

# *A Study on the Singing Version of Chinese Art Song “the Great River Goes East”*

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**Abstract:** The music genre of art songs has gone through a century since it was introduced to China in the early 20th century. After more than a hundred years of development, Chinese art songs have gradually formed their own style and characteristics, and a large number of excellent works have been born. Among them, “The Great River Goes East” can be regarded as a model of Chinese art songs. This article starts with the study of the singing version of “The Great River Goes East”, analyzes the work from different angles, and looks forward to further understanding of this outstanding vocal work.

## 1. Introduction

Qing Zhu, formerly known as Liao Shangguo, is a famous composer and music theorist in modern China, and is also a pioneer in the creation of Chinese art songs. He has studied in Germany and has a good understanding of Western music culture, especially composition techniques. “The great river goes east” is a representative work he composed during his study in Germany. Qingzhu quoted the poem “Niannujiao: Nostalgia for Chibi” by the famous Chinese Song Dynasty poet Su Shi as the lyrics, and cleverly combined Western composition techniques with Chinese classical poetry, making this classic poem once again exudes new brilliance through the millennium. “Niannujiao: Nostalgia for Chibi” is a poem written by Su Shi when he was demoted to other places. When he visited the ancient battlefield of Chibi, he was very emotional and expressed his depressed mood through nostalgia for the ancients. The old China where Qingzhu lived was a period of great changes in the times. Qingzhu borrowed Su Shi's bold poems to express his enthusiasm for serving the country and his strong concern for the country's destiny in music.

From the perspective of lyrics content, the work “The great river goes east” can be divided into two parts. The first part describes the scenery, and the opening sentence “The great river goes east, the waves are exhausted, and the romantic figures of the ages” set the tone for the whole work, and displays heroic and majestic momentum. Then it leads to the main event “The Battle of Chibi” and the main character “Zhou Yu” described in the work. The words “rocks” and “smashing waves” are used to reflect the spectacular scene of the Chibi Battlefield. Thinking about people, recalling Zhou Gongjin's graceful and heroic demeanor, who repelled Cao Cao's millions of soldiers while talking and laughing. I think of my own destiny again, feeling that time flies, my aspirations have not been paid, I can only comfort my loneliness by turning wine to the moon.

Qingzhu borrowed Western opera writing techniques. The first part is similar to the retelling tune in opera. The melody progresses mainly by second-degree progression, and the speed is relatively

gentle. The piano accompaniment texture is also mainly columnar chords, and the music is solemn and solemn. Solemn, with a strong sense of narrative. The second part is similar to the arias in operas. The lyricism of the music is very obvious, the melody is more undulating, and the piano accompaniment is mainly composed of triplets and chords, and the music is more fluid. The tonality of the song changes from e minor to E major and finally back to e minor. This tonal layout of the same major and minor tones makes the various passages of the work contrast with each other, and the music level is richer.

## 2. Research on Changyong Liao 'S Singing Version

Changyong Liao, a famous contemporary baritone singer in China, is currently the dean and professor of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, and the vice chairman of the Chinese Musicians Association. He has won the first prize of the international authoritative vocal music competition three times in a row. At the same time, he has performed all over the world and has cooperated with many world-renowned symphony orchestras and world-class opera masters. He also has the reputation of “Asia's No. 1 Baritone”.

The singing version studied in this article is selected from the “Chinese Classical Poetry and Calligraphy - Changyong Liao Chinese Art Song Solo Concert” held at the Akent Concert Hall in Vienna in May 2019. The version sung by Liao Changyong is in the key of F, and the whole song is 3 minutes and 20 seconds. Changyong Liao's voice is relaxed and natural, his timbre is mellow and solid and his works are very delicate, making him a model for baritone singing. Changyong Liao's mastery of this piece can be described as perfect, which can be seen from the handling of many musical details. For example, when he sang the phrase “West of the ancient base, it is humanity”, the speed of the singing changes from slow to fast, and the intensity of the voice increases. When the word “yes” is sung, the power is reclaimed, as if to tell, it is very graphic. When singing the phrase “Three Kingdoms Zhou Lang Chibi”, the speed returned to normal and the sound intensity increased. Changyong Liao's singing treatment of these two sentences followed the composer's original intention and made a second creation, with a richer musical level. When singing the second part of the song “Lunjin Talking and Laughing”, Changyong Liao also changed the speed of the music. The two sets of words “Lunjin” and “Talking and laughing” both correspond to four sixteenth notes on the music score. Changyong Liao's singing speed in this phrase is accelerated, and it sounds very free and easy, making Zhou Lang talk and laugh. The spirited momentum that repelled Cao Jun was vividly demonstrated.

In addition to the changes in speed and intensity, Changyong Liao also did a lot of processing on the tone and tone of the voice. The first part of the song is in a form similar to the narration of an opera. In this part, Changyong Liao 's voice is firm and full, giving people a sense of boldness and aura. The second part of the song is in the form of an opera aria. Changyong Liao's singing is in sharp contrast with the previous part of the song. The tone is more natural and the voice is softer than before. In the sentence “I missed Gong Jin back then, Xiao Qiao married for the first time”, Changyong Liao's singing is more like telling that the images of young Zhou Lang and Xiao Qiao, talented men and beautiful ladies are on paper. In the subsequent “Wandering in the Homeland, Love to Smile at Me, Early Life” Liao Changyong's singing mood became more restrained, and he began to withdraw from Gongjin Zhou's story, returning to reality with a trace of helplessness and sorrow. At the end of the song, “Life is a Dream” Changyong Liao's singing is more like muttering to himself, a sigh of his own life. Changyong Liao's firm and heroic singing of the last sentence, “One bottle is still the moon in the river”, conveys to us the freedom and ease of seeing the world through thousands of sails.

## 3. Research on Yijie Shi's Singing Version

Yijie Shi, a well-known Chinese tenor and a distinguished professor at the China Conservatory of Music and Hunan Normal University. He has won four consecutive gold medals in international vocal competitions in one year. In recent years, he has been frequently active on the international opera stage and is one of the most representative Chinese outstanding singers.

The singing version studied in this article comes from the “Yijie Shi Chinese Art Song Solo Concert” held in Xi'an Concert Hall, China in September 2020. Yijie Shi used the A key to sing, the whole song totaled 3 minutes and 40 seconds. Most of the work “The great river goes east” is sung by the baritone, and there are fewer tenor versions, so the version sung by Yijie Shi is still relatively new in terms of auditory experience. Shi Yijie is an excellent singer who has achieved great success on the international opera stage. His singing skills are very adept. Together with his unique understanding of Chinese art songs, this song “The great river goes east” has a new glory.

In terms of music duration, Yijie Shi sang this version for a long time. But it didn't sound like procrastination, on the contrary, there was more calm and firmness. In the first half of the song, Yijie Shi did not make too many changes to the original song. He strictly followed the composer's chart markings to sing, whether it was the music of “the old and the west, the humanity is” crescendoing, or the “random rock collapse”. He sang very standard and normatively for the strength and weakness of “clouds, stormy waves cracking the shore, and a thousand piles of snow.” In the second half of the song, Yijie Shi's singing speed did not increase significantly, especially the musical processing of the phrase “Yushan lunjin, talking and laughing” did not change the speed here like most singers do. If the image of Zhou Yu portrayed by most people before is proud of being a young man, with a sharp edge, then Yijie Shi's interpretation of Gongjin Zhou is more sophisticated and steady. At the end of the song, unlike the character that Liao Changyong portrays, who sees through the world and is free and easy, what Shi Yijie portrays is more like a loyal man who has been tempered by the world and still has a sincere heart. Moved by it.

It is worth mentioning that Shi Yijie has also done a very good job in the articulation of Chinese songs. For example, the “Dong” in “Da Jiang Dong Qu” and the “Lang” in “Three Kingdoms Zhou Lang” are all character sounds that need to be rhymed. Yijie Shi always extends the vowel part of the character as much as possible when singing, but needs to return to rhyme. The suffix did not stay too much, and passed by. In this way, the sound is smooth and full, and the burden of singing can be reduced accordingly. For another example, “Jie” in “How Many Heroes” and “Mie” in “Small and Fallen Ashes” are narrow vowels, and both appear in the high-pitched part, so singing is very difficult. When Yijie Shi sings the high notes of these two sentences, the word bite is more inclined to the “e” vowel, the oral space is more abundant, and the voice sounds more smooth. Many learners of Bel Canto will have problems with words when singing Chinese songs, which will affect the overall singing status. Yijie Shi's version of “Going East” is very clever in dealing with Chinese songs, which is worthy of our repeated consideration.

#### 4. Conclusion

The singing versions of the two singers selected in this article have their own characteristics, and both can be called classic interpretations. Chinese art songs are a rich cultural treasure. The “Great River to the East” studied in this article can be said to be the brightest pearl in this treasure, with irreplaceable unique value. I hope that through the micro-study of this classic, more people will pay attention to Chinese art songs and sing Chinese art songs, so that Chinese art songs can truly go to the world.

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