

# *Analysis of the Piano Recomposition Music at Sunset*

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**Abstract:** Piano has been introduced into China as a carrier of Western culture for hundreds of years, and it has already gradually merged with Chinese culture. In addition, it plays a significant role in promoting the creation and recomposition of Chinese traditional music works. The piano music named Music At Sunset is a solo piano work recomposed from the Chinese folk pipa music A Moonlit Night on the Spring River by the famous composer Li Yinghai. Based on the national style, he blazed a new path for the development of Chinese piano music by boldly exploring and innovating. This solo piano work absorbs and enriches the playing techniques of Chinese national instruments such as pipa, guzheng and flute. Based on historical data of this piece of music, the author analyzed its performance and artistic conception.

## **1. Introduction**

The artistic expression of Chinese piano music works is characterized by polyphonic thinking. This has caused severe impacts on Chinese monophonic system which has a long history for thousands of years, and in this context, a series of creative modes and recomposition modes have developed in the integration of Chinese and Western music cultures. Through the form of piano, composers show the world excellent Chinese traditional folk music works, reflecting the unique artistic style and artistic charm of Chinese traditional folk music. Mr. Li Yinghai is very proficient in Chinese traditional art and culture. For more than half a century, he had embarked on a new path of developing Chinese piano music through bold exploration and innovation. The piano recomposition *Music At Sunset* inherits and develops China's national music. It takes the traditional pentatonic scale of the Han nationality as the keynote, fully excavates the expressive power of piano timbre, and absorbs basic musical elements such as diverse accompaniment textures and complex structures. This piece of music combines the national characteristics of xiao, drum, pipa, guzheng and guqin, and well expresses the national characteristics of China. Therefore, it can be regarded as a classic in Chinese piano music works. He boldly used Western musical instruments and combined with appropriate modern techniques to nationalize piano music. This recomposition piece not only successfully expresses the strong Chinese national characteristics, but also has a new and vivid modern flavor. The plot of the Chinese national spirit contained in the work is very admirable, and the essence of national music he explores will inevitably be carried forward in the music world.

## **2. Introduction to Li Yinghai and His Works**

(1) Li Yinghai

Mr. Li Yinghai (1926-2007) enjoys a high reputation in the music industry in China and even in the world. He is an outstanding composer and music educator in contemporary China, and also one of the important founders of Chinese piano music. Born in a poor and ordinary family in 1926, his ancestral home was in Fushun County, Sichuan Province. His father was a small employee but a Sichuan opera lover, and his mother and sister were also Sichuan opera fans. Affected by his family, he had been passionate about music since he was a child and was influenced by folk music. His family was very poor then, so he dug a few holes in a piece of bamboo to make a flute by himself. Mr. Li Yinghai once said: "I have been exposed to local folk songs in Sichuan since I was a student, and recomposed the familiar folk songs into piano tunes. In the process of recomposition, I explored and studied China's own folk music characteristics and traditional music styles, so as to truly master the artistic expression of Chinese folk music." He had never given up on exploring the national artistic style belonging to our China and studying the creation and writing of multiple voices since he was a student, and his efforts to explore were reflected in his researches and creations as well as his teaching classes.

In 1940, he was admitted to Luzhou South Sichuan Normal University, where he worked diligently and was taken care of by the music teacher Mr. Wang Lisan. With the teacher's support and funding, he successfully entered the Chongqing Qingmuguan National Conservatory of Music in 1943, and devoted all his energy to learning and practicing piano. In the last year of his university life, the school moved from Chongqing to Nanjing due to the victory of the Anti-Japanese War and was renamed Nanjing National Conservatory of Music. Later, two foreign professors in Shanghai, Lazarov and Frankel, went to Nanjing National Conservatory of Music to teach courses. Li Yinghai's perfect performance won the favor of the two professors, and he was selected from the vocal music department at the time to the composition class. Since then, he determined the direction of his professional music and embarked on a richer learning path. He graduated from the National Conservatory of Music in 1948.

From the early 1950s to the early 1960s, Mr. Li Yinghai served as a lecturer and deputy director of the composition department, and also associate professor and director of the National Music Research Office of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. Working in Shanghai Conservatory of Music for nearly twelve years, the good academic environment provided him with quite favorable conditions for his work and the establishment of theoretical results, which are mainly expressed in his *Han Modality and Its Harmony* and other works. In 1964, China Conservatory of Music was established. As an important key figure in Chinese folk music theory and education, Mr. Li Yinghai was assigned to teach courses at the China Conservatory of Music and served as the deputy dean of the composition department. During these decades of exploration and creation and teaching courses, he recomposed nearly a hundred Chinese folk songs into Chinese piano music, which were included in *50 Chinese Folk Songs Piano Pieces*, *Li Yinghai Piano Works*, etc. He was proficient in Chinese traditional culture and art, and developed piano music based on the artistic style of China, which has blazed a new path that is very helpful to the development of Chinese piano music.

#### (2) Works

1). Mr. Li Yinghai is the author of *50 Chinese Folk Songs Piano Pieces* (Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House;1956 ), *Han Modality and Its Harmony*, *Pentatonic Piano Fingering Practice* (Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House;1963), etc.

2). Representative works of vocal music creations: nearly two hundred songs including *Looking up at the Map of the Motherland*, *Working Hard*, *At the Tomb of the Heroes*, *Song of the Ship*, *The Thousand-Year Iron Tree Has Bloomed*, etc. and vocal music *Three Tang Poems* (1982);

3). Representative Works of Film Music: *Story by the Minjiang River* (1955), *Captives* (1980), *Nie er* (1959), *the Great Beginning* (1954), Etc.

4). Representative Works of Piano Solo Recomposition: *Piano Suite Acrobatic Sketch* (1986),

Zoo (1986), Music At Sunset (1982), Etc.

5). Representative Works of Folk Song Recomposition: under the Silver Moonlight, See a Babbling Brook, Gaolita, Etc.

6). The Academic Essays Are Collected in Inheritance and Exploration -- Collected Works of Chinese Folk Music (Shanghai Music Publishing House, 2004).

Mr. Li Yinghai loved Chinese traditional culture very much. He was not only an excellent composer but also a music theorist and music educator. He had started his professional music creation since 1940, involving representative works of vocal music and piano. Most of these works are based on Chinese folk music, and the folk songs and traditional or modern national musical instruments were treated as piano, which promotes the traditional culture contained in Chinese folk music.

### 3. The Source of the Piano Solo Music At Sunset

The composer of the piano solo *Music At Sunset* is the famous Chinese musician Mr. Li Yinghai. It was recomposed from the pipa song *Xunyang Pipa*, which is very famous and was widely spread in southern China in the eighteenth century. The first draft score is a manuscript from Ju Shilin and Wu Wanqing. In the 1890s, Li Fangyuan included this song in the *Nan Bei Pai Shi San Tao Da Qu Pipa Xin Qu*. In the 1920s, several Chinese musicians including Mr. Liu Yaozhang of the Datong Music Club (a well-known amateur music group in Shanghai at the time) proposed to recompose this piece of music into a pipa-based piece with an ensemble of traditional stringed and woodwind instruments, and change the title to *The Moon over the River on a Spring Night*. This repertoire makes people feel the joy of life of fishermen, just like a scroll of thousands of miles of Yangtze River under the light of moonlight.

This piece of music contains eleven subtitles based on the artistic conception of each section, which also present strong Chinese national style. They were drawn up by Zheng Gwenwen, the founder of the Shanghai Datong Music Club, and they appropriately summarized the musical characteristics of each section.

- (1) *Jiang Lou Zhong Gu*
- (2) *Lin Shui Xie Yang*
- (3) *Yue Shang Dong Shan*
- (4) *Feng Hui Qu Shui*
- (5) *Hua Ying Ceng Die*
- (6) *Shui Yun Shen Ji*
- (7) *Yu Ge Wan Chang*
- (8) *Jiong Lan Pai An*
- (9) *Rao Ming Yuan Lai*
- (10) *Ai Nai Gui Zhou*
- (11) *Lin Jiang Tiao Yuan*

This classic national instrumental music has its own artistic value and charm, making many musicians have unique views on it and create and recompose it into various musical expressions. However, among the various recomposition works, the most influential one with the richest artistic expression and highest musical value is *Music At Sunset*, which was recomposed by Mr. Li Yinghai in 1972.

This recomposition skillfully uses the rich timbre, wide range and rich accompaniment texture of the king of Western musical instruments, piano, to imitate the timbre of various Chinese national instruments, showing the magical charm of “the combination of Chinese and Western”. Mr. Li Yinghai also said: “As far as piano itself is concerned, the tone of this musical instrument is very

single. But through the comparison of playing techniques, pedal applications, touch methods, and the sound range and volume, it can create an association of extraordinary timbres. When playing *Music At Sunset*, performers should have the sound of xiao, flute, guzheng, guqin, pipa and other traditional Chinese instrumental music in their minds.” Such a marvelous artistic practice show the world the melodious and elegant landscapes and night scrolls with a strong national heritage, bringing people a novel style.

#### 4. The Musical Style of the Piano Solo Music At Sunset

Compared with the music of Western countries, Chinese music has a special artistic attraction -- the charm and artistic conception of its traditional music. It is said in *The Charm of Chinese Music*: “If you want to interpret Chinese music, but cannot reveal the unique beauty that belongs to China, then what you interpret cannot be Chinese music, so it cannot capture the hearts of Chinese listeners.” In China, one of the key points in the aesthetic category of the national traditional culture is “artistic conception”, and the two elements “artistic conception” and “Qi Yun” are also greatly significant for the style and type of Chinese traditional art. Chinese music particularly emphasizes the combination of mood and nature, striving to create artistic conceptions.

##### (1) Analysis of music artistic conception

*Music At Sunset* retains the simple original musical image and traditional style, and at the same time, it also enriches the techniques of artistic expression. According to the modern social changes, the composer is creative in the process of creation and recomposition and shows a simple, beautiful and peaceful music image by extending from the melody trend, which can make the audience intoxicate. The joints of every part of this piece of music show unexpected artistic conception.

The whole piece of work depicts a poetic and picturesque image in which the sunset on the riverside slowly goes down west and the bells of the drum tower ring on the shore -- “The tide of the spring river connects with the sea, and the bright moon on the sea grows with the tide.” In terms of musical performance, the elegant style of classical rhythm makes this music full of passion, and the addition of piano playing techniques enriches the musical image. The sound of the simulating guzheng shows the ripples of the river, the swaying flowers and plants and the reflections in the water, as if the gentle evening breeze is blowing on the intoxicating scene of the river. Entering the Sixth part of *Shui Shen Yun Ji*, what spontaneously emerges is a magnificent scenery. Looking into the distance, fishermen returned slowly while singing loudly, showing a happy and lively scene in the backdrop of the sunset. In the seventh part, the sound of the pipa requires the “wheel” playing technique to present a scene in which moving fishing boats cut through the calm water surface and splashing waves around them. In the end, the music slowly returned to the light, distant and peaceful mood.

##### (2) Analysis of music's “Qi Yun”

In traditional Chinese culture, “Qi Yun” is also emphasized. “Qi” is the inner expression of the style of music, but it can only be understood and unspeakable. Only the flowing “Qi” can produce rhyme. “Yun” externally expresses the style of music. It is based on the solution of the basic elements of each music art, which can make the audience feel endless aftertaste. In other words, “Qi Yun” plays a vital role in the artistic style of music. In the performance of “Music At Sunset”, attention should be paid to the flow “Qi” and “Yun”, because they are the artistic soul of Chinese music.

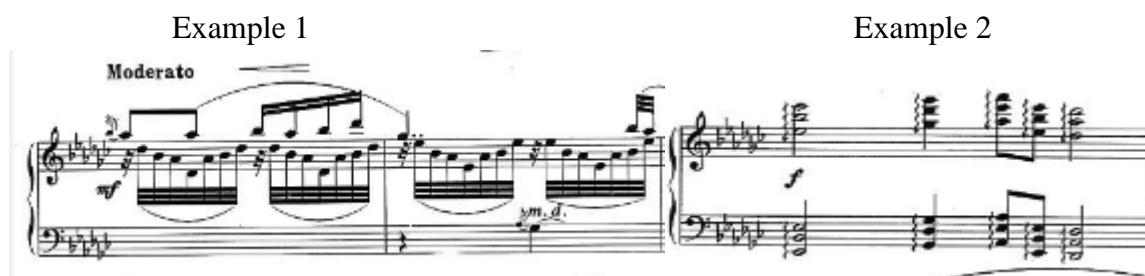
#### 5. Analysis of the Chord and Musical Structure

##### (1) Analysis of chord

The chord technique used in *Music At Sunset* includes the “five-degree chord” which omits the

three tones (as shown in Example 1), and such chords can be played with a clear and empty feeling; “arpeggio chord” (as shown in Example 2) is a technique often used in piano works. The “chord additional tone” of minor seventh and major second also appears. This usage is to better support the traditional Chinese folk modes and the rhyme of national music. “Pentatonic termination” is used in this piece. This type of termination is very characteristic and is a symbol of traditional Chinese national music. Its use in the piano work is extremely innovative and national.

The combination of the chord techniques with Chinese national characteristics and Western feature emphasizes the national character of the music and achieves the sound effects and artistic conception that it should be. This piano piece cleverly combines the essence of the Chinese and Western music world, making this picture of the night scenery of the south of the Yangtze River vivid.



(2) Analysis of Structure

Free variations

Leading	Theme	Variation 1	Variation 2	Variation 3	Interlude	Variation 4	Variation 5	Variation 6	Variation 7	Epilogue
	A	A1	A2	A3	B	A4	A5	A6	A7	
	Jiang Lou Zhong Gu	Yue Shang Dong Shan	Feng Hui Qu Shui	Hua Ying Ceng Die	Shui Shen Yun Ji	Yu Ge Chang Wan	Hui Lan Pai An	Rao Ming Yuan Lai	Ai Nai Gui Zhou	
rubato	little lento	moderato	stringendo	rubato	lento	little allegro	moderato	Lento-to- stringendo	allegro	lento

The tune of *Music At Sunset* recomposed by Mr. Li Yinghai is the pentatonic tone of traditional Chinese music. It uses the unique Chinese repetitive musical form, and maintains the variation musical form -- a structural musical form of the previous national instrument pipa music. At the same time, the Western composition method is adopted. When arranging the speed, he used the structure of Chinese traditional instrumental music “rubato, lento, moderato, stringendo and rubato”, arranging the intensity and rhythm in a free manner and expressing the characteristics of Chinese traditional music with his unique composition method. The composer cut the structured paragraphs, which makes the structure of the music work closer and more rigorous.

This recomposed piano solo has eleven sections, consisting of a leading, a theme, seven variations, an interlude, and an epilogue. The whole piece of music is centered on the interlude and the structure of the section is symmetrical and multi-layered, so that each part is tightly linked. The structure of each part is not to distinguish the speed in the way of termination, but to express it with

different speed changes.

The leading part at the beginning uses “rubato”, a free rhythm and a slight theme melody of the music, and it is ended with tautophony. The second part is the theme of the music. The three-sentence section is formed by the freestyle expansion of the adagio and the pentatonic scale, and the melody goes downward. The three bars at the end are the most important tones, and they also appear in several variations of the following sections also appear. At the same time, the traditional Chinese creation technique “fish biting the tail” is adopted at the connection of two parts. The third, fourth and fifth sections of the music are variations, and these three parts are also closely connected. The structure of the sixth part is a five-sentence music section, and the melody lines give people a kind of hollow and deep artistic conception. The following three sections are also variations of the main melody. The tenth part is the climax of the whole music work. It uses the quaver to gradually move towards the climax, and then continues the climax with nine triplets and octave bass. The last part is the epilogue. The structure is a two-sentence section, which reproduces the theme. It combines the previous features, making the piece of music to be a whole.

## 6. Summary

All in all, *Music At Sunset* is a masterpiece with very clever artistic conception, very rigorous structure design of the section, and very sophisticated artistic design concept. The chord forms used in the music are not only bold and novel but also complex, and they are also very peculiar in their creative techniques. The piano tones are particularly creative, allowing listeners to experience the charm of traditional Chinese music styles through piano.

*Music At Sunset* is a piano solo that plays the role of conveying musical emotions, portraying artistic conception and imagery, and shaping the acoustic tone of national instrumental music. It is an excellent work using the piano to successfully present the Chinese national pentatonic mode. At the same time, the use of the pedal helps to control the volume and change the tone. To a large extent, it can interpret this traditional Chinese folk music very well and accurately. The exquisite decorative sounds in the music better adds luster to the national charm. The composer was deeply rooted in the broad, profound and splendid Chinese national culture. This was more conducive for him to the understanding and comprehension of the charm of traditional Chinese music, and strive to seek a broader realm for the exploration of piano music.

## 7. Conclusion

In the world music industry, the music of different countries all have their own national factors, and they penetrate and develop with each other. The development of Chinese piano music creation requires continuous exploration and innovation, which is mainly reflected in the practice of piano music creation in the twentieth century. Those successful works perform well the music with traditional Chinese national style and national charm through the piano, thereby enriching the world's piano music bank. Mr. Li Yinghai has made contributions to the creation of piano music in China, and also has profound influences on the development of piano music. His piano music works show an outstanding pursuit of China's traditional cultural heritage both in terms of content and form. His piano music works are lively and vivid, with lofty artistic conception. In addition to the rich imagination, these works have a variety of genres and distinctive personalities. No matter in terms of piano technique or the style of traditional Chinese folk music, they all present a lofty artistic realm. These summaries are still enlightening for today's music creation, and they are valuable documents for the study of piano music in China.



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