

# **The Combination of Traditional Chinese Ancient Poetry and Piano: The Analysis and Poetic Expression in the Performance of the Solo Piece "Two Poems of the Tang Dynasty"**

Yueling Lang

School of Music, Weifang University WeiFang SanDong, 261041  
0111829@wfu.edu.cn

Weize Ma

School of Music, Weifang University WeiFang SanDong, 261041  
maweize2021@163.com

Hong Ding\*

School of Music, Weifang University WeiFang SanDong, 261041  
dinghong68@163.com

**Abstract:** Ancient poetry is the essence of Eastern culture, it has a profound and strong impact on Chinese culture. The implantation of ancient Chinese poetry elements in piano performance greatly enriches the Chinese piano music style, can better inherit Chinese traditional culture and aesthetic concepts, fully display the charm and artistic conception of piano music, and highlight the piano music appearance endowed with ancient national style. This study explains the combination of traditional Chinese poetry and piano through the analysis of Professor Xu's solo piece "Two poems of the Tang Dynasty" and the poetic expression in the performance.

**Keywords:** Traditional Ancient Poetry; Piano; Fusion; Solo Piece "Two Poetic Songs Of The Tang Dynasty"; Analyze

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Looking at the development of piano music in the world, it is not difficult to see that the musical styles and performance personalities in different era backgrounds are also very different. Looking back at the development of Chinese piano music, it has a relative continuity and similarity, in addition to the characteristics of the times in terms of musical content, it still has commonalities in genre and performance. Due to the late start of the creation of Chinese piano music, it did not enter the embryonic stage of creation until the twentieth century (Hu, 2023). Therefore, due to the limitations of the historical background, Chinese piano music is relatively single in form and style, but its emphasis on Chinese national cultural heritage and the embodiment of the aesthetic

conception of traditional Chinese music is one of the style characteristics to continue to be maintained. Only by combining the multi-voice advantages of Western musical instrument pianos with traditional Chinese culture and traditional aesthetic concepts is the key to expressing Chinese style in Chinese piano music. The "Chinese style" that musicians continue to pursue is the foundation of the development of Chinese piano music and the main vein of the development of Chinese piano music. The solo piano piece "Two Poetic Pieces of the Tang Dynasty" is a title instrumental work composed by Mr. Xu, a famous composer in China, in 1998. The piece premiered in March 1999 at the Eastman Conservatory Concert Hall, and won the "Golden Bell Award" for Chinese Music in 2002 and was selected as the prescribed repertoire of the 3rd China International Piano Competition in 2003. The solo piece "Two Poetic Songs of the Tang Dynasty" is not only a model of the combination of China and the West, but also a good example of the integration of ancient and modern (Yiheng & Pattananon, 2023). The composer uses ancient Chinese Tang poetry to combine ancient Chinese literature and modern music, combines the poetry culture of the ancients from the perspective of modern people, and feels the ideological realm and literati temperament of the ancients, so that the solo piece "Two poems of the Tang Dynasty" is full of Chinese and Western rhythm and rhyme.

## 2. THE RHYME OF POETRY AND THE ECHO OF THE PIANO: THE FUSION OF ANCIENT CHINESE POETRY AND PIANO

Ancient poetry is the essence of Eastern culture, it has a profound and strong impact on Chinese culture. The poem itself has a sound and rhyme beauty, and words can create a kind of artistic conception beauty, so the poetry culture has a unique and rich ideological connotation. At the same time, it is embodied in traditional art forms as a cultural form and coexists with other arts. From ancient times to the present, the combination of poetry and music has been a relatively common form of artistic expression, whether it is "composing music with poetry" or "giving poetry with song", their purpose is to express human emotions as the purpose. On the one hand, the emergence and development of this art form record the civilization and progress of human beings in the historical process; On the other hand, it also highlights its unique artistic value (Cao, 2023). The piano is a unique and technical instrument, it is able to perfectly express the

emotions and connotations of musical works, it is also one of the indispensable important instruments in the music world. The piano has a rich timbre, which can not only play the magnificent waves of the sea, but also interpret the trickle of the stream, and use the piano to accompany the ancient poetry art song, which can highlight the roundness and fullness of the song. The ancient Chinese poetry culture is vast and profound. Since ancient times, poetry and music have been deeply connected, and although the form of creation is constantly changing with the development of society, the beauty displayed has not faded. The fusion of ancient poetry and piano should not only express the thoughts of the creator, but also bring out the emotions of the performers, and highlight the charm of the song itself. The fusion of traditional Chinese ancient poetry and piano accompaniment places high demands on creators.

### 2.1 The Beauty of the Artistic Conception of "Poetry"

The beauty of the artistic conception of "poetry and music" fully reflects the Chinese artistic style, which is an artistic realm that blends scenes and combines virtual and reality. Integrating ancient Chinese poetry into piano performance can better continue the aesthetic concept of traditional Chinese poetry, and create the beauty of Chinese artistic conception in piano music while maintaining the oriental rhyme. For example, "Pinghu Autumn Moon", "Three Alleys of Plum Blossoms" and "Empty Mountain Bird Language", they are both adopted a title-style guidance method, which provides people with a clear image, so that people can directly and clearly obtain the meaning of the song, and specifically grasp the connotation and artistic conception of the piano performance work. Piano performance music works include pitch, rhythm, speed, harmony, texture and other elements, with the help of oriental characteristics of harmony, rhythm pattern and musical speed, presenting an illusory artistic conception, simple emotion and peaceful feeling with the meaning of oriental ancient poetry. So that Chinese piano music can show its due artistic conception and charm (Li & Woramitmaitree, 2023).

### 2.2 The Sense of "Poetry"

Charm is an artistic beauty with an endless aftertaste. The integration of ancient poetry and piano music performance allows the appreciator to feel the rhythm of music in literature, and feel the unique literary charm in music, reflecting a pure natural harmonious beauty and rich connotation. For example, "A Hundred Birds and Phoenixes", "Sunset Drum Flute",

etc., inject the charm of national instrumental music into the piano performance.

### 2.3 The Linear Thinking of "Poetry"

In the process of integrating ancient Chinese poetry and piano performance, we must pay attention to its linear characteristics, use linear and unique thinking to express musical works and express inner emotions in creation. Ancient Chinese poetry pays attention to priorities, subduing and setting off, using yin and yang and flat rhythms to create a gentle and peaceful scene, revealing heroic and unrestrained emotions. In the "poetry", linear thinking is adopted to carry out the reasonable layout of the musical structure, pay attention to the "understanding" of music performance, do not stick to a fixed mode, show the characteristics of relative freedom, scattered and not chaotic, fully show the harmonious beauty of Chinese "poetry", and exude a very poetic mellow aroma. The implantation of ancient Chinese poetry elements in piano performance greatly enriches the Chinese piano music style, can better inherit Chinese traditional culture and aesthetic concepts, fully display the charm and artistic conception of piano music, highlight the piano music appearance endowed with ancient national style, penetrate a subtle and tactful emotion in piano music, and effectively display the cultural temperament of ancient Chinese poetry piano music. At the same time, the integration of ancient Chinese poetry and piano performance can also extend the piano creation technique and performance technology, combine the content of ancient Chinese poetry to design the composition structure, give the piano performance a unique "charm" poetic characteristic, and innovate the application of new performance techniques, such as variation, polyphony, decorative tone, etc., especially the application of polyphonic texture and harmony, which can enrich the fluidity of piano music and show the sense of flat ups and downs in ancient Chinese poetry.

## 3. POETRY IN MUSIC: ANALYSIS OF THE SOLO PIANO PIECE "TWO POEMS OF THE TANG DYNASTY"

Among the many Chinese piano music works, I will choose Professor Xu's solo piece "Two Poetic Songs of the Tang Dynasty" as the research object, it is because in the creation of this work, the composer very skillfully integrates "East and West" and "tradition and modernity", which not only maintains traditional Chinese thought but also makes bold innovations,

which has both national charm and a sense of the times. This kind of creative concept is more in line with the research direction of the author's article. In addition, Professor Xu fully expresses the artistic conception of ancient Chinese poetry through a deep understanding of the connotation of Eastern music and Western composition techniques, reflecting the unique style of Chinese Impressionism. More importantly, under the strong influence of Western modern music trends, "Xu Zhenmin did not follow the trend, did not be swept away by Western fashions and trends, but went his own way in arduous exploration". His exploration has led the development of Chinese piano music, accumulating rich creative experience, and although this work is already a perfect work. From the perspective of Professor Xu's topic selection, it is not difficult to see that he has a very high admiration and enthusiasm for traditional Chinese culture and the historical characteristics of the Chinese nation, and he also knows that it is not easy to use the piano to express the ancient charm and beauty of oriental history, so in addition to showing the musical characteristics in terms of harmony color, texture composition, and contrast between strength and weakness, he pays more attention to grasping the connotation from a cultural point of view. From this point of view, to give the cultural connotation to the sound and timbre that match it, it is not only necessary to have a deep understanding of the essence of Chinese history and culture, but also to have exquisite composition skills, use ingenious and reasonable creative techniques to express the connotation of music, and highlight the characteristics of music style. This work contains two separate piano pieces, both of which are inspired by Tang dynasty poems, as mentioned above, Professor Xu pays more attention to grasping the connotation of music from a cultural perspective, so the poetic feelings in music are not difficult to be explored. The solo piece "Two Poetic Songs of the Tang Dynasty", in terms of creative technology and sound art, all reflect the artistic conception and charm brought by the verse, coupled with the poetry of the poetry in the flow of music, making the music clearer and clearer, and the flowing poetry has also become one of the biggest creative characteristics of this work. Throughout Mr. Xu's solo piano piece "Two Poetic Pieces of the Tang Dynasty", its flowing melodic lines, personalized harmony, rich texture changes and breaking conventions, using Western modernist techniques to express the ancient poetic mood of Chinese tradition, make the connotation of the work richer and the aural effect more unique. Some people once graphically commented on it as: "imagination that spans ancient and modern times". It can be seen that in the process of composing

music, composers use music to interpret the understanding and comprehension of the connotation of poetry by contemporary composers. Among them, the solo piece "Two poems of the Tang Dynasty" is divided into two, the first is from the masterpiece "The Song of Hiking Youzhoutai" by Chen Ziang(661-702), a famous poet of the Tang Dynasty in China. The second is the famous poem "Carved in the Backyard of Broken Mountain Temple" built by the Tang Dynasty poet Changjian.

### 3.1 The Song of Hiking Youzhoutai

I can neither meet the wise monarchs of the previous generation, nor the wise monarchs of the future generations.

Thinking that only the vast world is infinite, I can't stop being full of sadness and tears.—Chen Ziang.

The first solo piano piece based on the early Tang Dynasty poet Chen Ziang's "The song of hiking youzhoutai" is not an adaptation of ancient songs, but takes the spiritual tone of the original poem, showing the spiritual realm consistent with poetry. The composition adopts a single trilogy structure, each part is integrated with the connotation of the ancient poem, and the structure carefully corresponds to the structure of the poem, and the momentum of this five-word and seven-word intersecting poem is enhanced with a chanting-style melody.

Paragraph A (bars 1-10): The first verse is the first to speak, and from the second bar, the five-tone pattern is used to show the emotions of worry and emotion in ancient poems.

Paragraph B (bars 11-34): Multiple pentatonic mixtures, frequent changes of beat and tonality, staggered, speed increases, intensity increases, emotions turn from melancholy to anger, the poet's heroic inner world unfolds step by step, and in bar 24 falls on the strong tone of the fff, and the music reaches a climax. Subsequently, the speed slows down, the mood subsides, and the chromatic pattern appears, entering the situation of "solitude but sobs".

Paragraph A1 (bars 35-44): Section A reappears, the key returns to a five-tone pattern, deepening the experience of sadness, and finally creating an ethereal mood with a chord that omits three notes. The biggest feature of this poem is a strong sense of space, and this sense of space also creates conditions for poetic display. In addition, music is an artistic means that can bring people a huge imagination space, and Professor Xu used this art of sound, coupled with his impressionist creative method with a sense of the times, to create this piano piece of the same name. He uses an invisible

acoustic effect to portray the poet's abstract psychological process, from anger, helplessness, to loneliness and melancholy, using complex chord forms, dynamic changes, rhythm and texture reasonable combination, this intersection beyond time and space, the intermingling of music and poetry, the interaction of tangible and abstract, and the poetic nature flowing in music, realizing the creative attitude of "music in poetry, poetry in music".

### 3.2 Carved in the Backyard of Broken Mountain Temple

I'm walking into the ancient temple in the morning, the rising sun shines on the pine forest.

A path shaded by a bamboo forest leads to a deep place, and the Zen house is full of flowers and trees.

The bright mountain sun makes the birds more happy, and the clear water makes people refreshed.

All things are silent, and only the sound of the bell, which symbolizes the empty door, can cleanse the dirt of people's hearts like a pool of water and make it purer. —ChangJian.

This is a typical landscape poem, although there are many landscape poems during the Tang Dynasty, due to the unique perspective and wording of the poem, it creates an elegant and quiet artistic conception for the reader. Therefore, the musical works also continue this style, excavating the characteristics of the ancients who cherish the landscape and express hidden feelings, profoundly depicting the artistic conception of ancient poetry and restoring the essence of poetry. It still adopts a single trilogy structure, because the structure of the poem is neat, so the melody of the whole piece is stable, and in the slow flow, it expresses the poet's attitude towards life.

Paragraph A (Sections 1-11): The five-tone group is the main pattern, and the dominant melody highlights the national color, depicting the sunlight passing through the woods and quietly illuminating the ancient temple.

Paragraph B (Sections 12-31): The key changes frequently, bringing the most colorful passages to the whole song, "Curved Path", "Zen Room", "Flowers and Trees", "Mountain Light", "Bird Nature", "Pool Shadow" and "Wave" depict a flexible and idyllic landscape painting in the fast and slow arpeggio group.

Paragraph A1 (Sections 32-50): In the process of reproducing Paragraph A, there is a slight change in tonality, depicting the situation in the poem. The four-degree parallel chords at bar 40 seem to simulate the ethereal

sound of a temple bell, integrating emotions, scenery and people, and expressing a hidden artistic conception (Chen, 2012; Lihan & Thothum, 2020). The original poem is a poem with a love for the landscape, and the poems themselves carry a sense of artistic conception that transcends the mundane and a creative feeling that rewrites the meaning, and Professor Xu chose this poem as inspiration because of its far-reaching artistic conception and poetic characteristics. Therefore, he uses the wide vocal range and flexible transposition of piano instruments to describe the beautiful scenery and ethereal artistic conception in the poem, so that the poems that put people's hearts on the landscape are placed on music, and use music to describe poetry, reaching the height of sound and silent creation.

#### 4. POETIC INTERPRETATION: ANALYSIS OF THE PERFORMANCE OF THE SOLO PIECE "TWO POEMS OF THE TANG DYNASTY"

In the 100-year history of the development of Chinese piano, both players and creators have tried to practice from the aesthetic perspective of the East. As an important part of traditional culture, ancient poetry must play a major "role" in the "use of foreign affairs" (Hui, 2019). The highest point of poetry and music harmony is artistic conception, but artistic conception is created by many factors. First of all, reasonable creative techniques are required, and the harmony, melody, tonality, texture, and beat must follow the creative laws of oriental music; Secondly, the interpretation of the work mainly focuses on the five-tone fingering, and some loose and variable beats need to rely on the subjective understanding and understanding of the performer, which is not only a test of the player's playing skills, but also a concentrated display of the player's cultural heritage.

##### 4.1 Key Touch

The timbre is the soul of the work, the touch keys are the soul of the timbre, and different touch keys determine different acoustic effects. Looking at Chinese piano music, you will find that the touch keys mostly imitate the traditional Chinese instrumental music performance. This is based on knowledge of traditional musical instruments and proper imagination. A large part of Chinese musical instruments are plucked musical instruments, such as guzheng, guqin, etc., imitating them for

playing, should levitate the arms, gently transmit the power to the fingertips, "plucked" on the keyboard, in order to achieve an ethereal, illusory artistic conception. For example, the first 4 bars of "The song of hiking Youzhoutai" are the ethereal and light feeling created by using the method of fingers turning inside and outside and fingertips to provoke:

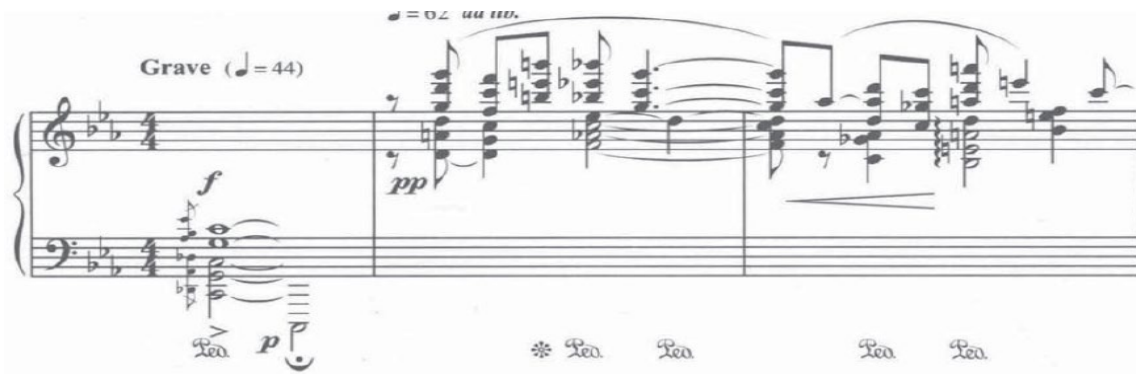


Figure 1

Starting from the 25th bar of "The song of hiking Youzhoutai", the mood of the poem reaches its peak, in order to vent the melancholy emotion, the "kneading" method is used:



Figure 2

In "Carved in the Backyard of Broken Mountain Temple", the "scraping" and "pressing" playing methods used are also imitating traditional Chinese musical instruments (Li & Chen, 2024; Tang, 2022). The feeling of generosity expressed by the tension of the fingers, and the reverberation of the sound by pressing loose alternately, etc., are all piano playing methods extracted from the playing techniques of Chinese musical instruments:

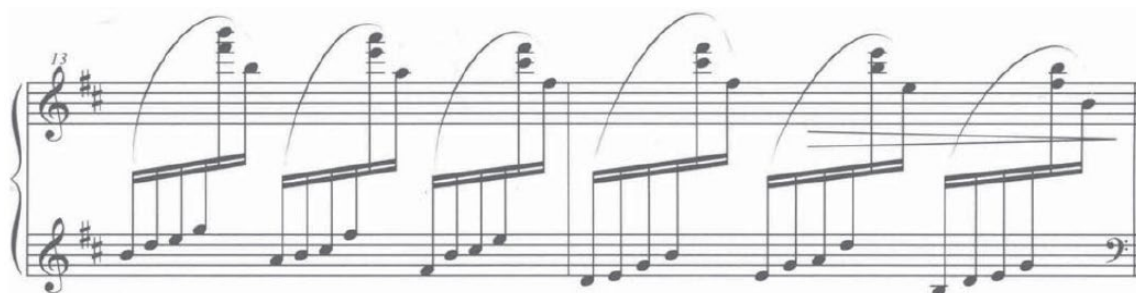


Figure 3

In addition to plucked instruments, wind instruments are also common in the composition of Chinese musical instruments. In "Carved in the Backyard of Broken Mountain Temple", the player completely relaxes his fingers and arms, and uses the "push" and "pull" force of the fingertips to make the sound float far away, restoring the timbre characteristics of the flute, which is truly "winding path to a secluded place" and "pool shadow empty people's hearts":



Figure 4

#### 4.2 Pedals

The traditional Chinese national instrument is a five-tone harmony, and if you follow the rules of using the pedals of Western instruments, the sound will be muddy, so you need to use special methods. First of all, divide the clear phrases for the work, understand the overall direction of the phrases, and mark the places where the pedals are used, which can neither be too frequent nor too loose, to ensure the coherence of the work, nor empty. Secondly, the switching of the pedal should follow the law of national harmony. Generally speaking, only half a pedal can be pressed to achieve a coherent and gentle effect, not too fast and too strong, to maintain the degree of "neutralization" (Yu, 2022; Zhou, 2020; Zhou, 2022). Judging from the solo piece "Two poems of the Tang Dynasty", there are roughly two ways to use pedals to create an aesthetic mood. The first is a sustain pedal containing multiple notes, expressing the majesty of the music:

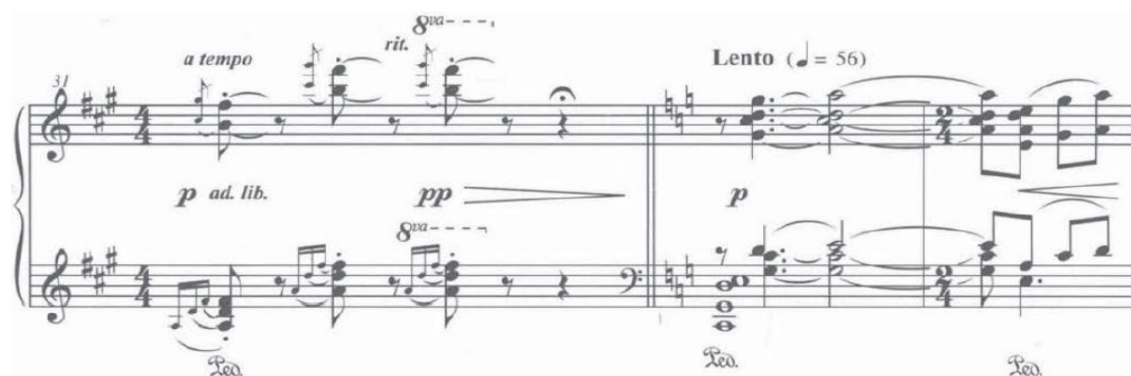


Figure 5

The second is to divide several sustain pedals according to the phrase or group to show the fluidity of the music:



Figure 6

You can also divide the pedal into smaller and do point-like pedaling to increase the clarity and humor of the music. In short, there are many possibilities for the use of pedals, as long as it conforms to the law of five tones and sound effects, it can be played with the subjective will of the player.

#### 4.3 A Combination of Vocal and Atmospheric Rhyme

The determining factor of phonology and rhyme is language. The grammar of the Chinese language is "one word with multiple tones, one tone with multiple sounds, one sound with multiple rhymes", if each phrase is turned into a real sound, it will not conform to the law of phonology, but also completely mutate the style of poetry and music, which shows that sound rhyme is a factor that has a greater impact on the poetic wind of music (Dong, 2024; Xue, 2022). When "rhyme" is reflected through various musical elements, the inner style of the musical work, "atmosphere" can be coherent and substantial, constituting the artistic conception of the musical work (Cui, 2021).

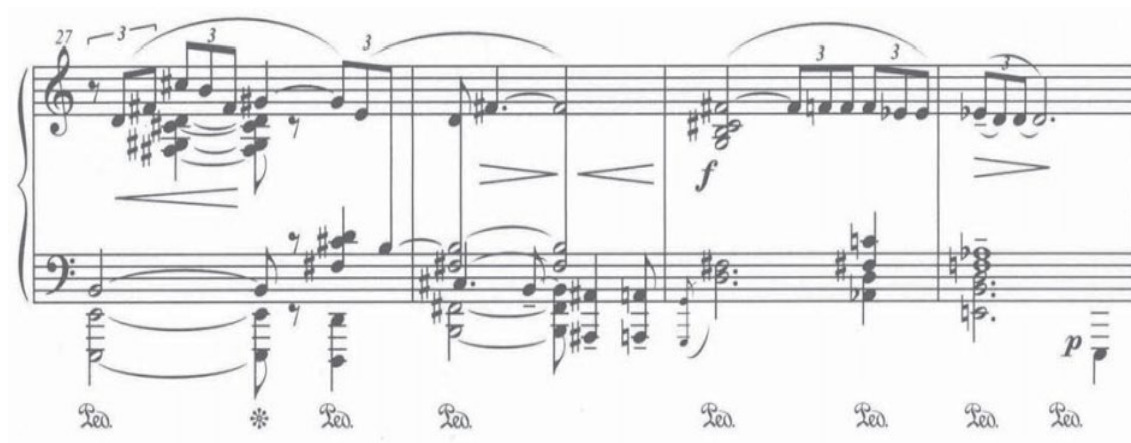


Figure 7

For example, in the 25th-34th bars of "The song of Youzhoutai", the author's melancholy feeling of looking at the distance on stage needs to be expressed with an endless breath, using playing techniques in terms of dynamics, speed, decorative tones and other elements, and finally combining "rhyme". It can be seen that after the piano is used in the creation of poetry and music, it actually adds the artistic charm of the piano.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In general, people think that in order to accurately convey the meaning of a musical work, you must first understand the content and experience it in the heart. This not only requires creators and performers to reserve rich cultural knowledge, but also tests their ability to transform telepathy into audible music. It is more appropriate to call musical works "external projections of the world of the mind". From the perspective of the performer, what they can contact is only the silent score, not the composer's heart, and the ability to "empathize" is very important to understand the connotation of the work. Therefore, the performers should feel the scene and mood of their music from the psychological level, construct the atmosphere of the work through artistic association, emphasize the "meaning outside the words, the sound outside the strings", understand the original poem from the surface to the inside, and then associate the situation and the picture, so as to obtain an expression of emotions and interpretation of images. Traditional Chinese aesthetic thought is rooted in various cultural forms, which not only influence people's judgment of beauty, but also guide people's behavior in creating beauty. As the integration of Eastern and Western cultures becomes more frequent and deeper, the aesthetic perspective of Chinese people has become broader and more diverse. Therefore, in the future, the trajectory of Chinese poetry and music harmony should not only preserve the traditional cultural foundation of China, carry forward its essence, but also expand the vision of creation with reference, and apply the aesthetic ideas and spiritual philosophy of culture to the creation of modern music.

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