of the original instruments all the time when performing the piano transcriptions, but it is an important consideration as it may help the performers to convey the idea of the original music and add more diversity to their interpretations.

Much has been written in Chinese about these piano works. Some of the authors offer technical advice on how to recreate the sound of the original Chinese instruments, but it is difficult to find detailed suggestions with specific examples. For example, Hexin Fan's discussion of the piano arrangement of *Three Stanzas of Plum-Blossoms* only

mentions some technical issues for playing the piece.<sup>1</sup> Jiang Jing offers analysis of several selected passages from Chinese piano works composed from the 1920s to the 1980s,<sup>2</sup> but he does not focus specifically on piano arrangements.

This study will discuss five modern arrangements for piano of Chinese traditional music. It will describe the original instruments of these works and compare the sound and structure of the arrangements with those of their sources. In addition, specific techniques needed to perform selected measures of the works will be suggested to help the intermediate pianist achieve appropriate interpretations.

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<sup>1</sup> Hexin Fan, "Teaching and Performing Piano Works Transcribed from Chinese Traditional Instruments," *Piano Art* 7 (2013): 32-34.

<sup>2</sup> Jiang Jing, "The Influence of Traditional Chinese Music on Professional Instrumental Composition," *Asian Music* 22.2 (1991): 83-96.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE GUQIN IN JIANZHONG WANG'S THREE STANZAS OF PLUM-BLOSSOMS

#### *Guqin*

The *guqin* was originally called *qin* (琴), a plucked string instrument with more than 3,000 years of history.<sup>3</sup> Because the Chinese character 琴 refers to a broad range of string instruments in the modern Chinese language, the name was changed to *guqin* in the 1920s. The Chinese character 古 (古) specifies that it is an ancient musical instrument. The early *guqin* had five strings, then it was modified to seven strings<sup>4</sup> during the Han dynasty around 2,000 years ago.

The ability to play the *guqin* is one of the “four arts”<sup>5</sup> that literati and officialdom were expected to practice in feudal China, namely *guqin*, chess, calligraphy, and painting. Many Chinese scholars and poets, such as Confucius<sup>6</sup> and Li Bai, are known to have played the *guqin* and used it as an accompanying instrument for reciting and chanting their poems. The gentle sound, subtle overtones, and elegant variations of timbre made by various techniques of the left hand are ideal for creating the atmosphere for ancient Chinese poems. The techniques of tapping, plucking, and sliding on the *guqin* imitate the inflections of the Chinese spoken language, corresponding to the tones and rhymes of the poems.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Meng Bian, “A Representative Composition that Shows the Chinese Ancient Sound on the Piano,” *Musical Instrument* 4 (2000): 36.

<sup>4</sup> Bian, 36.

<sup>5</sup> Zhidong Hao, *Intellectuals at a Crossroads: The Changing Politics of China's Knowledge Workers* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, c2003), 37.

<sup>6</sup> Bian, 36.

<sup>7</sup> L. I. Kai-lin, “On the Aesthetic Image of ‘Whooping Crane’ and Guqin in the Tang Poetry,” *Journal of Xuzhou Institute of Technology (Social Sciences Edition)* 2 (2016):

The origin of the *guqin* is still debated; the creation of the instrument appears in the mythologies of Huang Di, Fuxi, Shennong,<sup>8</sup> and other Chinese prehistoric figures, although there is no archaeological support for these legends.<sup>9</sup> The first professional *guqin* player to be found in historical records is Zhong Yi,<sup>10</sup> who lived during the Western Zhou dynasty around 1,000 BCE. There are many descriptions of the *guqin* in the Chinese ancient poem book *Shi Jing*. Some Chinese philosophers and poets who are considered to have been good *guqin* players are Zhuang Zi, Bai Juyi, Qu Yuan, and Yu Boya. Boya's relationship to the *qin* is recounted in the book *Han Shu*, from the 4th century CE.<sup>11</sup>

In a famous story, according to Lie Zi, Boya was good at playing the *qin* and his friend Zhong Ziqi liked to listen to him. When Boya was thinking about the high mountains in his playing, Zhong Ziqi said, 'Excellent, as high as Mountain Tai.' When Boya was thinking about flowing water in his playing, Zhong Ziqi said, 'Turbulent flows in the rivers and oceans!' Ziqi never failed to understand Boya's thoughts. When Ziqi died, Boya broke the strings of his *qin* and vowed he would never play the instrument again.<sup>12</sup>

This story of Boya and Ziqi is where the Chinese term "to know the tone" comes from, which refers to sincere and ideal friendship in the Chinese tradition. It is also one of

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<sup>8</sup> Zhenren Ouyang, "The Relation between Guqin and Ancient Chu Dynasty," *Zhou Shan Journal* 3 (2014): 80-85.

<sup>9</sup> Wei Yin, *The Romance of the Chinese Qin* (China: Yunnan People's Press, 2001), 1-10.

<sup>10</sup> Jian Xu, "The Preliminary Study of Qin History," *Music Study* 3 (2010): 109.

<sup>11</sup> Shouhua Liu, "A Cultural Explanation of Boya and Ziqi's Story," *Jiangnan Academia* 32.1 (2013): 61.

<sup>12</sup> Liu, 61.

the many examples in which the *guqin* is a featured musical instrument in Chinese ancient texts.

There are not many people who study *guqin* in modern China, and many tablatures have been lost; however, a journal of *guqin* music, titled *Jin Yu*, was founded in 1930 in Shanghai. During the 1950s and 1960s, Zha Fuxi, a Chinese *guqin*ist and theorist, interviewed and visited *guqin* players throughout China, and he collected and recorded many *guqin* pieces.<sup>13</sup> *Guqin* professors Wu Jinglue, Guan Pinghu, and Zhang Ziqian helped to incorporate *guqin* into the modern Chinese music education system by teaching and studying the instrument in music conservatories. In 1977, a recording of the *guqin* piece *Flowing Water*, played by Guan Pinghu, was carried on the Voyager spacecraft launched by NASA as a representation of historical music creation on Earth.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Yuxing Zhao, Suzel A. Reily, “The Hidden Musicians of the Guqin Music World of Lanzhou 1,” *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Local Musicking* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 241.

<sup>14</sup> Koon Hwee Kan, “New Global Art Connection: Paying Tribute to the Wave-Makers (1910-2010),” *International Journal of Education & The Arts* 14 (2013): 10.

## Jianzhong Wang, *Three Stanzas of Plum-Blossoms*

### Discussion and Comparison with the Original

*Three Stanzas of Plum-Blossoms*, as notated by Zhu Quan in 1425, has ten sections in which the main melody appears in three different ranges of the *guqin*. The piano arrangement made in 1973 by Jianzhong Wang, a composer, pianist, and former assistant professor of composition at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, is based on the *guqin* score provided by Jingle Wu, a *guqin*ist and professor at the Central Conservatory of Music in China. Figure 1 shows the original tablature as edited by Jingle Wu, and Figure 2 shows the first page of Jianzhong Wang's arrangement for piano, which has been well-received and performed often. Both the *guqin* and the piano versions are approximately nine minutes in duration.

**梅花三弄**

1=F  
正调定弦: 5 6 1 2 3 5 6  
[-1] ♩ = 50

据《琴谱谐声》(1820年)  
吴景略演奏谱  
许健记谱

1̣̣ 2̣̣ | 1̣̣ 6̣̣ | 5̣̣ 6̣̣ 2̣̣ | 2̣̣ 3̣̣ 6̣̣ - | 3̣̣ 3̣̣ | 3̣̣ 3̣̣ 2̣̣ |  
勾 四 勾 七 勾七 勾 七 勾 七 瓦 勾 瓦 厓

1̣̣ 2̣̣ | 1̣̣ 6̣̣ | 5̣̣ 6̣̣ 2̣̣ | 2̣̣ 3̣̣ 6̣̣ | 3̣̣ 2̣̣ 1̣̣ | 6̣̣ 1̣̣ |  
勾 四 勾 七 勾七 勾 勾 七 瓦 厓 七 勾

1̣̣ 1̣̣ 1̣̣ 6̣̣ | 1̣̣ 1̣̣ | 1̣̣ 1̣̣ 1̣̣ | 6̣̣ 1̣̣ | 1̣̣ 2̣̣ 1̣̣ 6̣̣ | 5̣̣ 6̣̣ 1̣̣ | 1̣̣ 2̣̣ |  
瓦 厓 勾 瓦 勾瓦 勾瓦 七勾 瓦 瓦 勾瓦 勾瓦 瓦 四

1̣̣ 1̣̣ 1̣̣ | 1̣̣ 2̣̣ | 2̣̣ 3̣̣ 2̣̣ 1̣̣ | 2̣̣ 3̣̣ | 5̣̣ - | 2̣̣ 1̣̣ 5̣̣ | 6̣̣ 1̣̣ | 1̣̣ 1̣̣ 2̣̣ 3̣̣ |  
瓦 勾瓦 瓦 瓦 瓦 瓦 瓦 瓦 瓦 瓦 瓦 瓦 瓦 瓦 瓦 瓦 瓦 瓦 瓦 瓦 瓦

Figure 1. Jingle Wu, *guqin* score of *Three Stanzas of Plum-Blossoms*, mm. 1-2.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup>Dongsheng Pu, *Guqin Quji* (Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 1998), 71.

# 梅花三弄<sup>16</sup>

Cal mando (♩=40-50) 王建中(1973)

\* 根据同名古琴曲改编。

26

Figure 2. Jianzhong Wang, *Three Stanzas of Plum-Blossoms*, mm. 1-28.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Tingge Wei, Mingjun Li, Min Xu, *Selections from Chinese Classical Music for Piano 3* (Changchun: Shidaiwenyi Publishing House, 1995), 26.

The *guqin* version made by Jinglue has eight sections, A<sup>1</sup> B A<sup>2</sup> C A<sup>3</sup> D<sup>1</sup> E D<sup>2</sup>, plus an introduction and a coda. The introduction is played with open strings at a very slow tempo, setting up the tranquil atmosphere of winter where the plum blossom will present its story. The main theme of the plum blossom appears first in the A<sup>1</sup> section and comes back in the A<sup>2</sup> and A<sup>3</sup> sections. The three appearances of the theme correspond with the “three stanzas” in the title. The main theme is played using an overtone technique, pressing the left hand on the left side of the strings while plucking the strings by the right hand. This produces a more mellow and quieter sound than the open strings. Many sixteenth-note passages are written in the B section, which overall is more lively compared to the noble main theme in the A section. The return of the main theme remains the same, but it is made more active by a faster tempo and repeated notes that are spread out over different octaves.

The C section is the most playful, employing many fast glissandos and sliding string techniques, similar to the portamento on the violin. The D<sup>1</sup>, E, and D<sup>2</sup> sections are the most technically difficult. There are many advanced *guqin* skills applied, which sound very fast and improvisational. The tempo is 112 bpm, which is more than twice as fast as the beginning tempo, 50 bpm. Just before the coda, the tempo slows down to 76 bpm and both eighth- and sixteenth-note triplets are used. The piece calms down to an even quieter level in the coda by reusing the overtone technique, which first appeared in the main theme.

The piano arrangement by Jianzhong Wang preserves the original structure of the *guqin* version with slight modifications. He adds a transition between the A<sup>3</sup> and D<sup>1</sup> sections and replaces the new material leading into the coda. The most significant change



is his modulation to new keys in A<sup>3</sup> and D<sup>1</sup>, as shown in Table 1. He also harmonizes the original theme with traditional Western tonal harmonies and adds fast arpeggios as accompaniments. He also adds countermelodies doubled in fourths and fifths, which fit the pentatonic melodies very well. The modulations to E major and F# major are not very smooth, but the abrupt key changes create special effects and fresh sonorities before the return to the home key of F major.

<i>Guqin</i>									
Intro	A <sup>1</sup>	B	A <sup>2</sup>	C	A <sup>3</sup>	D <sup>1</sup>	E	D <sup>2</sup>	F+Coda
1- 26	27- 46	47- 58	59- 78	79- 124	125- 144	145- 190	191- 212	213- 249	250- 272
Piano									
Intro	A <sup>1</sup>	B	A <sup>2</sup>	C	A <sup>3</sup>	Transition	D <sup>1</sup>	D <sup>2</sup>	E+Coda
F major	F major	F major	F major	F major	E major	E major	F# major	F major	F major
1- 28	29- 48	49- 61	62- 80	81- 113	114- 133	134- 142	142- 180	181- 229	230- 246

Table 1. Comparison of the *Guqin* Version and Piano Arrangement of *Three Stanzas of Plum-Blossoms*.

## Technical Suggestions

There are three types of *guqin* technique and their corresponding sounds to be discussed here: open strings, overtones, and portamento. Although a large number of *guqin* techniques are possible, it is practical to choose only the most frequently used ones to examine their translation to the sound of the piano.

The open-string technique on the *guqin* involves plucking the strings with the right hand without touching the strings with the left hand. It makes a pure, hollow, and echoing sound. The overtone technique refers to plucking the string with the right hand while gently touching the same string with the left hand, creating a very soft and delicate sound. The portamento technique is similar to what violinists do, sliding their fingers on the strings. However, on the *guqin* the performer plucks the string with the right hand first, then slides the left hand on the string to make different pitches. This technique is often used to play rapid notes.

In the arrangement for piano, the grace-note octaves in the first four measures imitate the sound of the *guqin*'s open-string technique (Figure 3). To make it sound hollow and echoing, it is important to play these measures using damper pedals. However, the *una corda* pedal should not be used, even with the *pp* dynamic, because it will make the sound "covered," and the *una corda* will be used later for timbre change. To convey a meditative atmosphere, the pianist will need to voice the top notes by putting more weight on the pinky while also avoiding playing the seconds in the inner voices too loudly.

## 梅花三弄



Figure 3. Jianzhong Wang, *Three Stanzas of Plum-Blossoms*, mm. 1-5.

The repeated F in m. 18 is played with a lot of spirit in the *guqin* version (Figure 4), so the pianist also needs to create a rich sound by gently pushing the fingers down to the bottom of the keys. I recommend thinking of a tenuto sound and using the damper pedal here. On the second beat of m. 19, the melody is originally F G F D in the *guqin* using portamento, but the second F is omitted from the piano arrangement. The effect of the omission is to simulate the subtle decrescendo that results when the *guqin*ist slides on the strings after plucking them.



Figure 4. Jianzhong Wang, *Three Stanzas of Plum-Blossoms*, mm. 18-23.

The pianist will need to use the *una corda* pedal to imitate the overtone technique of the *guqin* starting in m. 29 (Figure 5). Although the sixteenth notes in the right hand appear to be busy, the pianist should play them calmly, accentuating the notes in the melody. The left-hand accompaniment needs to be subdued and played very softly.



Figure 5. Jianzhong Wang, *Three Stanzas of Plum-Blossoms*, mm. 29-38.

Some pianists tend to slow down and add rubato starting in m. 51 due to the technical difficulty of big chord leaps (Figure 6). The *portato* markings over the chords in mm. 49, 51, and 52 would usually indicate that the performer should hold the chords longer than the staccato but less than their full value. To avoid sluggish playing, the pianist should play these chords with short touches and move back to the lower range position as soon as possible, using the sostenuto pedal to add length to the chord. The melody here is in the middle voice, so the performer should avoid playing the top chords too loudly.



Figure 6. Jianzhong Wang, *Three Stanzas of Plum-Blossoms*, mm. 49-53.

In Figure 7, the thematic material is the same as that of Figure 4, but its rhythmic values are halved. On the third beat of m. 82, the figure from the first beat of the measure is repeated, like an echo. It should not be played loudly, although it is marked with accents. The pianist needs to relax their wrists and use the weight of the palm to play the staccatos here. They can also imitate the plucking technique of the *guzhin* when playing the staccatos in fourths by moving their fingers inward a bit after touching the keys. Using this technique, one can acquire a more focused sound and avoid playing the two notes in the fourths unevenly.



Figure 7. Jianzhong Wang, *Three Stanzas of Plum-Blossoms*, mm. 81-85.

The arpeggio in m. 86 replicates the glissando of the *guqin* (Figure 8) and should be played very quietly in order to simulate the sound of *guqin*. Some pianists play the arpeggios very loudly in their recordings. It is possible that they did not listen to the *guqin* version and were not aware that the *guqin* is not able to produce loud glissandos. Also, if the glissando is played softly it will not cover the last, accented note of the measure.

In m. 90, the tenuto on the last eighth note indicates an accent, the same as the articulation in the *guqin* version. Although the tenutos are marked on all the chords in m. 91, the third chord, the one harmonizing G in the melody, should be played a bit shorter than the second, as many *guqin*ists do in their recordings. The direction of the phrase can be lost if all the chords are played with the same articulation.



Figure 8. Jianzhong Wang, *Three Stanzas of Plum-Blossoms*, mm. 86-91.

Measures 114-119 combine fast arpeggios with the melody on top (Figure 9). The difficult aspect of this passage is that part of the arpeggio needs to be played by the right hand while it is also playing the melody. The pianist will need to listen to and bring out the melody with the pinky, while also making sure to line up the melody with the arpeggios. The two 32<sup>nd</sup>-note B5s in the second beat of m. 116 should be played by the right hand with the fingering 2 and 1; although the stem on the first B5 indicates that it should be played by the left hand, it can cause too much stretch for younger pianists and

can increase the chance of making mistakes. The arpeggio here has such a wide span that it is better not to follow the composer's pattern of playing the two B5s with different hands. The pianist will not be able to hold the top note using the suggested 2-1 fingering, which is a compromise to reduce the stretch in the left hand. The pianist should use the pedal in this passage, so the top note will still be held, although it is not as effective as holding it by the pinky.



Figure 9. Jianzhong Wang, *Three Stanzas of Plum-Blossoms*, mm. 114-119.

This piece utilizes many pentatonic scales, which can be challenging for composers to harmonize. Dissonant chords could be applied to the pentatonic scales, but complex harmonies can change the sonority of the traditional music. For example, Jianzhong uses a chromatically-altered supertonic chord to accompany the pentatonic scales in mm. 211-212 (Figure 10). Wang's arrangement of the piece still requires the pianist to bring out the nobility, pride, and ecstasy in an elegant way with the image of the *guqin* sound in mind instead of overplaying the heavy texture. The pianist must play



the chords on the downbeats of these measures with proper arm weight, relaxation, and control so that they can avoid noisy sounds and create a rich sonority.



Figure 10. Jianzhong Wang, *Three Stanzas of Plum-Blossoms*, mm. 202-213.

Jianzhong Wang, through various techniques, preserves the character and sound of the *guqin* on the piano. To notice the subtle imitation and changes Jianzhong makes in the piano version, the pianist can listen to the *guqin* recordings and compare them. Jianzhong not only simulates the *guqin* effect, he also modernizes the musical language by adding complex chords and pianistic accompaniments. The pianist should be mindful of the sound of the *guqin* to bring out the traditional elements of this modern arrangement.



## CHAPTER 2

### THE ZHENG IN JIANZHONG WANG'S LIU YANG RIVER

#### *Zheng*

The *zheng* is a plucked string instrument of the Chinese zither family that commonly has 21 strings. It is over 2,000 years old, with a history beginning in the Qin dynasty.<sup>17</sup> It has evolved through the years into other versions with 13 and 16 strings.<sup>18</sup> The strings of the *zheng* are made of steel, nylon, or silk depending on different schools and styles. A wooden box in cuboid shape serves as a soundboard for the *zheng* and is usually decorated with Chinese art, such as calligraphy, carved patterns, shells, and other crafts.

The *zheng* is sometimes confused with the *guqin* by people who are not familiar with the instruments;<sup>19</sup> however, the *guqin* is usually smaller, has fewer strings and does not have movable bridges. The timbre of the two instruments is also very distinctive. The *guqin* has a mellower sound due to the material of the strings and the soundboard. Although the division is arbitrary, the *guqin* is more commonly played by ancient Chinese literati and scholars while the *zheng* often appears in folk music settings. Glissandos are more common on the *zheng* because the number of strings makes more room for this technique to be effectively applied.

The *zheng* has many different schools of playing according to its origins and development in different regions.<sup>20</sup> These schools are usually divided between Northern

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<sup>17</sup> Yue Cao, "The Main Schools and Characteristics of the Zheng," *Journal of Southeast University* 4/4 (July 2002): 84.

<sup>18</sup> Cao, 84.

<sup>19</sup> Zhaomeng Zhang, "The Discussion on the Differences of Guqin and Zheng," *Northern Music* 7 (2015): 140-141.

<sup>20</sup> Cao, 84.

and Southern based on their provincial names. For example, the Northern style includes Shandong, Henan, and Shanxi, and the Southern style includes Fujian, Canton, and others. The regional schools differentiate themselves by specific techniques, repertoire, and musical style. However, the most important feature is that the pieces that are performed and composed in different schools are related to their respective provincial traditional music. For instance, the pieces of Shandong school are usually related to *Qinshu*, a genre of Shandong folk music, while the pieces of Henan School are often based on the indigenous rap music and folk operas (*Xiqu*) of Henan.<sup>21</sup>

The technique of the *zheng* usually involves plucking the strings inward and outward with the right hand and creating slides and vibrato with the left hand. When plucking the strings, the player can either use a plectrum made of plastic, tortoiseshell or another material, or just use their fingers. The modern technique of *zheng* requires that the performer be able to play melodies with both hands. For example, Zhao Yuzhai, a *zheng* professor at Shenyang Conservatory of Music, composed a polyphonic piece in 1953 titled *Celebrating a Bumper Harvest Year*, in which melodies appear in both hands.<sup>22</sup> However, when the left hand provides harmony and counterpoint, it is not able to create ornaments for the right hand at the same time, which is one of the limitations of the modern *zheng* technique.

The *zheng* had a strong influence on other Asian zither instruments such as the Japanese *koto*, Korean *gayageum*, and Vietnamese *dan tranh*, all of which are considered

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<sup>21</sup> Cao, 85.

<sup>22</sup> Aihua Yan, "The Development of the Performing Art of the Zheng in the Contemporary Age," *The Hundred Schools of Art* 3 (2002): 107.

to be descendants of the ancient *zheng*.<sup>23</sup> Not only is the *zheng* a traditional Chinese instrument, but it also appears in many Chinese movies, TV shows, galas, and other popular genres, such as Chinese rock and rap music.

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<sup>23</sup> Keith Howard, *Korean Musical Instruments* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1995), 38.

## Jianzhong Wang, *Liu Yang River*

### Discussion and Comparison with the Original

*Liu Yang River* is a song composed by Qili Zhu and Biguang Tang, lyrics by Shuhua Xu, in the character of a Hunan folk tune. It was commissioned for a variety show held by the Hunan Provincial People's Government in 1950. It soon became one of the most popular songs in China and was performed by many Chinese folk singers. In 1972, Jianzhong Wang arranged it into a five-minute piano version. It became a famous piece that appears in the repertoire of many Chinese pianists at competitions and recitals. The piano version uses melodies from the folk song version; however, melodic variations in the left hand and fast arpeggios that imitate the sound of the *zheng* were added. The opening of the piece can be seen here in Figure 11.

浏 阳 河\*

Andante (♩=76) 王建中 (1972)

*mp*

*poco meno mosso string.*

8-----1

Figure 11, Jianzhong Wang, *Liu Yang River*, mm.1-9.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Tingge Wei, Mingjun Li, Min Xu, *Selections from Chinese Classical Music for Piano 3* (Changchun: Shidaiwenyi Publishing House, 1995), 11.

The song by Qili Zhu and Biguang Tang consists of an introduction followed by five verses of four phrases each. The introduction serves also as a refrain, returning between the verses. In his piano arrangement of this song, Jianzhong Wang preserves the introduction and three verses with variation. He adds fast thirty-second notes in the accompaniment and varies the melody of the verses by adding embellishments and more complicated figures, such as mordents and dotted rhythms. The introduction (Figure 11, above) has a doubled melody in the right hand and an accompaniment of arpeggios in the left hand with added embellishment of rapid running notes. In the three verses, the melody appears in the right hand in the first, the left hand in the second, then returns to the right hand in the third, with some added embellishments. In the transition between the second and third verses, Wang uses 36 beats of thirty-second-note arpeggios that imitate the sound and technique of the *zheng*. They are undivided by bar lines due to the improvisational manner. There is a short coda at the end with fast running notes in the style of the *zheng*.

## Technical Suggestions

The technique of the *zheng* overlaps some with the *guqin* when it comes to portamento and glissando; however, there are many differences in the details. Portamento is frequently used on the *zheng*, which creates the distinctive character of its sound. However, glissandos are more frequently used on the *zheng* than the *guqin*. The timbre of the *zheng* is crisper due to the material of its soundbox and strings compared to the *guqin*, so the pianist should use drier touches when playing *Liu Yang River*.

The steadiness and clarity of the running pentatonic scales are important in playing the *zheng*. At times, pianists do not mimic the *zheng* correctly and play these passages too freely and sloppily. Because the distance between the strings is greater than on the *guqin*, scales cannot be played as quickly on the *zheng*, and the pianist should take this difference into account (Figure 11, above, mm. 5-9).

The rolled chord on the second the beat of m.10 needs to be played very steadily using a flexible wrist (Figure 12). The pianist should use a single gesture to play both of the eighth-note chords here and in other measures to make the second chord sound like an echo of the first. The sixteenth notes in m.17 need to be played very softly because they are an embellishing link to the next phrase and not part of the melody. The A4 in m. 18 in the middle voice should not be covered by the sixteenths.



Figure 12. Jianzhong Wang, *Liu Yang River*, mm. 10-19.

There are similar accompanying sixteenths in m. 21 (Figure 13). As they are marked *pp*, the sixteenths on the second beat of this measure need to be played very softly; they are often played so loudly that they cover the main melody. The A and F# in the melody are usually played with portamento in the *zheng* version, and the technique is also used in Chinese folk singing. To imitate that, the pianist needs to play these two notes with a subtle decrescendo and keep the middle voice quiet.



Figure 13. Jianzhong Wang, *Liu Yang River*, mm. 20-21.

When playing mm. 27-28 (Figure 14), the pianist should keep the wrists relaxed and rotate them slightly. For the right hand, use a drop-and-lift gesture for each group of notes divided by the slurs. Use the third finger as a pivot on the E4 when rotating the left hand. The pianist might find the range too wide to keep the third finger in its position, but

one can still think of it as a pivot and move it slightly when reaching the higher notes. The melody is embedded on the top in mm. 27-28, so the pianist should bring it out using the hand weight by tilting the hand to the right side slightly.



Figure 14, Jianzhong Wang, *Liu Yang River*, mm. 25-28.

In Figure 15, the melody moves to the middle voice while accompanied by right-hand sextuplets. To mimic the *zheng* sound with the right hand, it is important to play the notes detached and keep in mind the sound of portato. It is also helpful to use very little pedal for the detached sound.

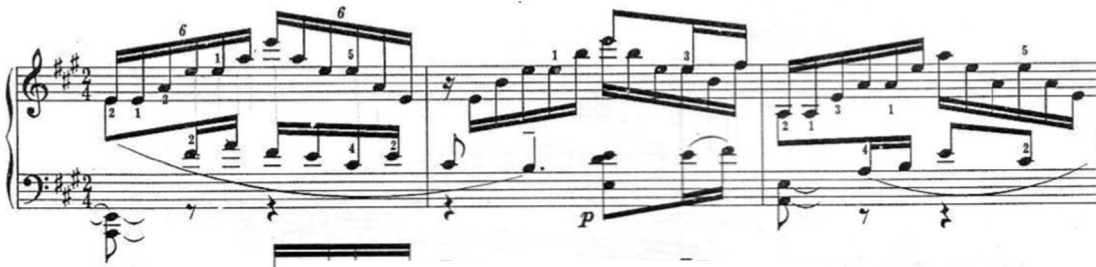


Figure 15, Jianzhong Wang, *Liu Yang River*, mm. 33-35.

Here again (Figure 16), the pianist should not play the running pentatonic patterns too quickly because the music calms down at the end and should remain at *pp*. The final, rolled chord should be played very slowly, as if the pianist is plucking each string on the *zheng*.





Figure 16, Jianzhong Wang, *Liu Yang River*, m. 82 (*ad libitum*).

The combination of singing melodies with running-note accompaniments creates some technical challenges for the pianist. Keeping in mind the origin of the piece as a song in folk style, the pianist should be careful not to cover the melody with the busy accompaniments. Moreover, in the sections where Jianzhong puts the melodies in the middle and bass voices, it is crucial to listen for them and bring them out. The technical difficulties are not barriers to gratifying interpretations, but rather opportunities for sharpening one's skills and balancing one's mind and ears.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE ERHU IN WANGHUA CHU'S MOON REFLECTED

#### ON THE ER-QUAN SPRING

##### *Erhu*

The *erhu* is a bowed string instrument, also known as the Chinese two-stringed fiddle or Chinese violin. *Er* (二) and *hu* (胡) are two individual Chinese characters. *Er* means two and *hu* refers to the *huqin* musical instrument family. The *erhu* originated from the northern Chinese minority ethnic group named Xi,<sup>25</sup> and was originally called the *xiqin*. Because the Han Chinese people generally referred to the minority ethnic groups from the northern border as Hu, *xiqin* was named *huqin* during the Tang dynasty, around 1,500 years ago. Thus, the literal meaning of *erhu* is two-stringed musical instrument of the *huqin* family.

The soundbox of the *erhu* can be made from various types of wood or bamboo with python skins covering it, but synthetic material has replaced the python skin for environmental protection in recent years (Figure 17). A vertical stick is connected to the soundbox with two tuning pegs on top and the two strings are attached to the pegs and the soundbox. There is no fingerboard under the strings as compared to other instruments in the western fiddle family. The strings are made of metal, silk, nylon or other synthetic material with the horse-hair bow placed in between the two strings.

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<sup>25</sup> Xueqin Yu, "The Development of the Erhu Art and its Changes in Culture," *The Hundred Schools of Art* 3 (2007): 110.

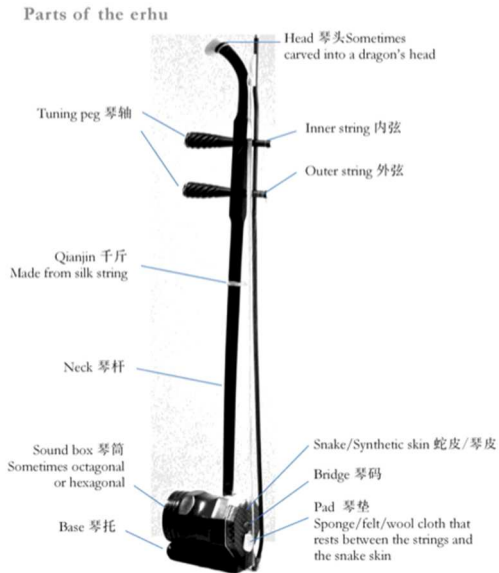


Figure 17. An Image of *Erhu*.<sup>26</sup>

Just as with other folk music, *erhu* pieces are passed down through oral teaching without sheet music. The *erhu* is often played in Buddhist and Taoist temples and serves as an accompanying instrument for folk songs and native operas. It appears in several mural paintings from the Song dynasty in which it is carried in the hands of some mythological figures. These depictions of the *erhu* are very similar to the modern ones in the painting *Autumn Banquet at Lintang* by You Ziqiu<sup>27</sup> from the Ming dynasty, and the *erhu* has been continuously developed by Chinese musicians after.

Liu Tianhua, Chinese musician, music educator and innovator in the early 20th century, is considered the most important contributor to the development of *erhu* music.<sup>28</sup> He was the first *erhu* professor in a Chinese college and he brought *erhu* music to the stages of modern concert halls. Tianhua studied *erhu* with the famous erhuist Zhou

<sup>26</sup> Patty Chan, *Playing Erhu: Bridging the Gap* (Ontario: ErhuBook.com, 2011), 2.

<sup>27</sup> Dongsheng Liu, *Zhongguo Yinyue Shi Tujian* (Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 1988), 169.

<sup>28</sup> Xueqin Yu, 111.

Shaomei and performed *erhu* music in many Buddhist and Taoist temples with monks and other Taoist musicians. Tianhua began teaching *erhu* at Beijing University in 1922, where he also studied violin with Russian violinist Tonoff. These lessons provided Tianhua with new ideas for *erhu* techniques. He also improved the manufacturing technology of traditional *erhus* by using silk strings for better sound. He was the first to promote the tuning of the two strings to A4 and D4 so that the instrument could be used in modern orchestras.

Tianhua also advocated for the use of Western five-line staff notation for traditional Chinese music.<sup>29</sup> He thought the decline of Chinese music had a lot to do with the lack of an integrated notation system, and many pieces were lost for this reason. Tianhua transcribed some Chinese traditional music for the *erhu* using the five-line staff notation and suggested adding precise dynamic markings and fingerings based on the original tablature. He also composed etudes and pieces in other genres for the *erhu*. Those pieces include *Ancient Tone of Yingzhou*, *Brightness Xing*, and *Empty Mountain and Bird Sound*.<sup>30</sup>

Famous erhuists in the 20th century include Hua Yanjun, Lü Wencheng, and Song Fei. They transcribed and arranged traditional music and wrote compositions using new techniques. Many *erhu* pieces in various genres have been composed by Chinese and Western composers after Liu Tianhua, such as *Wild Grass* by Guo Wenjing, *Past Time* by

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<sup>29</sup> Jing Li, "Chinese Music Master Liu Tianhua and the Music Education at Beijing University," PhD diss., Beijing University, 2009.

<sup>30</sup> Li.

Chen Qigang, *Erhu Concerto No. 3* by Zheng Bing, and *Presto* by Stefano Bellon from Italy.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Hanyang Zhao, Aiming Liu, *Erhu Music Dictionary* (Beijing: Blue Sky Press, September 2010), 342.

## Wanghua Chu, *Moon Reflected on the Er-quan Spring*

### Discussion and Comparison with the Original

*Moon Reflected on the Er-quan Spring* was originally composed in the early 1900s by Chinese folk artist and Taoist Yanjun Hua, nicknamed Blind Abing. It was recorded and transcribed in the summer of 1950 by Mengliu Yang,<sup>32</sup> a music educator and musicologist at the Central Conservatory of China. This piece, originally played on the *erhu*, expresses the suffering and sorrow of an indigenous artist because of the hardships in his life. The piano arrangement was completed in 1972 by Wanghua Chu, who studied piano and composition at the Central Conservatory of Music in China, and was based on the historical recording by Yanjun Hua. The eight-minute-long piece is selected for many competitions in China and appears in the textbooks of Chinese music conservatories.

Figure 18 shows the opening of the piano arrangement.

The image shows a musical score for the opening of 'Moon Reflected on the Er-quan Spring'. The score is written for piano and is in 4/4 time. It is marked 'Andante cantabile' with a tempo of 48-58. The score is attributed to 储望华 (1972). The music is in a key signature of one flat (B-flat major or D minor). The score consists of two systems of music, each with a treble and bass staff. The first system starts with a treble staff containing a triplet of eighth notes, followed by a slur over a series of notes. The bass staff has a similar triplet and then a series of notes. The second system continues the melody in the treble staff and provides accompaniment in the bass staff. Dynamic markings include 'p' (piano), 'espr.' (espressivo), 'sempre legato', and 'mp' (mezzo-piano). There are also various fingering numbers and slurs throughout the score.

Figure 18. Wanghua Chu, *Moon Reflected on the Er-quan Spring*, mm.1-6.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Baoqiang Han, Wenjuan Zhao, Yiqing Liu, “The Tonal Study of Abing’s Er Quan Ying Yue,” *Chinese Musicology* 2 (2000): 84-97.

<sup>33</sup> Tingge Wei, Mingjun Li, Min Xu, *Selection from Chinese Classical Music for Piano 3* (Changchun: Shidaiwenyi Publishing House, 1995), 92.

The *erhu* version has 89 measures and eight sections that include an introduction, theme, five variations, and a coda.<sup>34</sup> It was transcribed from a recording of Yanjun Hua improvising on his own piece. Although there are many improvisational passages, three main melodies unify the piece in this version.

The piano arrangement has only 65 measures. Wanghua Chu created a rich sound on the piano by adding bass notes in octaves and composing counter-melodies in polyphonic style, as well as adding arpeggios and fast running notes in the accompaniment. The piano version preserves almost all the melodic material from the *erhu* version; however, Table 2 shows that there is one fewer variation in the piano version because Chu merged together variations 4 and 5 in the *erhu* version into one variation (Variation 4). All the variations are shorter because Chu deleted some repetitive phrases and the tremolo parts that are difficult to imitate on the piano.

*Erhu*

Intro	Theme	Variation 1	Variation 2	Variation 3	Variation 4	Variation 5	Coda
mm. 1-2	mm. 2-12	mm. 12-27	mm. 27-39	mm. 39-45	mm. 45-62	mm. 62-78	mm. 78-89

*Piano*

Intro	Theme	Variation1	Variation2	Variation3	Variation4	Coda
mm.1-2	mm.2-12	mm.12-21	mm.21-30	mm.30-36	mm.36-52	mm.52-65

<sup>34</sup> Xiande Meng, "Moon Reflected on the Er-quan Spring," *Erhu Solo Classics* (Beijing: Xiandai Publishing House, 2012), 25.

Table 2. Comparison of the *Erhu* and Piano Versions of *Moon Reflected on the Er-quan Spring*.



## Technical Suggestions

Like many other stringed musical instruments, the *erhu* is very good at imitating the human voice and often appears in ensembles that accompany the Chinese *Xiqu* music, a genre of Chinese folk opera. In *Xiqu*, the *erhu* often corresponds to the bends and ornaments of the human voice. This capability needs to be taken into consideration when playing the piano transcriptions of the *erhu*, especially with the ornaments and legatos. The *erhu* is known for its melancholy, mournful, and melodious sound, and it is very important to mimic these characters on the piano.

The example below shows the importance of playing the ornaments properly. The grace note on the first beat of m. 4 (Figure 19) is an exact transcription from the original *erhu* version. On the *erhu*, the grace note is played on the beat with emphasis, so the pianist should align the grace note with the bass octave in the left hand and make sure to accent the B a little bit. The trill in the second half of the third beat in m. 4 needs to be played expressively, as it is a vocal ornament in a song about sorrow and struggle. In many *Xiqu* pieces, trills are not only an embellishment, but also a device for dramatic effects. The pianist should follow the slurs exactly for appropriate phrasing since this is what Yanjun Hua did in his original recording. The slurs here not only preserve the original idea of Yanjun, but also show his improvisational manner and innovative ideas of phrasing.



Figure 19. Wanghua Chu, *Moon Reflected on the Er-quan Spring*, mm. 4-6.

Here is another example of grace notes that imitate the bends of the *erhu* (Figure 20). The grace notes G# and A# in m. 9 must come on the sixteenth-note subdivision with some stress so as to simulate the pitch bend of the *erhu*.



Figure 20. Wanghua Chu, *Moon Reflected on the Er-quan Spring*, mm. 7-9.

In the measures shown in Figure 21, it is difficult to play a legato melody while dealing with big chords and doublings. Although no slurs are marked here, the pianist should still play the melody as if they were marked, because it is recalling the melody from the beginning. One must think about the balance between hands, listen carefully to the chords, and use the proper damper pedal to connect them. Pianists should understand why Wanghua added so many accents and big chords here: it is the last statement of one of main melodies before the climax of the piece in the *erhu* version. The heavy texture makes it difficult to bring out the melody on the top, so the pianist should subdue the middle voices in the chords and use clear damper pedals.



Figure 21. Wanghua Chu, *Moon Reflected on the Er-quan Spring*, mm. 45-46.

Figure 22 shows the climax of the piece. Yanjun played this excerpt with a lot of passion, especially the sixty-fourths in beat 2 of m. 51. In the *erhu* transcription, it is marked *ff* here, which is the loudest dynamic of the piece. The piano version simulates the climax by adding bombastic chords and sweeping left-hand accompaniment patterns. To play these notes powerfully and fast on the piano, pianists should keep their arms and wrists relaxed while keeping the palms and fingers strong, so they will get enough support to play the chords without tension. Pianists should keep in mind that there are a lot of notes here and one should not hurry the tempo out of panic; on the contrary, play the passage with confidence and calmness. There are thirteen sixty-fourth notes plus a sixteenth note in beat 2 of m. 51 in the left hand, which is difficult to align with the syncopation on the top, but one can achieve that with slow practice, hands separately, and with the metronome. These notes are not supposed to be perfectly aligned, but the slow practice will enhance the accuracy when the pianist plays in regular tempo. After the fermata in m. 52, the pianist should wait a bit until the *fortissimo* decays so the chord will not cover the return of the opening theme that follows.



Figure 22. Wanghua Chu, *Moon Reflected on the Er-quan Spring*, mm. 51-52.

In the excerpt shown in Figure 23, the middle voice is the melody. The pianist should touch the bass very gently, even using the *una corda* if necessary. It is important to practice the three layers separately, then combine two of the three voices. For example, practice the top voice and bottom voice together, or practice the top voice and middle voice together. Until the last chord, the top voice should be played by the left hand crossing over the right hand. The pianist should play the last chord with the right hand to avoid too much of a shoulder stretch.



Figure 23. Wanghua Chu, *Moon Reflected on the Er-quan Spring*, mm. 53-55.

Based on a historic recording by a folk musician, this piano piece keeps much of its improvisational character through the phrasing, articulations, and ornaments. It is

important to consider the combination of proper pedal use, finger legato, and wrist gestures to achieve an appropriate performance of the piece. The use of damper pedal can prevent the loss of the legato melodies that are originally in the *erhu* version. The finger and wrist techniques will help the pianist to simulate the bends, grace notes, and other embellishments of the *erhu* with ease. The pianist needs to keep in mind the character of the *erhu* as a string instrument, and not let the percussive sound of the piano take over the initial conception.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE SUONA IN JIANZHONG WANG'S A HUNDRED BIRDS PAYING HOMAGE TO THE PHOENIX

#### *Suona*

The *suona* is the Chinese version of the *sorna*, a double-reed woodwind instrument that originated in Arabia or India and was brought to China during the Jin Yuan period of the 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>35</sup> Although they are very similar in shape and structure, the Chinese *suona* has the capability to produce higher pitches and a brighter sound. This musical instrument is often used in ritual and wedding events throughout China, especially in some northern provinces such as Shandong and Henan. It also appeared in native festivals and military events in the period of feudal China.

The *suona* is often a featured instrument in *Gu Chui* music, a folk music style played by drums and wind instruments in northern Chinese provinces.<sup>36</sup> There is no unified standard for making *suonas* in China, and many provinces and ethnic groups have their own versions of it. It is also common to have different sizes of *suonas* in a Chinese traditional music ensemble. For example, there are several ranges of *suona* that are often used, such as piccolo, soprano, alto, tenor, and bass. The instrument was further developed during the 20th century by the addition of keys, which allows performers to play 12 semitones instead of only 7 pitches.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Xuelin Mei, "Three Studies on the Suona," *Journal of Shenyang Music Conservatory* 2 (February 2004): 46.

<sup>36</sup> Ye Chen, "Chinese Piano Music Transcribed from Traditional Chinese Music: *A Hundred Birds Paying Homage to the Phoenix*," *Fujian Forum, Humanities and Social Sciences* 1 (2012): 27.

<sup>37</sup> Shasha Zhu, "A Comparative Study of The Social Function of African Algaita and Chinese Suona" (M.A. Thesis, Kent State University, 2018), 57.

The *suona* is especially popular in Chinese villages because its timbre and volume fit the atmosphere of outdoor events such as processions, weddings, and rituals. A *suona* player can simulate the sound of birds and the inflection of the Chinese spoken language, effects that are widely appreciated by many Chinese people. According to Liu Yong, a musicologist at the Music Conservatory of China, there are different tuning systems for *suonas* in different regions.<sup>38</sup> For instance, the Hunan *suona* has a sharper G; the B is tuned a little bit lower in the Shanxi and Gansu provinces; and some *suonas* in Xinjiang are good for playing microtones. The various tuning systems of the *suonas* reflect the musical characteristics of their regions.

Chinese composers in the 20th century, such as Liu Shouyi, Yang Jiwu, and Zhu Jianer, wrote concertos that explored the possibility of collaboration of the *suona* with Western musical instruments. The *suona* concerto, *The Celebration of Victory*,<sup>39</sup> by Liu Shouyi and Yang Jiwu was performed during National Music Week in Beijing in 1956 and was the only concerto performed at the event. Although the piece was not well-received at that time, it is considered a bold experiment in balancing the sound of a Chinese instrument with the Western orchestra. In 1989, Zhu Jianer composed a concerto titled *The Sound of the Sky*, which is the first *suona* piece that uses twelve-tone and other atonal techniques. In a single movement with *suonas* in three different sizes, the work was highly praised by Jianer's peers in China.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Yong Liu, "The Cultural Observation in Chinese Suona Music," *Yunnan College of Art Journal* (March 2000): 52.

<sup>39</sup> Mei, 48.

<sup>40</sup> Hua Feng, "Discussion on the Serialism in Zhu Jianer's Symphony No.1," *Nanjing College of Art Journal: Music and Performance Edition* 4 (2001): 26-29.

## Jiangzhong Wang, *A Hundred Birds Paying Homage to the Phoenix*

### Discussion and Comparison with the Original

*A Hundred Birds Paying Homage to the Phoenix* was originally a popular *suona* piece featuring bird sounds and was played by Chinese indigenous musicians in Shandong and other northern provinces. It was transcribed in 1953 by Tongxiang Ren, *suona* artist of the Shanghai Opera Theater and *suona* professor at Shanghai Conservatory of Music. In 1973, Jiangzhong Wang composed an arrangement for piano based on a recording by Tongxiang Ren. The example in Figure 24 shows the opening of Ren's version; there are many other versions by other indigenous musicians. The *suona* piece was widely performed at weddings in the Shandong villages and still remains popular in some northern Chinese provinces. The seven-minute piano version (Figure 25) was played by famous Chinese pianists Shucheng Shi and Haochen Zhang and is performed widely in China and internationally.

**《百鳥朝鳳》**

筒音2演奏 民間樂曲

[一] 山雀啼曉 清新、悠揚、生機勃勃地 *tr*

サ 5̣. 6̣ 1̣. 2̣ 3̣ 6̣ 2̣. 3̣ 2̣ 3̣ 2̣3̣2̣3̣ 2̣ - 5̣ 2̣ ( 5̣ 2̣ ) 5̣ 5̣ 2̣

*mp* *mf*

( 5̣ 5̣ 2̣ ) 7̣55̣2̣ ( 7̣55̣2̣ ) 5̣2̣6̣2̣ 7̣2̣1̣2̣ 2̣2̣2̣2̣ 1̣6̣1̣6̣1̣6̣ 1̣6̣1̣6̣ 1̣6̣1̣6̣

*mf* *f*

[二] 春回大地 明朗、優美、充滿活力地

3̣6̣ 6̣ 6̣ 6̣ 6̣ 6̣ 6̣ 6̣ 6̣ 6̣ 2̣ -  $\frac{2}{4}$  5̣ 7̣ 6̣ | 5̣. 0 | #4̣. 7̣6̣5̣ 2̣ 4̣5̣6̣ | 5̣ - |

*mf*

Figure 24. Tongxiang Ren, *A Hundred Birds Paying Homage to the Phoenix*, mm.1-4.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Xingliang Luo, "Suona Advanced Tutorial," <http://www.hkco.org/uploads/docs/5d9437883b9541.pdf>, Accessed 13 April 2020.



# 百鸟朝凤

民间唢呐曲  
王建中改编



Figure 25. Jianzhong Wang, *A Hundred Birds Paying Homage to the Phoenix*, mm. 1-12.<sup>42</sup>

Tongxiang Ren's transcription of the *suona* piece was based on folk performances in the Shandong province. However, he himself made several recordings throughout his life and continued revising the piece even after the 1950s. The most popular version of the *suona* piece by Tongxiang Ren, shown in Figure 24 above, was published in the 1980s and is still played and arranged by today's Chinese suonaists and professors such as Guangcai Li and Ying Li. Tongxiang Ren's published version has an introduction plus seven sections that alternate between imitations of the birds and the folk melodies.

The piano version by Jianzhong Wang consists of eight sections. He deleted the introduction and shortened the birdsong sections (Table 3), perhaps because these sounds are not as easily imitated on the piano. For example, in the *suona* version, section VI has

<sup>42</sup> Tingge Wei, Mingjun Li, Min Xu, *Selections from Chinese Classical Music for Piano 3* (Changchun: Shidaiwenyi Publishing House: 1995), 16.

27 measures while the piano version (section VII) has only 2 measures. On the *suona*, the bird sound is produced by an extended technique that is impossible to imitate on a regular piano. Section VIII is longer in the piano version because Wang added some technically-demanding octaves and arpeggios to make a brilliant ending.

<i>Suona</i>							
Intro	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Bird Sound	Melodic	Bird sound	Melodic	Bird sound	Melodic	Bird sound	Melodic
m.1	mm. 2-52	mm. 53-77	mm. 78-111	mm. 112-184	mm. 185-225	mm. 226-252	mm. 253-296
Piano							
I	II	III	IV	V	V	VII	VIII
Melodic	Melodic	Bird sound	Melodic	Bird sound	Melodic	Bird sound	Melodic
mm. 1-28	mm. 29-92	mm. 93-131	mm. 132-173	mm. 174-186	mm. 187-232	mm. 233-234	mm. 235-294

Table 3. Comparison of the *Suona* and Piano Versions of *A Hundred Birds Paying Homage to the Phoenix*.

Wang uses sixteenth-note melodies that include many half steps and grace notes to imitate bird sounds (Figure 26 and Figure 27). To make the piece more pianistic, Wang omitted several improvisational birdsong phrases and deleted some repeated phrases. He utilized many 4ths and minor 2nds, which properly preserve the Chinese traditional style

by simulating the bends and the melodic style of the *suona*. The accompaniment patterns simulate the sound of traditional percussion instruments, such as the *gu* and the *luo*.



Figure 26. Jianzhong Wang, *A Hundred Birds Paying Homage to the Phoenix*, mm. 118-127.



Figure 27. Jianzhong Wang, *A Hundred Birds Paying Homage to the Phoenix*, mm.176-186.

## Technical Suggestions

This piece alternates between melodic and bird sound sections. The pianist must understand these sections in order to bring out the proper character. The performer should imagine the various articulations of the *suona* while playing the piano and imitate them with appropriate piano techniques. In general, the *suona* is played with a lot of emphasis on the grace note, and there are very obvious dynamic changes in the short phrases that imitate the bird sounds.

In Figure 28, the pianist should emphasize the accidentals in order to imitate the original ornaments. For example, the D#4 in m. 11 simulates the portamento technique on *suona*. The portamento here is not exactly transcribed in the piano version due to the different mechanics of the two instruments, but the accidentals in the piano version help to mimic the ornaments or dissonances in the *suona* version.



Figure 28. Jianzhong Wang, *A Hundred Birds Paying Homage to the Phoenix*, mm. 7-12.

In Figure 29, m. 15, the accidentals on the second beat in the left hand need to be stressed although there are no indications here. The minor ninths between the two hands are not in the *suona* version, but the piano transcription uses the dissonant interval to simulate the effect of the *suona* ornaments.



Figure 29. Jianzhong Wang, *A Hundred Birds Paying Homage to the Phoenix*, mm. 13-16.

The slurs in Figure 30 do not indicate legato but just the grouping of these short phrases. The grace notes in m. 22 should be played very quickly to imitate the bird sound.



Figure 30. Jianzhong Wang, *A Hundred Birds Paying Homage to the Phoenix*, mm. 18-22.

In Figure 31, the off-beat eighth notes in mm. 29, 31, and 33 should be played very short with some stress, as if there are staccato dots on the chords. The tempo changes suddenly here to depict the joyful scene of a village wedding. In m. 32, the pianist should pay attention to the downward direction and articulation marks so as to imitate the melodic character of the *suona*. It is important to notice that in the *suona* version, mm. 29-30 and mm. 31-32 are usually interpreted as question-and-answer phrases that mimic a dialogue between two birds. The pianist should interpret these measures as a conversation as well.



Figure 31. Jianzhong Wang, *A Hundred Birds Paying Homage to the Phoenix*, mm. 29-34.

Although the melodic sixteenth notes in mm.140-141 have no staccato markings (Figure 32), they should be played detached to mimic animated bird scenes. Pianists should play these sixteenth notes as if there were portatos marked on them, with the pedal used sparingly.



Figure 32. Jianzhong Wang, *A Hundred Birds Paying Homage to the Phoenix*, mm. 138-142.

It is very technically challenging to play at a fast tempo the melody in the left hand against off-beat accompaniment figures in the right hand, as shown in Figure 33. To achieve clarity and fluency in phrases like this, pianists should practice the hands separately with a metronome. To mimic the bird sounds in m. 157 in the left hand, pianists should play the grace notes as if the D# and E are played together while holding the thumb higher than the second finger, so when the hand drops on the key, it will create fast ornaments without muscle tension.



Figure 33. Jianzhong Wang, *A Hundred Birds Paying Homage to the Phoenix*, mm. 153-157.

In Figure 34, the trill is marked with a fermata only. However, in the *suona* version, it is often played with *ritardando* and *decrescendo*. The pianist can imitate the dynamic and tempo changes here. The sixteenth notes after the trill are often played with an *accelerando* followed by a *ritardando* toward the end of the measure.



Figure 34. Jianzhong Wang, *A Hundred Birds Paying Homage to the Phoenix*, m. 186.

This piece has many sections that imitate bird sounds and are not easy to play on the piano. The pianist should listen to recordings for ideas on how the *suona* imitates the birds before attempting to transfer that to the piano. The staccatos and repeated notes are relatively easy to play on the piano. However, the dissonant seconds and grace notes that simulate the bends of the *suona* are often played inattentively. To avoid bland interpretation of those sections, the pianist should carefully bring out the dissonances and embellishments using proper techniques, such as flexible wrists and arm weight.

Imagining the sound before playing will help to clarify those sections and improve one's inner hearing of the music.



## CHAPTER 5

### THE PIPA IN YINGHAI LI'S FLUTE AND DRUM AT SUNSET

#### *Pipa*

The *pipa* is a pear-shaped plucked-string instrument with four or five strings. The body is made of wood and bamboo. There is no consensus on its origin, but it was probably brought to northern China from West and Central Asia via the Silk Road, then to central China by nomadic groups from northern China. It was brought to Japan later on.<sup>43</sup> Pi (琵琶) and Pa (琶) are Chinese characters that represent the basic right-hand technique of playing the *pipa*: plucking outward and inward. A description of the *pipa* appears in texts from the Han dynasty around 2,000 years ago. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, it became a popular musical instrument to be played in the royal court during the Wei-Jin period of China,<sup>44</sup> which is also known as the Three Kingdoms period.

This musical instrument reached the height of popularity during the Tang dynasty in the 7th century. Many scholars and literates in the Tang, Song, and Yuan dynasties wrote poems and essays about the *pipa*, such as *Pipa Xing (The Poem of Pipa)* by Bai Juyi<sup>45</sup> and *Pipa Ji (The Story of Pipa)* by Gao Ming.<sup>46</sup> Sculptures, murals and paintings of the *pipa* from the East Han dynasty in the late 3rd century were found in the Shanxi and Gansu provinces in the early 20th century, such as the *Musicians in a Scene from Paradise in the Yulin Cave*.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Weiping Zhao, "A Historical Account of Pipa Found Along the Silk Route," *Chinese Musicology* 4 (2003): 34.

<sup>44</sup> Zhao, 45.

<sup>45</sup> Hongqiong Mei, "The Resonance of Music and Literature: The Musical Description in Bai Juyi's Pipa Xing," *Science and Technology Information* 27 (2009): 132.

<sup>46</sup> Rong Liu, "The Analysis of Zhang Guangcai's Character in Pipa Ji," *Literature Study* 13 (2019): 28.

<sup>47</sup> Jinshi Fan, *The Caves of Dunhuang* (London: Scala, 2008): 8.

A number of virtuosic pipaists lived during the Tang dynasty, such as Cao Bao and Cao Gang. Some even became court musicians because the emperors were very fond of *pipa* music.<sup>48</sup> During the Song and Ming dynasties, the *pipa* was often used in folk music, and it was embraced by the literates. In the mid-20th century, Hejia Cheng modified the *pipa* to extend its range from seven pitches to twelve semitones.<sup>49</sup>

There are three categories of *pipa* music, according to Lu Yingying at the music department of Minjiang University in China: ancient *pipa* music, arrangements of traditional music, and transcriptions.<sup>50</sup> Examples of the three categories include *Sunny Spring and White Snow*, *Little Sisters on the Prairie*, and *Turkish March*. Many traditional *pipa* pieces follow a slow-fast-slow ternary form and use pentatonic scales primarily. However, new techniques and scales were explored and utilized in the arrangements and transcriptions of the 20th century and gained popularity in China.

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<sup>48</sup> Jie Li, Kunli Li, "The Discussion of the Cultural Implication in Pipa Art," *The Sound of Yellow River* 15 (2012): 32.

<sup>49</sup> Li, 32.

<sup>50</sup> Yingying Lu, "The Influence of Transplanted Music of Pipa," *Minjiang Journal* 28 (2007): 93.

## Yinghai Li, *Flute and Drum at Sunset*

### Discussion and Comparison with the Original

*Flute and Drum at Sunset* is a traditional *pipa* piece. The earliest notated version, of unknown origin, was found in 1875. In 1925, Yaozhang Liu and Jinwen Zheng, members of the Shanghai Datong Music Society, arranged the piece for Chinese traditional orchestra.<sup>51</sup> There are many other versions of this *pipa* piece. According to Lin Wang's article, there are different versions from the schools of Yangzheng Xuan and Yuting Wang,<sup>52</sup> two main *pipa* schools in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Yangzheng Xuan's version has seven sections and Yuting Wang's version has five, both with poetic subtitles that describe the atmosphere and the scene of each section. The various arrangements made over time had been performed and recorded by many Chinese traditional orchestras. The recordings of the orchestral versions feature *pipa* soloists such as Dehai Liu and Shicheng Lin.

In 1975, Yinghai Li created a seven-minute piano version that imitates the sounds of the *pipa*. This version was later recorded by the famous Chinese pianist Chengzong Yin.<sup>53</sup> Li's arrangement, in eleven sections, includes melodic material from both the solo *pipa* version by Yuting Wang and the recent popular orchestral version by Zhongrong Luo. Figures 35 and 36 show the openings of the *pipa* part from the orchestral version and the piano solo version.

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<sup>51</sup> Lin Wang, "The Origin and Composer of Flute and Drum at Sunset," *Music Study* 1 (1993): 62.

<sup>52</sup> Wang, 62-63.

<sup>53</sup> Chengzong Yin. "Flute and Drum at Sunset," *Collection of Yin Chengzong*, ABC Record/AM0005s, 2003.

Figure 35. Zhongrong Luo, arrangement for Chinese traditional orchestra, *Flute and Drum at Sunset*, pipa part, mm.1-9.<sup>54</sup>

Figure 36. Yinghai Li, *Flute and Drum at Sunset*, m. 1.<sup>55</sup>

The piano version by Yinghai Li is very similar to Zhongrong Luo’s orchestral arrangement in that it preserves the main melodies and characters of the original

<sup>54</sup> Zhongrong Luo, “Flute and Drum at Sunset,” <http://www.hkco.org/uploads/docs/5a8b86c1198181.pdf>, Accessed 13 April 2020.

<sup>55</sup> Tingge Wei, *30 Pieces of Chinese Classical Music for Piano* (Changchun: Shidaiwenyi Publishing House, 1995): 99.

composition. Li's arrangement for piano has eleven sections, but does not use the poetic subtitles, while Luo's orchestral version still contains subtitles in its eight sections. There are three more sections in Li's piano version because he marked the introduction as an independent section, added one more section in the middle between sections two and three, and divided the next-to-last section of Luo's into two.

## Technical Suggestions

*Pipa* technique features tremolos of repeated notes played by plucking with the five fingers one by one quickly or sweeping the chords rapidly. The left hand is used to create bends and vibratos. The tremolo is not always imitated by repetitions of the notes in the piano, but is transcribed as trills instead. The bends are sometimes transcribed as grace notes or omitted in the piano version. Vibrato is transcribed as broken chords played downward to simulate the vibration of the *pipa* strings.

The repeated chords shown in Figure 37 are imitating a tremolo in the *pipa*. To make it more pianistic, Yinghai used two chords for this tremolo. The pianist will need to pay attention to the dynamic and tempo changes here as well. The *accel.* indicates that the pianist should make a smooth transition from eighth notes to triplets by increasing the tempo little by little instead of playing the rhythms exactly.

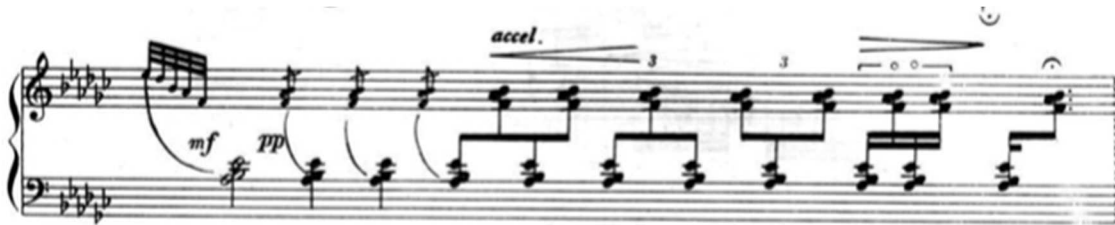


Figure 37. Yinghai Li, *Flute and Drum at Sunset*, m. 2.

In the measure shown in Figure 38, the melody is in the top notes of the chords. It is impossible to create vibrato on the piano, but the broken chords played in opposite directions create an echo-like effect that enriches the sound of the melody. The arpeggios should be played evenly with damper pedal and the pianist should avoid playing the arpeggios too fast because they may sound sloppy and noisy.



Figure 38. Yinghai Li, *Flute and Drum at Sunset*, m. 3.

In Figure 39, the fast trills should mimic tremolos in the *pipa*. Long trills are challenging to play because they can cause tension very easily. The pianist should rotate the wrist subtly to help with relaxation when playing the trills.



Figure 39. Yinghai Li, *Flute and Drum at Sunset*, mm. 57-59.

In Figure 40, the *pipa* sound is created by the wrist sweeping the strings. The arpeggios for the piano need to be played in the same character to imitate this sound. The pianist should use a down-up motion when playing each arpeggio. This will help to relax the hand and make a clear sound. The fermatas on the dotted eighth notes should not be played too long. They are just indications for a little stretch of the beat.



Figure 40. Yinghai Li, *Flute and Drum at Sunset*, mm. 155-159.

The articulation in Figure 41 should be detached to mimic the plucked string sound. In many of the *pipa* recordings, the sound decays quite quickly after plucking and each octave is played detached with some accent. For passages like this, the notes should be played drily, almost like staccatos.



Figure 41. Yinghai Li, *Flute and Drum at Sunset*, mm. 193-198.

In this piece, the pianist should focus on body relaxation while using proper fingerings, arm weight, and wrist gestures. Because there are many long trills and other ornaments that can cause muscle tension very quickly, the pianist needs to use the proper techniques. Appropriate pedaling and voicing are also crucial to mimic the *pipa*, which has a relatively dry sound. The pianist should avoid using excessive damper pedal for the sections that feature the *pipa* solo.



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