JOURNAL OF Music RESEARCH ONLINE

A JOURNAL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE

THE CONCEPT OF 'CHINESE STYLE' EMBEDDED IN CHINESE PIANO ADAPTATIONS OF THE GUQIN

Three Stanzas of Plum Blossoms, *Farewell at Yangguan Pass* and *Flowing Water* as Case Studies

LI CHEN

School of Music
The University of Queensland
St Lucia
Queensland 4072
Australia

li.chen6@student.uq.edu.au

doi.org/10.20851/vfyjeg18

JMRO
www.jmro.org.au

THE UNIVERSITY of ADELAIDE
www.adelaide.edu.au

At the beginning of the twentieth century, China endured a period of social, political and cultural change marked by foreign invasion and internal turmoil. The penetration of a series of Western cultural influences throughout the nineteenth century had led the Chinese to re-examine and critique their traditional cultures. Nationalist sentiments reached a peak during the New Culture Movement in 1915 as a result of these complex factors (Ho 2018: 92). The advanced science, technology and education demonstrated by the West before the 1930s, however, led many Westernisation theorists and politicians, such as Chen Duxiu, one of the advocates of the New Culture Movement, to believe that 'Westernisation' equated to 'modernisation' and this often led to the two concepts being used somewhat indistinguishably (Yu 2011). Luo (2004: 378) confirms this point:

> It was in the 1930s that the term 'modernisation' was used in the press as a new social science term. Based on available sources, the July 1933 special issue of *ShenBao Yuekan* ['Declaration Monthly'], published to mark the anniversary of journal's founding and themed around *Zhongguo Xiandaihua Wenti* ['Problems of Modernisation in China'], was probably the first formal dissemination of the concept in a public forum.

The advocacy of Westernisation (which, as explained above, often meant modernisation) raised a wave of new ideas in various cultural fields; and music, as an important carrier of culture, inevitably faced a similar challenge. The modernisation of music in China around this time, however, did not seem to have meant total Westernisation. By selectively absorbing and integrating elements of the Western musical system that were seen as positive, while at the same time retaining China's local musical cultures, leading musicians during the period, such as Zhao Yuanren (1892–1982) and Huang Zi (1904–1938), seem to have been trying to find a balanced model of musical development.

Zhao and Huang began to collect and organise musical materials systematically from different parts of China that might be able to represent a sense of nationality, such as pentatonic scales, folk melodies, dance rhythms and operas. This work represented

an early stage of searching and experimenting with how to reinterpret these traditional musical materials and combine them with Western musical techniques, trying to find a suitable path to express Chinese nationality in a variety of musical forms. For example, in the article *Zhongguopai Hesheng de Jige Xiaoshiyan* ['A Few Small Experiments in Chinese School Harmony'], Zhao (1928) suggested the possibilities and challenges of introducing elements of Chinese music, such as the use of pentatonic scales in constructing chords into the Western harmonic system, providing an important method of simultaneously expressing the nationality and modernisation of Chinese music. Huang (1934), in addition, emphasised in the newspaper article *Zenyang Caineng Chansheng Wuguo Minzu Yinyue* ['How to Produce the National Music of Our Country'] that folk music and opera were important resources for the development of musical nationality and that, in terms of composition, it was necessary to pay attention to tradition as well as positive innovation, such as the integration of Western harmony and polyphony, so as to make the music both ethnically oriented and contemporary. Zhao and Huang's exploration and experimentation with the fusion of Chinese and Western music was, in a way, an intentional process of cultural creation to construct a new cultural identity that would enable the Chinese to find their own cultural belonging in the process of reform and modernisation. This process of taking what is valuable from the past and incorporating it into new cultural forms in response to the challenges of modernisation, as described above, is a clear example of what Hobsbawm and Ranger (2012: 263) identify as an 'invented tradition.' In the process of rapid social change and modernisation, old social patterns and traditions may not be able to continue to adapt to the new demands and, therefore, new traditions need to be invented to maintain social cohesion and identity. At the same time, the quest to integrate local culture harmoniously into musical creativity has found a vibrant path for positive expression of nationalism, one which inspires a collective spirit of preserving a common cultural heritage.

Following the explorations and attempts of musicians like Zhao and Huang around the 1930s, musical nationality gradually came to have a clearer and more systematic expression — 'Chinese style' — an invented tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger 2012) intentionally created to serve social and political purposes. The concept of Chinese style was first formalised in the 1934 by the Russian composer and pianist Alexander Tcherepnin[1] (1899–1977), who believed that every nation should have its own musical culture and characteristics, and that imitating Western compositional techniques seriously threatened the development of its own national styles (Dai 2014: 19–20). This idea coincides with one of the claims of nineteenth-century Western nationalism — that for 'individuality to be truly original it must be rooted in the "national spirit"' (Dahlhaus 1989: 37). With the support and assistance of Chinese composer Xiao Youmei (1884–1940), Tcherepnin organised a prize competition in Shanghai in November 1934 titled *Zhengqiu You Zhongguo Fengwei de Gangqinqu* ['Call for Piano Compositions Featuring Chinese Style'] (Dai 2014: 20; Liu and Mason 2010: 102). The explicit requirement of Chinese style for the competition pointed the way for the exploration of musical nationalisation. Emerging from this competition, He Luting's *Mutong Duandi* ['Cowherd's Flute'] (1934) was deemed 'the first fully mature piano piece in China' (Wei 2007: 110). The piece combines traditional Chinese pentatonic modes with Western techniques, such as harmony and counterpoint. It evokes the cheerful rhythms of folk dance and the sound of the *dizi* — a traditional wind instrument often played by shepherds — intending to be reminiscent of the idyllic scenery of the Chinese countryside. Wang, Hu and Yang (2022: 95) claim that *Cowherd's Flute* was a landmark work in the history of Chinese piano music, showing that Western music theory and instrumentation can be integrated with Chinese musical traditions. Early piano compositions similar to *Cowherd's Flute*, such as Jiang Dingxian's *Yaolanqu* ['Lullaby'] (1934), Jiang Wenye's *Gangqin Xushishi: Xunyang Yeyue* ['Narrative Poem for Piano: The Night Moon of Xunyang'] (1943) and Qu Wei's *Huagu* ['Flower Drums'] (1945), all of which shared a common feature of taking folk and traditional Chinese modes as an important means of pursuing the Chinese style of piano music. These folk and traditional modes are diverse and include, notably, forms beyond the commonly recognised Chinese pentatonic system. For example, some modes are expanded into six-notes or seven-notes scales by adding extra notes to the pentatonic framework; as well as some unique ethnic modes shaped by combining local dialectal intonations, such as the distinctive A-Yu mode popular in Hunan region: A C D# E G# (Zhao 2020: 70–1). The widespread adoption of folk and traditional Chinese modes was not only a stylistic preference, but also a concrete manifestation of the general nationalist aesthetic consciousness of the time. Through these melodies, the composers tried to paint a sonic picture that could reflect the newly emerging cultural identity of the nation.

Chinese piano music in the twentieth century has not, however, always experienced a smooth path of development. The piano — as an imported Western cultural artifice — faced, in particular, difficulties and challenges during the Cultural Revolution (CR), a period when Chinese composers clearly had to consider how piano music should, or even could be, continued and developed in China. Inheriting the exploration and practice of nationality by previous composers, such as Zhao and Huang mentioned above, composers during the CR intensified the search for ways to incorporate what had become widely accepted nationalist symbols (folk song, Chinese opera, traditional instrumental music and so on) as a reaction to the very strong anti-Western imperatives of the CR. At the same time, their response

reveals the existential threat to the continuity of Chinese piano music at that time. I analyse three piano works composed during or just after the CR that are adapted from traditional music originally for the *guqin* in the second half of this paper in order to tease this idea out.

The *guqin* is one of the most celebrated classical Chinese musical instruments: its music is one of the primary objects of piano adaptations made by Chinese composers and has enjoyed a transformation through these works. This paper attempts to examine how Chinese composers constructed a national image through both the selective inheritance and innovation of traditional music, and the acceptance and adaptation of Western compositional approaches. It focuses in particular on how they evoked the sound and cultural memory of the *guqin* on the piano, while also incorporating certain non-traditional Western techniques. These works — referred to as *zhongguo gangqin gaibianqu* (literally translates as 'Chinese piano arrangement')[2] (Cui 2016: 5) — became the only politically acceptable category of piano music during the CR period. In this paper, I translate the term as 'Chinese piano adaptation' to distinguish it from more conventional terms such as 'transcription' or 'arrangement.'

Terminology of Chinese Piano Adaptation

Corrigan (2017: 34) recognised that with music adaptation activities and scholarly perspectives continuing to evolve rapidly, there is a lack of a stable definition or simple concept of what adaptation means in relation to music. *Zhongguo gangqin gaibianqu* — a central term in this paper — presents a particular challenge in translation due to its cultural and contextual specificity. The use of the terms — 'transcription' and 'arrangement' — to describe the case studies of this paper is inadequate when considered against prevailing conceptualisations of their meaning in music-related discourse. I propose, instead, the term 'adaptation' as more relevant to the cases to be examined further below, even though it is currently perhaps more widely used in the realm of other creative activities, such as the adaptation of novels to films and so on.

In Stephen's view (1988: 216), a composition considered as a *transcription* must meet the characteristics of sufficiently resembling or preserving the content of the original, by which he means translating the musical content of one medium as faithfully as possible into another. This concept is very close to the notion of 'transdialection' proposed by Beaudoin and Moore (2010: 106), whereby the original work is re-notated in a completely different musical language in order to preserve the music across notational differences. Scholars usually use 'arrangement,' by contrast, to characterise works that have changed media with more creative freedom, while still retaining adherence to the details of the original (Kim 2019: 7). This implicitly suggests that transcriber and arranger always adhere to the aesthetic values and musical content of the source and are in a derivative relationship with the original work. I claim the three piano case studies in this paper, however, interacted with the original works as independent entities with new aesthetic connotations. They basically follow the structure of the original faithfully in their broad framework, while creatively restating the musical content. In the piano pieces adapted from traditional instrumental compositions, more importantly, the composers reconcile the cross-cultural aesthetic balance between the traditional Chinese instruments and the new medium (piano), while also awakening the sound and cultural memories of the original instruments with techniques that are in line with the characteristics of the piano. In other words, the piano itself, as a Western instrument, does not have a background in traditional Chinese culture, and by adapting traditional Chinese music on the piano, the composer faces the problem of cultural appropriation and adaptation. This process encompasses a wide range of possibilities, covering a spectrum from verbatim translation to re-imagining, and with varying degrees of fidelity to the source material (Arturo 2023: 25–7). I, therefore, use the term 'adaptation' to encompass this process.

Guqin

The instrument known today as *guqin* has a history of more than 3000 years (Fig. 1), and it is included amongst the items of World Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO Intangible Culture Heritage, 2003). It has been known historically under different names, originally being simply called *qin*. The *guqin* has seven strings and the range is just over four octaves (Ma 2022: 114). There are thirteen *qinhui* of the *guqin*, mostly dots made of gold, jade or shells, which are distributed at different intervals on the front side of the strings to indicate the position of the pitch (Gaywood 1996: 32).

The *guqin* has evolved and changed through dozens of dynasties, condensing profound cultural connotations and humanistic spirit. Especially in ancient China, people often measured a person's erudition by their proficiency in *guqin*, Go (Chinese chess), calligraphy and

Fig. 1: *Guqin*

painting. The *guqin* — as the first of the four artistic criteria — has always been highly respected by ancient *wenren* (literati or scholar-gentlemen), a group of poets and intellectuals from China's ancient past, as the embodiment of elegance (Zhou 2020: 3). Similarly, Confucius, the founder of Confucianism, and Laozi, the founder of Taoism, not only played the *guqin*, but also regarded its performance as a compulsory subject for their students. They believed that playing the *guqin* could calm the mind, enabling one to listen to and express the true voice of the heart (Tan and Lu 2018: 142). 'The left *guqin* and the right poetry' seemed to be the standard combination for the ancient *wenren* (Xiao 2022: 158), so the *guqin* was also given the title of 'the holy instrument of the Ancient Sages' (van Gulik 1939b: 409).

Music for *guqin* was first notated using *wenzipu*, a full character notation that describes the *guqin*'s playing methods in full text (Gaywood 1996: 51–2). The full character notation was so complex and inconvenient to use that it was gradually replaced by *jianzipu* (simplified character notation) during the Tang Dynasty (618–907 AD) (Fig. 2) (Wan 2021: 3–4). The *jianzipu* is a reduced character score, which is written by removing and re-simplifying the radicals of Chinese characters, in which only the melody pitch and playing method are mainly recorded, without rhythmic markings. Later generations added numbered musical notation or Western staff notation to the ancient *jianzipu* to compensate for the lack of rhythmic specificity in order to better inherit and perform traditional *guqin* music (Fig. 3) (Cui 2020: 32–3). Chen (2021: 4) takes the view, nevertheless, that such attempts at precision miss the point. He contends that the unstable rhythm is precisely the soul of *guqin* music, as the focus lies in discrete form, not discrete spirit. This is akin to reciting an ancient poem with appropriate intonation and breathing breaks as the mood rises and falls, without the need for transitional interpretation and explanation.

I use the version of the *jianzipu* fused with numbered musical score when analysing the evocation of *guqin* sounds on the piano in the second half of this paper, which has been reworked by later generations around the first half of the twentieth century.

Three Piano Adaptations and Their Composers

Three Stanzas of Plum Blossoms (1973) and the composer Wang Jianzhong (1933–2016)

The flute piece *Meihualuo* [*Plum Blossom Falling*], composed by Huan Yi during the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317–420 AD), served as a precursor to the later *guqin* version (van Gulik 1939b: 418). It was not transcribed for *guqin* until the Ming and Qing Dynasties (1368–1840), at which time it was renamed *Three Stanzas of Plum Blossoms* (hereafter *Plum Blossoms*) (Chen 2021: 2). Whether it is a flute piece or a *guqin* piece, *Plum Blossoms* is not simply a description of flowers, but a symbol of personality, borrowing the spirit of the plum blossoming against the cold weather, snow and wind as a metaphor for the noble sentiments and qualities of the ancient literati or scholar-gentlemen (Chen 2018: 7). Popular versions of *Plum Blossoms* for *guqin* to the present time include those found in the anthologies *Jiaoan Qinpu* ['Jiaoan Score'][3] and *Qinpu Xiesheng* ['Score Harmony'][4] (Luan 2014: 4). The former version makes extensive use of triplets and syncopations, which are rare in *guqin* music, and the tune is not easily divided into phrases; while the latter version is clearly divided

Fig. 2. *Jianzi Pu*, A Section from *Flowing Water*, recorded by Zhang Kongshan in *Tianwenge Qinpu* ['Tianwenge Score'] (1876)

Fig. 3. A Section from *Flowing Water*, fusion of *jianzipu* and numbered musical notation, recorded by Xu Jian

into phrases and has a more stable rhythm. Comparison of Wang Jianzhong's piano adaptation of *Plum Blossoms* shows that it is much more similar to the version found in *Score Harmony* in terms of melodic rhythmic patterns, musical styles and phrase divisions, so it can be inferred that the piano adaptation is most likely based on this version. This piece inherits the characteristics of Chinese classical music and is usually understood to express the gentlemanly spirit of the plum blossoms standing proudly in the cold, so it is reasonable to assume that this is one of the reasons why it was so popular and loved by the public and survived even during the difficult period of the CR. When the composer Wang Jianzhong[5] was asked about his adaptations in an interview in 2003, he said that the CR period served as an important turning point for him, and he has since devoted his life to researching and composing piano adaptations (Song 2004).

He further claimed that *Plum Blossoms* was one of his proudest works, in which he has attempted to preserve the Chinese spirit to the greatest extent possible, hoping to promote and popularise the development of piano music in China while also passing on traditional Chinese instrumental pieces (Song 2004).

Farewell at Yangguan Pass (1978) and the composer Li Yinghai (1927–2007)

The *qinge* (*qin* song) *Farewell at Yangguan Pass* (hereafter *Farewell*) is a vocal piece traditionally accompanied by the *guqin*, based on a *qiyan lüshi* (Seven-Character Regulated Verse)[6] titled *Song Yuan Er Shi Xi'an* ['To Yuan Er on His Way to Xi'an'] by the Tang Dynasty poet Wang Wei (699–759 AD). The form of *qin* song can be traced back to the pre-Qin period (221 BC) and was commonly used for singing and reciting poetry on social occasions, such as banquets, serving as a musical medium for expressing the emotional content of poetic texts (Cui 2020: 10–11). In the poem *Farewell*, the poet Wang expresses sorrowful reluctance to part with a friend departing for the frontier to serve in the army, reflecting not only personal sentiments, but also the broader helplessness and indignation felt by the people under the tyranny of feudal rule at that time. The earliest known *guqin* score of *Farewell* appeared in the *Zheyin Shizi Qinpu* ['Zhenyin Shizi Score'] (1491), accompanied by a commentary that emphasises the deep sorrow of parting — 'when you are separated from your friends, you drink and sing at the same time, and when you leave Yangguan, there will be no more old friends' (Han 2018: 9–10). The word *Yangguan* has become a symbol of parting sentiments in Chinese literature due to the popularity of this poem and its ability arouse empathy with the mood (Yin-Liu and Wong 1973: 12).

There are more than thirty extant versions of a *guqin* score of *Farewell* (Zhang 2012: 6), however, its original composer and exact date are not known today. One of the editions included in *Qinxue Rumen* ['Introduction to the Qin'], edited by Zhang He in 1846, is most widely played by today's *guqin* players. This version consists of three parts, with three variations on the theme and new lyrics at the end of the original poems, blending the superimposed lines of the literary work with the variations of the musical piece to further bring the mood of farewell to a climax. Luan (2014: 3) claims that it was from this version that Li Yinghai[7], a renowned Chinese composer and music theorist, adapted the *qin* song for piano in 1978. Li Yinghai shared Wang Jianzhong's vision of creating piano works in the Chinese style, and he also believed that adapting familiar traditional instrumental pieces was an inevitable and effective way to spread Western piano culture in China (Chen 2008: 161).

Flowing Water (1976) and the composer Chen Peixun (1922–2006)

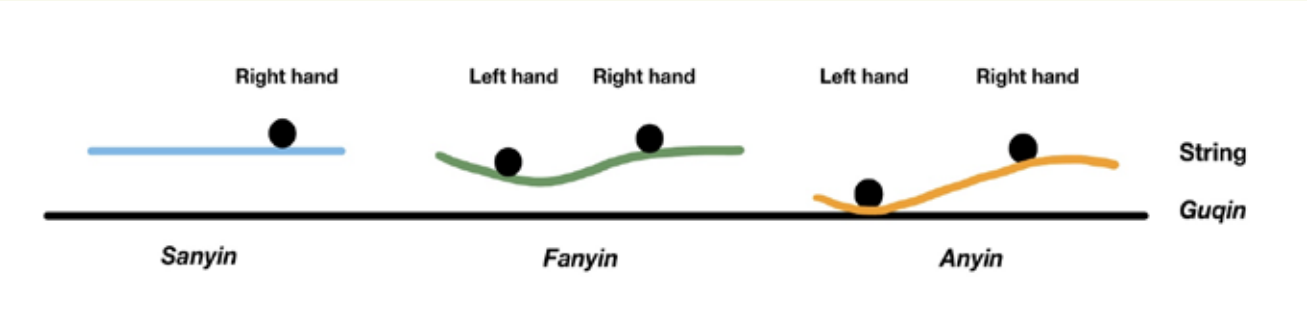
The piece *Flowing Water* is one of the most widely transmitted and most culturally significant among extant *guqin* compositions, and has been highly esteemed by *guqin* masters throughout Chinese history. It was included as a classic representative of Eastern music on the golden record in 1977, carried on NASA's Voyager 1 spacecraft into the depths of space, representing human civilisation's search for an extra-terrestrial soulmate (Yung 2017: 381). The piece also carries a story[8] that has been passed down through the ages (van Gulik 1939a: 89–90). The story was later included in the first batch of intangible cultural heritage protection listed in Hubei Province in 2007 (Cui 2020: 1).

The music for *Flowing Water* was originally part of a single piece known as *Gaoshan Liushui* ['High Mountain and Flowing Water'], which was divided sometime during the Tang Dynasty (618–907 AD) into two independent pieces: *High Mountain* and *Flowing Water* (Luan 2014: 4–5). Its *guqin* score was first included in Zhu Quan's *Shenqi Mipu* ['Magical Secret Score'] (1425), and over time, forty-four additional versions were developed, exhibiting subtle differences in musical style, structural form and melodic tones (Cui 2020: 16–19). One well-known version of *Flowing Water* appears in the *Tianwenge Qinpu* ['Tianwenge Score'] (1876), notated by Zhang Kongshan, consisting nine passages and a coda. The piano adaptation of *Flowing Water* composed by Chen Peixun[9] retains a melodic structure and formal outline similar to the *Tianwenge* version but incorporates some innovations. Chen expanded the piece to twelve passages plus a coda, assigned descriptive titles to each passage, and fully exploited the expressive potential of the piano through the use of ornamental notes and arpeggios, thereby creating a layered and contemporary musical landscape.

Techniques for Evoking Three Sounds of the *Guqin* in the Piano

There are three distinct tonal qualities of the *guqin* which present a distinct challenge to evoke and adapt to the composition of piano pieces: *fanyin* (overtone), *anyin* (pressed tone) and *sanyin* (scattered tone). *Fanyin* is produced by lightly pressing the string with the

Fig. 4. Illustration of *sanyin*, *fanyin*, and *anyin*



left hand and plucking the string with the right hand; *anyin* is produced by pressing the string to the finger board with the left hand and plucking the string with the right hand; and *sanyin* is produced by plucking the strings with the right hand only (Fig. 4). Among the descriptions of these three sounds, the interpretation in the *Fingering Rules* section in *Wuzhizhai Qinpu* ['Wuzhizhai Score'], compiled by Zhou Lufeng in 1724 during the Qing Dynasty, is particularly apt in its relation of technique and sound to poetic metaphor:

> The *fanyin* is crisp and light, like the bee and the butterfly picking flowers and the dragonfly dotting water; the *sanyin* is bright and clear, like the wide sky and the tantalising wind; the *anyin* is quiet and solid, like the lofty bell tower and the overlapping cliffs (Wuzhizhai Score 1721).

Fanyin (*overtone*)

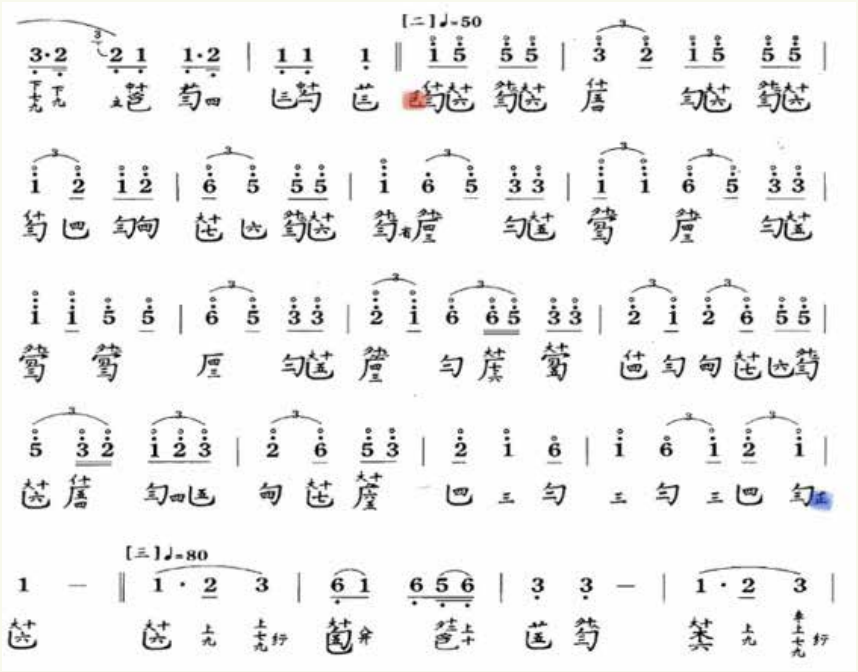
The sound of *fanyin* is an octave or a twelfth higher than the actual note in the score, producing a light, floating and pure tone (Zhang 2012: 28; Jia 2020: 126). In many instruments, the *fanyin* is only used as an embellishment of the tone and does not form the main part of the piece. The *fanyin*, however, is one of the most common techniques used in the *guqin*, functioning not only to shift the timbre, but also to express emotions, thoughts and connotations in the thematic sections of music (Yan 2022: 29–35).

A case in point is that, in *Plum Blossoms*, the three themes are played in the form of *fanyin* and repeated at three different positions on the *qinhui*, corresponding to the first, second and third stanzas. This repetition not only reinforces structural coherence but also symbolises the elegant integrity of the plum blossoms, traditionally associated with the noble character of a gentleman. Among them, the first stanza is characterised by a clear and smooth melody, resembling a floating sound from the sky; the second stanza repeats the theme in a lower octave, highlighting its lyrical and singable quality; in the third stanza, the melody features leaps within an octave, evoking a sense of movement, as if the plum blossoms were swaying gently in the wind. Take the first appearance of the theme (the first stanza) as an example (Ex. 1): the red and blue symbols in the figure represent the beginning and end of *fanyin* playing, respectively, as well as the hollow dots above the notes representing the *fanyin*.

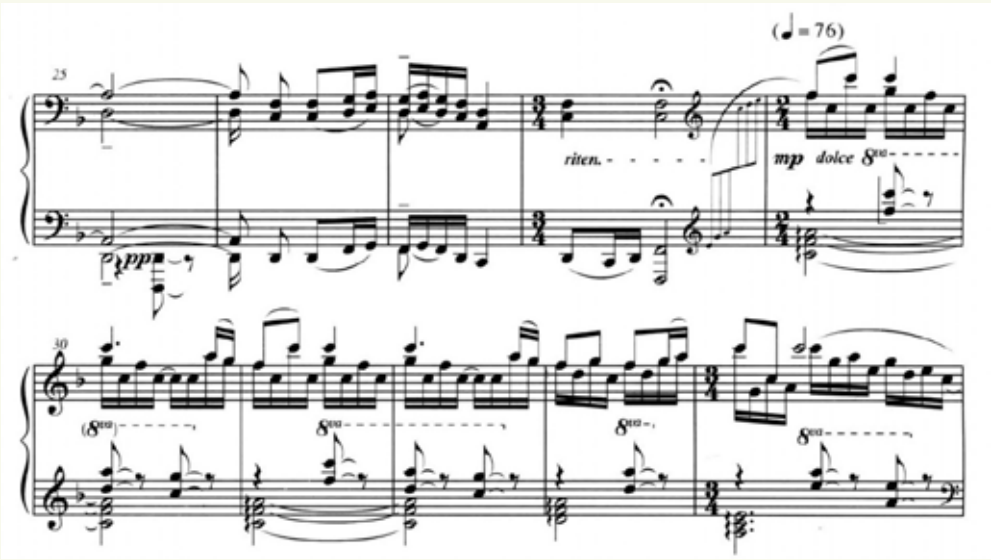
In Wang Jianzhong's piano adaptation of *Plum Blossoms*, the three thematic sections correspond to those of the *guqin* piece. Through this structural correspondence, Wang developed a distinctive approach to capturing the essence of the *fanyin* timbre on the piano. In the first stanza (bars 29–34) (Ex. 2), the register remains an octave higher than that of the score from the *fanyin* in the original *guqin* piece, although Wang slightly alters the main melody. At the same time, alternating intervals of the 4th and 5th are played in a stable accompaniment pattern of x in the right hand, which hints at the ethereal and hazy character of *fanyin*. In addition, the lowest *arpeggiated* chords are played in the second inversion, which sound less stable than the root position, further recalling the ambience of *fanyin* lingering in the ear and to set the mood of a quiet and gentle atmosphere.

In the second stanza (bars 63–69) (Ex. 3), the main theme is shifted to the left hand and plays in a lower octave to distinguish it from the *fanyin* of the first stanza. Meanwhile, the right hand plays a steady rhythm of parallel perfect 4ths in the upper register.

Ex. 1. *Guqin*, the first stanza in *Three Stanzas of Plum Blossoms*



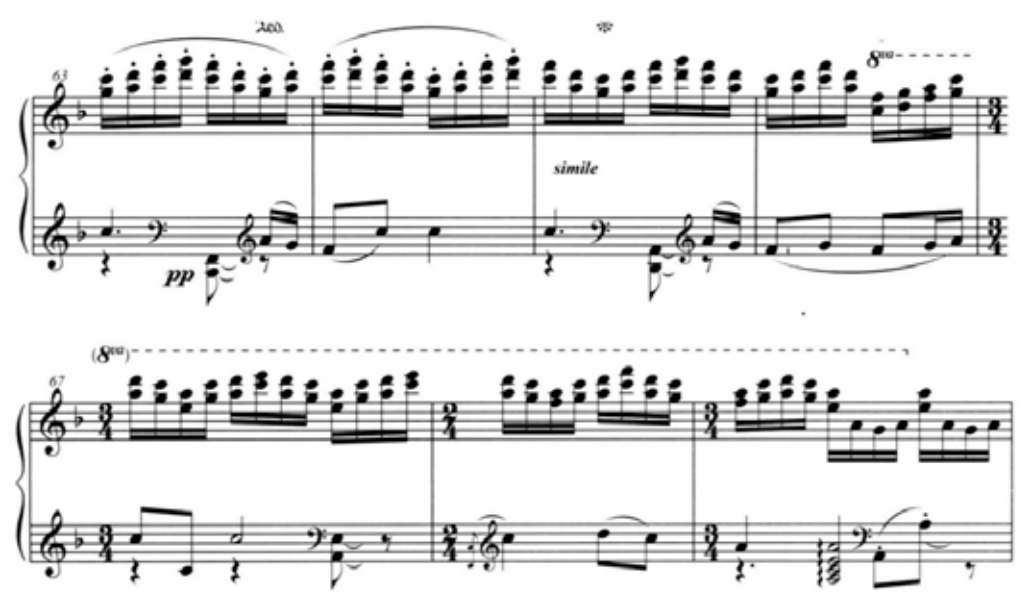
Ex. 2. Wang Jianzhong, the first stanza in *Three Stanzas of Plum Blossoms*, Bars 25–34



The acoustic effect is similar to the alternating intervals of 4ths and 5ths of the first stanza, both of which are intended to accentuate the ethereal and spiritual character of the *fanyin*.

Wang's technique of employing a large number of perfect 4ths and 5ths brings acoustic regularity due to structural unity, thus avoiding overly sharp acoustic clashes (Liu and Piao 2020: 179). In Chinese music aesthetics, the 4ths and 5ths of the sound coincide with the *zhongyong zhidao* (the doctrine of the mean) of the Confucian concept of music, which promotes tranquillity and equanimity, providing an aural and psychological perception of harmony, calm and serenity. Van Gulik (1939a: 89), for example, declared:

Ex. 3. Wang Jianzhong, the second stanza in *Three Stanzas of Plum Blossoms*, bars 63–69



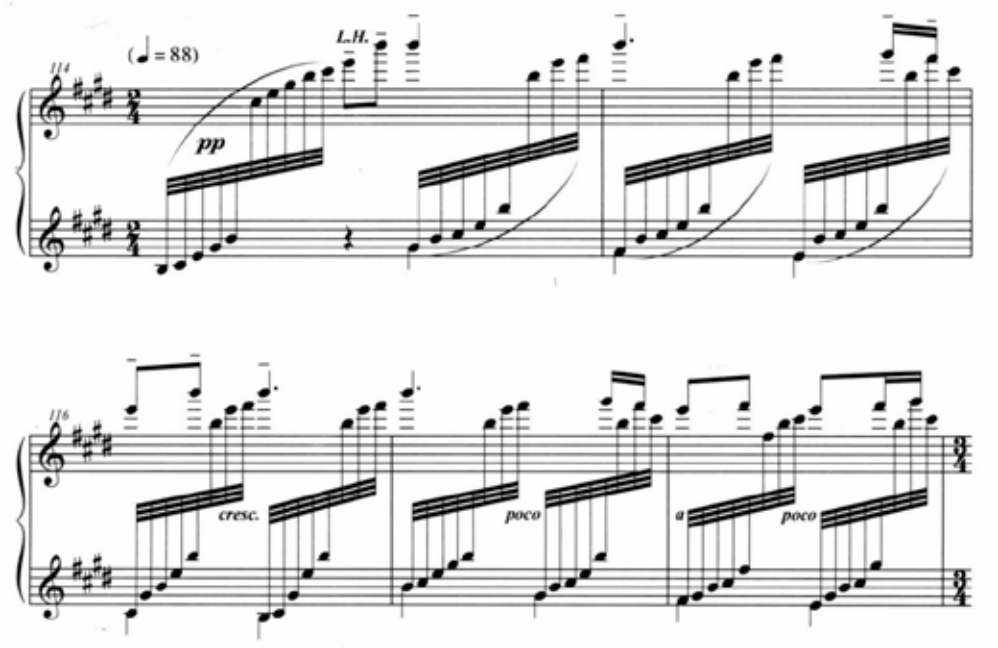
> The Lute [*guqin*] is considered to hold the [doctrinal] mean between great and small music, and its tones are harmonious. Its heavy sounds are not boisterous so as to be confusing, and its light sounds are not too weak so as to be inaudible. It is suited for harmonising the human mind, and may move man to the improvement of his heart.

Similarly, the *Guoyu*, a book of historical narrative 10th–5th century BC), quotes the saying of Shanmu Gong, the king of Shan State in the Spring and Autumn Period 770–481 BCE), and showed his perspective on the psychological dimension of this harmonic sound effect that 'harmonious musical sound of music contributed to inner harmony within people and this, in turn, benefited the society in terms of harmonious, interpersonal relationships' (Tien 2015: 7). This points to the cultural and aesthetic basis for the way in which Chinese music is composed. Therefore, Xiao (2022: 157) believed that applying the aesthetic connotation of the doctrine of the mean in piano music means that the musical work is firstly aurally concordant, and secondly the music makes the listener's heart calm and peaceful, which is also the initial impression that *guqin* music brings to the listener.

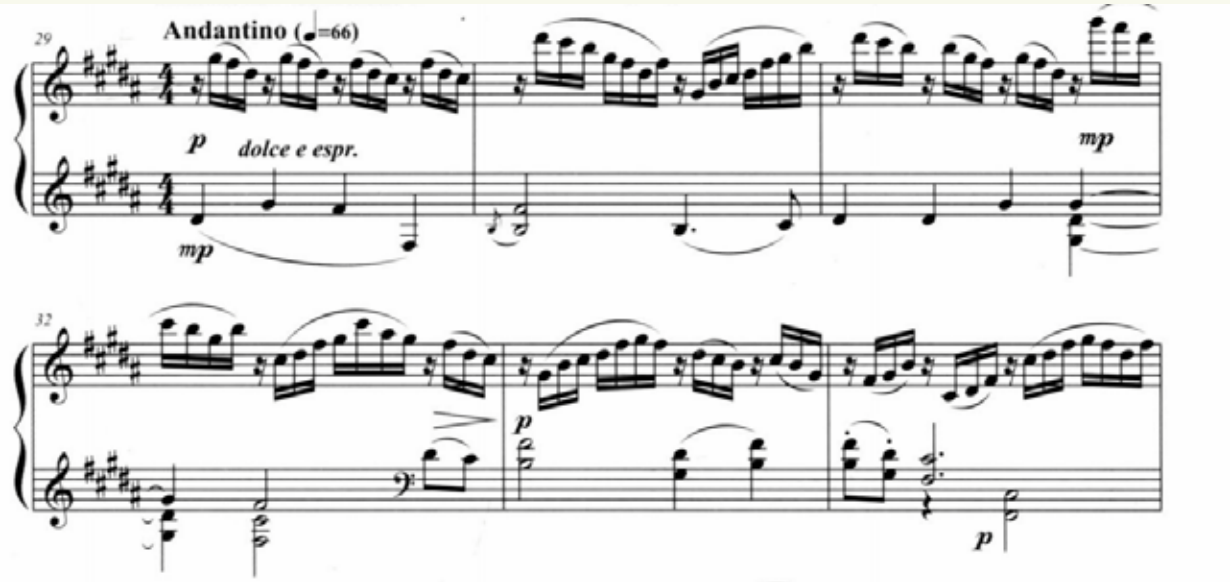
Wang's suggestion of *fanyin* in the third stanza differs from that in the previous two (bars 114–118) (Ex. 4). The third stanza features a variety of fast arpeggiated accompaniment patterns throughout the whole theme, reflecting a hazy and ethereal mood under the intensity of the *pp*, although the theme itself remains in monophonic form. The tempo also gradually increases from q = 76 in the first stanza, to q = 80 in the second, to q = 88 in the third; the infectiousness and ambience of the *fanyin* in the theme gradually increases, although not dramatically so.

The piano adaptation of *Flowing Water* created by Chen Peixun is extremely similar to Wang Jianzhong's technique of evoking *fanyin* timbre in this third stanza. They both prefer to use the original monophonic overtone melodies with fast and dense arpeggiated accompaniment textures to create the associated ethereal atmosphere. Two typical examples are shown in bars 29–34 (Ex. 5) and bars 52–53 (Ex. 6). They belong to the third passage of *Flowing Water* (which in total comprises a total of twelve passages plus a coda) with a specific title: *Youquan Chushan Qingche Youmei* ['Clear and Beautiful Spring from the Mountain']. The main melody of the former is played in the left hand, beginning with a single-note phrase occasionally interspersed with an appoggiatura, followed by a second phrase that adds parallel perfect fifths to enrich its harmonic colour, while the right hand provides an arpeggio texture of x as accompaniment. I surmise that Chen may have used the monophonic melody of the left hand in it to evoke the sound of dripping spring water, while the accompany texture of the right hand resembles the ripples that rise after the spring water drips, thus echoing the title of the passage with a figurative meaning.

Ex. 4. Wang Jianzhong, *Three Stanzas of Plum Blossoms*, bars 114–118



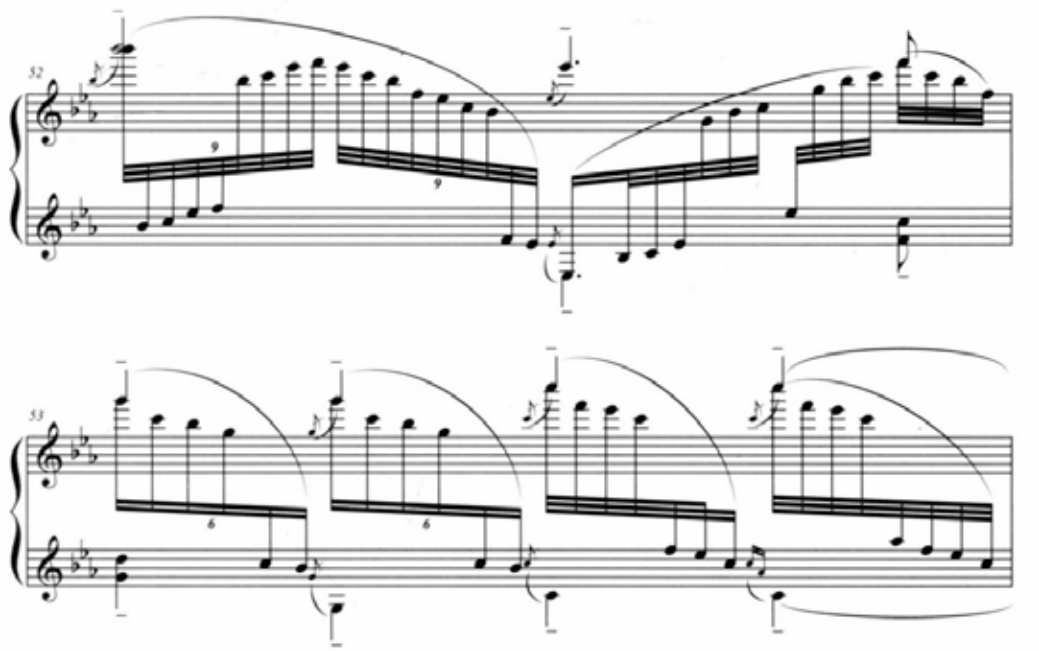
Ex. 5. Chen Peixun, *Flowing Water*, bars 29–34



In the second example, Chen moves the single line melody of the original *guqin* piece up two octaves on the piano and precedes each note with a lower octave appoggiatura and alternates the bass melodic line with an arpeggio accompaniment of mixed values. The rising and falling notes suggest a gradual increase in water flowing, evoking both the ethereal quality of the *fanyin* and the effect of lingering resonance.

Chen's approach to the *fanyin*-evoking passage in bars 160–161 of *Flowing Water* differs significantly, particularly in terms of mode and intervallic relationships, even though his overall compositional style shares general similarities with that of Wang. It hints at the seventh theme of the ancient *guqin* piece, depicting the scene of the water flowing through the aftermath of a shocking wave and gradually calming down. In the *guqin* score (Ex. 7), the traditional Chinese pentatonic D *Zhi* (D E G A B) and A *Yu* (A C D E G) scales alternate in

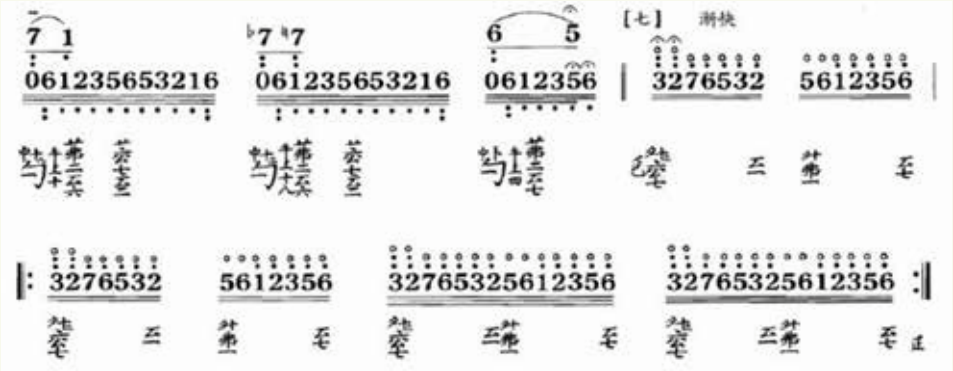
Ex. 6. Chen Peixun, *Flowing Water*, bars 52–53



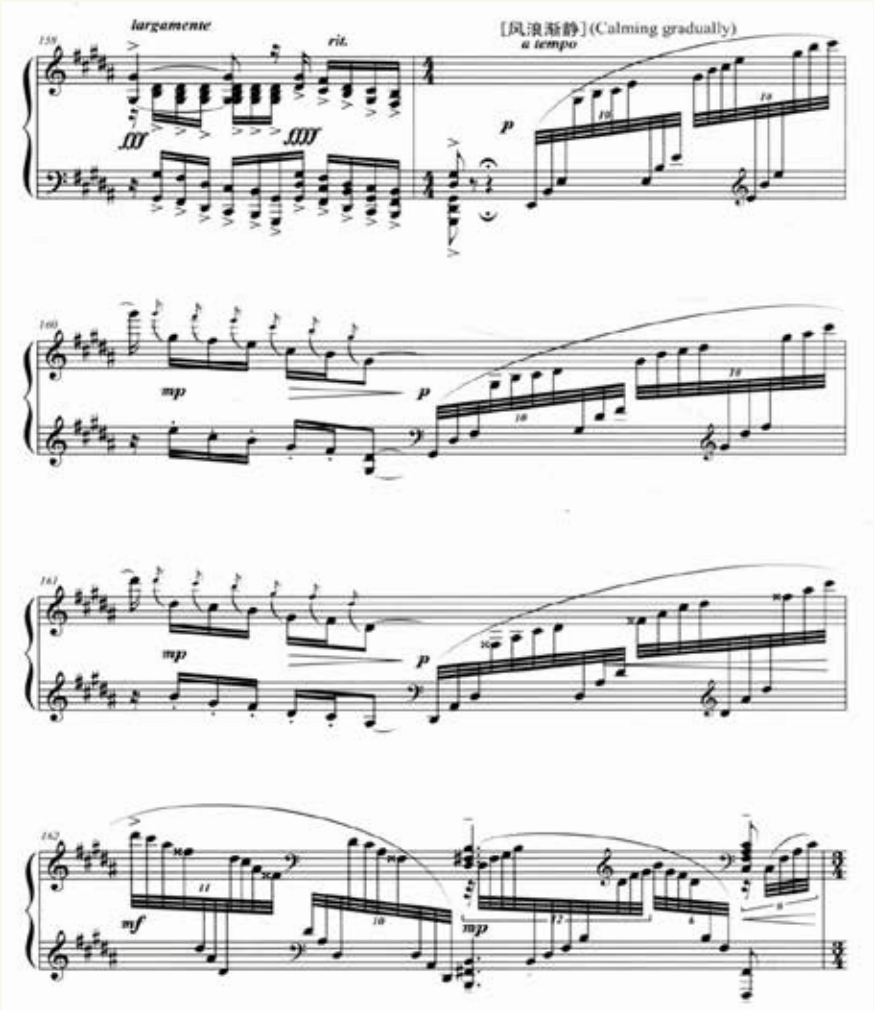
the form of a downward and an upward line, respectively, with the upward and downward lines repeating in one combination a total of seven times. This fast and intensive *fanyin* technique — rarely found in *guqin* pieces — conveys the calm but subtly rippling nature of flowing water, with waves that vary in size. It stands as one of the most representative sections in the *guqin* version of *Flowing Water*. In the piano adaptation (Ex. 8), Chen used the key signature of G-sharp minor. He captures the essence of the Chinese pentatonic tune by adopting only a few specific notes from the G-sharp minor scale, despite its Western tonal framework. For example, in bar 159 and the downward scale of bar 160, Chen uses only five of the notes, G#, B, C#, E, F#, so that they correspond exactly to the G-sharp *Jue* in the traditional Chinese pentatonic scale. Similarly, he shifts the tonic from the G-sharp *Jue* to the D-sharp *Jue* by slightly changing the order of the notes in the downward line of bar 159 and the upper line of bar 160: D# F# G# B C#, so that the two Chinese pentatonic modes are presented juxtaposed without changing the original Western tonic, G-sharp minor. In addition, octave appoggiatura is added to each note of the right hand, while the left-hand melody appears in the form of staccato and is internalised with the right-hand melody in 3rds and 4ths. The combination of these compositional techniques evokes the ethereal character of *fanyin* to the fullest. It not only enriches the image of flowing water but also enhances the aesthetic traces of Eastern pentatonic modulation, which is considered by many, such as Zhang (2012: 51), as a blend of Eastern and Western creative thinking. It is worth noting that in the second half of bar 161 and the first half of bar 162, FX is added to the transition to G- sharp harmonic minor, which does not conform to any of the tonalities in the Chinese pentatonic mode. This mode shift seems a bit jarring, like an intrusion of a different system of tonal organisation.

Li Yinghai and Chen Peixun, however, are ambiguous in evoking the *fanyin* timbres on the piano. For instance, bars 16 and 31 in the piano adaptation *Farewell*, correspond to the phrases of the original *guqin* piece which are to be played with *fanyin*. The composition of these phrases is similar to that of Wang's in that they use staccato, arpeggios and octaves, but these elements and the structure of the phrase are also used indiscriminately in the subsequent phrases that are not played in *fanyin* technique (bars 16–18; bars 31–33) (Ex. 9; Ex. 10). Similarly, Chen uses the forceful dynamic notation of *f*, *ff*, *fff* and accent marks to bring the music to a close with a powerful feeling in the coda of *Flowing Water*, which corresponds to a passage in a *guqin* piece played with the *fanyin* technique (bars 197–203) (Ex. 11). A piano coda with such a massive effect, however, does not seem to fit the quiet and ethereal character of the *fanyin*. These examples are very interesting in that they respond to the seeming conflict between the aesthetics in the original music and the aesthetics of the adaptation. The aesthetics of the adaptation respond not only to the ideas of ancient original *guqin* music, but also to feelings considering the several aspects. First, the grandiose ending is reminiscent of Romantic piano music, which often builds to large, final climaxes or apotheoses and is rich in lyricism and subjective inner expression. It is worth noting that Soviet music continued the emotional intensity

Ex. 7. *Guqin*, a *fanyin* passage of *Flowing Water*

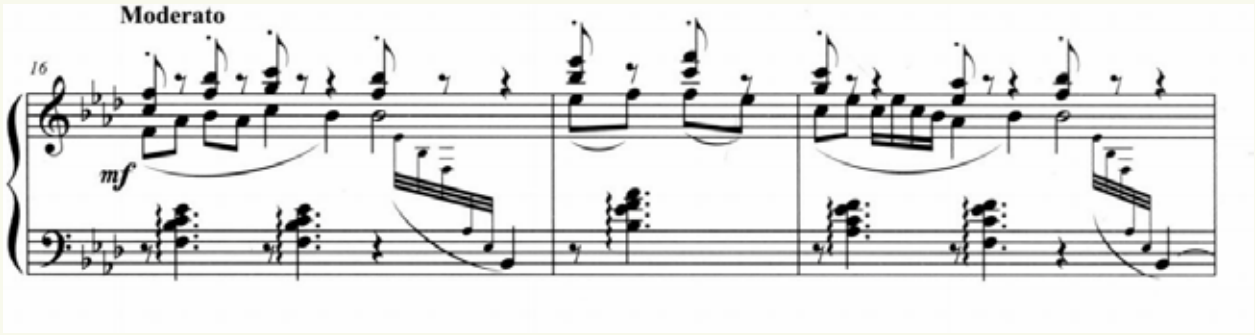


Ex. 8. Chen Peixun, *Flowing Water*, bars 158–162

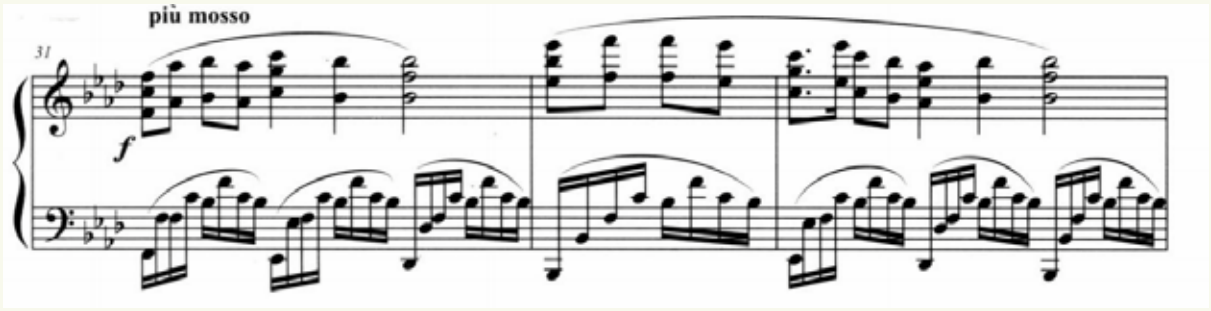


and narrative structure of Romanticism in both style and expression, while twentieth-century Chinese music was heavily influenced by and modelled on Soviet aesthetics (Ho 2021: 73). Thus, this grandiose ending is not only characterised by Romanticism in its emotional and structural aspects, but also reflects a specific projection of the dominant aesthetic trends in Chinese music creations at the time. In the context of the CR, this emotional intensity may have been combined with political emotions, echoing the heroic deeds of the socialist

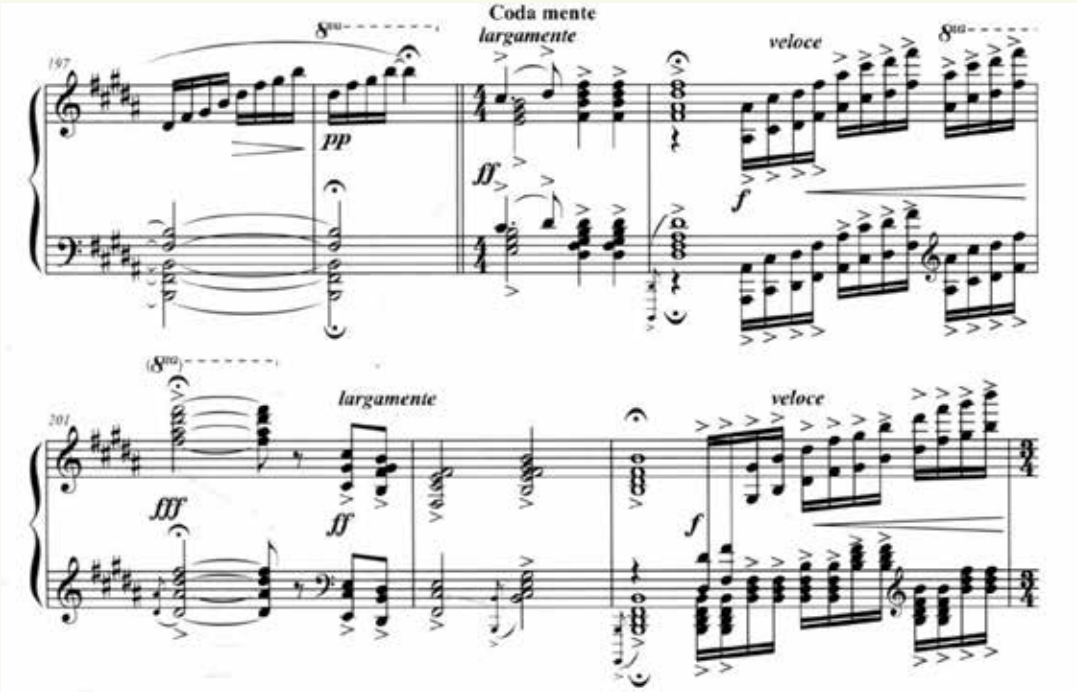
Ex. 9. Li Yinghai, *Farewell at Yangguan Pass*, bars 16–18



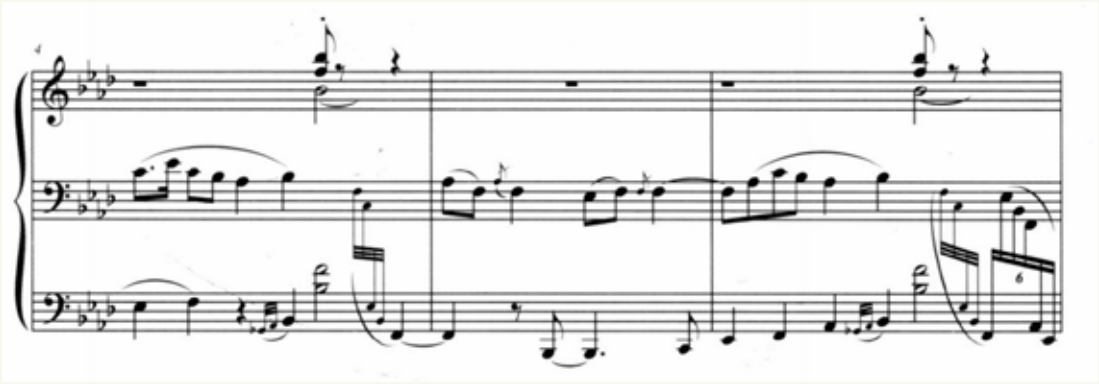
Ex. 10. Li Yinghai, *Farewell at Yangguan Pass*, bars 31–33



Ex. 11. Chen Peixun, *Flowing Water*, bars 197–203



Ex. 12. Li Yinghai, *Farewell at Yangguan Pass*, bars 4–6



revolution and reflecting Chen's patriotism. In addition, the grandiose ending may also reflect a pictorial mood, using human emotion to imagine and connect with nature. Chen may establish a picture of a mountain stream widening into a large river as it approaches the sea.

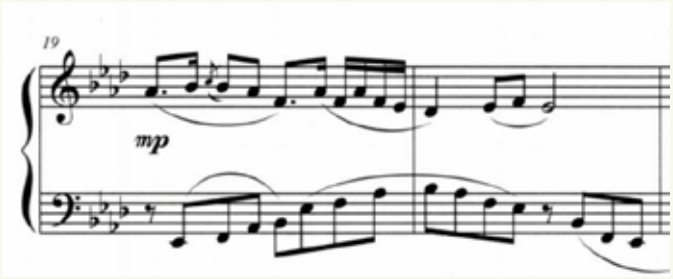
Anyin (*pressed tone*)

The tone of the *anyin* can be firm and strong, or delicate, soft and gentle like the human voice, and is the most expressive tone for emotional changes in *guqin* performance (Luan 2014: 26–8). It is played with consistent fingering, so the melodic line is coherent, smooth and singable. The most distinctive feature of the *anyin* is that, after playing the real tone, soft tones of different pitches can be produced by sliding the pressed strings upward or downward with the left-hand finger, adding a more swaying and vivid quality to the melody. This unique technique is called *zou shou yin*. It can be performed because to the *guqin* has long strings, which vibrate for a long period of time and have a lingering after-tone effect (Zhang 2012: 27).

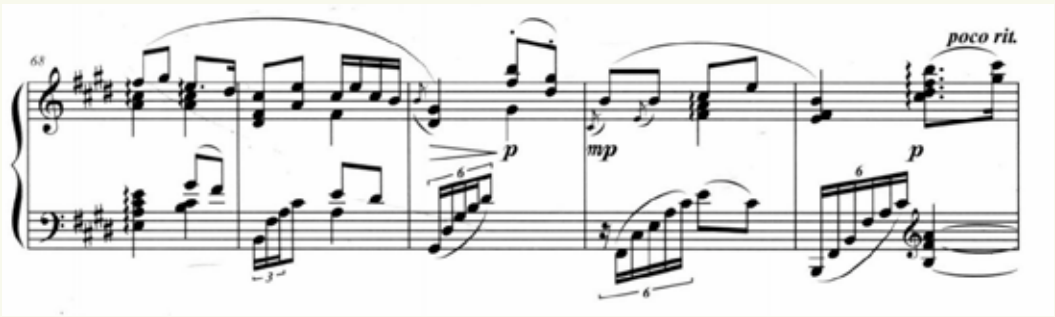
The delicate and melodious *anyin* reflects the distinctive human-like voice image in the *qin* song, *Farewell*. This piece frequently uses the *anyin* technique to play the long and unhurried musical phrases, capturing an atmosphere associated with parting and reluctance to leave. In adapting the piece for piano, Li Yinghai focuses on ornaments, legato melodies, Chinese pentatonic modes and playing the main melody in the alto range to reimagine the incessant long tones of the *anyin* sound. First of all, in bars 4 and 6 (Ex. 12), the main melody is played in legato in the alto range, which is suitable for singing; and the 32nd grace notes are creatively added at the end of the phrase, creating a sense of reverberation to fill in the gap in the rhythm at the end of the bar. In addition, the chords in higher range are divided into two parts, the 8th notes staccato and the half note legato; the staccato notes are played quickly while the half note is kept, so that the mood of the long notes and the effect of the lingering sound from *anyin* are rendered vividly. Similarly, in bars 19 and 20 (Ex. 13), the singing monophonic main melody is restored on the piano, with the neighbour notes to imitate the effect of the *zou shou yin*; and the simple arpeggiated accompaniment pattern is played in legato form, setting off the lilting and gentle melody when played in *anyin*. Interestingly, the mode here also indicates the Chinese national feature. Only five notes are actually used to compose the melody in this section, Ef, F, Af, Bf, Df, making it fit the Chinese pentatonic key of E♭ *Zhi*, although the main key of this piece is A♭ major.

The creative ways of evoking *anyin* on piano by Chen are different from that of Li described above. In Chen's piano adaptation of *Flowing Water*, he chooses to use grace notes, arpeggiated accompaniment, playing in legato, intensity changes and dialogic patterns to create the atmosphere of a soft tone emanating from *zou shou yin*. Firstly, in bars 68–72 (Ex. 14), Chen places the melody of the original *guqin* piece an octave higher on the piano in a legato style, embellished with light ornamental tones and grace notes. He complements this with an arpeggiated accompaniment pattern that enriches the imagery of flowing water. This texture simulates the gentle and soft tone of *anyin* on a delicate flowing water-like melodic line. Secondly, from bars 101 to 104 (Ex. 15), Chen thickens the main melody in the right hand by adding perfect 4ths, while the left hand alternates octave chords to support a fuller texture. This combination creates a form of counterpoint with rich variations of intensity, evoking the resonant and voice-like qualities associated with *anyin*. Similarly, Wang employs a layered approach in bars 82 and 85 of *Plum Blossoms* (Ex. 16). He makes the accented chords two octaves higher than the original melody, echoing the previous main melody, as if high-pitched human voice in the *anyin*.

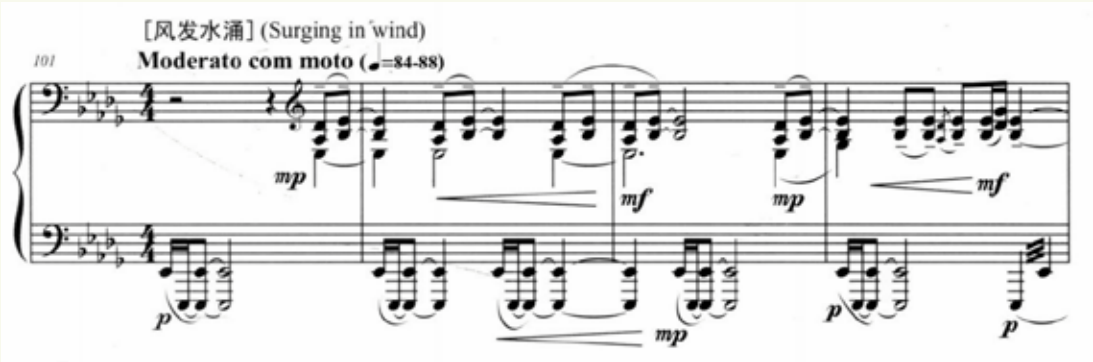
Ex. 13. Li Yinghai, *Farewell at Yangguan Pass*, bars 19–20



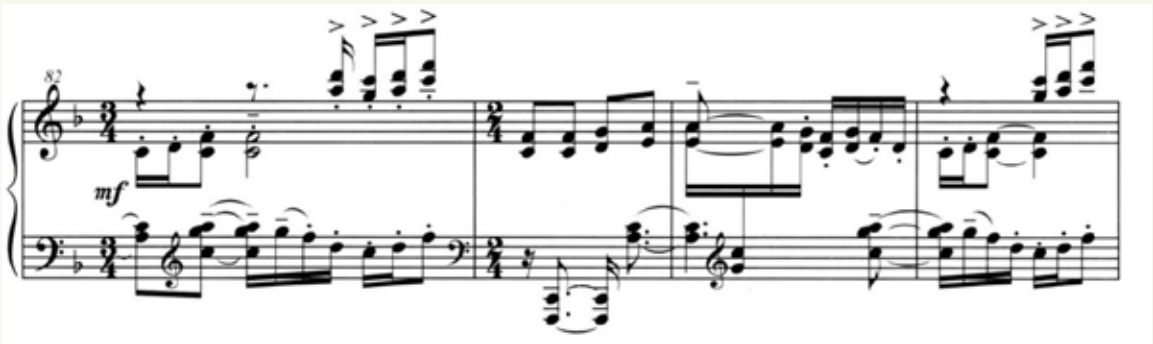
Ex. 14: Chen Peixun, *Flowing Water*, bars 68–72



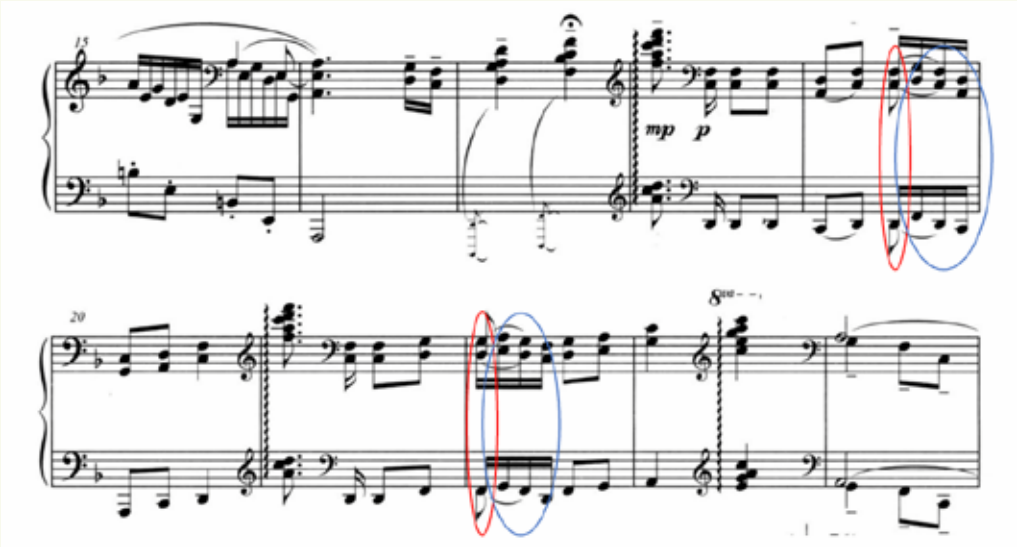
Ex. 15. Chen Peixun, *Flowing Water*, bars 101–104



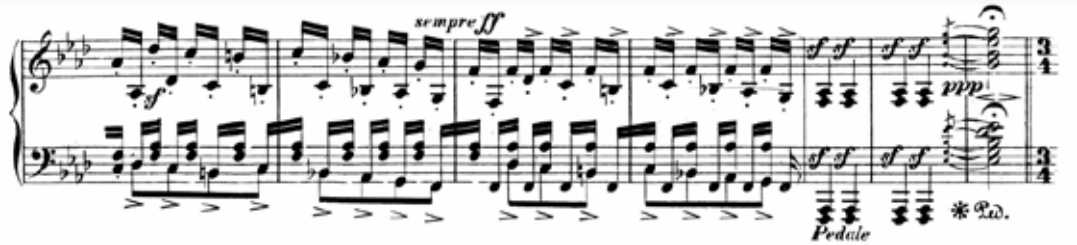
Ex. 16. Wang Jianzhong, *Three Stanzas of Plum Blooms*, bars 82–85



Ex. 17. Wang Jianzhong, *Three Stanzas of Plum Blooms*, bars 15–24



Ex. 18. Robert Schumann, *Carnaval*, Op. 9, 'Paganini,' bars 31–37



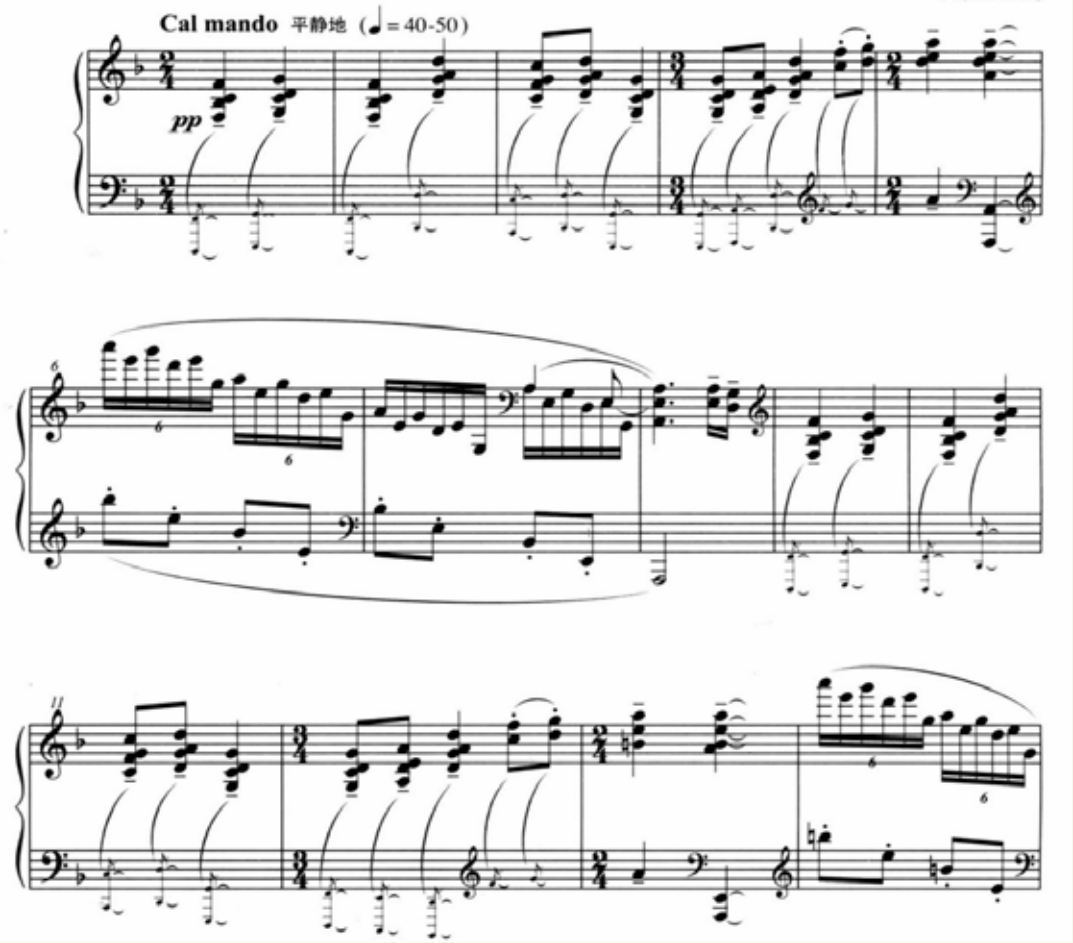
In bars 19 and 22 of *Plum Blossoms* (Ex. 17), Wang's approach to recalling *anyin* is more vivid and expressive than the compositional techniques employed by Li and Chen. Wang reproduces the main melody in 4ths while connecting eighth notes with sixteenth notes of the same pitch, where the eighth notes correspond to the real tone in the *zou shou yin* (indicated by the red circle) and the sixteenth notes correspond to the soft tone (indicated by the blue circle). Due to the use of the slur, the notes of the same pitch do not need to be replayed. This technique, although also can be found in some Western compositions — such as Robert Schumann (1810–1856)'s *Carnaval*, Op.9, 'Paganini' (Ex. 18) — in the context of adaptation, can suggest an evocation of the wavering and faint acoustic characteristics of the *zou shou yin* in *guqin* performance.

This mood of combining reality and emptiness brought about by changes in timbre is reinterpreted in piano adaptation and evokes the traditional Chinese aesthetic experience of *qiyun shengdong*. It is a spirit and atmosphere embedded in the melody of music, which can only be felt but not precisely expressed in words. In Western aesthetics, *qiyun shengdong* comes closest to expressing to the breath and rhythmic changes between phrases; in traditional Chinese culture, however, it refers not only to the interchangeable meaning of piano art, but also to the inherent vitality and spirituality of the music, the beauty of the imaginary and real, as well as the seemingly unrealistic context (Nie 2017: 195).

Sanyin (*scattered tone*)

The mellow and steady *sanyin* timbre is formed only on an open string with a hollow and distant charm in sound. The *sanyin* do not appear as a whole theme like *fanyin* but usually occurs only in short phrases or single bars, serving to set the stage for the development of following musical ideas. Moreover, it is not common to find passages in which the *sanyin* is more concentrated, and most of *sanyin* passages are played alternately with the *anyin*; together one is light and one is heavy, one imaginary, one real, complementing each

Ex. 19. Wang Jianzhong, *Three Stanzas of Plum Blooms*, bars 1–14

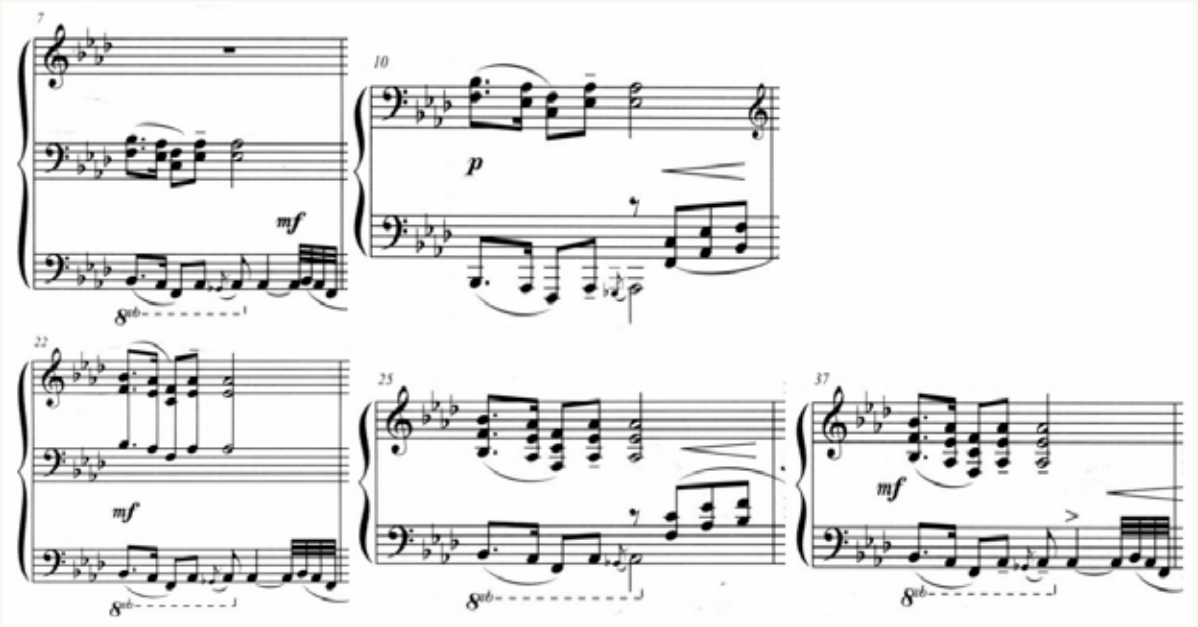


other. Their imitation on the piano can be traced, and the compositional techniques of all three composers are similar, although the parts in which the *sanyin* technique alone is used in the *guqin* are short and few in number. They are all, in particular, arranged as non-tertian chords instead of monotones and placed in the middle and low register, which on the one hand complements the thin sound of the monotone melodies in the *guqin* pieces on the piano, and on the other hand alludes to the thick and distant sound effect of the *sanyin*.

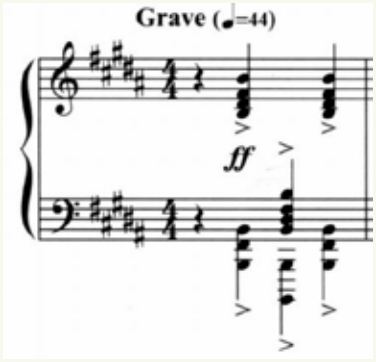
The first example is in the introductory section of *Plum Blossoms* (bars 1–14) (Ex. 19). Wang adds non-tertian chords built on 4ths and 5ths into the main melodic line, giving the original linear melody a more harmonic character. This approach not only enriches and compensates for the weaker monophonic timbre of the original *guqin* material, but also conveys the hollow and pure quality associated with *sanyin*. The octave ornamentations in the left hand, meanwhile, are played slowly with the strength of *pp*. Together, this suggests a mood from far to near and from virtual to real.

The *sanyin* passages in *Farewell* (Ex. 20) are similarly transformed from monophonic to harmonic textures and serve as thematic transitions and motivic developments. They appear across three variation sections with nearly identical compositional techniques, despite spanning only five bars in total. In bars 7 and 10 of the first variation, Li changes the monophonic melody to one in parallel 4ths, with a lower octave accompanying the melodic line, emphasising the hollow and distant timbre of the *sanyin*. The 5ths in the bass are also added to the parallel 4ths in bars 22 and 25 in the second variation and bar 37 in the third variation. These are similar to the non-tertian chords composed by Wang in *Plum Blossoms* mentioned above. This technique further enhances the pure and hollow character of the *sanyin*. As can be seen, as the three variations develop, their harmonic structure is gradually enriched and differentiated from the monophonic thematic melody before and after the bar, serving to enhance the musical ideas.

Ex. 20. Li Yinghai, *Farewell at Yangguan Pass*, bars 7, 10, 22, 25 and 37



Ex. 21. Chen Peixun, *Flowing Water*, bar 1



The first bar of *Flowing Water* corresponds to the part of the *guqin* piece that is played using *sanyin* technique (Ex. 21). Chen uses tonic chords in B major instead of the original monophonic main melody, played with enhanced intensity by *ff*. This makes the acoustics fuller and more harmonious, not only evoking the thick and subdued tone of the *sanyin*, but also enriching the expressiveness of the piano.

This comparison reveals a striking consistency among the three composers in their evocation of the *sanyin* on the piano, differing only in their expression of dynamics. Wang prefers ethereal and empty acoustics in *pp*; Li tends to more pure sound effect in *mf*; and Chen prefers solid and deep musical colours. Since the original *guqin* piece contains no dynamic markings, the piano composers may interpret and shape the dynamics based on both the mood of the original piece and their own musical understanding, thereby fully exploring the expressive potential of the piano. What is more noteworthy is that all three composers make full use of the harmonic effects of the piano, coincidentally choosing, as though in tacit agreement, a more subdued middle or low register, and using non-tertian chords built in 4ths and 5ths to obtain a hollow and resonant sound of *sanyin*, which effectively compensate for the relatively weak quality of monophonic melody.

The three composers, however, also show signs of losing the classical aesthetic character in the process of adapting *guqin* music to the piano. For example, *guqin* music often employs many quiet, hollow and single long tones, allowing the sound to drift naturally until

it dissipates after gently plucking the strings, bringing a clear and meditative state of mind and leaving enough room for reverie. Since the *guqin* embodies much of Taoist thought (Lee 2023: 167), this ethereal mood of *guqin* music is easily reminiscent of the philosophical connotations that come from Lao Zi's *Tao Te Ching — dayin xisheng*. *Dayin* originally refers to the sound of the universe, which is sublimated to express the natural sound of the inner world; and *xisheng* refers to the sound that exists but cannot be heard with the ear (Zhang 2022: 29–30). Taoist thought believes that the true meaning of art cannot be fully grasped by human audio-visual senses, and that it cannot be expressed in a tangible musical language, but rather by creating space or emptiness in music to reflect its meaning, pursuing a meaning that is beyond art (Liu 2018: 201). In piano adaptation, however, the use of a single long tone tends to make the music seem pale or lacking in colour, so the composers often add chords or accompaniment patterns to avoid this kind of emptiness, which is atypical of Western piano music. This gives the music a greater sense of concretisation, but at the same time, it diminishes some of its contemplative qualities.

Aesthetic Differences Between *Farewell at Yangguan Pass* and *The Willows are New*

The following example, presenting a different approach from a distinct cultural context, highlights certain similarities with the piano adaptations composed during the CR, and illustrates that the responses to the original material can be varied and subjective.

The Chinese-American composer Chou Wen-chung also adopted the same material of *Farewell at Yangguan Pass* for piano in 1957, which is more than twenty years before Li's version discussed above. Between 1955 and 1957, Chou devoted himself not only to collecting music and learning the way to read the *guqin*'s notation, but also to researching its historical background and playing techniques (Chang 2001: 100). When Chou recalled the experience, he said:

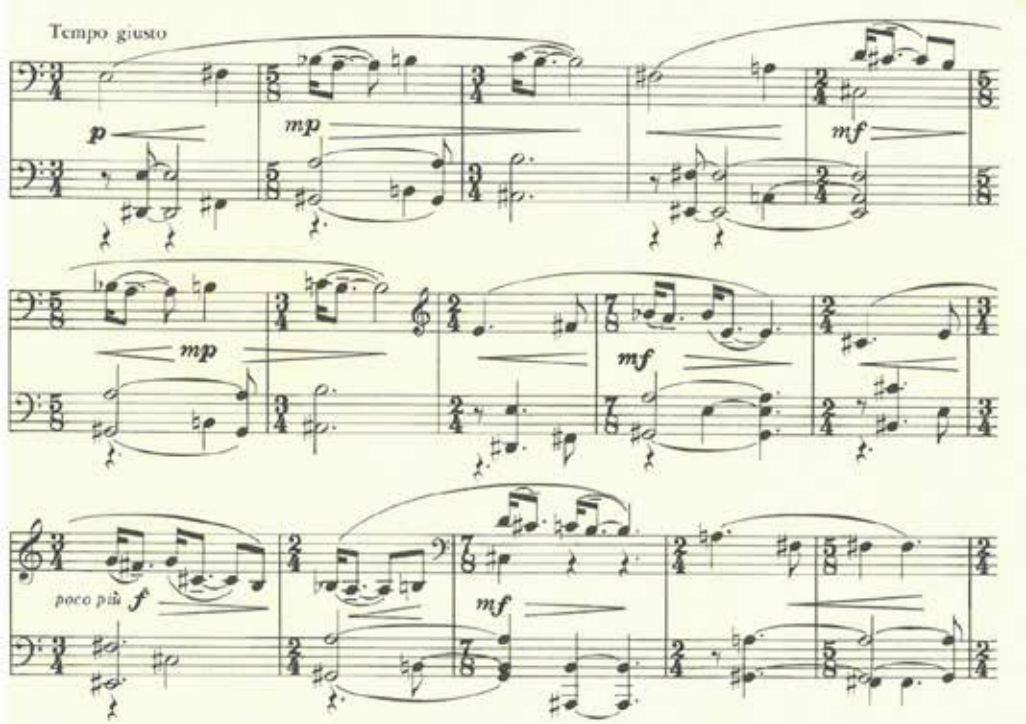
> I got hold of some collections of scores from China and taught myself how to read ch'in [*guqin*] notation… I realised that there is a philosophy behind Chinese music. Things seem to be so spontaneous and yet are contained in one 'character' in the notation — in a symbol… Its [*guqin* tablature] details provide the basis for 're-creating' the composer's acoustic as well as emotional intent (Chang 1995: 82).

This philosophical spirit that Chou realised seems to be inherited and reflected in his piano adaptation of *Liu Se Xin* ['The Willows are New'] (1957) (hereafter *Willows*). Chou mainly amplifies the spatial beauty of the *guqin* in three aspects: interval, register and time, in addition to preserving the single melodic character of the original *guqin* music. First, in bars 2–16 (Ex. 22), minor 2nds in the form of appoggiaturas are added to the single main melody of the right hand in large quantities, suggesting the vibratory sensation of plucked string sounding in *guqin* music; the left-hand accompaniment part employs a large number of 9ths, which is both dissonant and hollow in acoustic effect, leaving room for reverie while at the same time having a hint of mystery. Second, most of the musical themes employ registers in the lower-middle range, allowing for constant bass reverberation throughout the piece; even in bars 26–27 (Ex. 23), the register spans six octaves, enhancing the resonance and spatial ambience of the *guqin*'s music with strength of *f*. Finally, the frequently changing meters make the rhythm of the melody freer, balancing out the free rhythmic nature of the original *guqin* music.

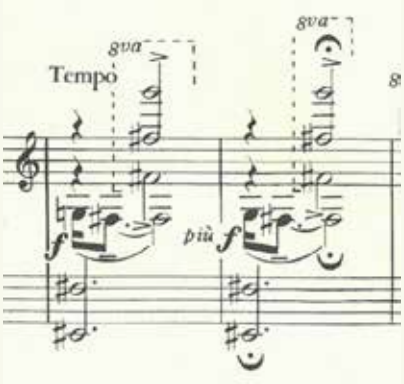
The overall sense of space portrayed by Chou in *Willows* is different from that expressed by Li in *Farewell*. Li prefers to use 4ths, 5ths and 8ths to create a sense of space for the monophonic main theme. In particular, in bars 1–6 (Ex. 24), he alternates three-line staff with ordinary two-line staff, placing the main melody in the centre and adding melodies based on non-tertian chords with 4ths, 5ths and 8ths above and below it to create an ambience of lingering sound. This sense of space can be imagined as a cuboid[10] with the main melody as the height of the cuboid, and the accompanying melodies surrounding the main melody in the upper and lower as the sides of the cuboid.

Chou, on the other hand, embodies another dimension of spatiality in *Willows*. In particular, his technique of adding minor 2nds to the monophonic main melody and pairing them with 9ths in the left hand not only evokes a sense of vibration when plucking the strings of the *guqin*, but also creates a deeply meaningful and seemingly boundless reverberation. The spatial sense brought about by this sound reverberation is like putting a drop of ink in water and spreading out in all directions, with no fixed form, impossible to capture but practically existent, constituting an important aspect of the aesthetics of *guqin* music. I suspect that this sense of space sought by Chou

Ex. 22. Chou Wen-chung, *The Willows are New*, bars 2–16



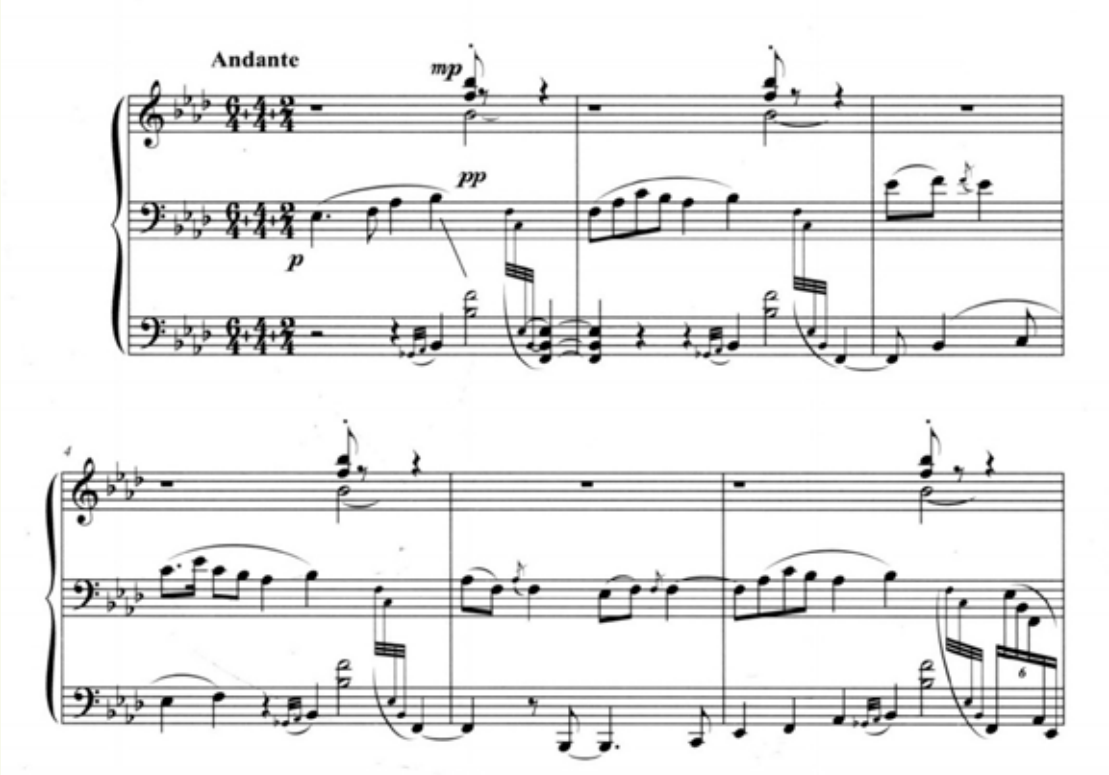
Ex. 23. Chou Wen-chung, *The Willows are New*, bars 26–27



is not only musical but also internal. As van Gulik (1939a: 75) described it when the player's mind is purified and elevated to mystical heights by the serene tones of the *guqin*, his soul can be liberated from earthly bondage and commune with all the natural beings of his environment, and thus he can experience complete communion with the *Tao*. Chou, however, adopts a unified compositional model throughout, and seems to make no special treatment or distinction between the evocation of the three main sounds of the *guqin*, even though his profound interpretation of the aesthetic spirit in *guqin* music can be glimpsed in *Willows*.

Chou seems to have made more efforts to imitate the acoustics of the *guqin* on the piano, but this is, in a sense, closer to an arrangement than an adaptation. This is because Chou focuses on transplanting *guqin* melodies directly to the piano in an effort to maintain the purity and original beauty of *guqin* music, reflecting his respect and preservation of tradition. Li, whereas, adopts a more freely creative approach to adaptation, re-imagine and reinterpreting traditional *guqin* music. In other words, Li's compositional approach transcends the boundaries of tradition and explores new forms of expression that fuse the East and the West, as explored above. Therefore, in the background of the concept of invented tradition, I consider that Li's *Farewell* is more in line with this recreative tendency: his adaptation reflects an innovative rather than conservative approach to traditional musical materials.

Ex. 24. Li Yinghai, *Farewell at Yangguan Pass*, bars 1–6



Conclusion

The three piano adaptations of *guqin* pieces explored in this paper demonstrate the process by which composers during the CR selectively inherited and innovated traditional Chinese music, as well as embraced and transformed traditional Western compositional approaches to piano music. The process reveals the composers attempted to mould a new cultural identity to meet the needs of the times during the CR in order to inspire a collective spirit of preservation of a common heritage — 'Chinese style,' a tradition that was invented to adapt to social and political transformations. This is not only a profound reflection on the cultural relationship between the ancient and the modern, that is, how to maintain national uniqueness and continuity by emphasising traditional culture in the reform process, while simultaneously innovating and constructing musical and cultural values compatible with modernisation. It is also an exploration of musical aesthetics and philosophy, that is, how to balance the differences between the *guqin* and the piano in terms of their physical construction, sonic characteristics and aesthetic connotations, and convincingly to evoke the sound and cultural memory of the *guqin* through the piano, thus further sublimating its aesthetic impact.

This paper, therefore, argues that these three piano adaptations not only have aesthetic value but are also typical examples of the composers' attempts to create a national image and cultural identity during the CR. The Chinese style is not the composers' personal stylistic preference, but points to the national aesthetic consciousness that prevailed in China in the twentieth century, especially during the CR period, with the ultimate goal of creating a soundscape that can reflect the emerging national cultural identity through music.

ENDNOTES

1. Alexander Tcherepnin was engaged in music composition and piano performance in China and was employed to teach at the Shanghai National Conservatory of Music between 1934 and 1937 (Dai 2014: 20).

2. The term *gaibian* is widely used in a variety of fields, such as the reinvention of literary works to film and television, as well as the reworking of mythological or historical stories to theatre plays, etc.; from these, one can glimpse the adaptor's ability to comprehend and recreate the

original work, as well as the versatility and flexibility of artistic expression. *Zhongguo gangqin gaibianqu* refers to works in which Chinese music is adapted for the piano. The material mainly covers folk songs, dance music, Chinese opera, traditional instrumental music and revolutionary songs.

3. *Jiaoan Score* is compiled by Zhang Ziqian and published in 1868 during the Qing Dynasty.
4. *Score Harmony* was compiled by Xu Jian in 1820 and performed by Wu Jinglue in 1939.
5. Wang Jianzhong, a renowned pianist, composer and music educator, entered the Shanghai Conservatory of Music in 1950 to study piano and composition and then stayed on as a professional teacher in 1958, mainly teaching conducting and harmonic analysis. He retired to the United States in 1997, but he returned to Shanghai many times for piano composition and teaching activities (Liu 2015: 4).
6. Seven-Character Regulated Verse is a type of classical Chinese poetry. It consists of eight lines, each with seven characters, following strict tonal patterns and rhyming rules.
7. Li Yinghai's compositional work focused primarily on piano music, vocal music and film music. As a nationalist composer, he dedicated himself to the exploration and development of Chinese national music. In 1959, he published a theoretical monograph titled *Hanzu Diaoshi Jiqi Hesheng* ['*Han Tuning and Its Harmony*'], which marked an important step in addressing the challenge of harmonic integration in Chinese piano music. In 1964, he was appointed to the newly established China Conservatory of Music, where he became a leading figure in research on the theory of national music (Zhou 2022: 379–80).
8. According to legend, during the Spring and Autumn Period (771–476 BC), a *guqin* master, Boya, sat in the mountains on a breezy morning and played the *guqin* while enjoying the beautiful scenery. The sound of the music passed through the silent mountain forest, sometimes as smooth as water, sometimes as deep as a dragon's chant. At that time, a woodcutter named Ziqi passed by this place was attracted by the music, so he sat down quietly and listened with closed eyes, as if stepping into a fairyland. He praised Boya's music, likening it to a lofty mountain and a gurgling stream, which suggested the essence of Boya's playing in a single sentence, and thus the two of them formed a deep friendship. After Ziqi died, Boya was so distraught that he broke the strings of his *guqin* and never played it again. The story of the meeting of soulmates between Boya and Ziqi spread and became a part of folklore (van Gulik 1939b: 421–22).
9. Peixun studied piano and composition theory with his father from an early age, and then taught at the Composition Department of the Central Conservatory of Music, devoting his life's work to music education in China (Huang 2019: 82).
10. Cumming (1990) provided a theoretical rationale for the application of such spatial metaphors to melodic analysis in her article *Metaphors of Space and Motion in the Linear Analysis of Melody*. She explored how spatial metaphors could help to visualise and understand the relationships between different pitches in a melody and showed that these metaphors enable music analysists to describe the movement of a melody in a more intuitive way. In Cumming's perspective, spatial metaphors are not only crucial to music analysis and criticism, but also provide a more detailed and richer understanding of how melodies work and are perceived by listeners.

REFERENCES

1. Arturo, Mora-Rioja. 2023. 'Introduction: Why Poetry and Metal Music'. In Poetry in English and Metal Music: Adaptation and Appreciation Across Media. 1st ed. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. 1–38.
2. Beaudoin, Richard. and J. Moore. 2010. 'Conceiving Musical Transdialection'. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 68 (2): 105–17.
3. Chang, Peter. 1995. 'Chou Wen-Chung and His Music: A Musical and Biographical Profile of Cultural Synthesis'. PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.Cui, Qing. 2016. *中国风格钢琴改编曲导论* [*Introduction to Chinese Style Piano Adaptations*]. Beijing: Modern Education Publishing House.
4. _____. 2001. 'Chou Wen-Chung's Cross-Cultural Experience and His Musical Synthesis: The Concept of Syncretism Revisited'. *Asian Music* 32 (2): 93–118.
5. Chen, Chengzhe. 2021. '钢琴改编曲《梅花三弄》民族元素的演奏诠释' [Performance Interpretation of the National Elements of the Piano Adaptation of *Three Stanzas of Plum Blossoms*]. Master diss., Hunan University of Technology.
6. Chen, Jin. 2018. '古琴曲改编的中国钢琴作品审美特征研究 — 以《梅花三弄》《阳关三叠》为例' [A Study of the Aesthetic Characteristics of Chinese Piano Works Adapted from the *Guqin* Pieces — *Three Stanzas of Plum Blossoms* and *Farewell at Yangguan Pass* as Case Studies]. Master diss., Academy of Music Central China Normal University.
7. Chen, Yong. 2008. '记与黎英海先生的一次访谈' [An Interview with Li Yinghai]. *Chinese Music* 1: 160–2.
8. Corrigan, Timothy. 2017. 'Defining Adaptation'. In *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*. Thomas Leitch, ed. New York: Oxford University Press. 24–35.

9. Cui, Haochen. 2020. '琴曲《流水》研究' [A Study of the *Guqin* Piece *Flowing Water*]. Master diss., Nanjing Art Institute.
10. Cui, Qing. 2016. *中国风格钢琴改编曲导论* [Introduction to Chinese Style Piano Adaptations]. Beijing: Modern Education Publishing House.
11. Cumming, Naomi Helen. 1990. 'Metaphors of Space and Motion in the Linear Analysis of Melody'. *Miscellanea Musicologica* 17: 143–66.
12. Dahlhaus, Carl. 1989. *Nineteeth-Century Music*. Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press.
13. Dai, Baisheng. 2014. *中国钢琴音乐研究* [*Research on Chinese Piano Music*]. Shanghai: Shanghai Conservatory of Music Press.
14. Gaywood, Harriet Rosemary Ann. 1996. '*Guqin* and *Guzheng*: The Historical and Contemporary Development of Two Chinese Musical Instruments'. Master diss., University of Durham.
15. Han, Mengmeng. 2018. '由古琴到钢琴 — 《流水》《梅花三弄》《阳关三叠》之改编曲研究' [From *Guqin* to Piano — The Study on Adaptation of *Flowing Water*, *Three Stanzas of Plum Blossoms* and *Farewell at Yangguan Pass*]. Master diss., Hangzhou Normal University.
16. Ho, Wai-Chung. 2018. 'Propaganda Songs in Music Education: Between Chinese Nationalism and Chinese Socialism'. In *Culture, Music, Education and Chinese Dream in Mainland China*. Singapore: Springer. 83–117.
17. _____. 2021. 'Rising China and Governing Aspirations for Cultural Politics, Music and Education'. In *Globalization, Nationalism, and Music Education in the Twenty-First Century in Greater China*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. 55–109.
18. Hobsbawm, Eric. and T. Ranger, eds. 2012. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
19. Huang, Min. 2019. *'中国风格'钢琴音乐构建与解读* [*Construction and Interpretation of 'Chinese Style' Piano Music*]. Beijing: China Textile Press.
20. Huang, Zi. 1934. '怎样才可产生吾国民族音乐' [How to Produce National Music in Our Country]. Shanghai Morning Post, 21 October.
21. Jia, Jianlei. 2020. '泠泠七弦上，静听松风寒 — 古琴音乐艺术探讨' [Rippling on Seven Strings, Quietly Listening to the Cold Pine Wind — Discussing the Musical Art of the *Guqin*]. *Guanzi Journl* 2: 125–8.
22. Kim, Hyun Joo. 2019. *Liszt's Representation of Instrumental Sounds on the Piano: Colours in Black and White*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press.
23. Lee, Mei-Yen. 2023. 'Concept of Nature in the Musical Aesthetics of the Chinese *Guqin'*. *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics* 46 (1): 161–71.
24. Liu, Chiao-Wei. 2018. 'In Dialogue: Response to Leonard Tan and Mengchen Lu, "I Wish to Be Wordless": Philosophising through the Chinese *Guqin*'. *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 26 (2): 199–202.
25. Liu, Ching-chih. and C. Mason. 2010. *A Critical History of New Music in China*. 1st ed. Hongkong: The Chinese University Press.
26. Liu, Xiaonan. 2015. '王建中钢琴改编曲中的器乐模仿和演奏特色研究 — 以《梅花三弄》和《百鸟朝凤》为例' [Research on the Instrument Imitation and Performing Features of Wang Jianzhong's Piano Adaptations — *Three Stanzas of Plum Blossoms* and *Song of the Phoenix* as Case Studies]. Master diss., Henan Normal University.
27. Liu, Xueyan. and Y. Piao. 2020. *中国五声性调式和声及风格手法* [*Chinese Pentatonic Modal Harmony and Stylistic Approaches*]. Beijing: People's Music Publishing House.
28. Luan, Xiling. 2014. '古琴与钢琴的对话 — 古琴改编钢琴曲《梅花三弄》的改编研究' [The Dialogue between *Guqin* and Piano — A Study of the Adaptation of the *Guqin* to the Piano Piece *Three Stanzas of Plum Blossoms*]. Master diss., Wuhan Conservatory of Music.
29. Luo, Rongqu. 2004. *现代化新论 — 世界与中国的现代化进程* [*New Theory of Modernisation — The Modernisation Process in the World and China*]. Beijing: The Commercial Press.
30. Ma, Jiaojiao. 2022. '中国古琴文化初探' [A Preliminary Exploration of Chinese *Guqin* Culture]. *Oriental Collection*: 112–4.
31. Nie, Zhuo. 2017. *中国现代钢琴作品创作特点及演奏* [*Characteristics and Performance of Modern Chinese Piano Works*]. Beijing: China Textile Press.
32. Song, Jie. 2004. '莫道桑榆晚，为霞尚满天 — 两访王建中先生' [Evening Glow Still Fills the Sky — Two Interviews with Wang Jianzhong]. *Piano Artistry* 4, 3–6.
33. Stephen, David. 1988. 'Transcription, Authenticity and Performance'. *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 28 (3): 216–27.
34. Tan, Leonard. and M. Lu. 2018. '"*I Wish to be Wordless*": Philosophising Through the Chinese *Guqin*'. *Philosophy of Music Education*

Review 26 (2): 139–54.
35. Tien, Adrian. 2015. *The Semantics of Chinese Music: Analysing Selected Chinese Musical Concepts*. 1st ed. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
36. UNESCO Intangible Culture Heritage. 2003. '*Guqin* and its music'. Accessed 7 November 2024. <ich.unesco.org/en/RL/guqin-and-its-music-00061#:~:text=The%20Chinese%20zither%2C%20called%20guqin,inseparable%20from%20Chinese%20intellectual%20history>
37. Van Gulik, Robert Hans. 1939a. 'The Lore of the Chinese Lute: An Essay in Ch'in Ideology [Continued]'. *Monumenta Nipponica* 2 (1): 75–99.
38. _____. 1939b. 'The Lore of the Chinese Lute: An Essay in Ch'in Ideology [Continued]'. *Monumenta Nipponica* 2 (2): 409–36.
39. Wan, Barry Yuk Bun. 2021. 'Application of the Aesthetic of *Guqin* (古琴) for Contemporary Music Composition'. *Revista Vórtex* 9 (3): 1–15.
40. Wang, Shasha. R. Hu. and L. Yang. 2022. '探析20世纪三十年代中国钢琴音乐的民族性 — 以贺绿汀的《牧童短笛》为例' [Analysing the Nationality of Chinese Piano Music in the 1930s — Taking He Luting's *Cohered's Flute* as an Example]. *Home Drama* 5: 94–5.
41. Wei, Tingge. 2007. '论我国钢琴音乐创作 (1915–1981)' [Discuss on Chinese Piano Composition (1915–1981)]. In *魏廷格音乐文选* [*Wei Tingge's Selected Musical Essays*]. Beijing: People's Music Publishing House. 105–42.
42. *五知斋琴谱* [*Wuzhizhai Score*]. Compiled by Zhou Lufeng. 1724.
43. Xiao, Manyu. 2022. '关于古琴文化与中国传统音乐美学思想的交融性分析' [An Analysis of the Intersectionality of *Guqin* Culture and Traditional Chinese Musical Aesthetic Thought]. *Appreciation Music* 11: 156–8.
44. Yan, Linhong. 2022. '论古琴泛音及其在乐曲中的运用' [Discussion of the Use of Overtones in Guqin Performance and Composition]. The New Voice of Yue-Fu 1: 26–35.
45. Yin-Liu, Yan. and I. Wong. 1973. 'A Preliminary Study of "Three Variations on Yang Kuan yang guan san die", an Ancient Song'. *Asian Music* 5 (1): 10–23.
46. Yu, Keping. 2011. '回顾与思考: 西化与中化的百年争论' [Review and Reflection: A Century of Debate on Westernisation and Sinicisation]. Beijing Daily, 28 November.
47. Yung, Bell. 2017. 'The Flowing Waters: *Guqin* Music of Liang Mingyue LYRCD 7453 (L Mingyue)'. *Ethnomusicology* 61 (2): 379–88.
48. Zhang, Qi. 2022. '老子的大音希声与约翰凯奇无声之乐音乐美学思想之比较' [A Comparison of Laozi's Da Yin Xi Sheng and John Cage's Soundless Music Musical Aesthetics]. Morden Music 1: 29–31.
49. Zhang, Yue. 2012. '由中国古琴曲改编的钢琴曲研究 — 以钢琴曲《梅花三弄》《流水》《阳关三叠》为例' [Research on Piano Adaptations from Chinese Guqin Pieces —Three Stanzas of Plum Blossoms, Flowing Water and Farewell at Yangguan Pass as Case Studies]. Master diss., Northeast Normal University.
50. Zhao, Dongmei. 2020. *中国传统旋律的构成要素* [*The Structural Elements of Traditional Chinese Melodies*]. Beijing: Modern Press.
51. Zhao, Yuanren. 1928. '中国派和声的几个小试验' [A Few Small Experiments in Chinese School Harmony]. Music Magazine 1 (4): 33.
52. Zhou, Guangren. 2022. *中国钢琴音乐博览* [*Chinese Piano Music Exposition*]. Beijing: China Federation of Literary and Art Circles Press.
53. Zhou, Jingchao. 2020. 'The Mimicking of Instruments in Arrangements and Transcriptions for Piano of Chinese Traditional Music.' PhD diss., Arizona State University.

ABSTRACT

In early twentieth-century China, some intellectuals believed that the country's modernisation required comprehensive reforms across politics, the economy and culture. These efforts were seen as essential to building a stronger nation and responding to the crisis of national identity caused by internal turmoil and foreign invasion. The field of music inevitably faced new contradictions and challenges in the process of modernisation, particularly in negotiating the balance between tradition and modernisation. Chinese piano composers have attempted to selectively absorb and integrate elements from the Western musical system, while simultaneously retaining traditional musical elements that might be able to represent nationality, such as configuring chords for the pentatonic scale. The aim was to find a soundscape that was in line with the modernisation process and could reflect the national identity — 'Chinese style.' This process of selective inheritance and adaptation of old culture has been called 'invented tradition' by Hobsbawm and Ranger, who claimed that in the process of rapid social change and modernisation, old social patterns and traditions may not continue to be able to adapt to the new

demands, and that new traditions need to be invented to maintain social cohesion and identity. Therefore, based on the theory of 'invented traditions,' this study examines three piano compositions adapted from the guqin during the Culture Revolution (1966–1976) — Three Stanzas of Plum Blossoms (Wang Jianzhong), Farewell at Yangguan Pass (Li Yinghai) and Flowing Water (Chen Peixun) — as case studies to explore how the composers interpreted and expressed the notion of 'Chinese style.' This is achieved through an analysis of the cultural context and aesthetic perspectives involved, focusing on both the inheritance and transformation of traditional culture and the reception and adaptation of Western culture. This study ultimately reveals that Chinese style is not only a personal stylistic preference of composers, but also a concrete manifestation of the general national aesthetic consciousness: an attempt to construct a sonic landscape that reflects the newly emerging cultural identity of the nation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Simon Perry, for his patient guidance and invaluable advice throughout this project and during our regular meetings. I am also grateful to my anonymous reviewers and the editors, Dr. Jula Szuster and Dr. Sylvan Elhay, for their insightful comments and feedback.

Keywords. piano music, guqin, compositional techniques, style, nationality, aesthetic connotation

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Li Chen is a current PhD candidate, under the direction of Dr. Simon Perry and Dr. Anna Grinberg, at the University of Queensland's School of Music, where she is conducting research on the concept of 'Chinese style' in piano adaptations during 1960s–1970s.

Received by the editors 11 Appril 2023. Accepted for publication (in revised form) 7 July 2025.