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The History and Heritage of the Pinghu Pipa School

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for the degree of

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Department of Music

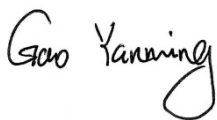
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2026

Declaration

This is to certify that the work I am submitting is my own and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere. All external references and sources are clearly acknowledged and identified within the contents. I have read and understood the regulations of University College Cork concerning plagiarism and intellectual property.

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the historical evolution of the Pinghu *Pipa* School, a significant tradition within Chinese instrumental art, from its formative period in the 19th century to its contemporary status under intangible cultural heritage (ICH) safeguarding. Moving beyond narratives of linear progression or decline, this study asks: How has the Pinghu School sustained its cultural vitality across societal upheavals—spanning the late-Qing crisis, the New Culture Movement, wartime turmoil, socialist transformation, and globalising modernity—and what mechanisms have enabled its practitioners to navigate these changes?

To answer this, the research employs a multi-method approach, combining historical ethnomusicology, archival analysis of critical scores, digital audio analysis of performance parameters (e.g., pitch, dynamics, tempo) and ethnographic fieldwork with contemporary inheritors. The analysis is structured around five pivotal historical phases, tracing the agency of key figures—from Li Fangyuan and Zhu Ying to Yang Shaoyi and two generations of present-day inheritors—in reinterpreting and transmitting their tradition.

The findings reveal that the school's continuity is characterised not by passive preservation but by strategic reinvention. Inheritors have consistently acted as cultural mediators, employing methods such as score compilation, national music reform, institutional integration, and, more recently, engagement with the ICH framework to ensure relevance. This study argues that the vitality of traditional arts stems from whether practitioners can, with clear cultural self-awareness, transform traditional spirit into practices that address contemporary issues. By providing a granular case study spanning nearly two centuries-long, this thesis contributes to broader discussions on cultural continuity, the modernisation of Chinese musical traditions, and the complex interplay between state-led safeguarding and living community practice in a globalised era.

摘要

本文以中国器乐艺术重要流派——平湖派琵琶为研究对象，考察其自 19 世纪形成以来，直至当代非物质文化遗产保护语境下的历史演进脉络。既有研究多将其发展简化为线性传承或衰落叙事，而本文提出核心问题：在晚清危机、新文化运动、战乱动荡、社会主义改造及全球化现代性等一系列剧烈社会变迁中，平湖派琵琶何以持续保持文化生命力？其实践者们又通过何种机制适应时代变革？

围绕上述问题，本研究采用多元研究方法，融合历史民族音乐学视角、代表性乐谱文献分析、演奏音频数字化解析（音高、力度、速度等参数），以及对当代传承人的民族志田野调查。研究以五个关键历史阶段为脉络，梳理从李芳园、朱英到杨少彝，再到两代当代传承人的艺术实践，分析这些核心人物在流派传承与再诠释中所发挥的能动作用。

研究表明，该流派的延续并非被动式保存，而是呈现出策略性再创造的鲜明特征。历代传承人始终以文化中介者的身份，通过编纂乐谱、参与国乐改良、融入院校教学体系，以及近年来借助非物质文化遗产保护框架等方式，不断赋予传统时代价值。本文认为，传统艺术的生命力关键取决于传承主体是否能在清晰的文化自觉下，将传统精神转化为回应现实问题的实践。通过提供一个跨越近两个世纪的详尽个案研究，本文可为文化延续性、中国音乐传统的现代化，以及全球化背景下国家主导的保护与活态传承实践之间的复杂关系等议题提供学术参考。

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You walked slowly, yet every step counted.

You walked with difficulty, yet every step was toward the light.

Introduction

0.1 Background

Within the five modern Chinese *pipa* schools (*pai*, 派), the Wuxi School (*Wuxi pai*, 无锡派) possesses the most ancient lineage; the Pudong School (*Pudong pai*, 浦东派) and Wang School (*Wang pai*, 汪派) exert the broadest contemporary influence; and several compositions from the Chongming School (*Chongming pai*, 崇明派) are essential pieces for beginners and intermediate students.¹ In contrast, the Pinghu School (*Pinghu pai*, 平湖派) seems to have become a silent shadow in the contemporary musical landscape—unknown not only to enthusiasts but also nearly inaudible within professional educational systems, where its image is akin to a passing breeze, almost voiceless. As a typical *pipa* practitioner, my developmental trajectory began with early childhood enlightenment learning, continued with professional training at a music conservatory-affiliated middle school and undergraduate and postgraduate schools, and ultimately led me to dedicate myself to *pipa* teaching and performance practice. However, throughout this systematic education, my understanding of the Pinghu School remained confined to a brief “glimpse” presented in a few lines on a page of the textbook. This phenomenon is not isolated to my personal experience—this school is merely briefly referenced in pedagogical contexts and seldom performs on stage, gradually transforming into a faint and distant symbol within collective memory, thereby reflecting its marginalisation within China’s contemporary musical ecosystem.

The turning point quietly emerged in the early 21st century with the rise of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (*feiwuzhi wenhua yichan*, 非物质文化遗产; hereafter, ICH) preservation movement. Since the formal establishment of the national ICH protection mechanism in 2003, Pinghu City—the origin of the Pinghu School—has undergone over a decade of systematic excavation and conservation efforts, gradually reviving this endangered artistic style, re-integrating it into the public eye. In 2018, it was within this context that I had

¹ *Liupai* 流派 or *pai* is used amongst *pipa* players (as well as other Chinese musicians) to mean the performance style, which can imply the particular school’s style of playing, or a group of people who play in the same style.

the opportunity to explore the Pinghu School, beginning a journey to uncover the “lost voices.”

During my initial visit to Zhu Dazhen 朱大桢 (b. 1939), a nationally recognised ICH inheritor, he abruptly unveiled the superficial resurgence of the Pinghu School with a calm yet incisive remark: “Those (performers from the Conservatories) are not truly playing Pinghu School.”² At that time, Pinghu School had already received official recognition, and its transmission system was progressing systematically. This statement left me stunned and prompted a series of questions: if professional transmission has failed to encapsulate the essence of Pinghu School, then what is the core artistic philosophy of the Pinghu School? What enabled it to become the first *pipa* school in China to be integrated into professional conservatories? Furthermore, what factors led to its decline from its pinnacle to its current diminished state? What is the current state of authentic transmission within the Pinghu School?

Honestly, these historical inquiries did not initially spark my desire to explore further; my first encounter with the Pinghu School’s music failed to move me profoundly, either. What truly drew me to this elder and this art were the nuances that transcended mere sound: under the scorching midsummer sun, he waited patiently for my uncertain arrival; at seventy-nine years of age, his knuckles stiffened, yet he insisted on demonstrating techniques for me. The halting melody produced by his age-slowed fingers could scarcely be called “masterful.” Yet precisely in that moment, I found myself, almost without thought, offering to learn from him. The master agreed without hesitation, and the resolve in his countenance—a resolve that transcended mere technique and bordered on religious devotion to transmission—became the vital foundation supporting my years of subsequent exploration.

Initially, I also approached the Pinghu School through a widely circulated stereotypical perspective within academia and the industry: among the five *pipa* schools, none has been as embroiled in controversy as Pinghu School: from the founder Li Fangyuan 李芳园 (c. 1850-1901) being accused of “forging” composers and subtitles, to disputes over the pedagogical lineage of key inheritor Zhu Ying 朱英 (1889-1954); from its aesthetic

² Interview with Zhu Dazhen in 2018.

emphasis on “self-entertainment” being criticised as disconnected from contemporary trends, to the subsequent emergence of the decline. These voices collectively form a seemingly solid narrative, as if this school has always lingered on the fringes of the era’s mainstream. Nonetheless, as I progressively gathered and analysed relevant historical materials, genealogical records, and contextual evidence, I discovered that these long-standing negative labels attached to the Pinghu School largely stemmed from later generations’ partial interpretations of texts, disregard for historical context, and even misunderstandings arising from fragmented knowledge of the school’s transmission lineage. What truly warrants scrutiny, perhaps, is not the practitioners of the past but the very lens through which later generations view history.

This cognitive shift not only prompted me to re-evaluate the positioning of the Pinghu School within the development history of modern Chinese *pipa* but also stimulated my scholarly motivation to further explore its artistic essence and historical authenticity. I firmly recognise that the essence of ethnomusicology lies in contemporary, vibrant fieldwork; yet when I delve into the dusty archives and confront those texts often regarded as cold symbols, the historical materials my fingertips touch are far from lifeless. I analyse their era through textual examination, engaging with their musical manuscripts as a dialogic interface, and attempt to listen to the sounds they once played through these static symbols—to comprehend the choices made by our forebears a century ago, and to rebuild connections of meaning across fractured time and space. This process constitutes an ethnomusicological fieldwork bridging temporal divides.

I still vividly recall that moment of illumination—when in the quiet night, I finally comprehended Li Fangyuan’s motivation to compile the *Li Collection*. I envision him seated at his desk, solemnly penning the remark that “this collection exhibits more innovative motifs and enhanced artistic refinement compared to the *Hua Collection*” (Li Fangyuan’s Introduction in Li, 1955/1895). What surges between the lines is not merely a musician’s pursuit of artistry, but the overwhelming surge of emotion and excitement felt by a pioneer who, in fulfilling his lifelong ambition, harboured the grand vision of transforming customs and reviving the art of the *pipa*. I was deeply inspired and equally stirred, and tears involuntarily welled up in my eyes—grieving the simplification and misunderstanding of his

meticulous efforts and strategic approaches by future generations, feeling a keen sense of injustice and frustration.

This moment made me realise that to comprehend a school, perhaps one must begin by understanding specific individuals—piercing through the layers of historical narrative to touch upon those authentic life trajectories and personal choices. This holds true not only for Li Fangyuan—when I deciphered the historical circumstances behind Zhu Ying’s lament, “I have been a professor here for eight years, and not a single day has been without pain” (Zhu 1935, June 6), an overwhelming heaviness settled in my heart; Upon learning of Yang Shaoyi’s two resolute attempts to end his life in his later years during the interview, boundless regret welled up within me; and while transcribing Zhu Dazhen’s ethnographic records, reconstructing his lifelong convictions and the realities he faced, tears once more flowed unbidden. These experiences have made me keenly aware that history is often simplified and reduced to mere soundbites in the act of writing. The researcher’s mission, perhaps, lies in understanding and empathy—in traversing the narratives constructed by later generations to restore the inherent weight and warmth to those lives that have been flattened.

The historical reality of the Pinghu School is far more complex, vivid, and weighty than the brief accounts found in textbooks. This school has been continually marginalised, forgotten, and misinterpreted throughout the history; however, successive generations of inheritors, through their unwavering resolve and silent perseverance, have preserved a strand of pure sound within the gaps of time, ensuring that the Pinghu School has never truly been interrupted. As a *pipa* performer, I feel ashamed that I remained detached from such profound historical roots for so long. It is precisely this exploration deep into the fabric of history that has given me a fresh understanding of ICH: true preservation is never merely about safeguarding some living text or sound recording, but rather about reawakening contemporary cultural consciousness through the recollection and reconstruction of historical narratives and lived experiences. Only when later generations—such as myself at this very moment—are genuinely moved by these concrete individuals and vivid stories, and comprehend the spiritual legacy that transcends mere technique, does transmission transform from a passive obligation into an active, heartfelt mission.

Therefore, the core purpose of this dissertation lies in systematically tracing and

deeply interpreting the century-long development of the Pinghu School, revealing the human warmth, choices, ideals, and spirit that permeate its artistic practice. It aims to present the individual life trajectories and artistic perseverance often obscured by grand narratives. It is my hope that this historical examination and humanistic interpretation may foster an enlightened cultural consciousness—not only enabling professional performers to recognise the aspirations embedded within these pieces, thereby actively performing, interpreting, and disseminating them; but also allowing scholars and the public to genuinely appreciate the value of this art form, understanding why it deserves to be cherished and perpetuated.

0.2 Overview of the *Pipa*

0.2.1 Historical Evolution

The *pipa* 琵琶 is a traditional plucked-string instrument with a long history and significant cultural status in China.³

During the Qin (221-207 BC) and Han (20-220 BC) dynasties, two distinct types of plucked instruments collectively designated as “*pipa*” emerged within China: one characterized by a straight neck and a circular resonator, later referred to as the *Qin pipa* 秦琵琶 or *Qin hanzi* 秦汉子; the other is the *ruanxian* 阮咸, named after the renowned musician Ruan Xian 阮咸 (c. 234-305), reputedly known for his skillful playing. Collectively, these two variants collectively constitute the indigenous Chinese origins of the *pipa*.

Around the 4th century CE, with the flourishing of the Silk Road, a type of lute originating from Persia and transmitted through Central Asia, characterised by a curved neck and pear-shaped resonator, known as the *Hupipa* 胡琵琶 or crooked-necked *pipa* (*quxiang pipa*, 曲项琵琶) was introduced into China. This instrument was initially commonly played on horseback. After its introduction, it gradually found use in imperial court ensembles and as accompaniment for Western Region music and dance. Its method of being held horizontally and played with a plectrum exerted a profound influence on the art of the indigenous *pipa*. Subsequently, through prolonged practice, these two instruments underwent mutual assimilation, gradually laying the foundations for the *pipa* system of later generations.

³ For further details on the history of the *pipa*, see Han & Zhang (2014) and Liu (2019).

During the Sui (581-618) and Tang dynasties (618-709), the development of the *pipa* reached its first significant peak, becoming an indispensable instrument in court music and folk entertainment. It integrated the characteristics of the Western Regions' crooked-necked *pipa* and the Han Chinese straight-neck *pipa*, gradually transitioning from being held horizontally and played with a plectrum to being held vertically and plucked directly with the fingers, thereby laying the foundational techniques for subsequent pedagogical and stylistic evolutions (see Figure 0.1). This period produced distinguished virtuosos, including Pei Shenfu 裴神符 (fl. early 7th century), Duan Shanben 段善本 (fl. mid-8th century), and Kang Kunlun 康昆仑 (fl. mid-8th century), who not only possessed superior technical proficiency but also contributed significantly to the development of systematic performance theories.



Figure 0.1: Close-up of “The Night Revels of Han Xizai” (*Han Xizai yeyantu*, 韩熙载夜宴图), showing a *pipa* with typical Tang Dynasty characteristics (Gu, c. 10th century).

During the Song (960-1279) and Yuan (1271-1368) dynasties, the flourishing of urban culture alongside the popularisation of folk arts such as opera and singing significantly transformed the structural design, playing techniques, and artistic functions of the *pipa*. The transition of the *pipa*'s playing posture from horizontal hold to vertical hold marked a pivotal evolution, which not only liberated the left hand for more agile and flexible fingering but also facilitated the systematic shift from plectrum-based plucking to fingerstyle plucking. This transformation, in turn, catalysed the development of a more intricate and nuanced technique

system for the right hand, significantly expanding the expressive capacity of the *pipa*. Meanwhile, the *pipa*'s structural design gradually stabilised, establishing a standardised classification system ranging from four ledges and nine or ten frets. The expansion of its tonal range and the standardisation of its grading system furnished a solid technical foundation for executing more intricate melodic passages and accommodating more complex scales. Therefore, during this period, the *pipa* was not only extensively utilised as an accompaniment instrument but also progressively evolved into a solo instrument capable of autonomous expressive performance.

During the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, the structure of the *pipa* was largely standardised, with the frets expanding to thirteen frets, approaching the modern configuration (see Figure 0.2). Leveraging regional stylistic traditions and pedagogical lineages, *pipa* artistry gradually diverged into two primary stylistic schools: the Southern School (*Nanpai*, 南派, centred in Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Shanghai) and the Northern School (*Beipai*, 北派, centred in Beijing, Hebei, and Shandong). However, by the early 20th century, the Northern School experienced a decline, while the Southern School continued its development within the Jiangnan region. It ultimately evolved and established five widely recognised major schools: Wuxi School, Pinghu School, Pudong School, Chongming School, and Wang School. Each school preserves regional stylistic features while promoting standardised notation, systematic instruction, and the accumulation of a canonical repertoire, thereby collectively facilitating the profound transformation of *pipa* education from traditional apprenticeship practices to a modern, institutionalised, and academic pedagogical framework.



Figure 0.2: Chinese woman playing a *pipa* (Thomson, 1870). The instrument depicted features four ledges and ten frets, and is being played horizontally using the fingertip technique.

Entering the second half of the 20th century, with the establishment of specialised conservatories and the systematic development of pedagogy, *pipa* artistry gradually exhibited an institutionalised characteristic that transcended individual schools and embraced an eclectic approach. Classical repertoire and performance techniques from various schools were systematically curated, researched, and transmitted, resulting in a modern pedagogical framework grounded in performance science and integrating diverse pedagogical traditions. Renowned masters such as Lin Shicheng 林石城 (1922-2005), Liu Dehai 刘德海 (1937-2020), while inheriting traditional techniques, advanced technical innovations and instrument reforms, the *pipa* evolved into a six-ledges, twenty-four frets model, achieving complete equal temperament tuning—significantly enhancing key modulation capabilities and contemporary harmonic expression. Performance formats expanded from solo to include concerto, chamber ensemble, and folk orchestra arrangements, broadening the instrument’s expressive potential as a polyphonic ensemble instrument. Following the Reform and Opening-up policy in 1979, *pipa* art has achieved significant advancements in internationalisation, cross-disciplinary integration, and contemporary composition. It now prominently features within the global music scene as a representation of Chinese culture, while also engaging in profound collaborations with symphonic, chamber, and multimedia

arts, establishing itself as a vital instrument that embodies both traditional heritage and modern innovation.

0.2.2 Five Major Schools

Since the Qing dynasty, the Jiangnan region, centred around Shanghai, has gradually fostered five major *pipa* schools—Wuxi, Pinghu, Pudong, Chongming, and Wang School—forming the primary lineage of modern *pipa* artistic tradition (see Figure 0.3).⁴ Although named after their respective geographical areas, each school was established by one or several eminent masters endowed with artistic consciousness and cultural mission. Their systematic development and cross-regional dissemination have collectively propelled the *pipa* art form toward its third significant evolutionary phase.



Figure 0.3: Map of the geographical distribution of the five *pipa* school regions. Map redrawn by Gao Yanming.

The Wuxi School, as the earliest established modern *pipa* school, traces its origins to the mid-Qing Dynasty, exemplified by Huaqiu Ping 华秋苹 (1784-1859). He compiled and published *The Authentic Transmission of the Secret Version of Pipa Scores from the Two*

⁴ For more information on the five *pipa* schools, refer to Han & Zhang (2017/2013) and Wu (2015).

Schools of North and South (*Nanbei erpai miben pipa pu zhenchuan*, 南北二派秘本琵琶谱真传) (Hua, 1876/1819) (hereafter, the *Hua Collection*) in 1818, which is recognised as the first officially published anthology of *pipa* scores in China.⁵ This collection includes six *daqu* (large multi-sectional suites, 大曲) and sixty-two minor pieces from the Zhili School (*Zhili pai*, 直隶派, also called the Northern School) led by Wang Junxi 王君锡 (d. 1612) and Chen Mufu's 陈牧夫 (c. 1736-1820) Zhejiang School (*Zhejiang pai*, 浙江派, referred to here as the Southern School). The transmission and preservation of this school were subsequently maintained through masters such as Wu Yuanqing 吴畹卿 (1847-1926) and Yang Yinliu 杨荫浏 (1899-1984). Since the mid-20th century, owing to the integration of *pipa* art and the standardisation of pedagogical frameworks, the independent lineage of the Wuxi School has gradually become less distinct; however, its core aesthetic principles remain preserved primarily through the *Hua Collection* and scholarly research by individuals like Yang Yinliu. The performance style of this school exemplifies a synthesis of the robust, vigorous qualities characteristic of the Northern School and the delicate, luminous nuances of the Southern School, often described as an integration of “rigour and grace” (Wu 2014, 196).

The Pinghu School originated in Pinghu City, located on the northern shore of Hangzhou Bay in Zhejiang Province. Its artistic system was gradually developed through five generations of hereditary transmission within the Li Fangyuan family. In 1895, Li Fangyuan compiled and published *The New Collection of Thirteen pipa Suites from the Northern and Southern Traditions* (*Nanbei pai shisan tao daqu pipa xinpu*, 南北派十三套大曲琵琶新谱) (Li, 1955/1895) (hereafter, the *Li Collection*), which systematically documented and organised thirteen large-scale instrumental suites. Building upon the foundation of the *Hua Collection*, this collection integrated the Li family's inherited techniques and repertoire, carrying out systematic expansion and innovation in areas such as musical structure, section arrangement, and the design of literary-style subtitles. In 1927, Zhu Ying, a successor of the school, took up a teaching post at the Shanghai National Conservatory of Music 上海国立音乐院 (today's Shanghai Conservatory of Music), thereby establishing the Pinghu School as the first *pipa* tradition to be formally incorporated into the professional music education

⁵ See Myers (1992) for further details on the *Hua Collection*.

system. This development exerted a profound influence on the standardisation of modern *pipa* pedagogy and the advancement of the discipline. However, with the death of its core inheritor in 1976, the Pinghu School gradually declined within the context of the post-Reform and Opening era. The Pinghu School is renowned for its performance style characterised by “rich, ornate, robust yet subtle” qualities (Yin & Yang 1982, 28). Its literary pieces (*wenqu*, 文曲) possess a lingering resonance, while martial pieces (*wuqu*, 武曲) are marked by majestic vigour.⁶ Musical interpretation emphasises literary expression, achieving an effect of restrained elegance. In 2008, the tradition was inscribed on the National ICH list.⁷

The Pudong School was founded by Ju Shilin 鞠士林 (c.1736-1820), in Nanhui County, Pudong, Shanghai during the Qianlong-Jiaqing period (mid-18th to early 19th century) and was carried forward through successive generations, including Chen Zijing 陈子敬 (1837-1891) and Shen Haochu 沈浩初 (1889-1953). In 1929, Shen Haochu compiled and published the *Yangzhengxuan Pipa Score* (*Yangzhengxuan pipa pu*, 养正轩琵琶谱), which documents twelve major literary and martial suites, serving as a crucial theoretical and notational document for the school. By the mid-20th century, the school’s representative figure, Lin Shicheng, while teaching at the Central Conservatory of Music 中央音乐学院 in Beijing, systematically organised and taught the artistry of the Pudong School, nurturing a large number of outstanding talents and extending the school’s influence nationwide. The artistic expression of the Pudong School is distinguished by its acute emphasis on contrasting timbres to heighten musical tension. When performing *wuqu*, the playing is grand and vigorous, while *wenqu* are rendered with serene restraint and exquisite subtlety. The school’s right-hand technique is notably rich and varied, in works such as “General’s Command” (*Jiangjunling*, 将军令) and “Gyrfalcons Seize Swans” (*Haiqing na tian’e*, 海青拿天鹅), the school has forged a distinctive style. In 2009, Pudong School was included in the National ICH list.⁸

⁶ In Chinese traditional music, particularly in solo instrumental performances such as *qin* 琴, *pipa*, and *zheng* 筝, the classifications of literary pieces and martial pieces represent two fundamental genres, originating from the Ming and Qing dynasties’ conceptualization of musical style and expressive content. Literary pieces, referring to melodic compositions that express lyrical and beautiful melodies, profound emotions, and vivid imagery that people aspire to; Martial pieces, using vivid musical language to depict specific storylines, with a more grand and complex structure.

⁷ Official website of the Pinghu School: https://www.ihchina.cn/project_details/12691/.

⁸ Official website of the Pudong School: https://www.ihchina.cn/project_details/12689/.

The Chongming School, originating from Chongming Island at the northeastern tip of the Yangtze River Delta in Shanghai, is also known as the Yingzhou Ancient Tune School (*Yingzhou gudiao pai*, 瀛州古调派). This school has been transmitted through successive generations of musicians, including Jiang Tai 蒋泰 (fl. 18th century), Shen Zhaozhou 沈肇州 (1858-1930), and Fan Ziyun 樊少云 (1885-1962), resulting in the development of a distinctive stylistic tradition. Its artistic framework is primarily anchored in the core repertoire compiled by Shen Zhaozhou, the *Yingzhou Ancient Tune* (*Yingzhou gudiao*, 瀛州古调), which encompasses numerous refined and expressive short compositions such as “Flying Flowers Touching Jade” (*Feihua diancui*, 飞花点翠) and “Fish Play in Water” (*Yu'er xishui*, 鱼儿戏水). These pieces are characterised by their depiction of natural landscapes and evocation of scholarly elegance. The Chongming playing technique is distinguished by delicate nuance, lyrical refinement, and serene elegance, emphasising implicit aesthetic qualities and intricate fingerwork, thus representing a significant tradition in *pipa* literary pieces. It is also regarded as an effective pedagogical approach

h for beginners to cultivate musical sensibility and foundational technical skills. In 2008, the “Yingzhou Ancient Tune School” was inscribed on the National ICH list.⁹

The Wang School (also known as the Shanghai School 上海派) is a relatively late-forming yet profoundly influential school within modern *pipa* artistry, established in Shanghai during the early 20th century by Wang Yuting 汪昱庭 (1872–1951). Drawing extensively from diverse traditions while building upon the foundations of schools such as the Pudong School, Wang undertook bold and systematic innovations in *pipa* performance techniques, musical interpretation, and pedagogical systems. He not only nurtured a generation of masters, including Li Tingsong 李廷松 (1906-1976) and Wei Zhongle 卫仲乐 (1908-1997), but also established the Wang School as one of the mainstream paradigms in professional *pipa* education since the mid-20th century through his standardised teaching methodology. The Wang School is known for its artistic features, characterised by simplicity and unadorned elegance. Its *daqu* are majestic and powerful, while smaller pieces are performed with fluid clarity. This aesthetic sets it apart from other schools, which tend to

⁹ Official website of the Yingzhou Ancient Tune School: https://www.ihchina.cn/project_details/12690/.

emphasise spontaneous, ornamental expression. Works such as the seven-section condensed version of “White Snow in the Spring Sunlight” (*Yangchun baixue*, 阳春白雪) and “Song of the Frontier” (*Saishang qu*, 塞上曲), adapted and refined by Wang Yuting, have become canonical models for later generations.

0.2.3 Contemporary Structure

The modern *pipa* form has become highly standardised, its structure comprising three principal parts: the “head,” the “neck,” and the “body” (see Figure 0.4).¹⁰

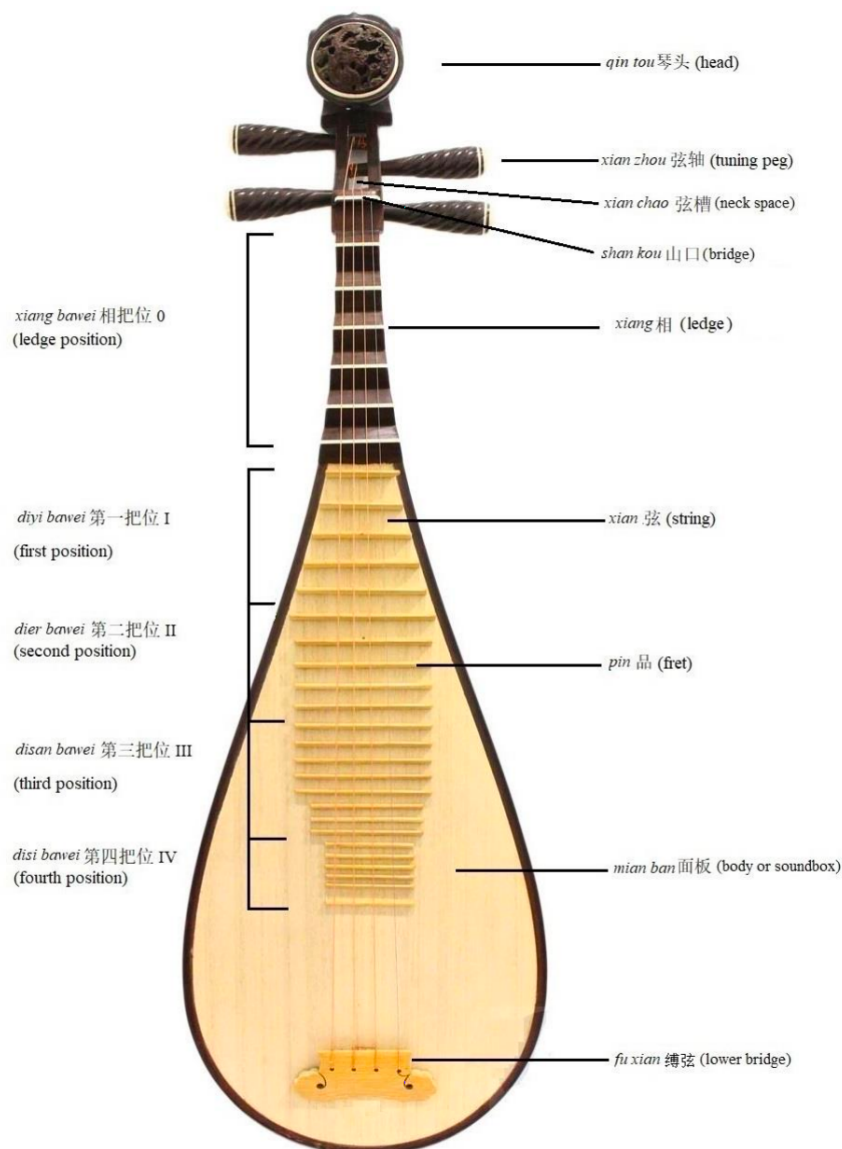


Figure 0.4: An image of the modern *pipa* with key parts marked, adapted from Gao Hong (Gao, 2016).

¹⁰ For further details on the structure, see Liu (2019).

The head (*qintou*, 琴头) of the *pipa* is positioned at the uppermost section of the instrument, typically elaborately carved with traditional motifs such as dragon or cloud patterns. Beyond its ornamental function, it also houses four tuning pegs (*xianzhou*, 弦轴), which are essential for tension adjustment and string anchoring.

The *pipa* neck functions as the slender structural component connecting the head and the body (*mianban*, 面板), serving as the primary region for left-hand fretting. The juncture between the neck and the soundboard features a bridge (*shankou*, 山口), elevated slightly above the ledges (*xiang*, 相), with four grooves to regulate string spacing and establish the pitch of open-string. Below the bridge, the surface is embedded with six ledges, traditionally crafted from materials such as buffalo horn, ivory, or hardwood, arranged in a triangular prism configuration. Above the body, there are 24 to 30 bamboo frets (*pin*, 品) arranged according to the equal temperament system.

The body of the *pipa* serves as the primary resonating chamber, with its body exhibiting a semi-pear shape—narrower at the top and broader at the bottom. The back plate is typically carved from a solid piece of hardwood such as rosewood or red sandalwood (*zitan*, 紫檀), selected for its dense structure to optimise sound wave reflection. The soundbox is usually crafted from firmiana platanifolia (*wutong*, 梧桐), favoured for its lightweight properties and excellent acoustic transmission. These components are adhesively joined via side panels to form a hollow resonator box, integral to the instrument's sound projection. The lower surface of the *pipa*'s soundboard is equipped with a bamboo lower bridge (*fuxian*, 缚弦) to which the four strings are anchored. Vibrations from the strings are transmitted via the cover board to the soundboard, thereby inducing resonance throughout the entire resonator chamber.

The four strings, traditionally classified from thin to thick as *zi* (the first string, 子), *zhong* (the second string, 中), *lao* (the third string, 老), and *chan* (the fourth string, 缠). The materials have evolved: historically, all strings were made from silk; in contemporary practice, the *zi* string is commonly constructed from steel to enhance brightness and clarity in the treble range, while the remaining three strings are predominantly nylon-wrapped, providing a richer and more resonant mid to bass tone. As string materials have evolved toward increased rigidity to achieve greater force application and clearer sound production,

performers often wear artificial fingernails made of celluloid, nylon, or tortoiseshell on the right hand to facilitate more precise plucking dynamics.

The *pipa* typically employs an A2–D3–E3–A3 tuning in ascending order of string thickness (from the thickest *chan* to the thinnest *zi*). Through the synergistic interaction of ledges, frets and the four-string arrangement, the modern *pipa* achieves an extensive vocal range extending from A to e³—covering over three and a half octaves.

0.2.4 Playing Techniques

The name “*pipa*” originates from its playing technique. As recorded in the Eastern Han scholar Liu Xi’s 刘熙 (c.126-270 CE) *Explaining Names and Explaining Musical Instruments* (*Shiming · Shi Yueqi*, 释名·释乐器): “Striking outward with the hand is called ‘*pi*’, plucking inward is called ‘*pa*’, sounds like when it is played, hence the name” (Liu, 1965/c. 200 CE). This description defines the core gestures of its performance—“striking outward” and “plucking inward,” which correspond to what is known today as *tan* 弹 and *tiao* 挑. Over the millennia, the art of *pipa* performance has continuously evolved, yet its core principle has always revolved around “the right hand governs sound” (activating tones, controlling rhythm and dynamics) and “the left hand governs charm” (determining pitch, shaping melodic inflection and emotional nuance).

In traditional techniques, the right hand employs *tan* and *tiao* as foundational movements, from which key techniques such as *lunzhi* 轮指, *sao* 扫 and *fu* 拂 are derived. The *lun* involves sequential plucking of the strings with each of the five fingers to produce linear melodies, while *sao* and *fu* are rapidly plucked across four strings to generate symphonic harmonic effects. The left-hand techniques are deeply rooted in Chinese musical aesthetics focused on “*yun*” (lingering tonal nuance, 韵), utilizing nuanced fingering methods including *yin* (subtle vibrato the strings, 吟), *rou* (gentle rocking the strings, 揉), *tui* (pushing the string to raise the pitch, 推), and *la* (pulling the string to lower the pitch, 拉). These techniques create delicate slides and vibrato variations on specific pitches, imbuing the sound with human-like tonality and lively breathing qualities. Collectively, this technical system underpins the aesthetic distinction between the *wenqu* and *wuqu* styles of traditional *pipa* playing, each establishing a unique stylistic signature across different musical schools.

By the second half of the 20th century, the *pipa* technique experienced systematic expansion and technological innovation, driven by the development of specialised music education. Right-hand techniques, building on *tan*, *tiao* and *lun*, creatively integrated complex methods such as *yao* (tremolo with a single finger, 摇) and *changlundaitiao* (sustained *lun* on a melody string, accompanied by rhythmic *tiao* on the bass strings, 长轮带挑), significantly enhancing melodic continuity and textural complexity. Concurrently, the development of non-pitched playing methods—such as *paiban* (tapping the instrument body, 拍板), *ji mianban* (striking the soundboard, 击面板), and *caxian* (rubbing the strings, 擦弦)—substantially enriched the timbral palette and rhythmic expression within *pipa* performance. The evolution of left-hand techniques is primarily reflected in the expansion of the pitch control range and improvements in efficiency. The range of traditional *tui* and *la* has significantly increased, often involving glissandos spanning more than a minor third. Rapid position shifts (*kuaisu huanba*, 快速换把) and jumping between positions (*tiaoba*, 跳把) have become standard requirements in technically demanding compositions. Furthermore, to accommodate non-traditional harmonies and scales in modern works, left-hand techniques have developed multi-finger chord pressing and complex fingering sequences, pushing the boundaries of the *pipa*'s musical language.

The development of modern techniques has transformed the *pipa* from a traditional art form emphasising the inheritance of individual style and charm into a professional instrument that combines profound traditional heritage with powerful contemporary expressive capabilities.

0.3 Research Questions and Methodology

0.3.1 Research Questions

Ethnomusicology has increasingly shifted toward understanding musical traditions from the perspective of the individuals who carry, transform, and sustain them. As Jonathan Stock (2001) argues, attention to individual musicians and their life stories offers a critical pathway for exploring how tradition is actively shaped rather than passively transmitted. Stock emphasizes the value of biographical writing, which brings individual agency, choices, and

lived experience into the center of historical and cultural analysis. Ruskin and Rice (2012) extend this approach in their call for a “musical ethnography” centered on individual trajectories, revealing deeper structures of cultural change, transmission, and historical power. For Chinese music studies, Helen Rees (2009) further demonstrates this approach in *Lives in Chinese Music*, which uses individual life stories to uncover the complex interactions between musical practice, social change, and political history in modern China. Together, these scholars establish that individual musicians are not merely bearers of tradition, but active agents who negotiate, reformulate, and redefine musical heritage under changing historical conditions.

Extending this individual-centred focus to consider a multi-generational framework, this thesis focuses on key inheritors as the driving force behind the evolution of the Pinghu Pipa School. It addresses three core research questions:

1. How have key individual inheritors shaped the continuity, transformation, and revitalization of the Pinghu Pipa School across different historical eras?
2. What strategies and forms of agency did Pinghu School inheritors employ to respond to social crises, institutional changes, and cultural pressures?
3. How does focus on individual inheritors help us re-examine the heritage, transmission challenges, and contemporary fate of the Pinghu Pipa School?

0.3.2 Research Methods

This thesis is explicitly positioned within historical ethnomusicology. Historical ethnomusicology, while still an emerging area of scholarly inquiry, has established a robust methodological foundation for connecting individual lives to broader historical narratives (see, e.g., Blum, Bohlman, and Neuman 1991; Rice 2003).

The thesis makes a primarily empirical and analytical contribution, with strong interpretive depth. It integrates four interconnected methods to examine how individual agency, institutional structures, and historical forces together shape the Pinghu Pipa School's trajectory:

First, **biographical reconstruction** draws on archival materials, historical documents, musical scores, and lineage records to trace the lives and legacies of key Pinghu School

inheritors across five historical phases. This historical grounding establishes the social, cultural, and institutional context for understanding continuity and change within the tradition.

Second, **digital audio analysis** compares historical recordings by senior Pinghu School inheritors (Fan Boyan and Yang Shaoyi) with performances by contemporary conservatory-trained musicians (Wang Tao and Yang Yi). Using software-based analysis of waveform structures, dynamics, tempo, and pitch, I document stylistic differences across generations in empirical, measurable terms that can be compared with performers' intuitive understandings of stylistic change.

Third, **oral history interviews** address gaps in the public historical record, particularly around the life and legacy of Yang Shaoyi, for whom publicly available historical materials are relatively scarce and vague. To overcome this limitation, I conducted multiple in-depth oral history interviews with Zhang Ming (b. 1958)—Yang's nephew, student, and a Pinghu School inheritor—over a period of two years. Through trust-building and collaborative research, I gained access to valuable unpublished information and personal accounts. The oral sources substantially enrich the biographical record of Yang Shaoyi, and they provide critical empirical evidence for understanding the survival strategies and resilience of the Pinghu School within a unique historical environment.

Fourth, **ethnographic fieldwork** anchors the study's contemporary perspective. Since 2018, I have conducted an extensive seven-year ethnographic study on Zhu Dazhen, the national-level inheritor of the Pinghu School. I have studied with him as a disciple, learning the school's repertoire and techniques, and simultaneously engaged as a participant-observer researcher. This long-term, trust-based relationship enabled me to access not only technical knowledge but also personal narratives and reflections that are seldom shared publicly. Beyond official heritage narratives, I was able to witness how Zhu embodies Pinghu School tradition through his lifelong practice. In this way, I document the "backstage" dimensions of transmission—including emotional structures, identity formation, and cultural commitment—that are often overlooked but essential to understanding living heritage.

Drawing upon my dual identity as both a *pipa* performer and a doctoral candidate in ethnomusicology, I can understand tradition from an insider's perspective while maintaining

academic objectivity from an outsider's viewpoint. This enables me to establish a critical dialogue between historical documents, musical texts, and living musical traditions.

0.4 Thesis Structure

The seven chapters of this dissertation consist of an introduction, five main body chapters and a conclusion.

The Introduction utilises my personal fieldwork encounters as a central narrative, highlighting the motivations and objectives for renewed attention to this musical tradition within the ICH context. Subsequently, I provide an overview of the historical development of the *pipa*, its predominant schools, and contemporary instrument configurations and playing techniques, establishing a background for the study. Finally, I delineate the interdisciplinary methodological framework employed and briefly outline the structure of subsequent chapters.

Chapter 1 focuses on the *Li Collection* compiled by Li Fangyuan in the late Qing dynasty. Through textual analysis integrated with historical context, I reveal that the compilation was not merely a collection of musical pieces but a cultural redemption effort by Li Fangyuan to elevate the status of *pipa* music amid the prevalent social phenomenon of “obscene and vulgar tunes” (Li, 1955/1895). Concerning the longstanding academic critique of fabricated authorship and subtitles, this chapter posits that such practices should be understood as strategic choices within specific historical conditions—leveraging ancient authority to reinforce artistic legitimacy and reconstruct folk music through scholarly encoding—rather than mere falsification. This reinterpretation challenges previous research constrained by moral judgments around authenticity, thereby establishing a new analytical framework for understanding the artistic origins and cultural significance of the Pinghu School.

Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive analysis of Zhu Ying's pioneering contributions across multiple domains, including performance, education, composition, instrument reform, and musical philosophy, with particular emphasis on analysing the forward-looking aspects embedded within his musical philosophy. Notably, Zhu Ying integrated diverse pedagogical philosophies to cultivate a professional network of experts during the 1930s to 1940s,

establishing a dominant position among contemporaneous *pipa* schools. This robust talent base not only directly contributed to the prosperity of the Pinghu School during this period but also provided a critical historical foundation for understanding the school's development following the founding of the People's Republic of China (1949) (hereafter, PRC). This finding challenges the conventional narrative that 1949 marked the decline of the school, thereby supporting an empirical reassessment of its institutionalised prosperity phase in subsequent analyses.

Chapter 3 re-examines the development of the Pinghu School during the early years of the PRC (1949-1974), correcting the prevailing academic narrative that its decline commenced with the founding of the nation. The findings indicate that the Pinghu school, grounded in a robust talent pool from the previous era, actively participated in national arts initiatives—such as music performances, instrumental reforms, and curriculum development—thus demonstrating dynamic engagement among the five major schools and maintaining substantial influence. During the Cultural Revolution, when externally imposed institutional transmission was forcibly disrupted, practitioners exemplified by Yang Shaoyi employed clandestine instruction and systematic rescue of endangered scores and audio archives, thereby exhibiting cultural resilience under extreme conditions. This historical process demonstrates that the Pinghu School's artistic vitality was never truly ceased. The institutional resources and professional frameworks accumulated during its “institutional prosperity” phase fundamentally supported its persistence in adversity, offering a comprehensive depiction of how a traditional musical school adapts, persists, and regenerates amid epochal institutional transformations.

Chapter 4 focuses on analysing the reasons for the decline of the Pinghu School following the Reform and Opening-up period. Research indicates that its decline stemmed directly from the rupture of its core transmission chain and the absence of brand-oriented operations, presenting a stark contrast to the school development achieved by the Pudong and Wang Schools. At a deeper level, the collectivist artistic philosophy established during Zhu Ying's era, within an academic discourse that “uses a single school to represent the entirety of history,” paradoxically diminished the school's distinctive identity, creating a structural impasse in its internal development. Concurrently, I examine the Pinghu School within

broader shifts in the artistic ecosystem, highlighting how multiple external pressures collectively constricted its survival space. Comprehensive analysis indicates that the decline of the Pinghu School stems from the complex interplay between its inheritors, historical legacy, and contemporary context. This conclusion not only corrects the overly simplistic attributions found in previous research but also offers a reference point for understanding the transformative challenges faced by other traditional arts in contemporary society.

Chapter 5 examines the transmission practices of the Pinghu School within the 21st-century context of ICH preservation. The research first acknowledges the pivotal role of intangible heritage systems in reconstructing transmission ecosystems. Subsequently, through fieldwork employing a dual “insider-outsider” perspective, I astutely identified a pervasive disconnect between “technique” and “cultural spirit” in contemporary transmission practices—namely, an overemphasis on standardised acquisition of performance skills at the expense of deep engagement with the school’s cultural essence and spiritual values. Finally, through seven years of longitudinal research on inheritor Zhu Dazhen, I have revealed his philosophy of transmission: practising embodied cultural consciousness through imperfect technique. This demonstrates that genuine living transmission lies in the mutual nourishment of institutional safeguards and cultural self-awareness, thereby offering a paradigm of “unity of cultural spirit and technique” for intangible heritage preservation and the contemporary development of traditional arts.

The conclusion comprises three sections: summary of findings, limitations and directions for future research. The summary of findings reveals that by examining five historical phases of the Pinghu School, its core transmission logic of “perpetuating tradition through modern means” is illuminated. Research limitations candidly reflect upon the influence of the researcher’s identity and emotional factors on academic perspective, while clarifying this study’s emphasis and boundaries in analysing the music itself. Future directions propose avenues for expansion, including tracing and comparing internal musical sources, studying key figures and groups, and tracking the efficacy of transmission.

Chapter 1

The Early Pinghu *Pipa* School and the *Li Collection* (1895)

I have devoted myself day and night over the past 20 years without the slightest hint of fatigue. My only fear is that my remaining years may be too short, making the compilation of musical scores my personal obsession.

(Li Fangyuan's Preface in Li, 1955/1895)

1.1 Introduction

After a period of nearly 140 years known as the prosperity of the Kangxi and Qianlong Reign Periods (*Kang-Qian shengshi*”, 康乾盛世), China experienced a severe economic downturn in the early 19th century. Using the methodology of real purchasing power, the British quantitative economic historian, Angus Maddison, has calculated the proportion of China's GDP in the world at different times. Research indicates that between 1700 and 1820, China's annual GDP growth rate was four times that of Europe, with its 1820 GDP accounting for 32.9% of the global total, ranking first worldwide. The economic hub of Jiangnan Province [home to both the Pinghu and Wuxi schools] accounted for one-third of the national tax revenue, making its political, economic, and cultural influence highly significant. However, over the subsequent century and a half, China's share steadily declined, reaching only 5.2% by 1952 (Maddison 2008, 36).¹ By the eve of the First Opium War, the Jiangnan region had already descended into the desolate state encapsulated in Feng Guifen's observation: “Rich merchants and large traders were left with nothing, and almost half of the shops closed their doors, with many clearing out their stocks” (cited in Li 2017/1876, 102).

By the mid-19th century, China was embroiled in severe internal strife and external threats. Between 1851 and 1864, a peasant uprising against the feudal rule of the Qing Dynasty was launched by Hong Xiuquan 洪秀全 (1814-1864), Yang Xiuqing 杨秀清 (1823-1856), and others from Jintian Village in Guangxi Autonomous Region. This became the

¹ Scholars have termed labels such as the “Daoguang Depression” 道光萧条 [economic depression under the Daoguang Emperor] and the “Jia-Dao Decadence” 嘉道中衰 [China's gradual downward spiral under the Jiaqing and Daoguang emperors] for these periods.

largest anti-Qing movement and led to the establishment of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, which had its capital in the key city of Nanjing in Jiangnan Province in 1853. Over the next decade and a half, the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom and the Qing Army engaged in extremely fierce wars in the regions of Jiangsu and Zhejiang in the Jiangnan region, disrupting all local production and livelihoods.² The wars led to widespread displacement of the population, and induced famine, epidemics, turmoil, and massacres, which collectively resulted in the deaths of tens of millions of people. According to data analysis by Cao Shuji and Li Yushang, Zhejiang had a population of approximately 31.27 million before the rise of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. Yet, after the war, the population in the entire province plummeted to only 14.97 million, a loss of 16.3 million (Cao & Li 2000, 43). Meanwhile, in the backdrop of turbulent domestic conditions, a series of Western colonial incursions occurred, starting with the First Opium War (also known as the Anglo-Chinese War), which inflicted profound suffering upon the Chinese people. The First Opium War, was a series of military engagements fought between the British Empire and the Qing Dynasty between 1839 and 1842. It concluded with China's defeat and the signing of the Treaty of Nanking, which included reparations and territorial concessions to Britain. Over the following decades, the Qing Dynasty faced continuous aggression from foreign nations, resulting in the forced signing of hundreds of unequal treaties, leading to further territorial concessions, indemnities, and tariff agreements.³

However, while the Western powers forcefully opened the Qing Dynasty's closed borders with formidable naval power and weaponry, they simultaneously introduced Western industrialisation into China, facilitating Shanghai's emergence as a pioneering hub of Sino-Western cultural integration. After the Opening of Shanghai (*kaibu*, 开埠) in 1843, foreign goods and capital poured in, leading to the establishment of businesses, construction of docks, delineation of concessions, and opening of banks, driving Shanghai's rapid development to become the economic hub of the Jiangnan region.⁴ The emerging civic

² See Spence (1996) for further details on the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom.

³ See Mao (2016) for further details on the First Opium War.

⁴ The signing of the Treaty of Nanking in 1842 designated Shanghai as a treaty port. Officially opened to international trade on November 17, 1843, this marked the beginning of its modernisation process. The port's establishment directly facilitated the creation of foreign concessions, the development of a modern customs administration, and rapid overtaking of Guangzhou as the primary hub for international commerce.

culture and commercial landscape in Shanghai have historically provided a pivotal platform for the dissemination and innovation of traditional arts. Within this context, the Pinghu School of *pipa* art, exemplified by the Li family lineage, has made a significant transition from insular transmission to open cultural exchange, marking a critical development in the evolution of traditional musical craft.

The origin of the Pinghu School can be traced back to the Qianlong period (1736-1796) of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). According to Li Fangyuan's Preface, Li Tingsen 李廷森 (b. c. 1771) began playing the *pipa* during the Qianlong period and gained a considerable reputation in the music circles of the Jiangnan region. However, due to the cultural environment of the time, the first three generations of the Li family kept their tradition within the family and did not teach it to outsiders. The fourth-generation inheritor Li Nantang 李南棠 (b. c. 1830) frequently travelled for business between Pinghu and Shanghai [about 100 kilometres away], and he started exchanging the family's hitherto private music scores with other *pipa* players in the Jiangnan region. The fifth-generation inheritor, Li Fangyuan, influenced by his father, fulfilled his father's wish to "publish a *pipa* music score book as a social guide due to the deteriorating social environment," which he did in the 21st year of the Guangxu era (Li, 1955/1895). His *The New Collection of Thirteen Pipa Suites from the Northern and Southern Traditions* (hereafter, the *Li Collection*) has been acknowledged by posterity as the pinnacle of the Li family's five generations of practicing *pipa* music—contemporary Chinese *pipa* master Liu Dehai called it the "second milestone in modern *pipa* music after the *Hua Collection*" (Liu 1995, 58), and it became a hallmark of the formation of modern Pinghu School *pipa* music.

The *Li Collection* is composed of two main contents, text and music. The music section is divided into two volumes, upper and lower, containing a total of thirteen, large multi-sectional suites of *pipa* ancient music popular in the Jiangsu and Zhejiang regions, compiled from the Li family's private music scores (Figure 1.1). The musical scores are written in *gongchepu* 工尺谱, with notes on each item indicating the compiler in addition to

Subsequently, Shanghai emerged as a central node for modern industry, finance, publishing, and cultural exchange in China. This transformation exerted a profound influence on the trajectory of modernisation across the Yangtze River Delta and throughout the nation. See Johnson (1995) for further details.

the title and composer.⁵ Furthermore, each piece of music is divided into several sections, each with a subheading. Following the thirteen suites are nine short introductory scores suitable for beginners, all compiled by Li Fangyuan alone.

Form	Title
Large multi-sectional suites	Upper volume: “White Snow in Spring Sunlight” (<i>Yangchun guqu</i>, 阳春古曲) “Manchu General’s Order” (<i>Man jiangjun ling</i>, 满将军令) “Yulunpao” (<i>Yulunpao</i>, 郁轮袍) “Huaiyin’s Attack on Chu” (<i>Huaiyin ping chu</i>, 淮阴平楚) “Gyrfalcons Seize Cranes” (<i>Haiqing na he</i>, 海青拿鹤) Lower volume: “Han General’s Order” (<i>Han jiangjun ling</i>, 汉将军令) “Wild Geese on the Sandbank” (<i>Pingsha luo yan</i>, 平沙落雁) “Xunyang Pipa” (<i>Xunyang pipa</i>, 浔阳琵琶) “Rainbow Dress Rhapsody” (<i>Ni chang qu</i>, 霓裳曲) “Chen Sui Ancient Music” (<i>Chen sui gu yin</i>, 陈隋古音) “Pu’an’s Mantra” (<i>Pu’an zhou</i>, 普庵咒) “Song at the Frontier” (<i>Saishang qu</i>, 塞上曲) “The Green Lotus” (<i>Qinglian yuefu</i>, 青莲乐府)
Simple smaller pieces	“The Melody of the Gentle Winds of Yu and Shun” (<i>Yu shun xunfeng cao</i>, 虞舜熏风操) “The Song of King Wen Reflecting on Scholars” (<i>Wenwang sishi cao</i>, 文王思士操) “The Guishan Melody of Confucius” (<i>Kongzi guishan cao</i>, 孔子龟山操) “The Orchid Melody” (<i>Yilan cao</i>, 猗兰操) “Master Su’s Autumn Reflections at Dongting” (<i>Su xueshi dongting qiu si</i>, 苏学士洞庭秋思) “Severing the King’s Lakeside Reverie” (<i>Zhan duan wang hushing xiaoyao</i>, 斩断王湖上逍遥) “Walking on the Ridge” (<i>Long shang xing</i>, 垄上行) “Three Variations on Plum Blossom Played by Lady Zhuang Anxiang” (<i>Zhuang an xiang nüshi meihua san nong</i>, 庄暗香女史梅花三弄)

Figure 1.1: All compositions within the *Li Collection* (Li, 1955/1895).

The textual part of the *Li Collection* has over 2000 Chinese characters, divided into 5 sections, including a table of contents, two Prefaces (by Yuan Zuzhi 袁祖志 [1827-1898] and Li Fangyuan respectively), a note (by Li Nantang), an introduction (written by Li Fangyuan),

⁵ *Gongchepu* is a traditional Chinese notation method, named after its use of Chinese characters such as 工 (*gong*) and 尺 (*che*) to indicate pitch names. It only notates a composition’s skeletal notes and so differs significantly from what would be heard in an actual performance. It allowed for individual variations in ornamentation during performance, and is considered a foundation for the emergence of different schools of *pipa* playing. See Zhang (2013, 25) for further details.

and three inscriptions (by Yuan Xiangfu 袁翔甫, Jiang Jiaqi 蒋家骥, and Hu Yuepeng 胡悦彭).⁶ They meticulously document the main content of the work, the compiler's life and editorial intentions, peer reviews, and the dynasties in which each piece was written, all of which provide important guidance for future generations in understanding the *Li Collection*. The *Li Collection* is a stone-printed edition, written in a combination of regular script (*kaishu*, 楷书) and running script (*xingshu*, 行书) forms of traditional Chinese calligraphy. Some characters have become difficult to distinguish in later reprints. Its style adopts the idioms of classical Chinese (*wenyanwen*, 文言文), which is more obscure and challenging to understand than modern, vernacular language. For instance, the text lacks punctuation marks, adding complexity for modern readers and posing inconveniences for future research.

Perhaps due to these challenges, researchers of later generations have mainly focused on analysing the collection's music scores, neglecting the interpretation of its textual content. Indeed, when the latter is discussed, it has often been in a context where the rationality of the editing and adaptation in the *Li Collection* is questioned. As we shall see below, later researchers have made continuous criticisms of Li's work, namely "self-centeredness and school-centredness", "using the ancients' words as a pretext" (*tuogu*, 托古), and "forgery of subheadings and authorship." These criticisms have even tended to overshadow a wider understanding of Li's contribution. In fact, focusing solely on the scores without paying close attention to the explanatory content has also led to biases and misunderstandings in interpreting the *Li Collection*, thereby severely underestimating its artistic value. In my research, I have found that the textual information in the *Li Collection* offers a concentrated expression of Li Fangyuan's personal artistic ideas, providing a solid basis for understanding his motivations in editing and adapting music. The textual part in the *Li Collection* complements the musical part, and only by combining the textual part with the main body of the music and placing it in a specific historical context can we comprehensively understand the entirety of the *Li Collection* and the *pipa* art of the Pinghu School during the period of Li's activity.

⁶ Unfortunately, the biographical details of Yuan Xiangfu, Jiang Jiaqi, and Hu Yuepeng are not recorded in standard reference works and remain unclear.

In this chapter, I use the textual part of *Li Collection* as the main basis for a new analysis of his contribution. I first analyse and explain the motivations behind Li Fangyuan's publication of the *Li Collection*, which will provide a strong basis for the analysis in my following two sections. Then, I comprehensively assess the major criticisms that later musicians have raised regarding Li Fangyuan, combining the three elements of text, musical compositions, and historical context. My objective is to rectify various misunderstandings of and biases against Li Fangyuan, which stem from later generations' lack of attention to the textual part of the *Li Collection* and the resulting incomplete understanding of Li's motives for revising musical compositions. Eliminating negative perceptions and stereotypes of Li Fangyuan is necessary for us to properly acknowledge Li Fangyuan's achievements and lay a solid foundation for understanding and appreciating the achievements of the later generations of Pinghu *pipa* musicians who inherited and further developed Li's materials and ideologies.

1.2 Compilation Motivations: Crisis, Goals, and Strategies

1.2.1 Family Inheritance and Personal Mission

Nearly eighty years elapsed between the publication of the *Hua Collection* in 1818 and the appearance of the *Li Collection* in 1895. During the 19th century the Qing Dynasty faced a succession of threats and challenges including sustained economic depression during the Daoguang Emperor's reign (1820-1850); the Opium Wars (1840-1842), which marked the start of largescale Western (and later Japanese) imperialist encroachment on China's territory and sovereignty; and the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom (1851-1864) in which an estimated 20-30 million died and another 30 million became refugees seeking new homes elsewhere in China or overseas. This macro historical context profoundly shaped Li Fangyuan's personal motivation for and sense of cultural mission in compiling the Collection. As he states in the Preface:

My father devoted over 40 years of his life to the study of the traditional *pipa* music that has been passed down through our family. He finally grasped the essence of this art form. However, during a time when society was enamoured with obscene and vulgar tunes (*yanqu yinsheng*, 艳曲淫声), which had further degraded societal morals, my father yearned to compile a significant

guidebook of *pipa* scores.⁷ Unfortunately, he never had the opportunity to achieve this ambition (...) Now, as I carry on his legacy, my greatest concern is the potential loss and extinction of this art form, and therefore, I am committed to fulfilling his wishes. (Li Fangyuan's Preface in Li, 1955/1895).

This passage appears to represent a familial legacy driven by filial piety, serving as a personal response to his father's last wishes; nonetheless, the phrase "my greatest concern is the potential loss and extinction of this art form" vividly illustrates Li's profound sense of crisis regarding the preservation of traditional arts amid an age of societal upheaval and "degraded societal morals". Therefore, Li Fangyuan's compilation of the *pipa* score is not merely a private family matter but a cultural intervention intended to extend the transmission of ancestral knowledge within a context of cultural responsibility and redemption. This motivation elevates the *Li Collection* beyond a simple collection of genealogical records.

The Preface to the first volume of the *Li Collection*, written by Li Fangyuan's friend Yuan Zuzhi, sheds light on Li Fangyuan's motivations:

From the past until today, more and more people have learned to play the *pipa*, but fewer and fewer have mastered it. This is probably because they all play obscene and vulgar tunes (*yinci yanqu*, 淫词艳曲) and decadent music (*mimi zhiyin*, 靡靡之音), and so have completely lost the original purpose and significance of learning the *pipa*.⁸ (Yuan Zuzhi's Preface in Li, 1955/1895)

This record reveals triple motivations behind Li Fangyuan's compilation of musical scores: firstly, from a sociocultural perspective, although there was a large number of *pipa* enthusiasts, few achieved mastery; secondly, in terms of performance practice, many *pipa* players at the time preferred vulgar, decadent melodies; thirdly, at the level of artistic essence, this prevailing performance style led musicians to abandon the authentic pursuit of musical integrity. Both Yuan Zuzhi and Li Fangyuan mention "obscene and vulgar tunes". This term was used to describe various forms of music, such as operas and ballads, and later interpretations often group Yuan and Li's usages together. However, based on context, they

⁷ *Yanqu yinsheng* is a term from traditional Chinese texts used to refer to songs or music with amorous content and frivolous melodies, which were deemed inconsistent with the orthodox Confucian standards for ritual and music.

⁸ *Yinci yanqu* is a variant of the term discussed in note 17, with greater emphasis on the sensual nature of both the lyrics and the melody; *Mimi zhiyin* places greater emphasis on the music's perceived effect of sapping vitality, weakening morale, and leading to moral laxity, distinguishing it from terms that focus primarily on erotic content.

are referring to different entities: Yuan specifically refers to *pipa* players, while Li criticises musical trends in society more broadly.

There are also clues on the reasons for the compilation of the collection in Li Nantang's Note:

People often say that with an inheritor, a tradition can continue without being abolished. Although the *pipa* is not a mainstream instrument in music, in order to bring it to a relatively high level, an inheritor is necessary. This way, it may not differ greatly from the *qin* 琴 (seven-stringed zither).⁹ (Li Nantang's Note in Li, 1955/1895)

This passage introduces a final critical factor: the cultivation of successors. It posits that for the *pipa* art form to attain mainstream recognition comparable to the *qin*, a comprehensive inheritance system must be established. This perspective can be viewed as an extension and development of Li Fangyuan's discourse, reflecting progressive considerations within the late Qing *pipa* community regarding artistic transmission. The combined arguments of the father and son formed a complete logical sequence from addressing societal trends to focusing on performance practice and emphasising the need for a formal inheritance framework in order to ensure the development of a high-status *pipa* artistry.

1.2.2 The Dual Crisis: Social Disorder and Artistic “Vulgarisation”

The moral and aesthetic anxieties expressed by Li Fangyuan and his father were firmly rooted in the tangible social realities of their time. After the Opening of Shanghai in 1843, economic prosperity and commercialisation fuelled a significant demand for entertainment activities, with theatres becoming the primary venues providing leisure and entertainment services to the public.

“**Lewd operas**”: In 1867, Chinese expatriate Luo Yiqing 罗逸卿 established Shanghai's first opera house, “Man Ting Fang” 满庭芳, investing heavily to introduce *Beijing opera* (*jingju*, 京剧) troupes. Before this, opera performances were typically at teahouses—multi-purpose venues where dim lighting, makeshift staging, and social conversation often overshadowed the performance itself. The innovative layout of the Beijing opera theatre, unfamiliar vocal techniques, and novel repertoires immediately ignited public enthusiasm in

⁹ The *qin* also known as *guqin*, a seven-stringed zither, was traditionally considered the instrument of Chinese scholars and gentlemen, symbolising refined culture and ethical integrity, in stark contrast to popular or theatrical music. See Van Gulik (1941/2021) for more information.

Shanghai, and this enthusiastic response directly propelled the rapid development of the theatrical entertainment industry, resulting in the emergence of over 120 commercial opera houses in late Qing Shanghai (Lin 1990, 262). Against the backdrop of the proliferation of modern theatres, performance spaces underwent a fundamental transformation, paving the way for breakthroughs in theatrical forms. Chen Shiguo's research indicates that Shanghai pioneered "mixed-gender performances in 1870" (Chen 2017, 20), granting female performers public opportunities to take the stage and thereby disrupting the male-dominated structure of traditional opera. Driven by commercial capital, the emerging merchant class gradually became the primary consumers of traditional opera. Their pursuit of romantic and sensual experiences intertwined with the profit-driven nature of theatrical venues, leading to the widespread popularity of "lewd operas" (*yinxi*, 淫戏) centred on male-female love themes.¹⁰ It is important to note that the "lewd operas" function as a critical concept within a specific historical context. It is not a rigid categorisation within the arts but rather refers to operatic performances prevalent in commercial theatres that, due to content perceived as sexually provocative and violating Confucian moral principles—particularly concerning gender relations. As scholar Wei Bingbing has classified the "lewd operas" popular in Shanghai at that time into three categories: 1. "traditional *Beijing opera* and *kun opera* 昆曲 that violate the morality between men and women and even involve adultery and incest;" 2. "obscene and indecent *huagu opera* 花鼓戏 with lewd gestures and sounds that are unbearable to the ears"; and 3. the *bin'er opera* 鬻儿戏 performed by female opera troupes (Wei 2010, 2). Its repertoire typically depicts intimate domestic scenes, such as "private pleasures within the boudoir, often accompanied by lewd gestures and vocalisations" (cited in Wei 2010, 2).

"Prostitute storytellers": At the same time, the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom War caused severe damage to areas surrounding Shanghai and other cities in Jiangnan. This led prominent families, wealthy merchants, and tycoons from the Jiangnan region to relocate to Shanghai. *Suzhou tanci* 苏州弹词, which originated in Suzhou, also made its way into Shanghai.¹¹ *Tanci* is traditionally performed by a duo who self-accompany on the *pipa* or *sanxian* (a

¹⁰ See Yang (2019) for further details on the "lewd operas" in the Qing dynasty.

¹¹ For further details in *suzhou tanci*, see Bender (2003).

three-string plucked instrument, 三弦), interweaving singing and storytelling (Figure 1.2). As urban entertainment demands surged, the *tanci* performance community also underwent commercialisation, resulting in significant transformations of both its artistic form and social functions. During this transition, the evolving roles of female performers are particularly prominent, exemplifying the alienation of *tanci*'s cultural and functional essence. Female *tanci* performers historically held marginal positions within the *suzhou tanci* tradition, which had been dominated entirely by the male-led Guangyu Society 光裕社, which consistently marginalised female artists. Conversely, in Shanghai's cosmopolitan entertainment scene, female performers gained opportunities for artistic expression but were swiftly entangled in commercialisation and eroticisation, leading to the emergence of the phenomenon known as "prostitute storytellers" (*jinü tanci*, 妓女弹词).¹² This phenomenon of "prostitute storytellers" is vividly documented in contemporary observers' accounts. As Tiaoxi Zuimosheng laments: "They sold their art, not their bodies, their worth therein supreme and alone. Who knew that after a few *pipa* tunes, they too would be permitted to seek the Peach Blossom Spring" (cited in Fang 1996, 52), which precisely captures the social and artistic transition of female storytellers from relying solely on craft to being compelled to trade on their physical allure.¹³ Wang Tingding also remarks that "post-Taiping Heavenly Kingdom movement, female storytellers became prevalent, yet they were essentially prostitutes" (cited in Zhou 1983, 291), directly highlighting the fundamental social identity transformation of female storytellers beneath their artistic facade.

¹² See Hershatter (1997) for further details on the transformation of the prostitution industry in Shanghai from the late Qing dynasty to the end of the twentieth century. Also, please see Zhou (1983) for a compilation of historical source materials related to "prostitute storytellers".

¹³ Tiaoxi Zuimosheng was the pen name of a literatus during the late Qing period. Little biographical information about him survives. His "Qinglou Bamboo-Branch Lyrics" is included in compilations *The Complete Anthology of Chinese Bamboo-Branch Lyrics* (*Zhonghua zhuzhici*, 中华竹枝词). The bamboo-branch lyric is a poetic genre, written in the form of a heptasyllabic quatrain with vernacular language, that documents local customs and social life. It serves as an important historical source for the study of folklore and social change.



Figure 1.2: Photograph of Xu Zhiyun 徐志云 (1901-1978, left) and Wang Ying 王鹰 (b. 1937, right) performing around the 1960s (cited in Xu, 2025).¹⁴

This societal trend aligns closely with the cultural phenomenon described by Li Nantang and Li Fangyuan, where the “prevalence of obscene and vulgar tunes” and “*pipa* performers were playing obscene and vulgar tunes” (Li, 1955/1895). Li Nantang and Li Fangyuan both began their entrepreneurial pursuits in their youth, frequently travelling between Pinghu and Shanghai. They witnessed the rise and gradual prosperity of the entertainment industry in Shanghai, including the emergence of “lewd operas.” It can be inferred that, upon observing the prevalence of such performances and the appearance of “prostitute storytellers” with *pipa* accompaniment, their traditional Confucian values as literati and officials were undoubtedly profoundly challenged. The underlying context of this cultural upheaval, as analysed by Song Lizhong, “is the transition of urban culture from the traditional scholarly elite’s refined aesthetic to a popular culture dominated by the emerging bourgeoisie in modern society” (Song 2010, 81). It is this shift in cultural authority that led the Li family to prioritise altering social mores as their primary motivation for compiling *pipa* music scores.

The Li family had been a typical scholar-bureaucrat class (*shida fu*, 士大夫). To become a “*shi*,” two conditions needed to be met: the individual needed both knowledge and, more importantly, a sense of responsibility. Someone who merely possessed knowledge or

¹⁴ Unfortunately, photographs of *tanci* performances in late Qing-era Shanghai appear to be rare or lost. Xu Zhiyun was the founder of the distinctive “Xu Style” (*Xudiao*, 徐调) of *suzhou tanci*, renowned for its soft, mellifluous quality. His student, Wang Ying, was a leading female performer who played a crucial role in disseminating and popularising the Xu Style throughout the mid-twentieth century.

skills without a sense of mission, responsibility, and moral integrity could not be considered a “*shi*,” and might even be looked down upon. This sense of identity is closely linked to the Confucian emphasis on the political functions of music. Confucianism particularly highlights the vital role of music in governance, moral cultivation, and social reform. The *Classic of Xiao* (*Xiaojing*, 孝经) states: “For changing customs and traditions, nothing is better than music” (*yifeng yisu, moshan yuyue*, 移风易俗, 莫善于乐) (Hu & Chen 2016, 259). This exemplifies the unique societal reformatory value attributed to music within Confucian thought. In Confucian philosophy, the role of music in supporting governance is indirect, requiring moral cultivation as its conduit, with music’s transformative power serving as the foundation for moral development. Therefore, for the Li family, deeply rooted in traditional Confucian musical thought and skilled in *pipa* performance, compiling an authoritative *pipa* score not only perpetuated the scholarly class’s cultural mission but also fulfilled the Confucian ideal of moral education through musical practice.

1.2.3 The Reformist Goal: Moralising Music Through the Qin Ideal

Faced with the dual crisis above, Li Fangyuan’s compilation of the *Li Collection* can be viewed as a deliberate project for the “moralisation” of the *pipa*. This reformist goal pursued a two-pronged strategy: to counteract the prevalent trend of “*yinci yanqu*” by steering music towards a Confucian moral framework, and to reconfigure the instrument’s cultural identity by adopting the *qin* as its idealised paradigm.

The term “*yinci yanqu*” was explicitly articulated as early as the late Ming and early Qing dynasty in dramatist Li Yu’s 李渔 (1611-1680) work “*Bi Mu Yu*” (*Bimuyu*, 比目鱼): Those *yinci yanqu*, if learned, would damage one’s sense of standards of honour and humanity [*ming jie*, 名节], my children absolutely cannot study them” (Li 2014/1651, 565). Li Yu not only critiques the vulgarity of certain artistic expressions and their detrimental impact on personal integrity but also implicitly emphasises the higher moral and cultural responsibilities that art should embody. In contrast, he emphasises the core Confucian moral values of “*zhong xiao jie yi*”. As Li Yu then states, “As long as the subject concerns *zhong xiao jie yi* [loyalty to country, filial piety to parents, faithful to spouses, trustworthy to friends], and the various teachings of the theatrical arts, my children can learn” (*Ibid.*, 565).

This comparison clearly illustrates the prevailing evaluative standards of the period: authentic artistic expression worth preserving must reject vulgar and immoral content and instead actively promote the Confucian virtues of *zhong xiao jie yi*.¹⁵ I infer that Li Fangyuan believed that if the societal atmosphere shifted from one of *yinci yanqu* back to that of *zhong xiao jie yi*, *pipa* players would gradually rediscover earlier aspirations for learning the *pipa*. This would not only lead to advances in *pipa* skills and a growing number of proficient individuals but also to more interest in historical *pipa* repertory. Ultimately, the elevation of artistic status may enable the *pipa* to attain a level of reverence comparable to that of the *qin*, thereby addressing its transmission crisis.

It was to resolve this core issue that Li Fangyuan set the *qin* as the standard, sharing his father Li Nantang's vision of elevating the *pipa* to the *qin*'s esteemed level. The *qin*, as one of the oldest plucked instruments in China, held the most prestigious position among the literati. As the instrument of the Noble Person (*junzi*, 君子), the *qin* reached a peak of transmission during the Ming and Qing dynasties, with well-developed scores, repertoires, schools, and theoretical frameworks. This flourishing scene starkly contrasted with the transmission challenges faced by the *pipa* at the time, characterised by numerous performers but few who mastered the instrument proficiently. It is noteworthy that the *qin*'s esteemed status among literati stems from its embodiment of moral virtues—Ji Kang 嵇康 (224-263 A.D.) in the *Qin Fu* 琴賦 described it as “the most virtuous among all instruments” (cited in Dai 2015, 125), viewing the *qin* as a perfect integration of virtue, moral integrity and ethical conduct. In contrast, and as we have seen, the *pipa* had become associated with “obscene and vulgar songs” during the period of the activity of the Li family, exemplifying the deficiency of moral integrity.

In the *Li Collection*, Li Nantang further equates the sound of the *pipa* with that of the *qin*. He emphasises that “The *pipa* produces deep, leisurely tones full of sorrow and song. Generally, these were used by ancient elegant scholars to express their emotions,” and notes that “its robust, grand, mournful, and intense sounds surpass the *qin*” (Li, 1955/1895). This evaluation indicates that Li's admiration is directed not at the inherited elegance of the *qin*

¹⁵ See Sun (2022, 26-33) for further details on the evolution of *zhong xiao jie yi*.

but at the intrinsic moral character of sound itself. The fundamental purpose of this analogy is to challenge traditional associations to each instrument of refinement and vulgarity, thereby advocating for a higher cultural status for the *pipa*. This endeavour aligns with efforts to revise musical scores to improve societal morals, both aiming to reconstruct the moral connotations of the *pipa* to attain a cultural recognition comparable to that of the *qin*.

1.2.4 Core Strategies

However, elevating folk music to the status of elegant art constitutes a formidable cultural endeavour. The arduousness and conviction underlying the project are exemplified through a rare rhetorical device employed in the Preface authored by Li Fangyuan and Yuan Zuzhi:

Li Fangyuan worried that the musical scores for the *pipa* edited by his father would be buried with him, and thus be unable to be passed down to the world to showcase their brilliance.

Through *ku xin gu yi* (painstaking study to an unprecedented level of excellence, 苦心孤诣), he selected thirteen sets of ancient melodies, which could be played naturally according to their inherent musical rhythms, and through *yi yi yanjiu* (meticulous study, 一一研究), he applied techniques inherited from Zhao Ting, merging them with the authentic versions passed down from the ancestors, which he constantly referred to and researched *zi zi qi qi* (diligently and unrelenting, 孳孳矻矻) for over twenty years. (Yuan Zuzhi's Preface in Li, 1955/1895)

I have inherited my father's legacy, fearing that his business might be overwhelmed. So, by *fafen zhaoxi* (working hard from morning to night every day, 发愤朝夕), I selected thirteen sets of ancient melodies that can be played naturally according to their inherent musical rhythms, for *yi yi cankao* (elaborate study and comparison of reference materials, 一一参考). Combining the teachings of my father with the ancestral musical notations passed down through the generations, I have been working for over 20 years, *wei chang shao juan* (without experiencing any fatigue, 未尝少倦). (Li Fangyuan's Preface in Li, 1955/1895)

Notably, Yuan and Li both use a large number of adjectives and idioms to describe Li Fangyuan's process of compiling the music collection. In Chinese, we rarely use so many overlapping adjectives with similar meanings to describe a person's qualities, only doing so when we need to emphasise the degree of their contribution. In this case, the expressions employed all describe Li Fangyuan's diligent and hard-working efforts in compiling music scores, emphasising the intensity of his work. For example, "*kuxin gu yi*" refers to studying with great effort to reach the highest level that others cannot achieve, and "*zizi qiqi*" describes the sustaining of an attitude of diligence and perseverance over many years. The two Prefaces

convey the same core message, vividly depicting the hardships of Li Fangyuan's compilation process.

Li Fangyuan did not do all the work alone. On the contrary, he actively shares his sources and collaborators. According to the *Li Collection*'s table of contents, a total of 13 individuals were directly involved in the compilation process, including members of the Li family, prominent Jiangnan scholars and disciples of the Li family.¹⁶ Furthermore, Li Nantang's Note indicates an even broader scope of scholarly exchanges:

In 1850, Zhang Zifang 张子房 and Yu Zhishan 俞芝山 from Danghu travelled by boat to the southern regions for leisure, bringing a *pipa* score specifically to seek my expertise (....) After returning to my hometown in 1856, I collaborated with old friends Yu Guyuan 郁谷园, Yao Feiquan 姚飞泉, and Yao Songqi 姚松齐 to discuss ancestral musical scores. We performed the *pipa* according to the scores, each gaining valuable insights. In the spring of 1876, guests such as Chen Zijing 陈子敬, Zhou Houqing 周厚卿, Huang Meiting 黄梅汀, and Zhou Rongjiang 周蓉江 visited my residence to exchange. I presented the scores to them, and they all praised them enthusiastically. (Li Nantang's Note in Li, 1955/1895)

Li Nantang's account shows as many as 9 *pipa* players involved in the discussion of the music scores [including one who is also listed in the table of contents]. Adding to the 13 individuals from the table of contents, we can infer that at least 20 *pipa* players collectively participated in the compilation of the *Li Collection*.

Additionally, as revealed above, the compilation process of the *Li Collection* spanned two generations of the Li family, taking over forty years. Evidently, Li Nantang had begun organising the family's musical scores in 1850, maintaining ongoing correspondence with Jiangnan musicians. By the 1870s, Li Fangyuan formally continued his father's scholarly pursuits, overseeing the editing process until the publication in 1895. His own account of "more than twenty years" aligns precisely with this period. This intergenerational and transregional compilation methodology ensured that the *Li Collection* preserved the core principles of the Li family pedagogical tradition while integrating the collective wisdom of late Qing Dynasty *pipa* performance practice, thereby establishing a solid foundation for subsequent strategic implementation.

¹⁶ Zhou Houqing 周厚卿 from Jinshan (a region in the southwest of Shanghai), Chen Zijing 陈子敬 from Nanhui (a region in the southeastern of Shanghai), Yin Jiping 殷纪平 from Dantu (a region in the southwest of Jiangsu Province), and Zhang Ziliang 张子良 from Songjiang (a region in the southwest of Shanghai).

Li Fangyuan recognised that personal passion and inherited expertise are insufficient. Accordingly, he employed two historically rooted strategies in scholarly tradition—“using the ancients’ words as a pretext” and “expressing music through literature.” However, these two cultural strategies aimed at elevating the status of the *pipa* faced severe criticism in the twentieth century, being accused of “fabrication”. To comprehend this shift in evaluation, it is essential to reexamine Li Fangyuan’s practices within the broader context of late Qing literati responses to cultural crises.

1.3 Criticism of Li Fangyuan I: “Using the Ancients’ Words as a Pretext”

Among the thirteen pieces of music in the *Li Collection*, ten pieces of music that were initially not linked to a composer were now attributed to particular historical figures or origins (Figure 1.3). From a bibliographic and historical validation perspective, there is a clear chronological discrepancy in all these attributions: for instance, the “Pu’an Mantra”, which is usually attributed to the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279) Chan Master Pu’an 普庵禅师 (1115-unknown), is ascribed to a Tang Dynasty *pipa* master monk, known as Seng Xiashi 僧段师 (also called Duan Shanben 段善本). Similarly, Li records two pieces—“Chen Sui Ancient Music” and “Huaiyin’s Attack on Chu” as created by Qin Hanzi 秦汉子, which appears to be an ancient instrument name. According to *New Book of Tang* (*Xin tangshu*, 新唐书): “The *pipa* is round in shape, with a slender and small neck, also known as the ‘*qinhanzi*,’ it is a remnant form of *xiantao* (a type of plucked instrument, 弦鼗), originating from the Hu people, said to have been made during the Qin and Han dynasties” (cited in Zhang & Han 2013/1060, 8). Based on these ascriptions, Li Fangyuan was accused of “using the ancients’ words as a pretext”. Subsequent generations of musicologists have criticised Li Fangyuan intensely for this action. For instance, Cao Anhe 曹安和 (1905-2004) believed that Li’s actions were no different from those of the traditional feudal literati, pointing out that praising antiquity is equivalent to not acknowledging the present and implies a disregard for folk culture (Cao 2021/1955, 230).¹⁷ Yang Yinliu 杨荫浏 (1899-1984), a highly influential

¹⁷ Cao Anhe, a native of Wuxi, Jiangsu Province, was a Chinese musicologist, *pipa* performer, and music educator. Her primary research areas included *pipa* music, traditional score translation and interpretation, and

musicologist and music theorist, described Li’s behaviour as “childish and ridiculous” and “absurd” (Yang 1985/1954, 230-31).¹⁸ These criticisms do not come simply from musicologists obediently mouthing the new dogmas of post-1949 communist China. Taiwan’s renowned musician and cultural critic, Lin Gufang 林谷芳 (b. 1950), bluntly stated that Li Fangyuan’s actions were primarily intended to satisfy his own penchant for antiquity and vanity (Lin 1987, 79-82).¹⁹ It is noteworthy that these critiques do not exist in isolation but form a mutually corroborative scholarly lineage—spanning cultural paradigms, academic standards, and individual psychology—constituting a multidimensional critical framework. This authoritative discourse, led by eminent scholars, not only questions the academic validity of the *Li Collection* but also, to some extent, shapes subsequent perceptions of Pinghu School art, with its influence extending far beyond mere academic debate.

Title	Composer (Dynasty)	Comment
Yulunpao	Wang Wei 王维 (Tang Dynasty)	The Tang dynasty anecdote “ <i>Yulunpao zhuan</i> ” 郁轮袍传 (from Xue Yongruo’s <i>A Collection of Strange Tales</i> [<i>Ji yi ji</i> , 集异记]), details how Wang Wei used his skill on the <i>pipa</i> to secure patronage at court (Xue 1980, 9-11; see 1.2.3).
Huaiyin’s Attack on Chu	Qin Hanzi (Sui Dynasty)	<i>Qinhanzi</i> is an ancient alias for <i>pipa</i> (cited in Zhang & Han 2013/1060).
Chen Sui Ancient Music	Qin Hanzi (Sui Dynasty)	<i>Ibid.</i>
Gyrfalcons Seize Cranes	Kong Wei 孔伟 (Han Dynasty)	As recorded in the <i>Miscellaneous Records of the Music Bureau</i> (<i>Yuefu zalu</i> , 乐府杂录) notes: “The <i>pipa</i> originated from the <i>xiantao</i> [...] Sun Fang, Kong Wei, and Ruan Xian were all skilled at playing this musical instrument” (Duan c. 894/2015).
Han General’s Order	Huangfu Zhi 皇甫直	As recorded in the Song Dynasty compilation <i>Extensive Records of the Taiping Era</i> (<i>Taiping</i>

folk music collection. See Music Research Institute of the Chinese National Academy of Arts (2021) for further details on her achievements, life and philosophy.

¹⁸ Yang Yinliu, a native of Wuxi, Jiangsu Province, was a foundational figure in Chinese music research, a musicologist specialising in music history, and a theorist of musical scales. Yang established the research framework for the history of ancient Chinese music; his seminal work, *Manuscripts of the History of Chinese Ancient Music* (*Zhongguo gudai yinyue shigao*, 中国古代音乐史稿) remains a core reference in the discipline. He made pioneering contributions in the fields of musical scale theory, interpretation of ancient scores, and fieldwork on folk music. See Zhao (1985) for further details on Yang’s music papers.

¹⁹ Lin Gufang is a contemporary scholar who embodies the roles of a Chan (Zen) practitioner, a musician, and a cultural critic. He has exerted significant influence in the fields of Chinese musical aesthetics.

	(Post Han dynasty)	<i>guangji</i> , 太平广记): “The Chu general Huangfu Zhi was skilled at identifying musical tones [...] He especially enjoyed playing the <i>pipa</i> ” (Gao & Wang 2021/978, 2557).
Xunyang <i>Pipa</i>	Yu Shinan 虞世南 (Tang Dynasty)	Author of the <i>Ode to the Pipa</i> (<i>Pipa fu</i> , 琵琶赋) (Yu 2012, 33-38).
Rainbow Dress Rhapsody	Pei Shenfu 裴神符 (Tang Dynasty)	A famous early Tang Dynasty <i>pipa</i> musician from the Western Region of Shule. Pei was skilled at playing various musical instruments, and especially renowned for his <i>pipa</i> skills in the capital city Chang’an. He was a prominent figure in spreading Western Region music to the Central Plains region.
Pu’an Mantra	Seng Xiashi (Tang Dynasty)	Also known as Duan Shanben, an influential <i>pipa</i> player, composer and monk in the Tang Dynasty.
Song at the Frontier	Wang Zhaojun 王昭君 (Han Dynasty)	Wang Zhaojun was a legendary figure from the Han Dynasty who married a Xiongnu ruler as part of a marriage alliance policy. The iconic image of her carrying a <i>pipa</i> on her journey beyond the frontier has become a shared collective memory in Chinese culture (see 1.2.3).
The Green Lotus	Li Bai 李白 (Tang Dynasty)	Li Bai was also known as the “Green Lotus hermit” (<i>qinglian jushi</i> , 青莲居士).
White Snow in Spring Sunlight	(no attribution)	No composer was recorded in the original sources, and Li Fangyuan did not ascribe authorship to any ancient figure. The reason for this remains unclear.
Manchu General’s Order	(no attribution)	<i>Ibid.</i>
Wild Geese on the Sandbank	(no attribution)	<i>Ibid.</i>

Figure 1.3: The connection between musical pieces, “composers”, and the *pipa* in the *Li Collection*.

Nevertheless, as I delved deeper into the exploration of Li Fangyuan’s motivation for compiling the *Li Collection*, a thought-provoking contradiction gradually emerged: Li Fangyuan and his collaborators are all literati artists deeply influenced by Confucian ethics. They must have been fully aware of the integrity risks involved in “using the ancients’ words as a pretext,” and as cultural practitioners committed to elevating the status of *pipa* art, it is unlikely they would intentionally deviate from scholarly integrity. In addition, the compilation of the *Li Collection* represents a collective scholarly endeavour, with attribution and textual verification ideally serving as the core components of collaborative textual collation. Why would these participants, who possess both artistic achievement and cultural

literacy, collectively opt for a method that appears to contravene academic integrity? The apparent contradiction between motivation and means suggests the presence of a more complex cultural logic. In the following section, I analyse the compilation strategy of the *Li Collection* within the specific historical context of the late Qing Dynasty, aiming to reveal a deeper understanding of the cultural intentions behind this “using the ancients’ words as a pretext” practice.

1.3.1 The Connection Between Composers and Compositions

There is a crucial yet consistently overlooked issue here: why did Li Fangyuan select certain ancient figures instead of others? What backgrounds did these “composers” have, and are there any connections between them and the musical pieces attributed to them? I have compared and explored each of the 9 composers [2 musical pieces are attributed to the same composer], and all 9 composers are directly related to the *pipa*, and several are also directly or indirectly related to the musical piece in question (see Figure 1.3 above). For example, Pei Shenfu and Seng Xiashi were influential *pipa* players during the Tang Dynasty; Huang Fuzhi and Kong Wei, based on historical records, were knowledgeable in music theory and skilled in playing the *pipa*; the renowned poet Li Bai, although not a *pipa* player, was known as “Qinglian Jushi” and thus was assigned as the composer of “Ode to Green Lotus.” These selected historical figures possess two prominent characteristics: firstly, they are recognised authorities in the field of *pipa* tradition or musical culture; secondly, their names or deeds can be reasonably associated with the titles and content of specific compositions. By establishing symbolic links between historical authority and each composition, Li Fangyuan was hoping to enhance the cultural legitimacy of his collection of musical notation. The following discussion will analyse the internal logic of this strategy through two representative cases: “Yulunpao” and “Song of the Frontier.”

“**Yulunpao**”: The detailed account in Zheng Huang’s *Yulunpao Biography* documents a pivotal event in renowned poet Wang Wei’s early career, where his *pipa* virtuosity facilitated his entry into officialdom. Just before the imperial examination, the under-20 Wang Wei learned that his rival had secured the Number One Scholar (*zhuangyuan*, 状元, conferred on the one who came first in the highest imperial examination) through his nepotism with the

princess. Through the recommendation of Prince Qi, Li Fan 李范 (686-726), Wang Wei gained an audience with the princess. During a banquet, he performed a new *pipa* composition, “Yulunpao.” His mastery of music, combined with the poetry he presented, thoroughly impressed her. Leveraging her high status and court connections, the princess then exerted direct influence, essentially overriding the examiners to secure Wang Wei’s top placement in the exams. This anecdote became widely circulated from the Tang Dynasty onward, elevating “Yulunpao” to a symbol of musical excellence and a classic emblem of outstanding composition. Li Fangyuan’s attribution of the composition to Wang Wei likely stems from three considerations: firstly, Wang Wei’s multifaceted cultural identity as a poet, painter, and musician of the Tang Dynasty confers authoritative credibility; secondly, the historical narrative provided by the *Yulunpao Biography* offers concrete contextual support; thirdly, the legend had become a culturally recognised symbol within the scholarly community. This attribution strategy enhances the historical gravitas of the composition by linking it to the historical figure Wang Wei and referencing the story of a talented individual gaining social impact through the use of his musical performance.

“Song of the Frontier”: In 33 BCE, Wang Zhaojun (c. 54 B.C.-19 B.C.) was selected as a diplomatic envoy by Emperor Yuan of Han to marry Huhanye 呼韩邪 (d. 31 B.C.), the Chanyu (ruler) of the Xiongnu. Her act of crossing the frontier has gradually evolved since the Han Dynasty into a central motif in Chinese literary and artistic tradition. Notably, in successive generations of artistic reinterpretations, the *pipa* has become an indispensable visual symbol and emotional conduit for Zhaojun’s image—during the Sui Dynasty, Yu Shinan’s *Ode to Pipa* explicitly linked this instrument to the expression of Wang’s sorrow and lament (Yu 2012, 33-38); the Yuan Dynasty poet Chen Lü 陈旅 (1288-1343) further emphasised the symbolic connection between the *pipa* and the character’s tragic fate through the poetic line “a *pipa* song expressing deep melancholy” (Chen Lü, “Map of the Ming Consort’s Frontier Expedition”). This “Zhaojun-*pipa*-Frontier” composite imagery is not only prevalent in scholarly literary and artistic works such as poetry, calligraphy, and painting but also permeates popular culture through modern drama, *pipa* compositions, and television series, thereby embedding itself into collective memory. Li Fangyuan’s attribution of “Song of the Frontier” to Wang Zhaojun is thus rooted in two cultural-logical dimensions: firstly, the

Zhaojun narrative possesses a millennia-spanning historical influence; secondly, the *pipa* holds an archetypal position within its artistic symbolism. This attribution continues a traditional artistic approach of personifying historical figures and, through the authority of classical allusions, endows the musical piece with profound emotional depth and a sense of historical continuity.

Summing up, Li Fangyuan's "using the ancients' words as a pretext" approach in the *Li Collection* fundamentally represents a strategy adopted by intellectuals during the late Qing Dynasty's cultural crisis, utilising traditional authority to pursue social reform and artistic innovation. This is not mere fabrication but a strategically rooted cultural historiography—Li appears to imagine that when contemporary audiences perused his collection of musical scores and encountered these revered cultural icons associated with *pipa* artistry, they could be provoked into critical reflection on the prevailing decadent musical trends and find renewed appreciation for the authenticity and orthodoxy of traditional music. Although seemingly at odds with scholarly integrity, this deliberate linkage between historical figures and the *pipa* represents a thoughtful response to cultural preservation challenges: by establishing symbolic connections between renowned historical figures and the instrument, Li aims to elevate *pipa* music to a classical status and provide a spiritual anchor for a society in decline.

1.3.2 Using the Ancients' Words as a Means to Achieve Reformation

"Using the ancients' words as a pretext" is an important component of Confucian historiographical thought, defined as presenting contemporary issues as if they had existed in ancient times, using the names of ancient sages to promote one's own ideas and theories. In Chinese history, the practice of "using the ancients' words as a pretext" became popular during the Spring and Autumn period (770 B.C.- 476 B.C.E.). Prominent scholars such as Confucius, Mencius, and Zhuangzi 庄子 often used this approach in their philosophical teachings. For instance, instead of directly stating how rulers should behave, Confucius cites

ancient sage-kings like Yao 尧 and Shun 舜 as examples of rulers who selected virtuous individuals to help administer their kingdoms.²⁰ According to Zheng Zhenjiang:

Yao is mentioned 4 times, and Shun is mentioned 8 times in the Analects, 28 times and 26 times respectively in Mozi 墨子, 54 times and 40 times respectively in Zhuangzi, 58 times and 97 times respectively in Mencius, and 44 times and 51 times respectively in Xunzi 荀子. (Zheng 2003, 116-18)

Using the ancients' words as a means to achieve reformation (*tuogu gaizhi*, 托古改制) is a distinctive reform paradigm in Chinese history, characterised primarily by reformers leveraging the authority of ancient sages or classical texts to justify and legitimise their transformative initiatives. Ma Deyong defines it as:

A way of thinking and solving social problems, where people often rely on historical and traditional authorities (which may be fictional or real, such as the words and actions of sages or classical works) as a standardised mode of thinking to support their actions and arguments for social reform. (Ma 2000, 68)

Wang Zijin further emphasised this common characteristic of ancient Chinese reforms:

“Reformist leaders in practice almost invariably invoked the ancient sage-kings, aligning their reforms with the classical institutional framework” (Wang 1988, 5). Throughout history, famous reformers such as Wang Mang 王莽 (45 BCE-23 CE) and Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021-1086) employed this strategy, and in modern times, Kang Youwei 康有为 (1858-1927) maximised its potential, becoming a quintessential example of “using the ancients' words as a means to achieve reformation”.²¹ By integrating Western bourgeois reformist ideas with Confucian teachings, Kang Youwei outlined a blueprint for reform in China, presenting it as the true ideal of Confucius to silence conservative opposition and enhance the appeal of reform.²² This had a significant impact at the time, particularly among young Confucian scholars, laying the theoretical groundwork for the Hundred Days' Reform (*Wuxu bianfa*, 戊戌变法) that followed.²³

²⁰ Yao and Shun are legendary tribal confederation leaders in ancient Chinese mythology, regarded by Confucianism as exemplars of sage-kings.

²¹ See Guo (2007) for further details.

²² Kang penned works including *A Restudy of the Literary Issues in Traditional Chinese Classics* (*Xinxue wei jing kao*, 新学伪经考) and *A Study of Confucius' Reformation* (*Kongzi gaizhi kao*, 孔子改制考), skilfully using Confucius' authority to justify his reforms as aligned with the “Way of the Wise.” For further details on Kang's “*tuogu gaizhi*”, see Kang (1891, 1897).

²³ The Hundred Days' Reform (1898) was an imperial attempt led by the Guangxu Emperor and his reform-minded advisors, most notably Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao 梁启超 (1873-1929), to modernise China's political, educational, and military systems following the defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War. Despite its failure, it is widely regarded as a significant ideological Enlightenment movement in modern Chinese history.

By comparing their definitions, we can see that this approach consists of two parts—means and objectives. “Using the ancients’ words as a means to achieve reformation” tends to focus more on political propositions, seemingly addressing social issues from a more macro perspective. The ultimate goal of “using the ancients’ words as a pretext” is also reform, but it lacks explicit politicisation, emphasising instead personal ideological propositions. However, whether the aim is to propagate personal ideological views or to promote political initiatives, the central objective is to achieve a form of “reform,” “using the ancients’ words as a pretext”, which is merely the manifestation of this goal. In other words, “using the ancients’ words as a means to achieve reformation” is a specific application of “using the ancients’ words as a pretext” within the realm of political reform, sharing the same underlying logic—utilising the authority of historical figures to enhance the legitimacy and persuasive power of one’s propositions.

In the cultural context of late Qing reverence for Confucianism and antiquity, “using the ancients’ words as a pretext” was a common strategy employed by intellectuals to promote their advocacies. Li Fangyuan and intellectuals in the Jiangnan region followed tradition and used the method: aiming to cloak their advocacy with “using the ancients’ words as a pretext” and leveraging Confucian authority to elevate the social status of *pipa* art and influence societal norms. Essentially, this behaviour represented an internal attempt to seek breakthroughs within the traditional framework, reflecting the typical pathway of late Qing intellectuals promoting reform within the confines of the traditional system.

1.3.3 Cultural Conservatism Resulting from the Clash Between Chinese and Western Cultures

Cultural background plays a crucial role in Li Fangyuan’s decision to employ the approach of “using the ancients’ words as a pretext”. From the start of the First Opium War in 1840 up to the publication of the *Li Collection* in 1895, the introduction of Western culture had put traditional Chinese culture into a perilous situation. In this context, some progressive intellectuals began to search for ways to save the country and its people. Three different ideological trends emerged:

- preserving Chinese traditional culture while learning advanced Western science, technology, and political systems,
- abandoning Chinese traditional culture and fully embracing Western culture and values, and
- opposing Westernisation and arguing that the only way for Chinese culture is to reestablish the dominant position of traditional culture and promote cultural conservatism.

Historical examination of the situation of Li Fangyuan in Pinghu City and the Jiangnan region, where other famous *pipa* artists resided, suggests that historical events that may have had a significant impact in pushing Li toward a form of cultural conservatism and thus adoption of “using the ancients’ words as a pretext” ideology.

Zhapu Battle: In fact, Pinghu was close to the centres of imperialist and national conflicts throughout this period. During the First Opium War on May 11, 1842, a British expeditionary fleet carrying about 2,200 soldiers and marines attacked Zhapu, which is a subordinate town of Pinghu City, Zhejiang Province. Located southeast of Pinghu City, Zhapu was a vital port town since ancient times. In the Qing Dynasty, it was an essential gateway for economic and cultural exchanges in the northern Zhejiang region. The British invading forces stayed in Zhapu for ten days, during which they engaged in extensive looting, burning, killing, and plundering.²⁴ When they finally retreated, they set fire to the town, causing it to be destroyed. In his novel *The Compilation of Sorrows* (*Maiyou ji*, 埋忧集), Zhu Xiangqing vividly described the tragic scene: “The British broke into Zhapu, the slaughter was brutal, the roads were filled with corpses, some were thrown into the river, blocking its flow” (Zhu 1979/1845, 103). According to historical records, the resistance of Zhapu soldiers against the British forces was extremely intense. The British invading forces expressed their admiration, stating, “Anyone who has witnessed Chinese soldiers defending their positions with such tenacity and determination cannot help but fully respect the bravery of the Chinese people (....) Up to the Battle of Zhapu, China deployed its most elite forces to resist our advance” (cited in Yang & Tong 1990, 54). *The Record of the Sacrifice in Zhapu in the Year*

²⁴ See Mao (2016) and Ouchterlony (1844) for further details on Zhapu Battle.

Renyin (*Renyin Zhapu xunnanlu*, 壬寅乍浦殉难录) further documents the heroic resistance of commoners such as peasants, carpenters, intellectuals, and even monks during the national crisis (Shen 2007/1842, 40).

The **Taiping Heavenly Kingdom** also brought serious conflict to the region. In 1836, the leader of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, Hong Xiuquan, repeatedly failed the imperial examinations. While in Guangzhou, he received the book *Good Words Exhorting the Age* (*Quan shi liangyan*, 劝世良言) from the Christian Liang Fa on the street. This book elaborated on Christian doctrines and laid the foundation for Hong's establishing of the Society of God Worshippers (*bai shangdi hui*, 拜上帝会). Subsequently, Hong proclaimed himself the younger brother of Jesus, preached extensively, attracted many believers, and launched the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom Movement (in late 1850). By 1853, Hong had established his capital in Tianjing (present-day Nanjing, Jiangsu Province) in the heart of the densely populated, economically prosperous, and culturally flourishing Jiangnan region in China. The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom Movement lasted for 14 years, during which the once affluent Jiangnan region suffered from the ravages of war (see Figure 1.4), leading to nearly deserted lands with much of the population perishing, many houses burnt down, and farmland abandoned. According to the *Pinghu County Annals* (*Pinghu Xianzhi*, 平湖县志) in 1838, the total population of the county was 304,365. After experiencing two Opium Wars and the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom Movement, the population in 1864 was only 50,750 (cited in Cao 2001, 471). For the people of Jiangnan, including Li Fangyuan, the words "Taiping Heavenly Kingdom" evoke terrifying historical memories of rivers of blood and desolated households, a legacy passed down through generations.

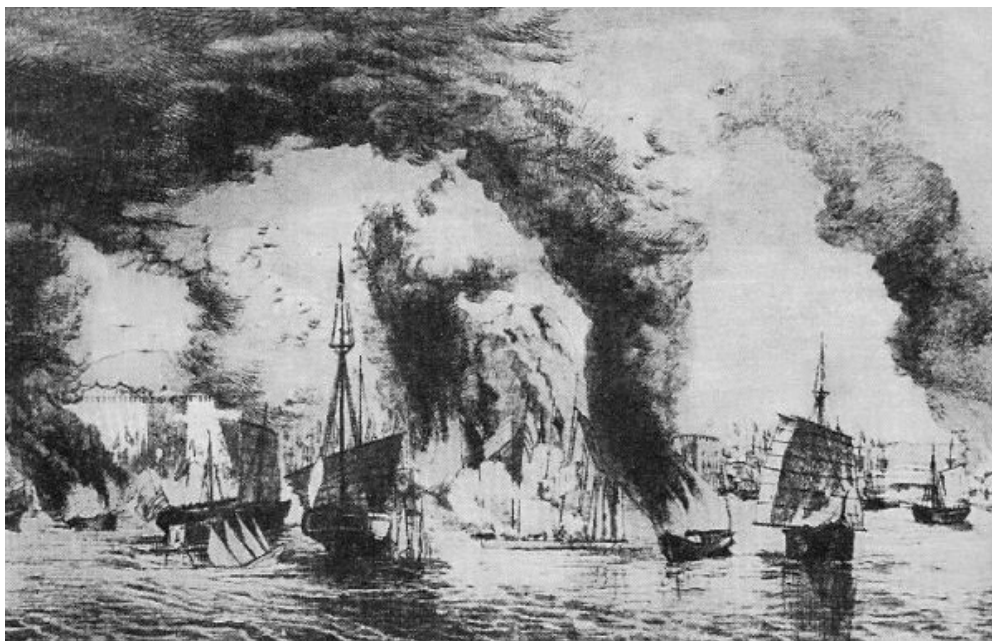


Figure 1.4: Actual photo of a Naval battle between Taiping-Qing armies on the Yangtze River, c. 1860s (Smith, 2022).

Notably, in order to establish the authority of God, the Taiping Army burned Confucian temples and Confucian canons and destroyed statues of Confucius. This behaviour of promoting Western ideology by denigrating traditional Chinese culture was undoubtedly a significant and heavy blow to traditional intellectuals like Li Fangyuan, who were rooted in Confucian culture. Amid this historical trauma, Jiangnan *pipa* artisans, situated in a region severely affected by cultural upheaval, found minimal prospects for embracing Western cultural influences. Instead, they predominantly adhered to cultural conservatism and sought to resist Westernisation through the revival of traditional practices, a culturally inevitable choice rooted in the socio-historical context. This underlying societal psychology informed Li Fangyuan’s adoption of a “using the ancients’ words as a pretext” strategy in compiling the *Li Collection*.

1.4 Criticism of Li Fangyuan II: “Falsification of Titles and Subheadings”

The table of contents of the *Li Collection* offers an eye-catching plethora of subheadings in various formats occupying two-thirds of the page (see Figure 1.5). This is one of the most notable features of the *Li Collection* as compared to the previously published *Hua Collection* and other publicly circulated handwritten scores. Li Fangyuan’s modifications to the titles

and subheadings fall into the following three types: 1. In existing classical music pieces with subheadings, Li made additions or changes; 2. For classical music pieces without subheadings, Li added subheadings to all of them; 3. Combining folkloric, small-format musical compositions into larger suites, Li gave the result a new title and subheadings.

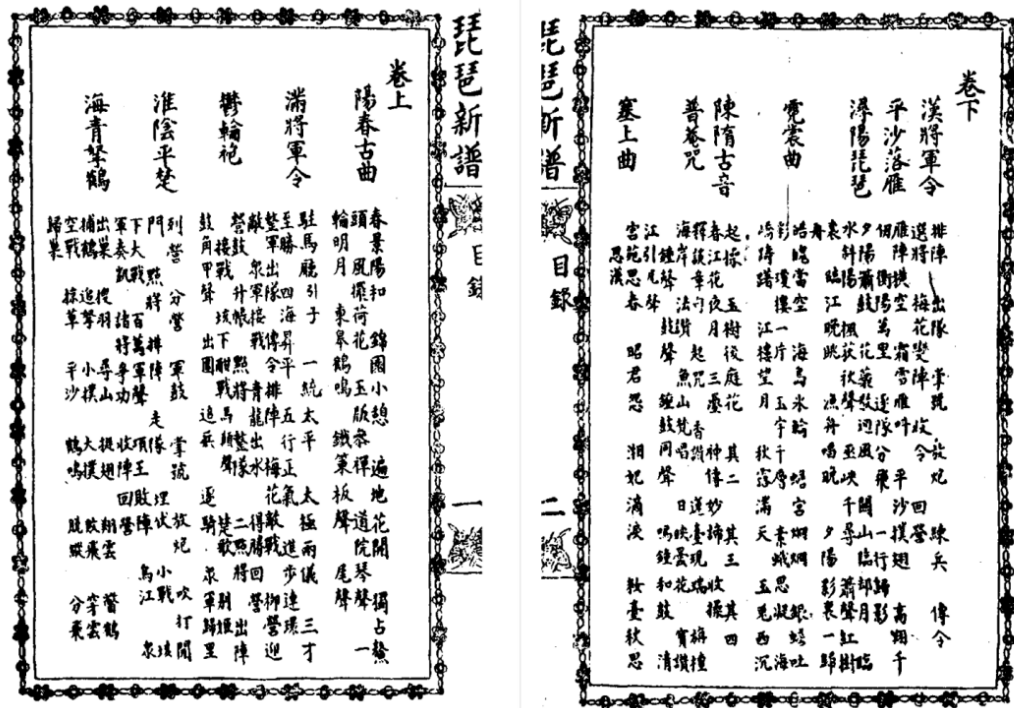


Figure 1.5: Partial catalogue of the *Li Collection* (Li, 1955/1895).

Li's three types of reconstruction have elicited divergent scholarly evaluations: proponents argue that they enhanced the systematic organisation and artistic expression of *pipa* repertoire, while critics condemn them as akin to “fabrication” (see, for example, Liu 1995, 58). The root of this controversy lies in the fact that the thirteen large suites revised by Li Fangyuan are primarily based on the integration and adaptation of folk ancient melodies and private family scores. Among them, pieces such as “General’s Order,” “Gyrfalcons Seize Cranes,” and “Xunyang *Pipa*” came from the same source of music as the *Hua Collection*. Subsequently, musicians have naturally categorised these as pieces of ancient music and have generally wished to preserve the “authenticity” of this repertoire, which leads to a rejection towards Li Fangyuan’s alterations. However, this study contends that to label Li’s work merely as “fabrication” is to misunderstand its fundamental nature. His editorial practice is better understood as a deliberate act of cultural repositioning—an effort to refine and elevate

pipa music within the framework of literati aesthetics by employing strategies deeply rooted in Chinese scholarly tradition.

1.4.1 Music Expressed Through Literature

Li Fangyuan's systematic construction of subheadings is a core strategy that elevates folk craftsmanship into scholarly artistic expression. This practice is not original but deeply rooted in China's long-standing tradition of "music expressed through literature" (*yiwén shū yuè*, 以文述乐)—that is, interpreting, defining, and enhancing musical imagery through literary texts.²⁵ In the exemplary art of the scholar-*qin*, this tradition has reached a high level of maturity. For instance, Zhu Quan's 朱权 (1391-1448) Ming dynasty anthology, the *Magical Secret Scores* (*Shenqi mi pu*, 神奇秘谱), includes 64 *qin* pieces, of which 50 are accompanied by literary subheadings. Notably, "The Ancient Tune of Guangling" (*Guangling san*, 广陵散) features 45 narrative subheadings, such as "Taking Han" (*Qu Han*, 取韩), "Wearing the Crown" (*Chong guan*, 冲冠) and "Memories of Loss" (*Wang ji*, 亡记; Zhu 2012/1425), forming a complete "music–literature mutual interpretation" system. Li's pivotal move was to appropriate this prestigious practice and apply it to the *pipa*. This was a deliberate act of cultural translation, aimed directly at countering the prevailing association of *pipa* with "obscene and vulgar tunes" and seeking to endow *pipa* music with the noble character and artistic conception of scholar-art thereby elevating its cultural status.

Taking the evolution of "Yulunpao" (i.e. "The King Chu Doffs His Armour") as a case study, one can clearly discern Li's artistic intent and reconstructive strategy.²⁶ This composition first appeared in the *Hua Collection* and is recognised as one of the most renowned classical *pipa* pieces. It is set against the historical backdrop of the Battle of Gaixia (southeast of present-day Lingbi County, Anhui Province) in 202 BCE, vividly depicting the tragic fate of King Xiang Yu 项羽 (232 BC-202 BC) of Chu—his defeat, farewell to his consort, and his suicide at the Wu River. The original composition of the *Hua Collection* consists of 12 sections, with only two sections accompanied by simple subheadings, and the

²⁵ See Gao (2014) for further details on tradition of music expressed through literature.

²⁶ This piece was originally titled "The King Chu Doffs His Armour" (*Bawang xiejia*, 霸王卸甲) in the *Hua Collection*. Li Fangyuan later re-designated it as "Yulunpao" in the *Li Collection*. In accordance with the primary textual source for this study, this thesis uniformly adopts the title "Yulunpao" in relevant discussions.

musical narrative still relies on the performer's personal interpretation and traditional conventions. In the *Li Collection*, the piece has been structurally reimagined, expanding the original 12 sections to 15, each with clearly defined narrative function subheadings (Figure 1.6). This titling transforms the piece from a sequence of musical sections into a coherent dramatic narrative. The sustained influence of this framework, as later editions show, demonstrates its practical validity. This approach was retained in the 1929 *Yangzhengxuan Pipa Score* and the 1956 collaboratively compiled edition of *The King Chu Doffs His Armour* by Cao Anhe and Li Tingsong. Although subsequent editions included some additions and deletions, Li's core structural framework of the subheadings remains. From a practical perspective, this indicates that Li Fangyuan's hierarchical titling system is regarded as more artistically rational and functionally expressive. Even though the Hua version predates it, later editors did not overturn Li's rearrangement of its structural core, and therefore his contribution remains significant in the musical transmission of the piece among subsequent generations.

Scores	<i>Hua Collection</i>	<i>Li Collection</i>	<i>Yangzhengxuan Collection</i>	<i>The King Chu Doffs His Armour</i>
Year	1819	1895	1929	1956
Schools	Wuxi School	Pinghu School	Pudong School	Wang School
1	Prelude	Beating Drums	Beating Drums	Beating Drums
2	First	Discussing Military Business in the Tent	Discussing Military Business in the Tent	Discussing Military Business in the Tent
3	Second	Appointment of Generals	Appointment of Generals	Appointment of Generals
4	Transition	Organizing the Army	Organize the Army	Organize the Army
5	Fourth	Re-appointment of Generals	Lining up (Troops)	Lining up (Troops)
6	Fifth	Entering the Arena	Entering the Arena	Entering the Arena (first)
7	Little Winds	Starting the Battle	Start the Battle	Entering the Arena (second)
8	Sixth	Fighting Fiercely in Gaixia	Fighting Fiercely in Gaixia	Starting the Battle
9	Seventh	Songs of the Chu	Songs of the Chu	Fighting Fiercely in

		Dynasty	Dynasty	Gaixia
10	Eighth	Farewell to Yu Ji	The Sound of War Drums, horns and armour	Songs of the Chu Dynasty
11	Golden- haired Lion	The Sound of War Drums, horns and armour	All the Troops Return Home	Farewell to Yu Ji
12		Breaking out of the Enemy's Siege		The sound of war drums, horns and armour
13		Pursuing Troops		Breaking Out of the Enemy's Siege
14		Catching up with the Cavalry		Pursuing Troops
15		All the Troops Return Home		Catching up with the Cavalry
16				All the Troops Return Home

Figure 1.6: Comparison of subheadings in different *pipa* Schools of “Yulunpao”.²⁷

Therefore, the adaptation of the subheadings in the *Li Collection* is essentially a re-creation guided by scholarly aesthetic principles. Based on Li and his collaborators’ acute sense of crisis regarding the prevailing “vulgarisation” of the artistic environment at the time, this elegant and systematic framework of subheadings was consciously endowed with the functions of “aesthetic bridge.” It not only provides interpretative guidance for performers of varying skill levels to overcome technical barriers, enabling them to master structurally complex large-scale narrative suites; simultaneously, through poetic literary imagery, it elevates the cultural character of *pipa* music, completing a crucial step in its elevation from “folk craft” to “literati art”. In this sense, Li Fangyuan was not merely a “forger,” but rather an editor who, at a specific historical juncture, proactively employed the tradition of “describing music through literature” to transform and elevate the folk musical heritage.

1.4.2 A Common Tradition: Variant Titles and Re-creation

²⁷ For the original Chinese terms and their *pinyin* transliteration, please refer to Appendix III.

In contemporary times, musicologists have observed a common phenomenon of “variant names with the same origin” (*yiming tongyuan*, 异名同源) during the process of tracing ancient music scores.²⁸ Wang Ting, for example, considered such names as showing as “homogeneous” musical forms or music belonging to the same “music family” (Wang 2020, 34). These variant names include modifications to the titles and subheadings, which will be exemplified by the piece “Gyrfalcons Seize Cranes” (*Haiqing na he*, 海青拿鹤). This composition has appeared under multiple titles across different historical periods in its transmission: in 1819, Hua Qiuping included it in the *Hua Collection* under the name “Gyrfalcons Seize Cranes”; in 1860, Ju Shilin’s handwritten *pipa* score *Casual Conversation and Private Notes* (*Xianxu youyin*, 闲叙幽音) referred to it as “Wild Geese on the Sandbank”; in 1895, Li Fangyuan retained the title from the *Hua Collection* but expanded the structural segments; by 1929, Shen Haochu’s *Yangzhengxuan Pipa Score* primarily used “Wild Geese on the Sandbank” as the main title. Interestingly, Shen also wrote the first name “Eagles Seize Cranes” and the second name “Big Wild Geese” (*Da ping sha*, 太平沙) next to the title.

An examination of the subheading system across different versions from a structural homologous perspective reveals the typical patterns of literary scholars’ adaptations of traditional musical compositions (Figure 1.7). The eighteen sections of the *Hua Collection* are uniformly titled with two-character headings such as “*lichao*” 离巢, “*souyu*” 搜羽, and “*xunshan*” 寻山, with content closely aligned to the narrative theme of “Gyrfalcons Seize Cranes,” demonstrating cohesive logical structure. Although the *Ju Collection* retains some original thematic titles like “11: Gyrfalcons Seize Cranes,” it introduces additional segments such as “10: One Goose Patrols” and “4: The Geese are in a Figure of Eight,” to depict the migratory patterns of wild geese, aligning with its revised title “Wild Geese on the Sandbank”. However, this hybrid adaptation results in a discontinuity in thematic expression, leading to a conflation of the imagery of Gyrfalcons and Wild Geese. The *Li Collection* largely inherits the framework of the *Hua Collection*, with only a conservative addition of the “Flying Separately” section at the end. By the time of the *Yangzhengxuan Pipa Score*, Shen

²⁸ See further details on this phenomenon, see Yuan (1989).

Haochu systematically refined the sectional headings, transforming the original two-character titles into four-character poetic expressions such as “*fenyu chuchao*” 奋羽出巢, and “*luting souyu*” 芦汀搜羽, reflecting the scholarly aesthetics’ deep engagement with musical narrative. This diachronic evolution indicates that, from the late 17th to the early 20th centuries, literati routinely reconstructed traditional compositions through methods such as title substitutions, paragraph modifications, and title revisions. Li Fangyuan’s adaptation is not an innovation but a specific manifestation of this widespread scholarly practice.

Score	<i>Hua Collection</i>		<i>Casual Conversation and Private Notes</i>		<i>Li Collection</i>		<i>Yangzhengxuan Pipa Score</i>	
Year	1819		1860		1895		1929	
Title	Gyrfalcons Seize Cranes		Wild Geese on the Sandbank		Gyrfalcons Seize Cranes		Wild Geese on the Sandbank (Gyrfalcons Seizes Cranes and Big Wild Geese)	
Prelude	1	Leaving the Nest	1	Prelude	1	Leaving the Nest	1	Taking Flight from the Nest
Main	2	Searching for Feathers	2	1. Geese Flying in the Moonlight	2	Searching for Feathers	2	Preening in the Reed Marsh
	3	Searching the Mountains	3	2. Second Part	3	Searching the Mountains	3	Crossing the River in Formation
	4	Stretching the Wings	4	3. Stretching the Wings	4	Stretching the Wings	4	Soaring Over the Wu Gorges
	5	Flying in the Clouds	5	4. The Geese are in a Figure of Eight	5	Flying in the Clouds	5	The Flock Journeys Afar
	6	Spotting the Cranes	6	5. Shooting a Glance	6	Spotting the Cranes	6	Circling with Strength
	7	Capturing the Cranes	7	6. Capturing	7	Capturing Cranes	7	Crisscrossing the Cloudy Sky
	8	Hunt and Capture	8	7. Geese Lodging in Xiaoxiang	8	Hunt and Capture	8	Clamoring Across the Firmament
	9	Slight Battle	9	8. Raging Battle	9	Slight Battle	9	Vast and Hazy Expanse
	10	Raging Battle	10	9. Failure	10	Raging Battle	10	Brushing the Layered Heavens
	11	Failure	11	10. One Goose Patrols	11	Failure	11	Aslant the Gale
	12	Through the Clouds	12	11. Gyrfalcons Seizes Cranes	12	Through the Clouds	12	Scattering to the Horizon
	13	Air Combat	13	12. Twelve	13	Air Combat	13	Foraging on the Cold Sands
	14	Capture in the	14	13. Thirteen	14	Capture in the Grass	14	Dispersing Over the

		Grass						Grasslands
	15	Fluttering Wings	15	14. The Crane's Call	15	Fluttering Wings in the Sand	15	Alighting on the Flat Sands
	16	The Crane's Call	16	15. Fifteen	16	The Crane's Call	16	Their Cry Fades at Hengyang
	17	Flying Separately	17	16. Sixteen	17	Liberation		
			18	17. Flying Separately	18	Flying Separately		
			19	18. Eighteen				
Postlude	18	Returning to the Nest	20	Postlude	19	Returning to the Nest	17	Harmonizing with Companions
							18	Homeward under the Moonlight

Figure 1.7: Correspondence Chart Between the Structure and Subheadings of Each Version of “Gyrfalcons Seize Cranes”.³⁹

³⁹ For the original Chinese terms and their *pinyin* transliteration, please refer to Appendix I.

Having looked at Li's strategy in revising the larger-scale repertory, his editorial approach to the creation of suites from smaller, pre-existing items also warrants further scholarly analysis. Li organised the suite "Spring Sunlight Ancient Melody" by combining ten folk melodies, including "Ten Scenic Views" (*Da shi yangjing*, 大十样景), "Small Ten Scenic Views" (*Xiao shi yangjing*, 小十样景) and "Harmonic Tones" (*Fanyin*, 泛音). Li Fangyuan designated "Spring Sunlight Ancient Melody" as the overarching title and reclassified each segment with poetic subheadings such as "Wind Sways the Lotus" (*Feng bai hehua*, 风摆荷花) and "Short Repose in Jin Garden" (*Jinyuan xiaoqi*, 锦园小憩), thereby enhancing its literary aesthetic and structural coherence. This technique of "assembling short pieces into a suite" (*ji qu cheng tao*, 集曲成套) was by no means Li Fangyuan's own invention. Rather, it represents a core element of Chinese musical structural thinking, with a historical lineage far predating its use in solo *pipa* music. A prime example can be found in the *Kunqu* opera masterpiece *The Peony Pavilion* (*Mudan ting*, 牡丹亭) by Tang Xianzu 汤显祖 (1550-1616) of the Ming Dynasty. Here, the highly mature suite structure based on melodic models (*qupai liantao ti*, 曲牌联套体) is employed: each scene (e.g., "The Interrupted Dream" [*jingmeng*, 惊梦]) is formed by linking over a dozen fixed-tune melodies (*qupai*, 曲牌), such as "Rao chi you" 绕池游, "Bubu jiao" 步步娇, and "Zao luopao" 皂罗袍, into a complete dramatic-musical unit according to specific emotional atmospheres and dramatic pacing. This corroborates Cao Anhe's assertion that "arranging several small traditional movements into a suite and selecting one movement's title as the overall name is a common practice in many folk instrumental ensemble suites" (Cao 2021/1955, 230). In other words, Li Fangyuan's editorial work represents a continuation and literary refinement of the longstanding suite tradition inherent in Chinese opera and instrumental music, rather than mere individual innovation. Cao also affirms that "his adaptation not only illustrates the process of suite formation but also reflects authentic folk performance practices, thereby possessing significant scholarly value" (*Ibid.*).

1.4.3 Systematic Structuring and Artistic Design of Subheadings

Having established that Li Fangyuan's editorial practices were grounded in established literati traditions, it is crucial to examine the specific artistic logic and systematic

design behind his modifications. This analysis reveals his work not as an arbitrary alteration, but as a deliberate refinement. The structure and style of the subheadings in the *Li Collection* are well-organised and diverse; they were not randomly added by Li Fangyuan. As Qian Tiemin stated, “some of [these subheadings] come from classical poetry, some from historical classics and character stories, some rely on ancient *qin* music, and some are reasonable additions by Li himself to cater to musical performance” (Qian 1986, 65-72). This approach to title construction not only reflects Li Fangyuan’s scholarly refinement of *pipa* repertoire but also profoundly influenced the narrative techniques and transmission modalities of *pipa* music.

In stark contrast to the tragic narrative centred on Xiang Yu in “Yulunpao,” Li’s version of “Huaiyin’s Attack on Chu” (i.e. Ambush from All Sides) adopts the perspective of the Han army, set against the historical backdrop of the decisive Battle of Gaixia in 202 BC.⁴⁰ It vividly depicts the deployment of the “Ten Sides Ambush” formation by the Han army led by Liu Bang 刘邦 (256 BC-195 BC), their strategic encirclement of the Chu army, and the eventual monumental victory that compelled Xiang Yu to commit suicide at Wu River. In the *Hua Collection*, the composition consists of a total of 13 sections, which can be divided into 3 parts: 4 sections for pre-battle preparation, 4 sections for the battle itself, and 5 sections for post-battle depiction. Li Fangyuan increased the number of sections up to 18, dividing the musical structure into 4 parts: 5 sections for the prelude, 4 sections for pre-battle preparation, 4 mid-battle sections, and 5 post-battle sections (Figure 1.8).

⁴⁰ Originally titled “Ambush from All Sides” (*Shimian maifu*, 十面埋伏) in the *Hua Collection*, this piece was later renamed “Huaiyin’s Attack on Chu” by Li Fangyuan in the *Li Collection*. “” refers to Han Xin 韩信, the Han army commander. In accordance with the primary textual source for this study, this thesis uniformly adopts the title “Huaiyin’s Attack on Chu” in relevant discussions.

Collection	Prelude	Pre-battle preparation	During the battle	Post-battle
<i>Hua Collection</i>		1. Opening the Gates and Firing Cannons 2. Playing Wind and Percussion Instruments 3. Appointing a Leader 4. Arranging Troops in Formation	5. Setting up an Ambush 6. Engaging in Small-scale Skirmishes 7. Shouting Loudly 8. Engaging in Large-scale Battles	9. Suffering a Defeat in Battle 10. Crossing the Wujiang River 11. Competing for Achievements 12. Singing Triumphant Songs 13. Returning to Camp
<i>Li Collection</i>	1. Column Camp* 2. Division Camp* 3. Military Drums* 4. Bugles* 5. Firing Cannons	6. Blowing and Beating while opening the Gates 7. Appointing a Leader 8. Arranging Troops in Formation 9. Marching in Formation*	10. Setting up an Ambush 11. Engaging in a Small-scale Skirmishes 12. The Battle of Gaixia 13. The Sound of a Million Troops	14. Xiang Yu's Defeated Formation 15. The Wu River 16. The Triumphant Sound of the Army 17. The Various Generals Vie for Credit 18. Disassembling the Formation and Returning to Camp

Figure 1.8: Comparison of the subheadings of the *Li Collection* and the *Hua Collection* of “Huaiyin’s Attack on Chu,” Titles with * are the new subheadings.⁴¹

⁴¹ For the original Chinese terms and their *pinyin* transliteration, please refer to Appendix II.

Judging from the number of titles, Li's addition of a Prelude seems to make the pre-battle preparation excessively prolonged, resulting in the delaying of the climax of the music, the "battle" itself. However, although the *Li Collection*'s Prelude includes five subtitled sections, the space they occupy is relatively short. Among them, the three sections entitled "Military drums," "Bugle," and "Firing cannons" only comprise 20 bars in total. The entire Prelude lacks a clear melodic line, mainly using sound effects, tone colours, and rhythmic changes to depict the tense atmosphere before the war. For instance, in the "Column Camp" section, Li uses repeated note clusters, gradually increasing in rhythm from slow to fast and tightening tension to create an atmosphere of war, while the high and strident pitch sets the tone for Liu Bang's victory (Figure 1.9). Meanwhile, the "Military drums" and "Bugle" sections are concise and powerful rhythmic segments primarily based on the simulation of the sounds of those instruments to uplift the soldiers' spirits and boost morale. The addition of a Prelude thus extends the timeline of the narrative, starting from the moment Liu Bang's army arrived at its campsite, greatly enhancing the narrativity and completeness of the composition. Li Fangyuan's addition of the Prelude has been widely affirmed by later generations: different schools vary in their presentation of this Prelude, yet all retain the content of the first five sections.



Figure 1.9: The first sentence of "Column Camp".

1.5 Conclusion

Actually, Li Fangyuan has already provided us with an answer as to why he employed the methods of "using the ancient' words as a pretext" and "fabricating titles and subheadings" in the full name of his collection, *A New Collection of Thirteen Pipa Suites from the Northern and Southern Traditions*. The keyword here is "new", and it is clear that Li is positioning his work in relation to the earlier *Hua Collection*, which is more fully known as

The Authentic Transmission of the Secret Versions of Pipa Scores from the Two Schools of North and South. Note that in his Preface, Hua Qiuping wrote that “the fingerings, tonal system, and playing techniques in the scores strictly adhere to the traditional version without any modifications” (Hua, 1876/1819), thus indicating the score’s key focus on maintaining the authenticity of ancient scores. Meanwhile, Li Fangyuan informs his readers that, although his collection is also a *pipa* score of the Southern and Northern Schools, like the *Hua Collection*, the one he is compiling is a new score, which takes the form of a complete set of large pieces. New and old are relative terms, and new represents change, implying there will be changes from pre-existing scores, as evidenced in the artistic modifying of existing titles, the creation of new subheadings for untitled music, and the compilation of shorter pieces into suites. From Li Fangyuan’s perspective, he definitely did not believe that he was engaged in some kind of fabrication. On the contrary, he wrote in the Preface: “This score is a private music score for teachers and learners, and its rhythms and melodies are more innovative and beautiful compared to the *Hua Collection*, with even more improvements,” (Li, 1955/1895) acknowledging the foundational role of the *Hua Collection* while also demonstrating Li’s conscious pursuit of artistic innovation.

From an academic research perspective, Li Fangyuan’s modifications to the titles and structures of *pipa* compositions are indeed contentious; scholars’ scepticism regarding his “using the ancients’ words as a pretext,” fabrication of subheadings, and integration of folk tunes is both justified and essential. Yet, from the perspective of music philology, Li’s adaptation practices should not be simplistically regarded as “fabrication,” but rather understood as a typical example of scholarly reconfiguration within the evolution of traditional music, reflecting late Qing literati musicians’ deliberate efforts to systematically elevate traditional compositions through artistic refinement.

Throughout the thousand-year history of the *pipa* in China, whether it is transforming the playing technique from plucking with a plectrum to fingerpicking, changing the instrument’s structure from four ledges and up to the current six ledges and twenty-four frets, or altering the playing posture from horizontal to vertical, each new reform has been a disruption to the old traditions, and each “new” breakthrough has been a fierce confrontation with the “old”. Li Fangyuan’s adaptations fundamentally continue that inherited pattern of artistic evolution. Over a century later, his adaptations of works such as “Song at the Frontier” and “White Snow in Spring Sunlight” have become central components of the *pipa*’s classical repertoire. His “fictitious” subheadings also serve as crucial references for contemporary performers and audiences in interpreting the music.

Although Li Fangyuan's scholarly reform of folk music altered its original form, it endowed these compositions with renewed artistic vitality. This creative transformation objectively advanced the systematic development of *pipa* art and elevated its cultural status. Li's efforts at standardising notation guided the transformation of performance practice, thereby contributing to his aim of purifying the social musical atmosphere; the improved artistic environment, he believed, would attract more practitioners, strengthening the transmission lineage by enhancing the overall skill level of *pipa* players, and ultimately positioning the instrument on par with the *qin* in cultural significance. This ambitious conception and its accompanying musical framework reflect his profound understanding of artistic evolution, exemplifying late Qing intellectuals' efforts to respond to social change through cultural reconstruction.

Chapter 2

Zhu Ying and the Pinghu School's Modern Transformation (1900-1949)

The day of the revival of national music is the day of the revival of Chinese culture, the day when China turns from weakness to strength, the day of the creation of new national music, and also the day of success in various great endeavours!

(Zhu 1935, 27)

2.1 Introduction

In the early 20th century, a cohort of modern intellectuals led the integration of Western music into Chinese contexts. Among them, Zeng Zhimin 曾志忞 (1879-1929) emerged as a foundational figure, whose 1904 declaration to “create a new music for China” (cited in Feng 2008/1904, 11)—forged from his studies in Japan and advocating for integrating Western elements—proved directly influential in catalysing the School Song (*Xuetang yuege*, 学堂乐歌) movement and shaping a new mainstream for modern Chinese music.¹

In 1911, the Xinhai Revolution (*Xinhai geming*, 辛亥革命), led by Sun Zhongshan 孙中山 (1866-1925) and others, ended over two millennia of monarchical absolutism in China, resulting in the establishment of the Republic of China; however, the revolutionary gains were swiftly usurped by the Beiyang warlords, preventing the realisation of genuine democracy and republicanism. Consequently, China descended into a period of warlord fragmentation and social instability. After the failure of the Xinhai Revolution, a group of progressive intellectuals who had studied abroad, such as Chen Duxiu 陈独秀 (1879-1942), Hu Shi 胡适 (1891-1962), and Li Dazhao 李大钊 (1889-1927), initiated an ideological liberation movement against feudalism through the magazine *New Youth* (*Xin qingnian*, 新青年), which became known as the New Culture Movement (*Xinwenhua yundong*, 新文化运动).² They introduced various Western ideologies, advocated for democracy and science,

¹ School Song refers to the “music singing” classes established in early 20th-century Chinese modern schools and the songs taught therein. These songs were mostly created by setting new lyrics to melodies from Europe, America, and Japan, representing a crucial form for the enlightenment of modern Chinese new music.

² Chen Duxiu was one of the principal founders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the founder of *New Youth*, and a central leader of the New Culture Movement; Hu Shi was a renowned scholar and thinker of modern China, and one of the leading figures of the New Culture Movement; Li Dazhao was one of the principal founders of the CCP and among the earliest Marxists and propagators of Marxism in China. For more information on the New Culture Movement, see Chow (1960).

and ignited a wave of intellectual emancipation. Under the promotion of the New Culture Movement, China saw the emergence of numerous new-style music groups.³ Although primarily amateur, they generally adhered to Cai Yuanpei's 蔡元培 (1868-1940) advocated concept of aesthetic education (*meiyu*, 美育), engaging in regular practice, skill transmission, and public performances. These organisations played a significant role in dismantling feudal cultural constraints and promoting contemporary musical ideas.⁴ Based on these music groups, early professional music schools and departments gradually emerged in China. For instance, the Music Department of Beijing Advanced Normal School 北京高等师范学校 (1920) and Peking University Music Institute 北京大学音乐传习所 (1922). On November 27, 1927, the first independent national higher music institution in China, the Shanghai National Conservatory of Music (today's Shanghai Conservatory of Music), was founded by Cai Yuanpei and Xiao Youmei (1868-1940).⁵ The educational content and principles of these music institutions mainly drew from the professional music education systems of Western countries, and they focused on imparting knowledge and skills in Western music. The establishment of new music associations and early professional music education institutions significantly advanced urban music performance activities as well, and, notwithstanding the focus of many reformers on Western music, this activity provided a context within which traditional Chinese *pipa* art also flourished.

Following the example of what we now call the Wuxi and the Pinghu Schools, further regional schools of *pipa* performance became established across the Jiangnan region, each with its characteristic performance style and repertoire. These are now referred to as the Chongming, Pudong, and Wang Schools. The resulting five *pipa* schools, centred around Shanghai as an economic and cultural hub, continuously developed their own styles through mutual learning and interaction, giving rise to renowned artists such as Wang Yuting, Shen

³ For instance, Beijing University Music Research Association (*Beijing daxue yinyue yanjiuhui*, 北京大学音乐研究会, 1919), National Music Reformation Society (*Guoyue gaijin she*, 国乐改进社, 1927), and Datong Music Society (*Datong yuehui*, 大同乐会, 1920).

⁴ Cai Yuanpei was a prominent educator, revolutionary, and politician in modern China. He was a pioneering advocate of aesthetic education. From 1916 to 1927, he held the position of President of Peking University, where his educational philosophy of intellectual freedom and inclusivity profoundly influenced the evolution of contemporary Chinese higher education systems. See Duiker (1972) for further details on the aesthetics philosophy of Cai.

⁵ Xiao Youmei was a prominent figure in modern Chinese music education and composition, studied music and pedagogy in Japan and Germany during his early years, earning a doctoral degree from Leipzig University. In 1927, he co-founded Shanghai National Conservatory of Music alongside Cai Yuanpei and served as its long-term administrative leader. See Xiao (2004) for further details on Xiao's life, achievements and philosophy.

Haochu, Liu Tianhua 刘天华 (1895-1932), and Zhu Ying. In the 1920s-1930s, these musicians collectively propelled a flourishing period of modern *pipa* performance.⁶

Since the death of Li Fangyuan in 1901, the development of the Pinghu School was mainly carried on by his disciples Wu Bojun 吴柏君 (fl. late 19th-early 20th century), Wu Mengfei 吴梦飞 (1892-1962), and Zhu Ying, with Zhu Ying's achievements being the most prominent.⁷ Zhu Ying, also named Zhu Xingqing 朱荇青, was a native of Pinghu city (Figure 2.1). According to Zhu, he received education from the private school established by Li Fangyuan since childhood, studying under Li for 8 years and mastering Li's thirteen grand suites of *pipa* music.⁸ In 1921, Zhu Ying travelled to the United States, where he performed the *pipa* at diplomatic functions and held concerts, earning recognition as a "national treasure" (*guoshou*, 国手; Xiao 2014, 74); in 1927, he was appointed by Cai Yuanpei to teach at the Shanghai National Conservatory of Music, becoming the first educator to introduce the *pipa* into higher education in professional music.⁹ Over a seventeen-year teaching career, he achieved significant milestones in pedagogy, performance, composition, and instrument reform. In 1944, he resigned from teaching and returned to his hometown due to his refusal to perform for the Japanese puppet regime (Li 2021, 1). Zhu then passed away in Pinghu in 1954.¹⁰

⁶ With the establishment of both folk music societies and professional musical institutions, the transmission of the *pipa* has gradually diverged into two models: apart from Shen Zhaozhou and Liu Tianhua of the Chongming School, and Zhu Ying of the Pinghu School, the other schools sustained the folk heritage transmission mode.

⁷ Wu Mengfei received direct instruction from Li Fangyuan and later studied under Zhang Ziliang, a pupil of Li Fangyuan's father, Li Nantang. In the 1920s and 1930s, he frequently performed in Shanghai, making significant contributions to the promotion of the Pinghu *pipa* school. For further details, see Han & Zhang (2017/2013).

⁸ I referenced Zhu Ying's statements from his interview in the *Southeast Daily*, dated June 7 to 9, 1935. There exists another narrative regarding Zhu Ying's teacher: he initially learned the *pipa* under Wu Bojun, the foremost disciple of Li Fangyuan, and later received personal instruction from Li Fangyuan due to his recognition of Zhu's talent. For more details on this controversy, see the reports in the *Southeast Daily* from June 7 to 25, 1935.

⁹ The early introduction of the *pipa* into modern Chinese higher education was pioneered by figures such as Shen Zhaozhou, who taught at Nanjing Higher Normal School 南京高等师范专科学校 around 1917, and Liu Tianhua, who began teaching at Peking University's Institute of Music in 1922. However, their instruction took place within broader educational or cultural frameworks aimed at general education, rather than professional musician training.

¹⁰ For more biographical information on Zhu Ying, please see Li (2021) and Han & Zhang (2017/2013).



Figure 2.1: Portrait of Zhu Ying (n.d., cited in Shanghai No. 1 National Musical Instrument Factory and Shanghai Museum of Chinese Musical Instruments 2007, 63).

When discussing crucial musicians during the budding period of Chinese music education (1917-1927), Xiao Youmei listed Zhu Ying and Liu Tianhua as “the key representatives of the *pipa*” (Xiao 1990, 450), indicating his significant influence in that era.¹¹ Russian composer Alexander Tcherepnine (1899-1977) also lauded Zhu Ying as a “genius composer and *pipa* master” (Tcherepnine 2009/1935, 109).¹² However, the trajectory of historical appraisal reveals a perplexing shift. In stark contrast to his contemporary Liu Tianhua, who is now widely celebrated as a “pioneering master of modern Chinese national music” (Li 2009, 144), Zhu’s name is not widely known, even among the professionals in the *pipa* circles of today. This observation prompts questions on the rationale underlying the inclusion or erasure of certain figures in the historical imagination. More thought-provoking is the stark contrast between Zhu Ying’s esteemed reputation and his inner turmoil. In a 1935 confession, he revealed a different side behind his illustrious standing: “I have been a professor here [Shanghai Conservatory of Music] for eight years, and not a day goes by without feeling pain, not a day goes by without wanting to leave” (Zhu 1935, June 6). This poignant admission prompts reflection: could understanding the inner suffering of this widely acclaimed “genius” be the key to understanding his historical fate?

¹¹ Liu Tianhua was a prominent modern Chinese composer, musician, and educator. He pioneered Chinese folk music reform and laid the foundation for the modern school of *erhu* performance. He composed three pieces for *pipa* and ten pieces for *erhu*. For more information about Liu, please see Fang & Min (2009).

¹² Alexander Tcherepnine was a Russian-born American composer and pianist. He was a significant figure in 20th-century music, whose compositions integrate Russian traditional motifs, Western European modernist techniques, and East Asian (notably Chinese) musical elements. Between 1934 and 1937, he resided and taught in China. In 1934, he sponsored a competition titled “*Seeking Chinese-Style Piano Compositions*,” which significantly contributed to the nationalisation of Chinese piano music. See He (2021) for his contribution on Chinese music and Korabelnikova (2008) for his bibliography.

Through in-depth research, I have discovered that this suffering was far from mere personal sentiment; it stemmed from the spiritual torment of a pioneering intellectual who profoundly understood the value of national music amid the tumult of Western musical influence and the challenges of reforming it. His patriotic compositions (e.g., “The Battle of Songhu”) were criticised as “vulgar naturalism” (cited in Liao 1991, 79); despite his being acclaimed by the media as the “*Pipa* Maestro”, yet he faced collective criticism from his peers (see *Southeast Daily* 1935, June 7 to 25); he advocated for the abandonment of musical sectarianism, yet observed ongoing inter-industry conflicts (Zhu 1944b, 81-86).¹³ This stark disparity between idealism and reality amplified his sense of powerlessness into a tragic vision: “I wish everyone in the world would be as foolish as me.... With more fools like this, national music will naturally thrive in the future” (Zhu 1934, 34).

My research indicates that there is a significant misperception within contemporary academia regarding Zhu Ying. Existing studies predominantly focus on his performance and pedagogical contributions, while his notable achievements in compositional innovation, *pipa* reform, and musical philosophy are generally overlooked. This one-sided understanding not only undervalues Zhu Ying’s individual contributions but may also be a key factor in the marginalisation of the Pinghu School in the modern musical landscape.

In this chapter, I centre my discussion on Zhu Ying, a pivotal figure in the transmission of the Pinghu School during the early 20th century. I first highlight his outstanding contributions across multiple domains, including education, composition, performance, and the reform of the *pipa*, particularly emphasising areas that later research has overlooked. Following this, I examine his musical philosophy and the specific reform measures implemented based on these philosophies. Finally, I present how students nurtured by his musical practice and philosophy exhibited advantages that differed from those found within folk traditions, thus benefiting them as they sought positions within the rising conservatory tradition. My objective is not only to address the research gap concerning a musician marginalised by later historical narratives but also to utilise Zhu Ying as a focal point to illuminate a broader cohort of musicians whose collective spiritual pursuits and artistic explorations constitute an underrecognised undercurrent in the modern

¹³ Vulgar naturalism refers to an artistic tendency that unilaterally and superficially seeks to mechanically, rigidly, and indiscriminately imitate and replicate the superficial aspects of life—particularly the ugly, brutal, or trivial—without selective refinement. This approach neglects the typicality, intellectual depth, and aesthetic value of art, ultimately resulting in works that are superficial, shallow, and even of low artistic taste.

transformation of Chinese music. By rediscovering Zhu Ying, we may provoke a reevaluation of the paradigms used in 20th-century Chinese music history.

2.2 Zhu Ying's Musical Practice

2.2.1 Education

Since 1917, Zhu Ying taught successively at the Beijing Jinhua School of Fine Arts (now the Central Academy of Fine Arts), the Shanghai Conservatory of Music (1927-1944), the Hangzhou School of Arts (1933-1937, part-time), and Hubei Normal University (1945-1947), with a teaching career spanning over 30 years. In the early 20th century, national music education, particularly in higher music education, was still in an exploratory phase. To adapt to a professional teaching model, Zhu Ying developed a unique teaching system tailored to the cultivation of specialised talent.

In selecting a textbook, Zhu adopted an open and inclusive philosophy that transcended the prevailing pedagogical norms of his time. While most contemporaneous performers, as scholar Wu Huijuan notes, “adhered to the teaching lineage of their respective schools” (Wu 2015, 218), Zhu Ying developed a more diverse pedagogical framework that encompassed: 1. the *Hua Collection*; 2. the *Li Collection*; 3. various *pipa* scores and practice methods created by Zhu Ying; 4. various other exquisite *pipa* scores (cited in Luo & Qian 2013, 361).

This framework was not merely assembled but intellectually organised. As attested by his student Chen Gongze, Zhu placed great emphasis on systematic progression and structured instruction. He imparted knowledge to students in a progressive manner, starting from simple to complex, considering factors such as finger technique, length of the pieces, and content comprehension. Consequently, his students felt “interested in learning, with little difficulty” (Chen 1986, 28). In terms of pedagogical methodology, prior to teaching each piece, he provided a comprehensive explanation of its thematic content, emotional expression, and conceptual framework to facilitate holistic understanding. This was followed by segmented instruction, review sessions, and meticulous correction. Upon completion of the entire piece, review sessions were conducted without errors, often involving live demonstrations to reinforce comprehension, demonstrating a commitment to practical application. Furthermore, whether for major or minor assessments, he mandated memorised performance, reflecting rigorous pedagogical standards (*Ibid.*). Consequently, his pedagogical efforts achieved remarkable accomplishments. According to Xiao Yang, during the period 1927-1937, Zhu trained 31 principal students majoring in *pipa* and 43

minor students (Xiao 2016, 76). Among them were a significant number who later became renowned music masters in the history of contemporary national music, such as Cheng Wujia 程午加 (1901-1985, enrolled in 1927), Jiang Fengzhi 蒋风之 (1908-1986, 1927), Ding Shande 丁善德 (1911-1985, 1928), Chen Gongze 陈恭则 (1906-1995, 1930), Tan Xiaolin 谭小麟 (1912-1948, 1931) and Lu Xiutang 陆修棠 (1911-1966, 1933). Additionally, his *pipa* pupils included profoundly influential composers and music educators like He Lüting 贺绿汀 (1903-1999), Liu Xue'an 刘雪庵 (1905-1985), and Wu Yizhou 巫一舟 (1913-1997).

Zhu Ying's contributions extended far beyond classroom instruction; he was also the foundational figure in the development of the national music education system.¹⁴ In 1930, he was elected to the university council at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music and tasked with co-drafting the curriculum and credit system for the National Music program alongside Wu Bochao 吴伯超 (1903-1949, an *erhu* instructor). Through his vigorous advocacy, on May 24, 1930, under the directive of the Ministry of Education (Document No. 1105), the revised regulations of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music officially incorporated “national music” into China's modern higher professional music education system, establishing it as the first formal major in modern Chinese higher music education. Subsequently, he played a pivotal role in formulating a comprehensive curriculum framework, including teaching guidelines, credit allocation, instructional materials, and assessment systems, marking a significant step toward the modernisation of Chinese national music education. As renowned musicologist Qiao Jianzhong pointed out: “The inclusion of national instruments in professional programmes by music institutions marked the first sign of Chinese instrumental music becoming an independent art form in the 20th century” (Qiao 2012, 41). Zhu Ying's dual advancements in pedagogical practices and institutional reforms laid a solid foundation for the establishment of China's first Department of National Music at Shanghai Conservatory of Music in 1956.

2.2.2 Composition

In the early 20th century, there was a significant increase in the creation of *pipa* music compared to the 19th century, yet the performance and creation of *pipa* music still

¹⁴ For further details on Zhu Ying's contribution on the national music education system, see Xiao (2016).

predominantly focused on traditional ancient tunes.¹⁵ Zhu Ying began his creative work in the 1920s. From 1922 to 1935, he composed over 20 pieces for the *pipa*, including 14 solo *pipa* pieces, 4 ensemble pieces for Chinese instruments (Figure 2.2), as well as some simple *pipa* pieces and etudes. In addition, he also composed lyrics and songs. After beginning work at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music in 1927, he studied composition, music theory, and harmony under Huang Zi 黄自 (1904-1983) and Chen Tianhe 陈田鹤 (1911-1955).¹⁶

Year	Location	Form	Title
1922	Beijing	<i>pipa</i> solo	“Autumn Palace Resentment” (<i>Qiu gong yuan</i> , 秋宫怨)
1926	Beijing	<i>pipa</i> solo	“The Song of Everlasting Regret” (<i>Chang hen qu</i> , 长恨曲)
Apr 1928	Shanghai	<i>pipa</i> solo	“Longing in Separation” (<i>Chang xiang si</i> , 长相思)
Apr 1928	Shanghai	<i>pipa</i> solo	“Farewell” (<i>Bie li</i> , 别离)
May 1928	Shanghai	<i>pipa</i> solo	“May 3rd Memorial” (<i>Wusan jinian</i> , 五三纪念)
Winter 1928	Shanghai	<i>pipa</i> solo	“Unyielding in Doing What is Right” (<i>Dang ren bu rang</i> , 当仁不让)
Nov 1929	Shanghai	ensemble	“Night Mooring at Maple Bridge” (<i>Feng qiao ye bo</i> , 枫桥夜泊)
1930	Shanghai	ensemble	“Night on the Sea” (<i>Haishang zhi ye</i> , 海上之夜)
Autumn 1931	Shanghai	<i>pipa</i> solo	“Lament for the Flood” (<i>Ai shuizai</i> , 哀水灾)
Sep 1931	Shanghai	<i>pipa</i> solo	“Unforgettable Melody” (<i>Nanwang qu</i> , 难忘曲)
1932	Shanghai	<i>pipa</i> solo	“The Battle of Songhu” (<i>Songhu xuezhàn</i> , 淞沪血战)
May 1933	Hangzhou	Ensemble	“Rotating Melody” (<i>Xuanzhuan qu</i> , 旋转曲)

¹⁵ In 1916, Shen Zhaozhou (Chongming School) published the *Yingzhou Ancient Tunes*, which included 44 small pieces and one major piece, totalling 45 pieces. See Gao & Zhao (2020) for further details; In 1929, Shen Haochu (Pudong School) published the *Yangzhengxuan Pipa Score*, which included totalling seven traditional pieces. See Zhuang (2020) for further details; In addition, Liu Tianhua, composed three *pipa* pieces called “Song and Dance Prelude” (*Gewuyin*, 歌舞引), “Improved Exercise” (*Gaijin cao*, 改进操), and “Meditation” (*Xu lai*, 虚赖). See Shen (2023) for further details. Except for Liu Tianhua’s works, all the other compositions were extensions of traditional ancient melodies, mainly focusing on literary pieces styles.

¹⁶ Huang Zi is widely regarded as one of the foundational figures of modern Chinese music—a composer, music theorist, and educator. After returning from studies in the United States in 1929, he taught at the Shanghai National Conservatory of Music. There, he established an early professional composition pedagogy system and mentored a generation of outstanding composers. See Qian (2017) for further details; Chen Tianhe was admitted to the Shanghai Conservatory of Music in 1930, where he studied under Huang Zi. See Chang (1985) for further details.

1934	Hangzhou	Solo/Ensemble	“Autumn Sentiments” (<i>Qiu yi</i> , 秋意)
Jan 1935	Hangzhou	Ensemble	“Harmony in Voice” (<i>Tong sheng qu</i> , 同声曲)
1935	Hangzhou	<i>pipa</i> solo	“Layers of Mountains and Peaks” (<i>Ceng luan die zhang</i> , 层峦叠嶂)
n.d.	n.p.	<i>pipa</i> solo	“Joy throughout the World” (<i>Tianxia huan</i> , 天下欢)
n.d.	n.p.	<i>pipa</i> solo	“Seeking Response Melody” (<i>Qiu yi qu</i> , 求意曲)
n.d.	n.p.	<i>pipa</i> solo	“Butterflies Dancing Among Flowers” (<i>Die huawu</i> , 蝶花舞)

Figure 2.2: Music composed by Zhu Ying (Zhang & Han 2017/2013, 214).

Zhu Ying’s *pipa* compositions encompass a diverse range of thematic material, which I have categorised into three primary categories:

- Historical themes, such as “Autumn Palace Regret” and “Eternal Sorrow Song”.
- Personal emotions, exemplified by “Farewell” and “Autumn Sentiments”.
- Current national crises, including “Unforgettable Melody” and “Battle of Songhu.”

Notably, his *pipa* works inspired by social circumstances during times of national hardship stand out. For instance, in the autumn of 1931, provinces in China such as Shandong, Shanxi, and Zhejiang experienced severe flooding, affecting millions of victims. In response, Zhu composed “Lament for the Flood”. The 1932 composition “The Battle of Songhu” was inspired by the tragic history of January 28th of the same year, when Japanese troops landed at Wusongkou to attack Shanghai. Despite months of fierce resistance, Chinese forces were ultimately compelled to accept a humiliating ceasefire. Zhu Ying’s piece served as a patriotic reminder of the national humiliation. The emergence of these patriotically inclined works broke the pattern of other *pipa* performers in the 1920s and 1930s, who mainly focused on performing and composing ancient pieces, and opened up new ideas for the development of *pipa* composition. In the context of the “Music for National Salvation” (*yinyue jiuguo*, 音乐救国) movement that emerged in the 1930s, composers primarily focused on creating songs, with Zhu Ying emerging as a pioneer in utilising large-scale national instrumental music to depict contemporary themes.¹⁷

¹⁷ The “Music for National Salvation” movement emerged in 1930s China as a widespread popular music campaign. Musicians and intellectuals consciously directed musical composition and performance to support the Anti-Japanese War, transforming songs into rallying cries for resistance and symbols of national spirit. See Yu (2015) for the historical discourse of the movement.

Zhu Ying is the pioneer of the literary and military style (*wenwuqu*, 文武曲). Prior to Zhu Ying's work as a composer, *pipa* repertory was habitually divided into two types: literary pieces and military pieces. Literary pieces were entirely lyrical, while military pieces were entirely martial. Zhu Ying initiated the combination of these styles in a single contemporary *pipa* composition, founding the literary and military style, which has subsequently become widely adopted. Zhu Ying's composition "Eternal Sorrow Song" pioneered the new combination (Zhu 1931, 47). The literary and military style integrated lyrical melodies with intense conflicts, thereby significantly enhancing the expressive capacity and narrative dimension of *pipa* music. This advancement had far-reaching implications for contemporary *pipa* artistry: it established a structural paradigm of combining and alternating strength and softness in large-scale *pipa* compositions. Moreover, it promoted a comprehensive development of performance techniques that embody both literary and martial qualities, decisively influencing the modern transformation of *pipa* pedagogy and performance aesthetics.

2.2.3 Performance

In the 1920s and 1930s, the inheritors of the five *pipa* schools centred in Shanghai produced numerous renowned masters. Musicians such as Wang Yuting and Li Tingsong from the Wang School, Shen Zhaozhou and Liu Tianhua from the Wuxi School, and Zhou Shaomei 周少梅 (1885-1938) and Fan Shaoyun from the Chongming School all garnered high acclaim in the music community.¹⁸ However, in an era where famous musicians were blossoming, Zhu Ying distinguished himself through his transcendent *pipa* performance skills, earning the moniker "*pipa* maestro" (*shengshou*, 圣手) from his peers. These skills meant he was regularly selected to act as a representative of Chinese tradition for visiting international guests. For instance, during a reception following the visit of French music critic Dr Louis Laloy (1874-1944), Zhu Ying performed on the *pipa*. The school publication reported, "Mr Zhu Ying's *pipa* performance revealed the true essence of national music to outsiders" (cited in Luo & Qian 2017/1931, 243). Or, in 1934, the Russian composer Alexander Tcherepnine came to the Conservatory to hold a piano concert. After the concert, at Tcherepnine's request, Zhu played his own composition "The Battle of Songhu" and the traditional piece "Xunyang *Pipa*." Tcherepnine was highly impressed by Zhu's exceptional

¹⁸ See Wu (2014) for further details on their bibliography.

pipa playing skills, praising it as “the sound of a master, extraordinary, and especially captivating” (cited in Qin 2017/1934, 537).

Zhu Ying was also the earliest modern Chinese musician documented as having performed the *pipa* on the international diplomatic stage (Xiao 2014, 74). During the Washington Naval Conference of 1921-1922, which shaped the post-World War I Asia-Pacific geopolitical order, the Chinese delegation engaged in complex diplomatic negotiations aimed at reclaiming sovereignty over Shandong Province.¹⁹ Recognising the significance of this issue, the Chinese government dispatched a sizable delegation comprising over 130 representatives, with the strategic aim of leveraging multilateral diplomacy to influence national fate. As a senior member of the delegation, Zhu Ying not only performed the *pipa* at official diplomatic events but also organised concert performances, receiving widespread acclaim and earning the reputation of “national treasure” (Figure 2. 3). Within this high-stakes diplomatic arena—marked by national dignity and international scrutiny—Zhu Ying’s musical performances transcended mere artistic displays, serving as a deliberate and successful form of cultural diplomacy.



Figure 2.3: Portrait of Zhu Ying playing *pipa* in the United States in 1922 (cited in Li 2014, 109). The inscription in the upper left corner reads: “Pinghu Zhu Xingqing playing the *pipa* sculpture; painted by the American friend Bortligé and inscribed by Yuan Kewen”.

Zhu Ying’s ability to represent the highest level of national music and succeed in diplomatic settings stemmed from his exquisite, highly expressive artistic mastery. He was

¹⁹ Also known as the “Pacific Conference,” this was a significant international forum aimed at recalibrating geopolitical relations and multilateral naval restrictions within the Asia-Pacific region; See Spence (1990) for further details.

particularly renowned for the refinement of his literary pieces, exemplified by his exceptionally detailed interpretation of “Xunyang *Pipa*”. He emphasised “beauty, softness, subtlety, and delicacy as the foundation, with lyrical essence taking precedence” (Chen 1986, 29), employing unique techniques to create a lingering, ethereal aesthetic that seemed to hover in the air long after the notes were played.²⁰ Meanwhile, his martial pieces performance was described by Chen Gongze as “dynamic and forceful, possessing an overwhelming momentum. However, it does not merely evoke a chaotic martial display; it retains a gentle elegance, embodying a poetic quality within the martial expression” (*Ibid*). This comprehensive and highly skilled artistry not only garnered high praise from industry professionals but also deeply resonated with the general audience. As journalist Huang Pingxun of the *Southeast Daily* (*Dongnan ribao*, 东南日报) recounted after witnessing a concert: “At the conclusion of the piece, the entire hall was silent, as if they had entered a meditative state. All listeners were immersed in this transcendent music, their spirits seemingly purified” (Huang 1935, June 8).

2.2.4 A Revolution in *Pipa* Transmission

Innovations in Performance Techniques

Zhu Ying attached great importance to the *pipa*’s playing technique, and pointed out that: “studying the *pipa*, the most difficult aspect is the finger technique (...) However, nowadays, most learners do not have a complete understanding of the finger technique, and their skills do not last long” (cited in Han & Zhang 2013, 211-12). In light of this, he published an article titled “Explanation of All Right- and Left-Hand Fingerings for the *Pipa*”, 琵琶左右手全部指法记号说明 (Zhu 2017/1928, 7; hereafter, the “Fingerings for the *Pipa*”), becoming the first modern Chinese musician to organise and analyse *pipa* finger techniques systematically.

This work summarised and categorised 87 techniques for playing the *pipa*, including 70 right-hand fingerings and 17 left-hand fingerings, and introduced 16 entirely new fingering strategies. Zhu stated his purpose for organising fingering techniques as follows:

I will detail various fingering methods and highlight the differences in markings across different schools. This will ensure that anyone reading any *pipa* score can understand it. Additionally, I will expand on many exquisite techniques that others may not know, which are absent from existing scores, to prevent them from being lost and to break the tradition of

²⁰ Unfortunately, no recordings of Zhu Ying’s performances appear to have survived, but we can refer to the version performed by Zhu Ying’s student, Fan Boyan, based on Zhu Ying’s revised score: https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1gY4y1N7sE/?spm_id_from=333.337.search-card.all.click&vd_source=92841bc271dcdb3a839db12045976c11, accessed on 10 February 2026.

secrecy. I hope that fellow enthusiasts and experts will not dismiss this as mere nonsense. (*Ibid.*)

The “Fingerings for the *Pipa*” consisted of three parts: symbols for techniques, names of techniques, and instructions for performing the techniques. He not only provided detailed explanations for each fingering, but also noted the differences in symbols used in different schools’ musical scores, making it easier for learners to identify them when reading any *pipa* score.

The sixteen new fingerings encompass techniques such as left-hand *le* 勒, *tuo* 托, as well as right-hand methods like *lunsao* 轮扫, *quangun* 圈滚, and *nian* 撵 (Figure 2.4). More importantly, he drew inspiration from Western musical notation and introduced symbols such as “*accelerando*,” “*diminuendo*,” and “*rest*” in the right-hand fingerings, making the *pipa* notation more detailed. It is noteworthy that Liu Tianhua’s 1930 publication, *Mei Lanfang Song Score* (*Mei Lanfang gegupu*, 梅兰芳歌曲谱), also employed Western musical terminology, but Zhu Ying’s approach predates this by over a year and a half—his article was published in May 1928—indicating that he was at the forefront of modernising *pipa* notation. In a cultural environment where many musicians were extremely secretive, often withholding knowledge even from their disciples, Zhu made a significant contribution to the preservation of *pipa* heritage through his practice. In modern times, the techniques of *tuo*, *lunsao*, and *le* created by Zhu, remain widely used and have become important techniques of the *pipa*.

Zhu Ying’s Innovation of Finger Techniques		
Left hand	Semitone	An indication is placed in the notation when the left hand presses a fret or ledge that produces a semitone.
	<i>Le</i>	<i>le</i> involves the left index finger sliding along the string from a higher to a lower fret while the right-hand plays <i>lun</i> .
	<i>Tuo</i>	Placing the left thumb against the string and sliding it from a higher fret downwards to a lower position, while the right hand simultaneously plays <i>lun</i> .
Right hand	<i>Lun sao</i>	Play <i>sao</i> with the index finger by, then immediately play with the middle finger, ring finger, little finger, and thumb, connecting them into a complete <i>lun</i> .
	<i>Quan lun</i>	Play with thumb and index finger together, drawing a circle from the fourth string to the first (index finger) and then from the first to the fourth (thumb).
	<i>Gou da dai lun</i> 勾搭带轮	Beginning with <i>gou</i> fourth string with the index finger, immediately followed by a <i>lun</i> played by the other four fingers on the first string, and concludes with a quick succession of a <i>tan</i> and a <i>gou</i> on the

		same string.
	<i>Nian</i>	Intensive playing <i>tan</i> and <i>tiao</i> at a <i>lun</i> -like speed.
	<i>Zhuan kuai</i> 转快	The preceding slow section transitions into a fast section.
	<i>Zhuan man</i> 转慢	The preceding fast section transitions into a slow section.
	Accelerando 渐快	To play a passage, gradually increasing the tempo from slow to fast.
	Ritardando 渐慢	To play a passage, gradually decreasing the tempo from fast to slow.
	Diminuendo 渐远声	To play, gradually decreasing the volume from loud to soft.
	Crescendo 渐近声	To play, gradually increasing the volume from soft to loud.
	Pause 休止	After playing, a brief pause of approximately three to four seconds.
	Fermata 延长	When this symbol appears in the <i>gongchepu</i> , it indicates that the note should be sustained or prolonged.

Figure 2.4: Zhu Ying's innovation of finger techniques (Zhu 2017/1928, 7).

Improving the Notation Format

In the early 20th century, much traditional Chinese music was recorded using the *gongchepu*. This system is a distinctive form of musical notation that employs Chinese characters such as *shang* 上, *chi* 尺, *gong* 工, *fan* 凡, *liu* 六, *wu* 五, and *yi* 乙 to denote pitch, supplemented by *ban-yan* 板眼 symbols to indicate meter by marking strong and weak beats. However, as it generally does not specify detailed rhythmic patterns or the exact duration of each note, *gongchepu* captures not the precise performance rendition of a piece, but rather its basic melodic framework and skeletal notes (Figure 2.5). In such a notational system, the transmission of music heavily relies on oral transmission and mental impartation (*kouchuan xinshou*, 口传心授).²¹ Due to varying interpretative approaches among different schools or performers regarding rhythmic articulation and ornamentation of the core score of a composition, multiple versions often emerge. While *gongchepu* and oral instruction effectively preserved the essence of the music, certain nationalist musicians felt that it constrained the widespread dissemination and standardised transmission of the compositions.

²¹ The essence of traditional *pipa* instruction lay in *kouchuan xinshou*, a holistic pedagogical mode that depended not on fixed notation but on the master's direct demonstration and the disciple's intuitive grasp of the musical essence.

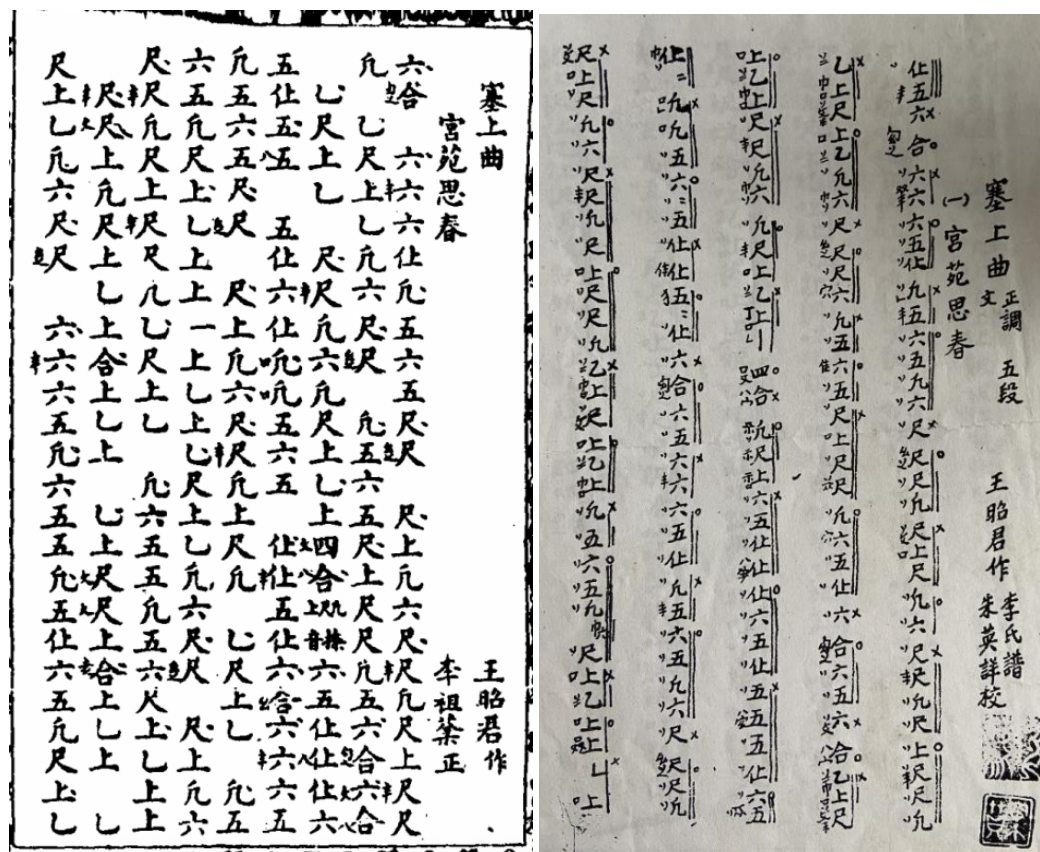


Figure 2.5: Comparison of Li Fangyuan's version (left) and Zhu Ying's (right) annotated version of "Song at the Frontier".

Therefore, Zhu integrated details from Western staff notation (and its derivative cipher musical notation [*jianpu*, 简谱]), for instance, applying Western rhythmic markings to the *gongchepu* by adding short vertical lines to indicate the duration of each note equivalent to the rhythmic lines beneath the notes in cipher notation, thereby standardising rhythmic notation (Figure 2.5). Meanwhile, on the foundation of Li Fangyuan's score, he meticulously annotated and refined notes that were expected in actual performance but not indicated in the original score. By comparing Figures 2.6 and 2.7, we observe that Zhu's version exhibits greater rhythmic complexity. The embellishments and decorative notes preserve a more complete representation of the Pinghu School's musical heritage. Moreover, Zhu Ying incorporated symbols for right-hand fingering techniques and string-order indications to the left of the *gongchepu* characters (Figure 2.7). This series of measures transformed the performance process, which originally relied heavily on personal experience and oral transmission, into a visualisable system, thereby making the transmission of performance techniques more precise and standardised. This initiative by Zhu marks a significant reform in advancing traditional Chinese notation towards what he

and his contemporaries saw as a more scientific and accurate system, and provides a solid basis for future explorations of the evolution of the Pinghu School's *pipa* style.



Figure 2.6: Staff notation transcription of Li Fangyuan's version of "Song at the Frontier".



Figure 2.7: Staff notation transcription of Zhu Ying's version of "Song at the Frontier". Selected performance annotations in the score include right-hand fingering symbols, such as "♯" for *danlun* 单轮 and "𐄣" for *shaunglun* 双轮, and string indications, such as "1" for the first string and "4" for the fourth string.²²

Openly Utilise the Left Hand's Little Finger and Thumb

Historically, the *pipa* technique involved not using the little finger and thumb of the left hand to press the strings. This was documented as early as 1819 in the *Hua Collection*: "When pressing the strings with the left hand, only the thumb and little finger are not used" (Hua 1976/1819). Chen Zemin recalled that his tutor Cao Anhe emphasised:

In traditional *pipa* playing technique, the use of the little finger is prohibited. Therefore, when performing traditional repertoire, it is necessary to adhere to this rule. "Song and Dance Prelude" is a composition by Liu Tianhua, but he still follows the traditional left-hand technique. We should respect Mr Liu's requirements for the performance of the music when playing it. (Chen 2013, 141)

According to this commentary, even Liu Tianhua, who upheld the idea of integration of Chinese and Western styles, still followed traditional *pipa* techniques. In contemporary times, not only is the little finger used in *pipa* technique, but the thumb is occasionally employed as well. However, under such traditional strictures, a silent revolution quietly unfolded—from prohibitions of the little finger and thumb to contemporary techniques like ten-finger coordination, the left-hand techniques of the *pipa* underwent a radical transformation. Few are aware that the first to break free from these constraints and to introduce the use of the little finger on the strings was Zhu Ying.

In his article, Zhu Ying astutely identified the factional disputes within traditional *pipa* playing techniques among folk musicians: one used the three left-hand fingers excluding the little finger and thumb, and another used the four left-hand fingers excluding

²² For the symbols corresponding to fingering techniques and their performance methods, please refer to Zhu (2017/1928).

the thumb. Both groups held mutual disdain, each considering the other's technique illegitimate (Zhu 1944b, 82). Faced with this divergence, Zhu Ying did not blindly adhere to any tradition but instead traced its origins. He analysed that the reason why the *pipa* does not use the little finger is because it imitates the *qin*—the *qin*'s strings are thick, and the insufficient strength of the little finger led to its omission. However, the *pipa*'s strings are thin, and using the little finger is viable. He lamented:

The *pipa*'s fingering patterns are numerous, even with the five left-hand fingers, I still feel it's not enough. Why would we only use three fingers when we clearly have five? If I had six or seven fingers to use, I couldn't imagine how many complex and ingenious musical phrases could be developed. (*Ibid.*)

Therefore, Zhu Ying boldly defied traditional conventions by publicly asserting, "My technique is different from ordinary people; in pressing the strings with the left hand, not only do I use the little finger but also the thumb" (*Ibid.*). This pioneering claim fundamentally challenged centuries-old limitations of the *pipa*'s left-hand technique, significantly expanding the expressive potential of the instrument.

Zhu Ying's innovation in left-hand technique represented a pivotal turning point in the history of *pipa* art, significantly expanding the instrument's technical and expressive potential. This advancement subsequently became fully integrated into the performance methodology, remaining an indispensable foundation for contemporary *pipa* execution today.

Open up the Use of the Right-hand Technique Lunzhi

The technique known as *lunzhi* 轮指 or *lun* is one of the *pipa*'s most fundamental fingering techniques. *Lunzhi* involves using the fingertips of the five fingers of the right hand to repeatedly pluck one or more strings, creating a continuous sound with similar volume, tone, and duration. There are two variations of *lunzhi* in traditional teaching: *xiachulun* 下出轮 and *shangchulun* 上出轮. In *xiachulun*, the technique involves starting with the little finger, ring finger, middle finger, and index finger plucking the string from the player's left to right, followed by the thumb plucking inward from right to left. In contrast, the *shangchulun* technique follows the reverse order (Lin 2002, 72).

According to Zhu Ying, the Southern School mostly used the *shangchulun* technique rather than the *xiachulun* technique, while the Northern School mostly used the *xiachulun*

technique (though some Northern musicians also used the *shangchulun*).²³ However, members of each school criticised and belittled the other's playing techniques. Addressing this phenomenon, Zhu Ying pointed out:

The *pipa* is a symmetrical instrument, so its fingerings should also be symmetrical. If someone plays with the *shangchulun* technique, they must also learn the *xiachulun* technique. If someone can only perform one type of technique, they cannot claim that their skill set is comprehensive. (Zhu 1944b, 82)

Analysing from the perspective of playing principles, he explained that the *shangchulun* and *xiachulun* techniques yield distinct tonal qualities due to differences in force direction and application. The *shangchulun* produces a refined, soft timbre with a balanced intensity but a weaker volume, making it suitable for lyrical pieces. In contrast, the *xiachulun* delivers a rich, robust sound with greater volume, though it often leads to uneven intensity among the fingers, making it ideal for martial compositions. Thus, Zhu Ying emphasised the importance of flexibly applying techniques in accordance with the character of the musical composition. He cites lyrical examples such as “Xunyang Moonlit Night” and “Chen Sui Ancient Melody”, noting that “without mastering the *xiachulun* technique, one cannot capture the intricacies of this repertoire. Conversely, the martial piece “General Man’s Command” best utilises the *shangchulun* technique (*Ibid.*).

During a conservative and insular era in traditional music, Zhu openly criticised a social phenomenon that he saw as hindering the transmission and development of the *pipa*. Although the technique of *xiachulun* has nearly vanished in contemporary performance practice, his flexible application of technical methods driven by musical expressive requirements continues to offer valuable reference and inspiration for the development of *pipa* artistry.

2.3 Zhu Ying’s Musical Ideology

Zhu Ying’s musical philosophy was shaped amidst the tumultuous cultural transformation of early 20th-century Chinese music. Since the opening of Shanghai in 1843, Western music had been rapidly introduced through church schools and modern academies, establishing the city as a major hub for the dissemination of Western music in modern China. By 1927, with the founding of the Shanghai National Conservatory of Music, Shanghai had emerged as one of Asia’s most vibrant centres of musical and cultural activity. It was in this context that

²³ The terms Southern School and Northern School referenced here denote the macro-regional stylistic distinctions within *pipa* art during the first half of the 20th century, distinct from the names for schools established post-1953 by Cao Anhe, which are based on lineage and pedagogical traditions. See Chinese National Academy of Arts (2021) for more information.

Zhu Ying moved south to teach, immersing himself in an international metropolis where Eastern and Western traditions converged and collided. He was deeply influenced by the institution's educational mission to "introduce world music on one hand and engage in organising Chinese music on the other, aiming for unity, cultivating national beauty and the spirit of harmony, and its art" (Shanghai Conservatory of Music's official website, n.d./1927).

After cultivating a foundation in national music in Beijing, Zhu Ying further integrated Western music theory in Shanghai and actively engaged in contemporary musicological scholarship. In 1930, he co-founded China's first academic journal on music, *Yue Yi* 乐艺, which served as a platform on which he could systematically articulate his in-depth reflections on the future of Chinese music. Over the subsequent decade, Zhu published dozens of articles in this and various other journals, addressing topics such as national music, music education, musical composition, and the reform of the *pipa*, thereby providing a comprehensive portrayal of a musician rooted in tradition yet globally minded, committed to artistic innovation, and deeply concerned with national cultural destiny.

2.3.1 National Music is Not Backward, but Underdeveloped

As Western music gained dominance in China and attracted increasing interest, criticism of national music also grew. In 1903, Chen Shiyi 陈世宜 (1884-1959) published "On the Reformation of Chinese Music" (Chen 2004/1903, 193), articulating the notion of "China's musical backwardness", serving as an early articulation of this critique.²⁴ During the New Culture Movement, this critical perspective became increasingly widespread. The head of the Shanghai National Conservatory of Music, Xiao Youmei, explicitly stated that he believed "national music was at least a thousand years behind Western music" (Xiao 1990/1938, 469); theorists like Qing Zhu 青主 (1893-1959) even considered China "to be a country without music" (Qing 1931, 58).²⁵ Coupled with similar viewpoints from these socially elite musicians, such as Huang Zi and Zeng Zhimin, these perspectives collectively established the "Chinese musical backwardness thesis" as a dominant discourse in

²⁴ Chen Shiyi also known by his penname Chen Feishi 陈匪石, was a Chinese lyricist, scholar, and educator from Jiangning (present-day Nanjing), Jiangsu province. For a seminal discussion on "On the Reformation of Chinese Music", see Zhang (2003, 30-33).

²⁵ Qing Zhu, originally named Liao Shangguo 廖尚果, was a modern Chinese composer and music aesthetician. For more information about Qing, see Liao (2005, 35-44).

contemporary musical thought, reconfiguredly impacting the reassessment of traditional musical and cultural values.

In response to this trend, Zhu Ying repeatedly used the expression “undeveloped national music” (Zhu 1939c, 37) in his articles. These two statements are easily confused in terms of definition and concept, leading people to believe that Zhu also belonged to the school of thought that considered national music backwards. Chen Shiyi’s “backwards” (*luohou*, 落后) refers to falling behind one’s peers in progress and is used in comparison with a reference point. Zhu’s term, “undeveloped” (*bufada*, 不发达), refers to something that has not been fully developed relative to its potential. Therefore, Zhu’s viewpoint was that national music was not necessarily inferior to Western music, but simply that it had yet to be fully developed.

Compared to many musicians who critiqued Chinese music solely through Western musical standards, Zhu Ying adopted a more objective and rational comparative perspective based on an in-depth study of Western music. He neither blindly venerated tradition nor arbitrarily dismissed Western music, stating: “both Chinese and Western music have their own strengths. Although Western music has its merits, national music should not be underestimated” (Zhu 1937a, 12). In his article, there is a brilliant description by Zhu regarding the comparison of Chinese and Western music:

From my understanding, Chinese plucked music is complex, with intricate finger techniques and countless variations. Western bowed music is precious, with a wide range of tones and constant changes. In terms of other wind instruments, national music excels in tone quality, while Western music triumphs with its multitude of sounds. In terms of composition, national music is often delicate and sentimental, while Western music is energetic and powerful. However, it is important not to generalise, as vocal techniques in national music require mastery of over ten different variations in vocal size and range, from the highest to the lowest notes. Western music focuses on projecting a loud voice, with each person assigned to a specific vocal part, with a maximum of eight parts requiring eight singers. However, the tranquillity of national music does not necessarily mean its sound is inferior to Western music. (Zhu 1937a, 12)

Based on this stance, Zhu Ying identified that the root cause of the challenges facing traditional Chinese music—even among musicians—lay in the lack of a “genuine understanding” of national music. He emphatically asserted that “authentic understanding” constituted the fundamental pathway for the development of Chinese music, and subsequently proposed a systematic framework for the modernisation of traditional Chinese music, encapsulated by four primary strategic avenues: 1. Rewarding: he advocated for preferential incentives for researchers and innovators of national music; 2. Promoting: he called for the establishment of specialised music schools in major cities and music

departments within universities; 3. Organising: he emphasised the systematic compilation of scores, instruments, and theories, along with the creation of music museums; 4.

Popularising: he recommended that concert programs include Chinese explanations to advance public music education.

Zhu Ying's substitution of "underdeveloped" for "backward," along with his proposed systematic set of reforms, collectively delineated a culturally conscious and rational approach to the revitalisation of national music. In an era dominated by the "backwardness" discourse, Zhu Ying's ideas addressed fundamental issues of how non-Western cultures navigate modernisation and self-renewal.

2.3.2 The Reform of National Music

After the New Culture Movement, faced with the strong impact of both Western music and the constraints of traditional Chinese music, there was a strong movement for the "reform of national music" (*gaijin guoyue*, 改进国乐).²⁶ Even before this trend became mainstream, however, Zhu Ying had already begun his own explorations. As early as 1911, when the movement for the reform of national music had not yet gained mainstream acceptance, Zhu Ying proactively travelled to Beijing to specialise in national music, exploring feasible methods for its modernisation (Zhu 1935, June 19). After over a decade of scholarly accumulation, he enrolled at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music in 1927, ultimately gaining the platform to realise his musical vision.

Although Zhu Ying and contemporaneous reformers both advocated for "Sino-Western integration" and the systematic study of Western musical principles, their proposed approaches diverged significantly. For instance, Qing Zhu emphasised that "understanding the essence of music required drawing inspiration from Western paradigms" (Qing 1933, 5), thereby establishing a foundational direction from a cognitive and theoretical standpoint. In the field of composition, Xiao Youmei highlighted that the key to overcoming the challenges of national music lay in "actively promoting Western musical models and adopting advanced Western compositional techniques" (Xiao 1990/1935, 433); He Lüting also advocated for the utilization of "exquisitely crafted Western musical instruments with

²⁶ The reform of national music refers to the movement emerged in the 1920s and 1930s. Influenced by the "democracy" and "science" tenets of the New Culture Movement, Chinese musicians like Liu Tianhua and Wang Guangqi 王光祈 (1892-1936) initiated a reformist endeavor to counter the impact of Western music and revitalise national musical traditions. The core philosophy centered on integrating Western musical theories and methodologies to systematise, research, and enhance indigenous Chinese musical forms. See Feng (2007) for further details.

established historical value” (He 1999/1934, 19) as models in the reform of Chinese musical instruments. Collectively, these positions established a reform paradigm centred on Western models, emphasising learning and adaptation to transform national music and foster the development of a new Chinese musical idiom.

Zhu Ying’s assertions, meanwhile, demonstrated a balanced perspective. He stated: “Music knows no borders, both Chinese and Western traditions should be valued equally, without harbouring biases” (Zhu 1937a, 12). Zhu called upon Chinese music educators to prioritise national music first, followed by Western music, ensuring that both disciplines receive equal attention. He believed that individuals educated within a system that values both Eastern and Western music would find it easier to innovate and create new forms of national music, having a comprehensive understanding of both traditions.

To implement this principle, Zhu Ying engaged in multifaceted practical applications. Theoretically, he commenced in-depth studies of both Chinese and Western compositional techniques from 1911, culminating in the 1943 publication of “Theoretical Composition Methods of National Music” (Zhu 1943, 154-57), which became one of the earliest systematic treatises on the theoretical foundations of national music composition. Moreover, he charted two parallel practical approaches: “organising old scores” and “compiling new scores”. Regarding “organising old scores”, he proposed that “advocating traditional Chinese music must begin with organisation, and organisation must start with improving musical notation” (Zhu 1930c, 37). He thus reformed traditional *gongchepu*, drawing upon Western notation to introduce rhythmic markings from the staff system (see 2.2.4). Concerning “compiling new scores,” he consistently composed new *pipa* pieces from the 1920s onwards. His innovations in compositional techniques and subject matter constituted the most direct creative application of his theoretical framework (see 2.2.2).

He openly admitted that his motivation was purely to “enhance national music to prevent it from being ridiculed as a musicless nation by outsiders” (Zhu 1935c, June 20th). This sense of mission, driven by cultural confidence and national pride, ultimately propelled him to transcend his role as a thinker and become a practitioner. Amidst the prevailing tide of Westernisation, he left an indelible mark by charting a path for the improvement of national music.

2.3.3 Breaking the Habit of Secrecy

Reformers often cited imperfect notation as a primary factor hindering the transmission of traditional Chinese music in the early 20th century. Chen Zhongzi described this inadequacy

“significantly contributed to the decline and stagnation of national music” (cited in Feng 2007, 124). Similarly, Xiao Youmei noted, “If instructors lack proper methods, musicians primarily learn pieces by ear, neglecting the study of scores. Consequently, when a musician passes away, the music perishes with them” (Xiao 2007, 666). Zhu Ying revealed the deeper socio-cultural issue—the hindrance of music dissemination caused by the mentality of “secrecy” (*shoumi*, 守秘). He sharply pointed out: “Today, our national music is not well-developed, and the lack of standardisation and even loss of music scores is all due to this: secrecy” (Zhu 1937a, 11).

The practice of “guarding secrecy” is a deeply ingrained cultural phenomenon in the transmission of traditional Chinese skills, extending far beyond *pipa* music to encompass martial arts, opera, traditional Chinese medicine, craft arts, and many other fields. Its roots lie in the structure of traditional handicraft societies, where mastery of a skill was the essential means of livelihood for both master and apprentice. This reality gave rise to the survival anxiety encapsulated in the proverb, “Teach the apprentice fully, and the master starves” (*jiaohui tudi, e si shifu*, 教会徒弟, 饿死师傅). Consequently, masters often held back a final trick even from their own direct disciples. While this conservative mindset may have preserved a master’s authority and livelihood in the short term, it ultimately became the crux of why countless unique techniques vanished without a trace. Zhu expressed strong disapproval of the situation, stating:

Even if there are music scores, teachers keep their secrets, unfairly withholding detailed explanations (...) They each excel in their own secret methods, boasting about their own abilities. (...) Different Schools, jealous of each other, engage in mutual slander. (...) Everyone keeps their own secrets, refusing to teach people outside their own students, and not seeking advice and learning from other talented teachers. (Zhu 1930c, 37)

Thus, he issued a thought-provoking appeal:

I hope that musicians of our generation will not imitate vulgar people, with their secretive methods, jealous attitudes, the evil of stealing and modifying scores, claiming knowledge without truly understanding, boasting of abilities without being capable, defaming others while promoting oneself, and feeling ashamed while amusing oneself with ridiculing fellow musicians. We should avoid the suspicion of jealousy among peers, and only through the collective efforts of like-minded individuals can the promotion of national music be achieved. We should support and inspire each other, unite, and advocate for national music. If it is beyond the ability of individuals, then it should be undertaken collectively, and if the achievement cannot be accomplished overnight, the plan should be long-term. The rise of national music is something to look forward to. (Zhu 1930c, 39)

Zhu set an example through his own stance. He studied under more than twenty renowned masters from both the Northern and Southern schools, assimilating their diverse expertise, publicly stating: “Even if you only know one superb technique or can play one exquisite

piece of music, you can become a teacher” (Zhu 1935b, June 19). In 1929, Zhu stated in the fingerings explanation of his composition “Night Mooring at Maple Bridge”: “Common fingerings are widely known, but I will provide detailed answers to any questions from readers who are unclear, without keeping secrets” (Zhu 1930a, 7). He compiled and published the “Fingerings for the *Pipa*” to “prevent the risk of losing tradition and break secrecy” (Zhu 2017/1928, 8). Zhu’s colleague Liao Fushu also mentioned that:

His students can testify that he completely abandoned the old practice of masters keeping something hidden from their apprentices. Even when I, a layman, read descriptions of *pipa* performances in poetry, he would patiently explain whenever I sought his advice. (Liao 1991, 79-80)

In Zhu Ying’s model, the role of the master musician evolved from being a guardian of secret techniques to that of a public educator and systematiser, transforming intangible personal artistry into a tangible, reproducible curriculum. This shift was fundamental to the modernisation of national music education, enabling it to meet the demands of its new institutional settings. His advocacy and personal practice provided a pioneering model for the rising generations of conservatory-based educators.

2.3.4 The Social Function of Music

Chinese traditional intellectuals have historically emphasised the social functions of music, viewing it as a reflection of the sociopolitical climate and the rise and fall of nations. Music was entrusted with the significant responsibilities of both transforming societal norms and upholding state authority. Zhu Ying (like Li Fangyuan before him) exemplified this perspective, placing great importance on the social role of music and possessing a profound awareness of its critical significance for the stability and governance of the nation. He repeatedly asserts in his writings, “Music closely relates to politics; it can govern a nation or influence societal norms” (Zhu 1937a, 11). He cites the Confucian classic *Book of Rites* (*Liji*, 礼记)—“we must discriminate sounds in order to know the airs; the airs in order to know the music; and the music in order to know (the character of) the government” (Zhu 1935, 24)—advocating that music should serve as a fundamental aspect of national cultivation and a means of national salvation. As a music educator, he sharply criticised the education sector for its complicity in China’s poverty and the vulnerability of its people, arguing that it failed to instill a sense of patriotism and that learners had not fulfilled their national responsibilities.

Nonetheless, following the New Culture Movement, the ideological currents of “science and democracy” swept through the intellectual sphere, prompting a profound

reevaluation of traditional Chinese musical philosophy. A group of musicians, exemplified by Qing Zhu, issued sharp critiques, arguing that “Confucian ritual and music doctrines imposed significant constraints on Chinese music, fundamentally serving political authority” (Qing 1933, 2). They strongly advocated for the artistic autonomy of music, opposing its subjugation to political agendas. Simultaneously, they asserted that “music should not be monopolised by literati” (*Ibid.*), as such control would perpetually categorise music as subordinate to ritual, thereby hindering its independent evolution. Under this novel ideological framework, Zhu Ying’s assertion that the relationship between music and politics is intrinsically interconnected was naturally perceived by some as a residual feudal remnant that needed to be eradicated.

However, a thorough analysis reveals that Zhu Ying’s original intent was not to subordinate music to authoritarian dominance but stemmed from a pedagogical sense of responsibility coupled with an artist’s patriotic fervour. He expressed grave concern in his inquiries:

Our cohort of 54 graduates [the total number of graduates from the Shanghai Conservatory of Music over the past decade] faces a daunting question: how many regions within China’s vast territory can we effectively contribute to in order to transform societal norms and support political initiatives? This question is somewhat alarming. (Zhu 1937b, 45)

This awareness of crisis motivated him to issue a resolute call:

Henceforth, we must intensify our efforts tenfold—accelerate our pace tenfold—dedicate ourselves tenfold to expanding music education across the mainland, and shoulder the responsibility of music pedagogy with resilience, aiming to disseminate it throughout China. We should not wait a century for societal reform to achieve the goal of cultural transformation. (*Ibid.*)

Zhu Ying also demonstrated his commitment to reform through action. Since the Japanese invasion of Manchuria on September 18, 1931, the anti-Japanese patriotic movement intensified.²⁷ He actively engaged in the practical application of “Music for National Salvation,” composing a series of *pipa* works centred on patriotism, such as “Unforgettable Melody” and “Battle of Songhu”. His contributions positioned him as a pioneering figure in using traditional Chinese instrumental music to embody and promote nationalistic themes. According to Xiao Yang’s analysis, among the 22 national music concerts (1930-1937) at Shanghai Conservatory of Music, there were 22 *pipa* solo performances featuring 16 *pipa* compositions, of which 11 were newly composed by Zhu

²⁷ Japanese invasion of Manchuria also known as the Mukden Incident, refers to the military occupation of Northeast China (Manchuria) by the Imperial Japanese Army beginning on September 18, 1931. This event marked the start of Japan’s large-scale aggression against China and led to the establishment of the puppet state of Manchukuo in 1932.

Ying (Xiao 2016, 76). This reflects the concerted efforts of Zhu Ying and his colleagues at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music to utilise music consciously as a response to national crises and to fulfil the social functions of art during a period of cultural and political upheaval. Therefore, Zhu Ying’s advocacy of “music as a means of national salvation” was not merely an empty political slogan but a pragmatic philosophy rooted in cultural responsibility and educational mission.

2.4 The Post-Zhu Ying Era

According to the “Transmission Diagram of the Pinghu School” organised by Li Qinghui, it is evident that after Li Fangyuan, Zhu Ying almost single-handedly undertook the entirety of the transmission of Pinghu *pipa* artistry, playing a decisive role in bridging the past and future (Li 2014, 29; Figure 2.8). Since the 1930s, a significant number of professional students trained by Zhu Ying advanced the Pinghu School through teaching, performance, and composition into a stage of maturity. One could argue that without Zhu Ying, the *pipa* art of the Pinghu School might have stagnated, and contemporary society would lack the opportunity to explore such a valuable art form.

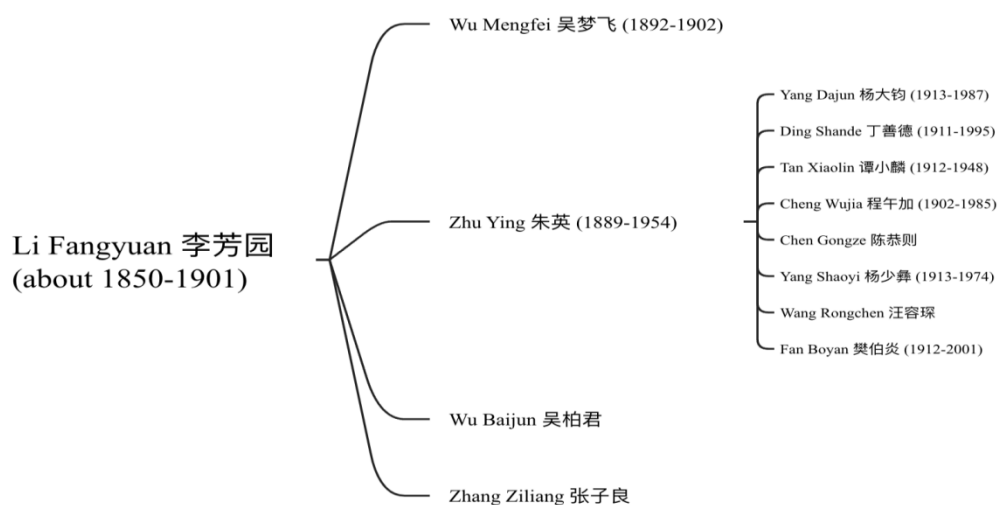


Figure 2.8: Transmission Diagram of the Pinghu School (Li 2014, 29).

Once Zhu Ying began teaching at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music in 1927, he cultivated a group of professional performers whose musical activities became a key foundation for the development of *pipa* artistry in the 1930s. During a time when the music education system was not well-established, students who chose to receive higher education at a music conservatory generally came from the intellectual class. They possessed a certain level of cultural and artistic education. Building on this, the specialised teaching methods of

the Shanghai Conservatory of Music and the students' cultivation of comprehensive musical skills allowed these inheritors to thrive across the country after graduation.

Zhu Ying's efforts at establishing professional *pipa* education can be compared to those of expert musicians active in various traditional music associations in major cities like Shanghai and Beijing who also trained a large number of folk *pipa* players, with Wang Yuting's Wang School being the most representative among several such schools. According to Wu Huijuan's records, when Wang began teaching *pipa* at the Datong Music Society, his exceptional performance skills and egalitarian teaching philosophy attracted over a hundred students. In 1929, Wang established the Wang *Pipa* Study Society (*Wangshi pipa xueshe*, 汪氏琵琶学社), which not only attracted numerous learners but also sparked a wave of interest in *pipa* education in Shanghai (Wu 2008, 198).

The rise of new educational institutions opened a pathway for the spread of *pipa* traditions from Jiangnan to other provinces while simultaneously showcasing a multi-dimensional heritage model that incorporated creation, education, and performance, but it did not serve each school equally. Figure 2.9 below compares the spread of musicians from the Pinghu and Wang schools. The Pinghu School's graduates generally entered specialised music conservatories at an earlier stage to assume academic positions, having disseminated *pipa* art through higher education institutions in cities such as Beijing, Chongqing, and Hong Kong, as well as internationally, before 1949. This pedagogically centred transmission pathway facilitated their strategic advantage in advancing the institutionalisation of *pipa* artistry. In contrast, the Wang lineage predominantly gained access to university systems post-1949 through national policies (see Chapter 3). Prior to this, their activities were primarily confined to performances within the Shanghai region, resulting in a relatively limited scope of institutionalised transmission at that time. This nearly two-decade temporal gap not only signifies divergent career trajectories but also underscores the strategic dominance of the Pinghu School, pioneered by Zhu Ying, in advancing the institutionalisation and disciplinary formalisation of *pipa* studies, thereby securing an advantage in the field's development.

	Main Figures	Working Experience (Institution, City, Start Year)
	Yang Dajun 杨大钧 (1913-1987)	Hebei Provincial Women's Normal School (Handan, 1935) China National Radio Music Group (Chongqing, 1940) National Women's Normal College (Chongqing, 1940s) Hubei Normal University (Jingzhou, 1942) Beiping Normal University (Beijing, 1947) Beijing Normal University of Fine Arts (Beijing, 1956)

Pinghu School		China Conservatory of Music (Beijing, 1964) Central Conservatory of Music (Beijing, 1973)
	Cheng Wujia	Nanjing University of the Arts (Nanjing, 1945) East China Military University (Ji'nan, 1949) Nanjing University of the Arts (Nanjing, 1958)
	Yang Shaoyi 杨少彝 (1913-1974)	Shanghai Opera School (Ji'nan, 1934) Chinese Academy of Opera Song and Drama Quartet (city, 1953) China Railway Cultural and Labour Troupe (Beijing, 1953) Xi'an Conservatory of Music (Xi'an, 1957)
	Wang Rongchen 汪蓉琛 (1919-1994)	Hongkong Conservatory of Music (Hongkong, 1948) Xinghai Conservatory of Music (Guangzhou, 1957)
	Tan Xiaolin	Shanghai Conservatory of Music (Shanghai, 1946)
	Wang Shaoxian 王绍先 (fl. 1930s-1960s)	Northwest Conservatory of Music (Xi'an, 1940s)
Wang School	Li Tingsong	Central Conservatory of Music (Beijing, 1952) Tianjin Conservatory of Music (Tianjin city, 1956) Shenyang Conservatory of Music (Shenyang, 1956) Harbin College of the Arts (Harbin, 1956) Jilin College of the Arts (Changchun, 1960)
	Wei Zhongle	Shanghai Conservatory of Music (Shanghai, 1949)
	Sun Yude 孙裕德 (1904-1981)	Shanghai National Orchestra (Shanghai, 1956)
	Chen Tianle 陈天乐 (1919-1993)	China National Song & Dance Ensemble (Beijing, 1953) Guizhou Institute for Nationalities (Guiyang, 1958) Guizhou University (Guiyang, ca.1960s)
	Zhang Pingzhou 张萍舟 (1898-1989)	Wuhan Conservatory of Music (Wuhan, 1954)
	Chen Yonglu 陈永禄 (1912-1994)	Guangxi College of the Arts (Nanning, 1958)

Figure 2.9: Comparative Timeline of Academic Appointments: Pinghu and Wang School Practitioners.

Firstly, at the institutional level of education, commencing with Zhu Ying's admission to the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, his disciples successfully extended the flame of higher professional education into the broader field of national education. As

illustrated in Figure 2.9, figures had already taken up teaching positions in normal colleges and specialised art schools across the country by the 1930s. This marked the expansion of *pipa* instruction beyond the confines of single-discipline music academies into other key domains of the higher education system. Notably, Yang Dajun's artistic practice at both the Hebei Provincial Women's Normal College [One of China's earliest institutions of higher education for women in normal studies] and the National Women's Normal College [the highest women's institution during the Anti-Japanese War] introduced this then predominantly male-dominated art form into the core sphere of cultivating female intellectual elites (see figure 2.10).²⁸ This fostered a new generation of female audiences and disseminators. Concurrently, while the transmission of the Wang School remained active, it continued to rely heavily on private teaching and folk societies. Its scope and degree of institutionalisation remained relatively limited until after 1949, when it became widely integrated into the national higher education system.



Figure 2.10: Zhu Ying (right) instructs Yang Dajun (left) on playing the *pipa* in c.1930-1940s (cited in Li 2014, 111).

Secondly, in artistic creation, practitioners of the Pinghu School are influenced by Zhu Ying's creative philosophy, actively transcending traditional scholarly aesthetic pursuits. Instead, they actively and deliberately engage with and respond to pressing

²⁸ Yang Dajun was a Chinese musician, painter, and a key inheritor of the Pinghu School. Proficient in literature and traditional painting from a young age, he travelled to Shanghai during holidays to study *pipa* intensively under Zhu Ying, from whom he received rigorous training and mastered the complete repertoire of the Pinghu School. For further details on Yang Dajun's pedagogical career and performance, see Zheng (2004, 54-57).

contemporary socio-political issues. During the Anti-Japanese War, Yang Dajun composed many *pipa* compositions, including “Blood on the Lugou Bridge” (*Xue ran Lugouqiao*, 血染卢沟桥), “The Rising Sun” (*Xuri dongsheng*, 旭日东升) and “Triumphant Return” (*Kaige guili*, 凯歌归里), utilising music as a means to inspire national resilience and solidarity.²⁹ Moreover, as early as the 1930s, he experimented with modifying the *pipa* by arranging its frets according to the equal temperament. This laid crucial early foundations for his series of innovations in instrumental reform during the 1950s (see Chapter 3); Meanwhile, Tan Xiaolin’s transformation and reconstruction of traditional music through modern compositional thinking represents the Pinghu School’s advancement in professional composition.³⁰ He adapted traditional classics such as “Flying Flowers Dotted with Emeralds” (*Feihua diancui*, 飞花点翠) and “Dragonfly Skimming the Water” (*Qingting dianshui*, 蜻蜓点水), while also composing folk ensemble pieces including “Midnight Chant” (*Ziye yin*, 子夜吟) and “Spring on the Lake” (*Hushang chunguang*, 湖上春光).³¹ The core of his practice lies in liberating folk musical materials from traditional performance frameworks, reshaping them within modern harmonic, contrapuntal, and structural thinking. His work “Midnight Chant,” praised by Alexander Tcherepnine as a “significant piece of national instrumental music” (Tcherepnine 2009/1935, 109), stands as a hallmark of his professional stature, receiving authoritative recognition. By contrast, while other schools exerted broad influence through performance practice and repertoire dissemination, the Pinghu School demonstrated a more pioneering stance in exploring artistic creation.

Finally, within the dissemination domain, the Pinghu School disciples continued Zhu Ying’s early practice of introducing *pipa* artistry into international stages, further consolidating its cultural role within high-level international exchanges. Wang Shaoxian conducted European performances between 1935 and 1936, receiving “unprecedented acclaim” in Vienna (cited in Yang 2017, 88); Tan Xiaolin, after travelling to the United

²⁹ Recordings of Yang Dajun’s early works are scarce, but a notable available audio document is his performance of “Traveling on the Passageway Which Leads to Sichuan” (*Shudao nan*, 蜀道难). This valuable document is available for listening on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gj-jkWy4MUo&list=RDGj-jkWy4MUo&start_radio=1, accessed on 10 February 2026.

³⁰ Tan Xiaolin was a Chinese composer and *pipa* performer. He studied *pipa* under Zhu Ying and composition theory under Huang Zi at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. For further details on Tan Xiaolin’s life, compositions, see Qian (2012).

³¹ Performance video of Tan Xiaolin’s “Spring on the Lake”, arranged by Su Wenqing, accessed via YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jiax3akm4aU&list=RDJiax3akm4aU&start_radio=1, accessed on 10 February 2026.

States in 1939, performed the *pipa* at numerous international events, including a solo at the Boston International Student Congress, and was twice invited to perform for President Franklin D. Roosevelt at the White House. His 1946 solo concert of Chinese instrumental music in New Haven was lauded by Western media as an “Eastern triumph over the West” (cited in Qian 2007, 35); During the World War II in 1940s, US envoy George C. Marshall (1880-1959)’s visit to China featured a grand reception hosted by Soong Mei-ling 宋美齡 (1897-2003), where Yang Dajun performed classical pieces “Ambush from All Sides” and “Wild Geese on the Sandbank, ” positioning the *pipa* as a cultural symbol within wartime allied diplomacy.³² These proactive and sustained dissemination activities collectively forged a cross-cultural network, enabling the Pinghu School to garner a reputation surpassing other contemporary schools and symbolising the successful transformation of the *pipa* from a traditional craft into an element in shaping modern national cultural identity.

In summary, the Pinghu School during the post-Zhu Ying era underwent systematic development through the coordinated efforts of its disciple community across the domains of education, creation, and dissemination. This phase, spanning the 1930s to 1940s, exhibited a relatively prominent growth trajectory. Central to this evolution were their pioneering and systematic efforts to transform the *pipa* art form from a traditional folk craft into a modern professional practice paradigm. It can be argued that the institutional foundations, professional prestige, and international influence accumulated during this period—beyond mere technical continuity—provided crucial historical conditions and sustained momentum for the Pinghu School’s integration into the national arts system and its ongoing influence following the establishment of the PRC.

2.5 Conclusion

Zhu Ying and Li Fangyuan, two intellectuals from different eras who dedicated their careers to the *pipa*, collectively upheld and transcended the traditional lineage of the Pinghu School. Li witnessed the late Qing Dynasty’s fragmentation and the suffering of the Chinese populace, all while a culture of “obscene and vulgar tunes” prevailed. His fundamental motivation for compiling the *Li Collection* was to embody Xunzi’s statement in *The Book of*

³² The performance took place within a critical diplomatic context. General George C. Marshall arrived in Chongqing in December 1945 as President Truman’s special envoy, with the explicit mission of mediating between the Nationalists and Communists to prevent civil war in China. His meetings with Chiang Kai-shek 蒋介石 (1887-1975) were consistently facilitated by Soong Mei-ling, who served not only as the chief translator but also as the primary liaison throughout Marshall’s mission, underscoring the event’s high political significance. For further details on Marshall’s mission and its diplomatic context, see Kurtz-Phelan (2018).

Rites: “Music can make people’s hearts good, can deeply influence people, can change social customs,” aiming to utilise music as a means of moral education and social reform; Zhu, on the other hand, observed the Xinhai Revolution and the New Culture Movement, experiencing the dissemination of democracy and scientific ideals. He persisted in the belief that “music and politics are closely intertwined,” striving to cultivate patriotic sentiments rooted in national consciousness among learners. Despite differing historical missions, Zhu Ying, educated from a young age at the Li family’s private school, exhibited a conception of music’s social function that aligned with that of Li Fangyuan, demonstrating a profound continuity at the spiritual level. They thus shared a common cultural lineage: firmly believing that music should transcend mere technical display and assume a pedagogical role in moral cultivation and the enhancement of national morale.

During the artisanal era, when confidentiality was regarded as an industry standard, Li Fangyuan and Zhu Ying demonstrated forward-thinking vision, pioneering efforts to transcend this conventional constraint. The Li family publicly disclosed their ancestral secret scores as early as the 1850s; by 1895, Li Fangyuan integrated these scores with other ancient compositions to compile and publish the *Li Collection*. Nearly four decades later, Zhu Ying not only openly published his compositions but also explicitly stated, “If readers have any questions, they may write to me, and I will respond in detail, never keeping secrets” (Zhu 1930a, 7). They unanimously adhered to the principle of “*gongzhu tonghao*” 公诸同好—a phrase that signifies openly presenting one’s cherished collections to the community for mutual appreciation among like-minded individuals.

A noteworthy phenomenon for reflection is that Li Fangyuan, in the preface of the *Li Collection*, never self-identified as a member of the Pinghu School. His initial motivation for compiling musical scores was to educate through music and to improve societal morals. Zhu Ying, in his writings, consistently focused on the future of national music rather than the cultivation of a single school. However, subsequent scholarship has habitually but anachronistically framed their contributions within the Pinghu School paradigm. This methodological approach led to the institutionalisation of school-based classifications as the predominant framework for understanding *pipa* development and can be traced back to 1953, when Cao Anhe conducted a comprehensive survey of *pipa* art in East China. While it is helpful in tracing transmission lineage, it has inadvertently compromised our recognition of the historical significance of figures like Li and Zhu, and was critically questioned as early as 1995 by Liu Dehai (Liu 1995, 58). The cases of Zhu Ying and Li Fangyuan

exemplify the limitations of this methodology, their artistic practices transcending regional school boundaries.

Reevaluating Zhu Ying not only serves to rectify the underappreciation of a distinguished master but also prompts an inquiry into the collective fate of a generation of musicians who shared similar ideals yet were similarly marginalised by subsequent historical narratives. The interplay of perseverance and adversity, aspiration and reality among these artists collectively delineated a crucial foundation and trajectory in the development of traditional Chinese music. As Zhu Ying articulated, “Chinese music is not valueless; it is our recognition that is lacking” (Zhu 1935a, 28).

Chapter 3

Beyond Decline: A Resilience Narrative (1949-1974)

3.1 Introduction

In 1949, the Chinese Communist Party defeated the Kuomintang and established the PRC, with Mao Zedong 毛泽东 (1893-1976) as its main leader. The establishment of the PRC triggered significant changes in various aspects of Chinese politics, economy, and culture. The first 17 years of the PRC (1949-1966), particularly the first 7 years of the socialist transformation period, witnessed remarkable progress in various fields, including social order, education, living standards, and morality.¹ As Liu Ching-chih states: “[People] see those years as a particularly successful period for the Communists after they came to power, a peaceful and settled time such as has been rarely seen in China” (Liu 2010, 295). China’s music has thus entered a new era of prosperity and development, bringing new vitality to music education, composition, performance, musical scores, and cultural exchanges between Chinese and Western music.

The state implemented a series of foundational initiatives to foster the flourishing development of traditional musical culture. Two primary measures exerted a profound influence on the inheritance and advancement of *pipa* artistry: 1. The establishment of professional music education institutions. In order to cultivate urgently needed new talents, a total of eight music conservatories, including the Central Conservatory of Music and Sichuan Conservatory of Music 四川音乐学院, were successively established, along with some regional arts colleges, including Nanjing University of the Arts 南京艺术学院 and Guangxi Arts University 广西艺术学院, forming part of a comprehensive system of higher professional education institutions. 2. The employment of folk music talents. A large number of artists with attainments in Chinese national music were employed to teach at these institutions.² Several important figures from the *pipa* schools entered professional music institutions through this medium to engage in teaching work, including Li Tingsong

¹ See Lynch (2008) for further details on the Chinese history during 1949-1976.

² For instance, *qin* masters Zha Fuxi 查阜西 (1895-1976) and Wu Jinglüe 吴景略 (1907-1987), *guan* master Yang Yuanheng 杨元亨 (1893-1959) were employed at the Central Conservatory of Music; *dizi* master Lu Chunling 陆春龄 (1921-2018) and *zheng* master Wang Xunzhi 王巽之 (1899-1972) were hired at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. See Wu (2014) for further details on the development of *pipa* art after the establishment of the PRC.

(Wang School), Cao Anhe (Chongming School) at the National Music Research Institute of the Central Conservatory of Music (today's Chinese National Academy of Arts, 中央音乐学院音乐研究所), Lin Shicheng (Pudong School) at the Central Conservatory of Music, and Wei Zhongle (Wang School) and Fan Boyan (Chongming and Pinghu School) at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. These appointments not only established an institutionalised framework for the perpetuation of national music but also safeguarded the authenticity and expertise inherent in the transmission of its techniques.

Concurrently, Mao Zedong's Double Hundred policy (*shuangbai fangzhen*, 双百方针, 1956), a fundamental national strategy for the development of Chinese literature and art, fostered the modernisation of *pipa* art by advocating for the diversification of artistic forms and styles.³ Within this context, the *pipa* art form manifested a dual trajectory of traditional continuity and modern innovation. Through systematic cultivation, this system produced composite talents such as Liu Dehai (see Chapter 4) and Wang Fandi 王范地 (1933-2017), who would become influential innovators of new performance techniques and create new repertoires for *pipa*.⁴ Regarding the dimension of traditional inheritance, a relatively permissive cultural policy environment has enabled the sustained flourishing of traditional schools, exemplified by the Pinghu and Wang Schools.

However, the onset of the Cultural Revolution (*Wenhua dageming*, 文化大革命) in 1966 inflicted remarkable devastation on Chinese musical arts, plunging the development of *pipa* artistry into a historic nadir.⁵ The transmission and evolution of *pipa* artistry encountered unprecedented historical challenges. Musical compositions, both ancient and modern, domestic and foreign, were universally proscribed. Traditional music and folk arts were labelled as "feudal," *pipa* masters bore the brunt of this persecution: Wei Zhongle was denounced as a "reactionary academic authority," and his disciple was compelled to secure his basic sustenance through clandestine means; Li Tingsong met his demise amidst sustained political suppression and personal humiliation; Yang Shaoyi chose suicide as a form of resistance after enduring prolonged persecution. A decade-long catastrophe caused a

³ Its full designation is "Let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools of thought contend" (*baihua qifang, baijia zhengming*, 百花齐放, 百家争鸣), which permits the free development of diverse artistic forms and styles and advocates for open debate among different academic schools. This policy initially invigorated the cultural and scholarly sectors but was not consistently implemented in subsequent political campaigns. See Ju (2014) for further details.

⁴ Wang Fandi was a foundational figure in the first generation of *pipa* artistry in the PRC, excelling in performance, composition and education. See Xiu (2018) for further details on Wang's life and achievements.

⁵ For more information about Cultural Revolution, please see Dikötter (2016).

rupture in the lineage transmission of *pipa* artistry, resulting in the loss of numerous invaluable scores and techniques, with gradual restoration and development only commencing after the Reform and Opening-up period (see Chapter 4) in 1979.

Following their shared prosperity during the first half of the 20th century, the five primary *pipa* schools exhibited different developmental trajectories between 1949 and 1974. Discussion within academia regarding the Pinghu School generally regards the establishment of the PRC as a dividing point, describing the development trajectory of the Pinghu School's *pipa* art as one of “decline” or “obstruction”. As renowned *pipa* player and scholar Chen Zemin 陈泽民 (b. 1930) pointed out, “After the establishment of the PRC... the Pinghu School gradually began to decline” (cited in Tang 2012, 20). The inheritor of the Pinghu School, Yang Baoyuan 杨宝元 (b. 1953), also expressed a similar view, stating, “The phenomenon of the Pinghu School's inheritance being blocked is particularly serious. It can be said that this phenomenon of being blocked began after the founding of the PRC” (cited in Tang 2012, 26).⁶ Such discussions shaped a narrative in which the Pinghu School appears to be uniquely heading towards decline against the backdrop of the flourishing development of the other contemporary *pipa* schools.

Contrary to prevailing narratives, my research indicates that the development of the Pinghu School between 1949 and 1966 did not exhibit a trajectory of decline. Instead, it experienced a period of relative flourishing, even attaining a dominant position among the five major schools. During the Cultural Revolution, despite the *pipa* schools experiencing systemic institutional disruption and manifesting apparent discontinuity and decline, a limited number of lineage inheritors, such as Yang Shaoyi and Lin Shicheng, engaged in covert resistance through clandestine instruction and documentation compilation, thereby ensuring the survival of their respective schools' artistic essence and cultural lineage under extreme conditions.

In this chapter, I systematically examine the development of the Pinghu School from 1949 to 1974, dividing it into two key phases: the institutional prosperity period from 1949 to 1966 and the non-public transmission period from 1966 to 1974. During the institutional prosperity period, I analyse representative events to demonstrate that the Pinghu School maintained dominance across three critical domains: professional performance, instrumental reform, and educational systems. This evidence indicates that the school experienced a

⁶ Yang Baoyuan (the son and pupil of Yang Baoyuan) is a professor at the Central Conservatory of Music and an inheritor of the Pinghu School.

significant modern transformation and sustained growth following the founding of the PRC, rather than an immediate decline. For the study of the non-public transmission period, I focus on the preservation work of the inheritor, Yang Shaoyi. By examining his transmission activities during this politically tumultuous era, I reveal that the decline of the Pinghu School was essentially a forced stagnation resulting from political interference. Furthermore, I argue that the resilience of its artistic vitality in extreme environments is rooted in two fundamental pillars: firstly, the institutional security gained through integration into the national system during the founding of the state; and secondly, its deeper foundational base, which comprises a comprehensive artistic system and scholarly lineage established by predecessors such as Li Fangyuan and Zhu Ying. It is this profound integration of historical heritage and contemporary transformation that constitutes the intrinsic driving force enabling the Pinghu School of *pipa* art to withstand adversity and sustain its developmental trajectory.

3.2 Institutional Prosperity Period (1949 to 1966)

Following the establishment of the PRC, the professionalisation of the music education system provided a foundational institutional basis for the modern transmission of the *pipa* Schools. In contrast to the situation in the 1930s and 1940s, when only a few inheritors of the Pinghu School were employed in higher music institutions (see Chapter 2), influential *pipa* lineage inheritors nearly fully transitioned into employment at formal professional music education institutions. However, within this shared institutional framework, the developmental trajectories and outcomes of the various schools' exhibit marked differences.

Both the Wang and Pinghu Schools demonstrated significant developmental momentum, collectively forming the two principal pillars of *pipa* pedagogy. The Wang School, under the extensive influence of Wang Yuting, produced disciples who became a vital cadre of *pipa* instructors within conservatories. Key lineage inheritors established a stable pedagogical network at core institutions, including the Central Conservatory of Music and Shanghai Conservatory of Music; at the same time, the Pinghu School through the dedicated cultivation by Yang Dajun and Fan Boyan in cultural centres like Beijing and Shanghai, alongside expansion efforts by Yang Shaoyi, Cheng Wujia, and Wang Rongchen

in Xi'an, Nanjing, and Guangzhou, similarly constructed a comprehensive instructional system.⁷

Other schools, however, exhibit marked limitations or discontinuities. The Chongming School had two principal inheritors. The elder, Fan Shaoyun, was already advanced in age which limited his capacity for teaching and expansion. Cao Anhe shifted her focus towards music theory research. Although she continued to engage in teaching and performance activities, this combination of factors prevented the establishment of an effective pedagogical framework for the school. Lin Shicheng, the sole inheritor of the Pudong School began teaching at the Central Conservatory of Music in 1958 but was compelled to relinquish his position in 1960 due to political circumstances, thereby preventing the systematic transmission of the Pudong School within the conservatory. The Wuxi School, due to a rupture in lineage transmission, gradually receded from the historical stage.

Under the guidance of national cultural policies, the differentiation in the development of musical schools became increasingly pronounced. The inheritors of the Pinghu School, through active participation in significant artistic events including the First National Music Week (*Diyijie quanguo yinyuezhou*, 第一届全国音乐周) in 1956, the Instrumental Reform Conference (*Yueqi gaige huiyi*, 乐器改革会议) in 1959, and the National Music (Art) College Erhu and Pipa Professional Textbook Conference (*Quanguo yiyue yishu yuanxiao pipa zhuanke jiaocai huiyi*, 全国音乐艺术院校琵琶专业教材会议) in 1961, achieved comprehensive innovation from performance practice to educational systems, thereby establishing its leading position within the professional domain.

3.2.1 The First National Music Week (1956)

Under the guidance of the Double Hundred policy, the First National Music Week (hereafter, the Music Week) in Beijing, jointly organised by the Ministry of Culture and the Chinese Musicians Association, marked a significant milestone in the development of national music in the PRC.⁸ As Liu Zhiming emphasised during the opening ceremony, “An event of such magnitude, with so many musicians and music professionals gathered, is

⁷ Figure 2.9 (Chapter 2) details the key teaching positions held by dominant performers of the Pinghu and Wang schools at major Chinese conservatories in the post-1949 period. Additionally, it is particularly noteworthy that Li Fangyuan's student, Wu Mengfei was also appointed as a special researcher at the National Music Research Institute of the Central Conservatory of Music.

⁸ For further details on the First National Music Week, please see Chen (2018).

unprecedented in our country's history and marks the first grand assembly in our music community" (Liu 1956, 2). This music festival brought together over 4,500 performers from across the nation, spanning 24 days with 91 performances, and attracting tens of thousands of spectators. It served as a significant platform for evaluating the artistic calibre of various musical genres and schools.

To take the stage at such a high-profile national event requires passing through an extremely rigorous selection process. To ensure the quality of the performance, all participants had to pass a rigorous provincial selection process. Taking the selection process in the Beijing region as an example, the entire recruitment procedure was both systematic and competitive. The specific steps were as follows:

1. On May 22, the Beijing preparatory committee disseminated a notice to composers and artistic organisations regarding the selection of performance pieces.
2. Following preliminary selection by the respective organisations, the works were provisionally determined by May 26.
3. By early June, a total of 182 submissions were received, including 58 instrumental compositions.
4. On June 19, the preparatory committee convened a coordination meeting with representatives from various performance groups to discuss the allocation of works and establish a detailed rehearsal schedule; and
5. A public selection performance was held in early July, resulting in the final selection of the program (Chen 2009, 7).

This selection mechanism not only ensured the artistic calibre of the featured performances but also, through the successive screening of participants and their works, provided a comprehensive representation of the zenith of *pipa* artistry in China during that period.

Consequently, the following leading *pipa* virtuosos were successfully selected:

- **Pinghu School:** Yang Dajun (Beijing Arts Normal College, 北京艺术师范学院, today's China Conservatory of Music) and Cheng Wujia (East China Specialised Arts School 华东艺术专科学校, today's Nanjing University of the Arts).
- **Wang School:** Wei Zhongle (Shanghai Conservatory of Music), Li Tingsong (Central Conservatory of Music), and Chen Tianle (China National Song & Dance Ensemble).
- **Chongming School:** Cao Anhe (National Music Research Institute of the Central Conservatory of Music).

These individuals were the most representative virtuosos of their respective schools in the mid-20th century, all direct disciples of their lineages [Pinghu School under Zhu Ying, Wang School under Wang Yuting, Chongming School under Liu Tianhua], demonstrating exceptional technical mastery and embodying the highest standards of their respective traditions. Moreover, most held positions at leading domestic conservatories or research institutions, combining performance excellence with pedagogical expertise.

The *pipa* art presented during the Music Week illustrated a dual trajectory of traditional inheritance and innovative exploration. This characteristic was vividly reflected in the practices of different schools: the Wang School performers focused on the interpretation of traditional pieces, selecting the classic works “Ambush from All Sides” and “The King of Chu Doffs His Armour” respectively; meanwhile, the Pinghu School musicians emphasised innovation while simultaneously undertaking experimentation in instrument reform.⁹ Both Pinghu School inheritors opted to present newly created works. Yang Dajun performed his original *pipa* composition, “Spring Scenery in the Countryside” (*Tianyuan chunse*, 田园春色), while Cheng Wujia performed three new works of his own creation, namely “Peacock Spreading Its Tail” (*Kongque kaiping*, 孔雀开屏), “Sunrise at Mount Tai” (*Taishan guan richu*, 泰山观日出), and “Night Rain in Bashan” (*Bashan yeyu*, 巴山夜雨) across two concerts.¹⁰

Moreover, Cheng Wujia’s performances consistently featured his newly developed *gupa* 鼓琶, a novel instrument of his design (see Figure 3.1). Development of the *gupa* was undertaken to augment the instrument’s tonal resonance and volume through structural innovation, alongside the standardisation of its tuning to the equal temperament system. Specific modifications encompassed the integration of a 22-centimetre diameter, 9-centimetre-deep python-skin drum-style resonance chamber to amplify acoustic properties, the addition of 24 frets to expand the instrument’s range, and concomitant adjustments to the neck, tuning pegs, and bridge (Cheng 1956, August 15th).

⁹ Due to limitations in available sources, the performance repertoires of Cao Anhe and Chen Tianle have not been identified and are therefore excluded from this analysis.

¹⁰ “Spring Scenery in the Countryside” performed by Yang Dajun:

https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1kM411V7vS?spm_id_from=333.788.videopod.sections&vd_source=92841bc271dcd3a839db12045976c11&p=2, accessed on 10 February 2026.

“Sunrise at Mount Tai” performed by Cheng Wujia:

https://chinesemusicarchive.com/en_us/aiovg_videos/%E6%B3%B0%E5%B1%B1%E8%A7%80%E6%97%A5%E5%87%BA-%E9%BC%93%E7%90%B6%E7%8D%A8%E5%A5%8F%EF%BC%9A%E7%A8%8B%E5%8D%88%E5%98%89-a6m05-a0013/, accessed on 10 February 2026. The remaining two compositions are currently unavailable through online resources.



Figure 3.1: Cheng Wujia and *gupa* (n.d., cited in Shanghai No. 1 National Musical Instrument Factory and Shanghai Museum of Chinese Musical Instruments 2007, 74).

Cheng Wujia's presentation of the *gupa* instigated a sustained period of scholarly discourse within the musical community. According to the *Proceedings of the First National Music Week* (June 11 to September 4, 1956), the initial public presentation of his redesigned instrument was followed by the publication of seven specialised articles. These articles delved into the *gupa*'s applicability, innovative merits, and inherent limitations, thereby establishing a prominent position within the contemporaneous musical discourse. Of particular interest is Cheng Wujia's direct engagement with the debate, as evidenced by his two published responses to the critiques of *gupa*'s modifications. This phenomenon not only underscores the prevailing interest in the refinement of national instruments during that era but also, through both practical application and theoretical analysis, highlights the pioneering contributions of Pinghu School musicians to the field of instrument reform.

Thus, for the Pinghu School, the Music Week represented far more than a high-profile performance. It served as a pivotal platform for demonstration and validation. By selecting core inheritors, performing newly composed works, and introducing reformed instruments, the inheritors showcased its comprehensive innovative capabilities to the nation's musical community.

3.2.2 The Instrument Reform Conference (1959)

During the wave of Chinese musical instrument reform that took place between 1954 and 1966, the Ministry of Culture and the Chinese Musicians Association organised five national discussions, exhibitions, and concerts on instrument reform. Among these, Yang

Dajun's achievements in shaping the tonal character of musical instruments have been recognised internationally through their inclusion in UNESCO's Memory of the World Programme.

The series of national instrument improvement activities organised by the Chinese Musicians Association in Beijing in February 1959 is the most representative (Figure 3.2). This event lasted for four days and attracted over 800 experts, scholars, performers, and instrument makers from across the country (Gao 2023, 45). Musicologist Mao Jizeng emphasised the innovative work model of this event in his summary, pointing out that “the deep collaboration between performers and makers, as well as the cooperation between experts and the public,” constituted a significant characteristic of the instrument reform efforts (Mao 1959, 10). He illustrated this by describing a *pipa* improvement project jointly developed by Yang Dajun and *pipa* maker, Fu Lishan 傅历山 (fl. 1950s; Beijing National Musical Instrument Factory, 北京市民族乐器厂).



Figure 3.2: In February 1959, a group photo was taken at the Instrument Improvement Symposium (Gao 2023, 48). [front row, third from the left is Yang Dajun, fourth is Cao Anhe, fifth is Yang Yinliu].

The outcomes of the reform were showcased at the Reform Instrument Concert. The concert recorded 27 demonstration pieces across 16 programs, becoming a significant component of the first global UNESCO *Memory of the World* project—*Chinese Traditional Music Recording Archives* (*Zhongguo chuantong yinyue luyin dang'an*, 中国传统音乐录音

档案, currently preserved at the China Academy of Art) (Gao 2023, 47).¹¹ Notably, the *pipa* improvement project led by Yang Dajun was the only selected demonstration case within the *pipa* category.

At the concert, Yang Dajun conducted performance experiments utilising the reformed *pipa*, selecting pieces from both literary and military for efficacy validation (Figure 3.3). Within the military piece, he employed a comparative methodology: initially, the introductory section (38''-1'02'',

https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1kM411V7vS?vd_source=92841bc271dcdb3a839db12045976c11&spm_id_from=333.788.videopod.sections, accessed on 10 February 2026) of “Ambush from All Sides” was performed on a traditional *pipa*, revealing a muted, somewhat raspy timbre on the first string; the application of *sao* techniques resulted in an imbalance of volume among the four strings, as the first string’s sound was obscured by the subsequent three; Subsequently, the same passage was performed on the newly modified *pipa* (1'17''-2'26''), demonstrating a marked improvement in sound quality—the first string exhibited a more resonant and clear tone, with a significant enhancement in high-frequency overtones. Researcher Cao Anhe’s technical analysis indicated that “[the reformed *pipa*] achieves an even and amplified sound across all four strings, characterised by clarity and brilliance; the slightly protruding soundboard and the repositioned internal crossbeams contribute to increased volume” (Cao, as cited in the audio archive “Reform Instrument Concert,” 1959).

¹¹ *The Memory of the World* project, initiated by UNESCO in 1992, serves as a critical initiative for the preservation of documentary heritage. This program aims to safeguard the world’s documentary legacy, which is increasingly vulnerable to degradation and loss. Through international collaboration and the application of advanced preservation techniques, the program endeavors to ensure the comprehensive documentation of human memory. Official website of *The Memory of the World*: <https://en.unesco.org/programme/mow>, accessed on 10 February 2026; *Chinese Traditional Music Recording Archives*: <https://www.ctmsa-cnaa.com/>, accessed on 10 February 2026.



Figure 3.3: Yang Dajun playing *pipa* onstage in 1961 (Yang, 2022).

The performance of “Spring Scenery in the Countryside” showcased the advancements in left-hand timbre achieved on the reformed *pipa*. According to Cao Anhe, the piece incorporates numerous fingerings involving *dayin* 打音, *xuyin* 虚音 and *anyin* 按音 executed with the left hand, a feat unattainable on many traditional *pipa* (*Ibid.*). These *xuyin* techniques—where the right hand does not pluck the strings, relying solely on the left hand to strike or release the strings to produce sound (including *nayin* 捺音, *daiyin* 带音, and *souyin* 擞音)—often result in a sudden reduction in volume and a blurred sound effect in traditional performance. However, when performing this piece on the adapted *pipa*, techniques such as *dayin* and *nayin*, as seen in the second beat of the third bar (48”-50”, https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1kM411V7vS/?p=2&vd_source=92841bc271dcdb3a839db12045976c11, accessed on 10 February 2026) not only clearly delineate the timbral contrast between *xuyin* and *shiyin* but also mitigate the issue of volume imbalance, allowing the *xuyin* to maintain a consistent volume and clarity of tone (see Figure 3.4). This research provides crucial empirical evidence for the refinement of traditional instruments, illustrating the significant impact of these modifications on enhancing the expressive capabilities of *pipa* performance.



Figure 3.4: The first eight bars of “Spring Scenery in the Countryside” [♯ : nayin, C : daiyin].

Moreover, Cheng Wujia achieved groundbreaking progress in the structural reform of the *pipa*. He pioneered a significant modification as early as 1928 by successfully implementing the six-ledge, eighteen-bamboo-frets *pipa*, enabling the instrument to perform in fully chromatic equal temperament for the first time, laying the most crucial foundation for the modernisation of contemporary *pipa* design (Jia 2016, 33).¹² Following the founding of the PRC, both academic and instrument-making fields built upon this pioneering work, continuously refining the design until the contemporary standard form of “six ledges and twenty-four frets” was finally established (see Figure 3.5).

¹² In the 1920s, the *pipa* was traditionally structured with four ledges and ten or twelve frets. With the introduction of Western music theory in the early 20 century, musicians including Yang Yinliu, Liu Tianhua, Yang Dajun, and Cheng Wujia proposed reforms to adapt the *pipa* for equal-tempered performance. Ultimately, Cheng Wujia successfully implemented these changes in 1928, resulting in a new design featuring six ledges and eighteen frets. See Jia (2007) for more debate on who made the first design.

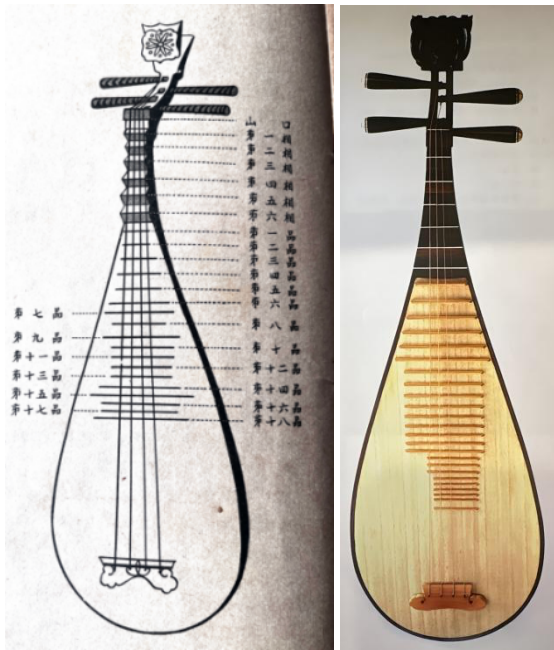


Figure 3.5: Comparison of *pipa* with 6 ledges and 18 frets (left, Cheng 1958, 2) and 6 ledges and 24 frets (right, cited in Shanghai No. 1 National Musical Instrument Factory and Shanghai Museum of Chinese Musical Instruments 2007, 158).

Artists of the Pinghu School, exemplified by Cheng Wujia and Yang Dajun, have redefined the structural design and expressive capabilities of the *pipa* through pioneering reforms. Their innovations have not only enhanced the instrument's performance potential but also advanced the modernisation trajectory of Chinese national music.

3.2.3 The National Music (Art) College Erhu and Pipa Professional Textbook Conference (1961)

During the 1960s, Chinese national music education was undergoing a pivotal transition from traditional oral transmission to a modern pedagogical framework, following the innovations in the preceding generation of teachers like Zhu Ying. In 1961, the Ministry of Culture of the PRC organised the National Music (Art) College Erhu and Pipa Professional Textbook Conference (hereafter, the Textbook Conference) in Shanghai. The conference brought together leading figures from across the country to standardise the future of *pipa* pedagogy.

At this landmark professional symposium, the inheritors of the Pinghu School demonstrated its central role. It was represented by eight senior musicians—the largest single-school delegation at the conference—while the core *Pipa* Group consisted of approximately 32 participants. Moreover, three of the school's masters were selected to perform, a number that accounted for nearly half of the total performers in that session. Furthermore, several core pieces from the Pinghu School repertoire were formally adopted

into the first nationally standardised teaching materials. Collectively, these achievements signified the Pinghu School's evolution from a regional artistic tradition to a leading force in the advancement of *pipa* artistry.

Participants

The conference convened prominent figures from the national *pipa* artistic community, including eight invited inheritors of the Pinghu School: Wu Mengfei, Fan Boyan, Wu Zhenping 吴振平 (1907-1979), Chen Gongze, Yang Shaoyi, Cheng Wujia, Ding Shande, and Yang Dajun. Except for Wu Mengfei, the other seven were all Zhu Ying's students (see Figure 3.6).¹³



Figure 3.6: Pinghu School musicians at the Textbook Conference (Shanghai No. 1 National Musical Instrument Factory and Shanghai Museum of Chinese Musical Instruments 2007, 63). The caption in Chinese reads: “Attending the National Music (Art) College *Erhu* and *Pipa* Professional Textbook Conference, a group photo with Mr Zhu Xinqing’s [i.e. Zhu Ying’s] fellow disciples in Shanghai on September 5, 1961”. [Back row (left to right): Fan Boyan, Wu Zhenping, Chen Gongze, Yang Shaoyi; Front row from left to right: Cheng Wujia, Ding Shande, Yang Dajun].

An analysis of the photograph of the representatives of the *Pipa* Group, as shown in Figure 3.7, reveals distinct characteristics of the period regarding participant composition [Wu Zhenping and Ding Shande did not participate in the discussion of the *pipa* group]:

- **Traditional School Inheritors** (12 individuals):

Pinghu School: 6 individuals (First row: Wu Mengfei, Yang Dajun, Yang Shaoyi, Cheng Wujia; Second row: Fan Boyan, Chen Gongze)

¹³ Wu Zhenping initially studied *pipa* under Zhu Ying at the Shanghai National Music Conservatory. Post-establishment of the PRC, he gained prominence for his scholarly contributions to *qin* pedagogy and classical Chinese organology. See Zhang (2025) for further details on his life and achievements.

Wang School: 4 individuals (First row: Zhang Pingzhou, Sun Yude, Wei Zhongle; Second row: Chen Yonglu)

Chongming School: 2 individuals (First row: Cao Anhe, Fan Shaoyun)

Wuxi and Pudong Schools: Unrepresented¹⁴

- **Non-School Senior Performers:** 4 individuals (Chen Zhong 陈重, Li Rongsheng 李荣声, Wu Jinglüe, Chen Jilüe 陈济略)
- **Emerging Generation Performers:** 18 individuals (Younger instructors cultivated by various music conservatories, such as Liu Dehai, Kuang Yuzhong).¹⁵



Figure 3.7: A group photo of all representatives from the *pipa* section at the Textbook Conference, taken on September 2, 1961, in Shanghai (Institute of Music, Chinese National Academy of Arts 2021, 23). [Front row (left to right): Cheng Wujia, Zhang Pingzhou, Sun Yude, Cao Anhe, Wu Mengfei, Fan Shaoyun, Wei Zhongle, Yang Dajun, Wu Jinglüe, Chen Jilüe, Yang Shaoyi].

Among the thirty-three attendees, the five major traditional schools were represented by a total of twelve individuals. The Pinghu School led with six representatives, significantly surpassing the other two. This personnel composition outlined the power dynamics within the *pipa* community at that time. The Pinghu School not only held an

¹⁴ Lin Shicheng of the Pudong School began teaching at the Central Conservatory of Music in 1958 but was compelled to relinquish his academic position in 1960 due to political circumstances; the Wuxi School, however, became extinct after the founding of the PRC owing to a discontinuity in its lineage of successors.

¹⁵ Except for Chen Jilüe (second from right) and Wu Jinglüe (third from right), all non-school senior and emerging generation performers are in the second and third rows.

absolute numerical dominance but also demonstrated its central position in the allocation of influential roles. It is noteworthy that among the eleven performers seated in the front row, the Pinghu School dominates with four positions, and Wu Mengfei and Fan Shaoyun occupy the central seats. This arrangement is certainly intentional. In the context of traditional Chinese etiquette, seating arrangements are not merely physical placements but serve as visual representations of hierarchical power and social status.¹⁶ Therefore, the Pinghu School position at the front and centre of group photographs serves as a significant indicator of the institutional recognition of their prominence within the artistic and scholarly community.

Additionally, the gender composition among emerging performers had shifted significantly: while the previous generation included only one female representative alongside Cao Anhe, the new cohort of 18 young faculty members comprised seven women. Among the 33 attendees, female participants accounted for 24%. This structural transformation reflected a profound shift in national music education in the PRC era: socially, it dismantled the traditional patriarchal norm of “male inheritance only,” demonstrating the tangible impact of women’s emancipation policies; educationally, all these female instrumentalists emerged from formal conservatory training systems, underscoring the critical role of modern academic institutions in advancing gender equality.¹⁷ From the perspective of artistic heritage, taking the earliest professional institution-based Pinghu School as an example, the female lineage evolved from the individual case of Wang Rongchen, trained by Zhu Ying in the 1930s, to the 1950s when Yang Shaoyi cultivated dozens of female students at Xi’an Conservatory of Music (Li 2021, 15). This shift not only expanded the transmission lineage of the *pipa* art but also facilitated the modern transformation of traditional artistic expression through an institutionalised training model.

¹⁶ From the eastward orientation of the “Banquet at Hongmen” (*hongmenyan*, 鸿门宴) in the *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji*, 史记) to the careful consideration by Lin Daiyu 林黛玉 of seating order upon her initial entry into the Jia household in the *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Hongloumeng*, 红楼梦), these examples reflect the close relationship between seating positions, discourse authority, and social hierarchy (see Yang 2012).

¹⁷ Feudal Chinese society was profoundly influenced by the notion of male supremacy over women. To safeguard skills as “family secrets” and means of livelihood from being divulged, a convention emerged whereby such knowledge was passed down to sons but not daughters. Daughters, regarded as “outsiders” upon marriage, were excluded from core transmission, as their skills might otherwise be transferred to their husbands’ families. Following the founding of the PRC, the transmission of traditional skills gradually shifted towards socialisation and openness, enabling women to enter various industries on a broad scale to learn.

Performance

As an important artistic practice segment of the conference, the Shanghai Branch of the Chinese Musicians Association organised two thematic concerts at the Shanghai Concert Hall on September 2 and 4. These performances served not only as artistic showcases but also as formal endorsements of the artistic value inherent in various musical schools.

In terms of *pipa* performance, eight representative performers were selected to present ten solo items, selecting compositions that significantly reflected the characteristics of the era: the older generation of performers included representatives from the Pinghu School, Yang Shaoyi, Yang Dajun, and Cheng Wujia, as well as Zhang Pingzhou from the Wang School, and Li Rongsheng from the Northern School and Chen Zhong; the younger generation of performers consisted of Liu Dehai, Kuang Yuzhong, and Zeng Qingrong 曾庆蓉 (b. 1938, a former student of Yang Shaoyi). Notably, the Pinghu School demonstrated outstanding artistic influence in this performance: first, they accounted for 37.5% of the participating performers (3/8); second, they represented 40% of the program quantity (4/10), with Yang Dajun and Cheng Wujia invited to participate in both performances; Cheng Wujia presented one solo and one ensemble item (see Figure 3.8). This allocation of artistic resources fully reflected the high recognition of the artistic value of the Pinghu School within the Chinese *pipa* community in the 1960s, confirming its sustained influence and mainstream status as a traditional school on the contemporary music stage and also highlighting its historical contribution and widespread recognition in academic circles.

September 2, 1961			September 4, 1961		
Performer	Piece	Institution	Performer	Piece	Institution
Zeng Qingrong	“Xinjiang Dance Music” 新疆舞曲	Sichuan Conservatory of Music	Li Rongsheng	“Spring Festival Overture” 春节序曲 “Dancing under the Moonlight” 月下欢舞	Shandong College of Arts
Zhang Pingzhou	“Song at the Frontier”	Wuhan Conservatory of Music	Kuang Yuzhong	“Khorchin Grassland” 科尔沁草原	Central Conservatory of Music
Liu Dehai	“The Five Heroes of Langya Mountain” 狼牙山五壮士	Central Conservatory of Music	Chen Zhong	“Wild Geese on the Sandbank”	Tianjin Conservatory of Music
Yang Shaoyi	“The Moon High Above” 月儿高	Xi’an Conservatory of Music	Cheng Wujia	“The King of Chu Doffs His Armour”	Nanjing University of the Arts

Yang Dajun	“Traveling on the Passageway Which Leads to Sichuan”	Beijing Academy of Fine Arts	Yang Dajun	“Traveling on the Passageway Which Leads to Sichuan”	Beijing Academy of Fine Arts
Cheng Wujia/ Wang Yi	“Land Sailing” 陆地行舟; “The Iron Tree Blooms” 铁树开花	Nanjing University of the Arts			

Figure 3.8: Part of the *pipa* items from the two concerts for the conference delegates (1961).

Textbook

At this conference, the expert committee unanimously approved the designation of Yang Shaoyi’s compiled *Pipa Scores of the Pinghu School* (*Pinghupai pipa qupu*, 平湖派琵琶曲谱), in both cipher musical notation and staff notation as a nationally standardised *pipa* instructional material. This decision was grounded in the textbook’s significant academic merit and pedagogical practicality. Serving as a core reference repertoire for *pipa* performance majors in higher music institutions, twelve of the thirteen traditional major suites from the Pinghu School were incorporated into the curriculum, with the majority classified as advanced performance pieces, underscoring the Pinghu School’s pivotal role and professional recognition within the *pipa* education framework.

During the compilation process, Yang Shaoyi utilised Li Fangyuan’s *gongchepu* as his foundational text and conducted rigorous revisions by cross-referencing the transcriptions of Wu Mengfei and Zhu Xingqing (Yang 1963). Ultimately, by 1963, the Xi’an Conservatory of Music published a comprehensive collection of *Pipa Teaching Materials* (*Pipa jiaocai*, 琵琶教材), which includes four volumes: *Li Fangyuan Gongchepu Score* 李芳园工尺谱, *Zhu Ying Annotation Score* 朱英标注谱, *Yang Shaoyi Cipher Musical Notation Score* 杨少彝简谱, and *Yang Shaoyi Staff Score* 杨少彝五线谱 (see Figures 3.9 and 3.10). This collection innovatively integrates traditional *gongchepu* with modern cipher and staff notation, preserving the authentic performance techniques and musical style of the Pinghu School tradition while aligning with contemporary music education standards through a systematic notation approach. As a critical document for the transmission of Pinghu School artistry, this collection not only provides a standardised reference for professional *pipa* instruction, facilitating the formalisation of teaching methodologies, but also offers a reliable academic resource for investigating the historical development and technical evolution of the Pinghu School.

materials, the school had established a comprehensive and prominent leading position across three critical dimensions: talent cultivation, artistic expression, and academic development. This signified that by the early 1960s, the Pinghu School had evolved from a significant artistic tradition into a defining force within professional *pipa* education.

In summary, during the period of “institutional prosperity” from 1949 to 1966, the Pinghu School successfully embedded its traditions within the framework of professional music education in the new China, thereby achieving significant development. Their strategy was multi-layered and proactive: in terms of talent deployment, core figures such as Yang Dajun, Yang Shaoyi, and Cheng Wujia established a nationwide teaching network across major institutions, forming a broad and stable foundation for transmission; in professional practice, through active participation in national-level artistic activities, they established authority and benchmarks across three dimensions: musical innovation, instrumental reform, and standardisation of teaching materials. This series of institutional engagements and successes accumulated crucial “academic capital” for the Pinghu School. It was precisely this substantial “capital” that formed the school’s profound “buffer layer,” endowing it with inherent resilience to withstand crises and preserve its flame amid the subsequent historic upheavals.

3.3 Non-public Transmission Period (1966 to 1974)

During the Cultural Revolution, traditional *pipa* artistry was condemned as a “feudal remnant,” resulting in the systematic decimation of the musical ecosystem. *Pipa* masters, including inheritors of the Pinghu School such as Yang Dajun, Cheng Wujia, and Yang Shaoyi, were subjected to public criticism, and all public musical activities were suspended, rendering traditional music a forbidden domain. However, it was within this extreme environment that the Pinghu School musicians demonstrated remarkable cultural resilience.¹⁸ Yang Shaoyi, through a clandestine transmission model that I will call integrating secret teaching, scholarly writings, and systematic salvage efforts, preserved crucial elements for future revival amidst a cultural extinction crisis.

3.3.1 Clandestine Teaching and Writing Amidst Turmoil (1966-1972)

¹⁸ During this period, a small number of musicians, such as Lin Shicheng and Sun Yude, secretly continued musical instruction. However, in contrast to the case of Yang Shaoyi, these instances either lack sufficient historical documentation or possess less-defined lineage, thus not yet demonstrating adequate historical significance.

The Xi'an Conservatory of Music, where Yang Shaoyi taught, was a major site of Cultural Revolution persecution, notorious for forcing professors to “kneel outside the campus walls and endure public humiliation by passersby” (Zhang 2014, 59). As one of the Conservatory’s leading figures and as someone with an established public reputation, Yang was quickly labelled as an “anti-revolutionary academic authority” (Li 2023, 51) and became a “counter-revolutionary” figure in literary and artistic circles, being forced to clean toilets and parade in humiliating public displays (see figure 3.11).¹⁹ Later, he was locked up in a cowshed for struggle sessions and then sent to a farm to start a 7-year life of pig feeding. Yang’s son, Yang Yusun, described the appearance of his father when he saw him in 1969 during an interview. He said,

My father has aged and been so maltreated that he no longer looks like a human being. His once sturdy body has now collapsed, and his fingers, which used to magically play the strings of the *pipa*, have been swollen and deformed by the pig feed bucket, with prominent bones and rough fingers like dry tree branches. (Bai 1992, 48)



Figure 3.11: Yang Shaoyi was subjected to public criticism and parading; the slogan on the right side bears the inscription: “Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong: Never forget class struggle” (c. 1968-1970, Provided by Liu Xifeng).²⁰

Despite enduring both physical and psychological duress, Yang Shaoyi remained steadfast in his commitment to perpetuating the Pinghu School. Under extreme political circumstances, he risked his life to secretly provide Yang Yusun with systematic

¹⁹ For further details on Yang Shaoyi’s experience during the Cultural Revolution, please refer to Li (2023, 51-56).

²⁰ During the Cultural Revolution, intellectuals were regarded as representatives of bourgeois.

instruction.²¹ According to Yang Yusun's account, his father's pedagogy encompassed not only *pipa* performance techniques but also a comprehensive musical knowledge system—this included the origins of music, the westward transmission and subsequent evolution of the *pipa*, and a comparative analysis of Chinese traditional musical notation with Western music theory. It also covered musical structure analysis, interpretation of historical and literary contexts, the correlation between the theory of five elements and the performer's internal sensations, and comparisons of creative styles among Chinese folk music, Western classical music, and both Chinese and foreign masters. In performance practice, Yang Shaoyi's teaching consistently adhered to established norms. From the posture of sitting upright with chest held high and the instrument held parallel to the chest, to the strict prohibition of leaning the head close to the instrument or employing exaggerated movements, every detail rigorously upheld the traditions of the Pinghu School (see Figure 3.12). He cautioned his son, "Art must be pure; if those engaged in art relax their standards and become tainted by vulgar practices, they will bring disgrace to their art" (*Ibid.*). Yang Shaoyi's teaching not only fully preserved the repertoires of the Pinghu School, but also ensured the continuity of the school's artistic essence through theoretical instruction and technical training.

²¹ According to Yang Yusun's recollection, Yang Shaoyi was exiled to a remote farm for "re-education" in 1969, residing in cowshed [a term used to describe the informal prison where persecuted person is detained during the Cultural Revolution] (Bai 1992, 48). It was likely within this isolated and arduous environment that the clandestine transmission of his *pipa* playing techniques was able to occur covertly, avoiding external scrutiny.



Figure 3.12: Yang Shaoyi was performing on stage in the 1950s (Yang, 1990).

During the years when he was confined within the cowshed, Yang Shaoyi's spirit fought its way out, turning towards a monumental theoretical endeavour—in 1970, he secretly commenced writing the *Pipa chungiu* (unpublished). This was an arduous struggle against time, illness, and extreme conditions: days spent in forced labour that drained nearly all his strength, nights spent writing in silence while tormented by stomach pains (Yang 1985, 4). After almost three years, a manuscript spanning 244 pages was finally completed, covering music history, musical theory, instrumentology, performance techniques, and pedagogy across numerous fields (see Figure 3.13). The exceptional merit of this work lies in its being far from a mere compilation of materials, but rather a “practical theory” crystallising this performer's lifelong artistic insights. Particularly noteworthy is his in-depth interpretation of each piece within the *Li Collection*, grounded in years of performance practice, elucidating the key performance points and technical challenges for every composition. This section fundamentally achieves a crucial historical transition: it transforms the highly personalised and experiential musical understanding of the early Pinghu School—Oral transmission and mental impartation (such as the subtle grasp of dynamics, nuance, and breath control in specific passages)—into a systematic, detailed, and verifiable textual record for the first time. Therefore, this manuscript also serves as the earliest and most direct verifiable source for future scholars aiming to understand the “interpretative essence” and musical exegesis methodology of the Pinghu School of this era.

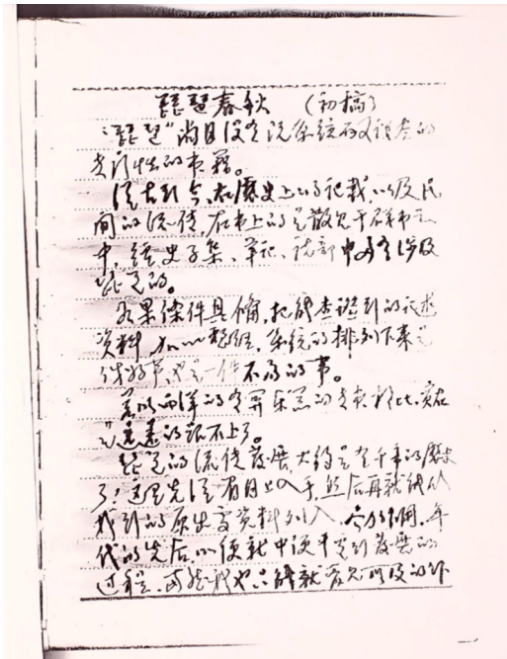


Figure 3.13: First page of the manuscript of *Pipa Chunqiu* (Yang 1972, provided by Zhang Ming).

3.3.2 Systematic Salvage During Political Relaxation (1972-1974)

Following episodic adjustments within the domestic political climate of 1972, Yang Shaoyi was able to return to pedagogical duties, where he immediately initiated a systematic preservation project dedicated to the Pinghu School.²² His student, Li Jianzheng, recalled: “Having just been liberated from the first tumultuous wave of the Cultural Revolution, he eagerly urged me to organise the repertoire and personally reviewed and annotated the scores” (Li 2021, 17). This conservation project was meticulously structured, employing a multifaceted approach.

Confronted with notation inaccuracies and ambiguous fingerings in the 1963 edition of the *Pinghu School Textbook* due to resource constraints, Yang Shaoyi’s primary objective was to meticulously revise the musical scores.²³ He first implemented a specialised division of labour, assigning different students to collate modern *pipa* pieces, Zhu Ying’s original compositions, and the entire traditional repertoire of the Pinghu School, respectively. In his

²² After the Lin Biao incident of 13 September 1971, there was a turning point in China’s political situation. Premier Zhou Enlai 周恩来 (1898-1976) resumed control of the government, which greatly reversed the country’s passive situation in politics, economy, and culture. In this context, the situation in the cultural and artistic circles started to improve, and professional activities gradually resumed.

²³ According to Zhang Ming’s oral account, the 1963 edition of the *Pinghu School Textbook* contained numerous errors in musical notation and fingering marks due to financial constraints and limited printing technology. The 1972 revision primarily addressed these typographical and content inaccuracies through systematic correction, re-editing of the scores, standardisation of fingering techniques, and improved layout design, thereby enhancing the accuracy and clarity of the method to facilitate the transmission and pedagogy of the Pinghu School tradition.

notation methodology, he employed a “listening-based proofreading” approach: he would perform the piece himself while students listened attentively, cross-referencing each note against the score and meticulously annotating performance techniques, tonal nuances, and rhythmic variations (see Figure 3.14). This methodology complemented his organisation of students to collaboratively collate scores, collectively advancing the standardised documentation of traditional musical materials.



Figure 3.14: Yang Shaoyi (left) performed while the students transcribed the music (c. 1970s, provided by Liu Xifeng).

Yang Shaoyi astutely recognised the critical role of audio documentation in preserving the Pinghu School. At that time, the audio archival development of this lineage was severely lagging—in contrast to the Wang School’s near-complete recording of its entire repertoire and the Pudong School’s Lin Shicheng having recorded eight representative pieces, the Pinghu School possessed only three fragmented tracks recorded in 1957 by Wu Mengfei using an antiquated large-disk recorder, resulting in a mere 23% coverage of its repertoire.²⁴ Confronted with this critical deficiency amid political constraints and technological limitations, Yang Shaoyi resolutely procured advanced recording equipment from Shanghai through intermediaries. Enduring severe hand pain, he completed the recording of the Pinghu School’s thirteen pieces. This endeavour not only filled the gap in the school’s audio archives but also miraculously preserved the complete

²⁴ In the 1950s, a significant undertaking in the preservation of Chinese folk music was initiated by scholars Cao Anhe and Yang Yinliu of the National Music Research Institute of the Central Conservatory of Music. Employing recording technology, they systematically documented the performance practices of eminent folk musicians, including Lin Shicheng, Li Tingsong, Wu Mengfei, and others, thereby safeguarding invaluable traditional musical heritage for posterity.

artistic lineage of the school, compensating for the historical absence of recordings from early masters, including Zhu Ying and Li Fangyuan.

To ensure that the school's historical narrative was preserved, Yang Shaoyi also engaged in fieldwork, personally leading Yang Yusun to locations such as Shanghai and Pinghu to conduct oral history interviews with informants, including Li Tingsong, Lin Shicheng, Yang Dajun, and Fan Boyan. Yang's research aimed to systematically collect eyewitness testimonies, manuscript fragments, and archival visual materials related to the master Zhu Ying. His objective was to compile a *Commemorative Album of Mr Zhu Xingqing* (*Zhu Xingqing jiniance*, 朱荇青纪念册, unpublished) and to transcribe the materials into cipher or staff notation for publication, aiming to reconstruct the development trajectory and genealogical framework of the Pinghu School through these fragmented yet vivid primary sources.

These measures ensured that the Pinghu School's advantages, accumulated during the period of institutionalised prosperity, were not completely severed by the Cultural Revolution. Instead, they sustained their academic and systematic nature in a concealed manner, preserving the potential for subsequent revival.

3.3.3 The Tragedy of Yang Shaoyi and the Fracturing of Lineage (1974)

Nonetheless, within the historical context of the Cultural Revolution's waning influence, scholarly pursuits were still fraught with considerable political peril. In 1974, amid the Criticise Lin [Biao], Criticise Confucius Campaign (*pilin pikong yundong*, 批林批孔运动), this scholar suffered severe persecution due to his academic endeavours, particularly his compilation of the *Commemorative Album of Mr Zhu Xingqing*.²⁵ Eyewitness accounts recall that he was twice forcibly taken to large auditoriums, subjected to baseless interrogations and public humiliation on the podium. Most egregiously, he was falsely accused of embezzling proceeds from the sale of *Pipa Teaching Materials* (1963)—a devastating affront to his lifelong integrity and adherence to scholarly ethics. Following the

²⁵ In 1941, the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, where Zhu Ying was employed, was taken over by the Wang Jingwei regime. Following the conclusion of the Second Sino-Japanese War, the Nationalist government promulgated the "Regulations for Punishing Traitors," which stipulated that individuals who held positions such as principals or significant roles in puppet organisations' institutions of higher education should be penalised (Zhang 2001, 167-68). As Zhu Ying served as the Director of Education during this period, his name was included in the "List of Traitors in the Music Sector" published by the *Xinhua Daily* 新华日报 on September 7, 1945, thus bringing the matter to the attention of the *pipa* community. According to Zhang Ming's oral account on 25th May 2025, in 1974, Yang Shaoyi's revision of the *Commemorative Album of Mr. Zhu Xingqing* was exploited by certain individuals under the pretext of "revising for a traitor," which served as a catalyst for the incident.

struggle sessions, the elderly scholar was nearly incapacitated, unable to return home unaided. After enduring inhumane psychological torment, Yang ultimately resorted to the most resolute form of resistance: according to his student Qu Wenjun 曲文军 (b. 1959), he first attempted self-disembowelment using a *pipa* repair knife, inflicting severe injuries. Despite emergency medical intervention, his persecutors publicly accused him of “suicide out of guilt”. Following his return home, he ingested a large quantity of sleeping pills and completed suicide by gas inhalation.²⁶ Yang Shaoyi’s physical life and his public legacy came to an abrupt end at that cold juncture in 1974.

The death of Yang Shaoyi and the subsequent destruction of his scholarship caused irreparable damage to the development of the Pinghu School lineage, marking a critical inflexion point for the tradition. Research indicates that the aftermath of Yang Shaoyi’s passing triggered a cascade of disruptions that severely undermined the Pinghu School’s pedagogical network. Although approximately three million intellectuals in China were politically rehabilitated following the Cultural Revolution, Yang’s anomalous death was simply classified by authorities as a “natural death,” and his political label as a “reactionary academic authority” remained unremoved. Yang Yusun, dedicated years to advocating for his father’s rehabilitation, aiming to restore his reputation by removing the remaining political stigma. However, due to persistent political and personal obstacles, his efforts were repeatedly thwarted, ultimately leading him to emigrate abroad in the 1990s (Bai 1992, 48).²⁷ In the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, the domestic political climate remained tense, and the political characterisation of Yang Shaoyi further intensified the collective silence within the inheritors. Key inheritors such as Yang Dajun and Fan Boyan, due to political constraints, “ceased to discuss or teach the Pinghu School in public” (Tang 2012, 26). This stands in stark contrast to the flourishing development of other *pipa* lineages during the Reform and Opening up period. Consequently, the Pinghu School experienced a profound transmission crisis amid this series of political suppressions.

²⁶ Based on the oral testimonies of Qu Wenjun on April 12, 2023, Zhang Ming on May 23, 2025, and the compilation by Li Jianzheng (2021, 20).

²⁷ According to the interview with Zhang Ming on May 23, 2025, Yang Yusun repeatedly petitioned Xi’an Conservatory of Music to posthumously rehabilitate Yang Shaoyi. However, the institution refused to acknowledge the necessity of rehabilitation, citing the official categorization of Yang Shaoyi’s “natural death.” Nonetheless, during the 1993 National Symposium on Pipa Pedagogy 全国高等艺术院校琵琶教学研讨会 held in Hangzhou, over thirty *pipa* experts, collectively submitted a letter to Xi’an Conservatory advocating for Yang Shaoyi’s rehabilitation. Regrettably, this appeal was ultimately ignored and received no official response.

3.3.4 An Enduring Legacy: The Preservation and Rediscovery of Heritage (Post-1974)

Although Yang's public legacy was violently severed, the forward-thinking systematic work he undertook during his lifetime planted the seeds of revival for the Pinghu School.

In his teaching, while seeking to clear his father's name, Yang Yusun also shouldered the mission of artistic transmission. His disciple Guo Shaohua 郭少华 (b. 1959), whom he instructed, currently focuses on performing, teaching, and disseminating this school primarily within Shaanxi province, representing a vital contemporary continuation of the Yang family lineage.²⁸ Meanwhile, Zhang Ming, the son of a family with long-standing ties to the Yang family, whom Yang Shaoyi taught in the early 1970s, constitutes another crucial branch of this transmission. Since the beginning of the 21st century, Zhang Ming has been consistently dedicated to various endeavours aimed at preserving, protecting, researching, and performing the Pinghu school, emerging as a central figure in putting Yang Shaoyi's scholarly ideas into practice and further developing them (see Chapter 5).

In the domain of musical score compilation, Yang Shaoyi's publication of 1963, *Pipa Teaching Materials*, was groundbreaking in its comprehensive documentation of the Pinghu School across different periods using *gongchepu*, cipher musical notation, and staff notation. This work predates the Pudong School's *Ju Shilin Pipa Scores* (1982), the Wang School's *Wang Yuting Pipa Scores* (*Wang Yuting pipa pu*, 汪昱庭琵琶谱, 1981), and the Chongming School's *Yingzhou Ancient Melody Selections* (*Yingzhou gudiao quxuan*, 瀛洲古调曲选, 1984) by nearly two decades. Crucially, when Yang Shaoyi died in disrepute, the authorities moved to confiscate and destroy his possessions, but Yang Yusun was able to recover and preserve the manuscript of *Pipa chungiu*—widely believed by the academic community to have been destroyed—along with the newly revised *Thirteen Sets of the Pinghu School* and other vital documents to a friend's custody. This enabled this core academic heritage to survive the catastrophe of Yang Shaoyi's death. Recently, the *Thirteen Sets of the Pinghu School* has been entrusted by Yang's descendants to the Central Conservatory of Music's Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Center for forthcoming publication. Meanwhile, Zhang Ming and others are actively seeking publication avenues for the *Pipa Chungiu*. This signifies that the complete transmission system of the Pinghu

²⁸ Guo Shaohua began studying the *pipa* under Yang Shaoyi at the Xi'an Conservatory of Music in 1973. Following Yang's passing, he continued his training with Yang Yusun starting in 1975. From 1978, he worked professionally within Shaanxi province, serving in performers such as the Tongchuan Song and Dance Troupe 铜川市歌舞团 and the Xianyang Qinqiang Opera Troupe 咸阳市秦腔团.

School will receive more specialised preservation and dissemination, concurrently furnishing new historical evidence to reassess the artistic contributions of the Pinghu School.

In addition, Yang's student, Li Jianzheng, astutely anticipated that Yang Shaoyi's recordings would become a "national treasure of Chinese *pipa* artistry" (Li 2021, 18). Taking a calculated risk, he duplicated and preserved these recordings, ensuring that this invaluable material, which had otherwise been slated for destruction, was transmitted to future generations. Currently, five pieces performed by Yang Shaoyi are available online: "The King of Chu Doffs His Armour", "The Green Lotus," "Rainbow Dress Rhapsody" (*Ni chang qu*, 霓裳曲), "Song at the Frontier" and "Xunyang *Pipa*". Combined with Wu Mengfei's three early recordings, they collectively form a valuable acoustic archive representing eight quintessential compositions of the Pinghu School.²⁹ Despite the suboptimal audio quality due to the technological limitations of the era, this collection remains the sole authoritative resource for studying the artistic characteristics of the Pinghu School, serving as a milestone in the historical transmission of Chinese *pipa* artistry.

Reviewing Yang Shaoyi's journey of artistic transmission during an extreme period, it stands as a testament to the power of exceptional human action in cultural preservation. On the one hand, his public artistic activities were forcibly interrupted by political violence, and his life ended tragically, constituting a conspicuous rupture in the historical narrative of the Pinghu School. Yet on the other hand, his clandestine teaching, writing, score arrangement and recording efforts formed a crucial yet long-obscured thread of continuity. This legacy not only preserved technique and repertoire but also accomplished a critical transformation: systematically transforming the Pinghu School's highly experiential tradition of oral transmission and intangible interpretative practices into accessible textual and audiovisual archives for future scholarly inquiry, interpretation, auditory study and

²⁹ Currently, five of Yang Shaoyi's recordings are available for public access online (all links were accessed on 10 February 2026):

"The King of Chu Doffs His Armour":

https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV17j411J7gs/?spm_id_from=333.337.search-card.all.click&vd_source=92841bc271dcdb3a839db12045976c11;

"The Green Lotus": https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1bg4y197X9/?spm_id_from=333.337.search-card.all.click&vd_source=92841bc271dcdb3a839db12045976c11;

"Song at the Frontier": https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1rf4y1U7Tm/?spm_id_from=333.337.search-card.all.click&vd_source=92841bc271dcdb3a839db12045976c11;

"Xunyang *Pipa*": https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1t5411t7jW/?spm_id_from=333.337.search-card.all.click&vd_source=92841bc271dcdb3a839db12045976c11;

"Rainbow Dress Rhapsody": https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1Gw411M72X/?spm_id_from=333.337.search-card.all.click&vd_source=92841bc271dcdb3a839db12045976c11;

inheritance. It was precisely this quiet, steadfast work in adversity that preserved vital embers at the brink of extinction and ensuring that an artistic tradition could survive even when its public expression had been silenced.

3.4 Conclusion

The developmental trajectory of Pinghu School from 1949 to 1974 is a story of its practitioners' remarkable capacity to endure and adapt. Through a dual analysis of institutionalised prosperity during 1949-1966 and clandestine transmission from 1966-1974, this study reveals that the so-called “decline” of the Pinghu School primarily reflects an apparent rupture induced by political external forces. Nonetheless, the core artistic vitality persisted within a framework of institutional support and covert practice.

During the seventeen years following the founding of the PRC, the Pinghu School experienced unprecedented opportunities for development within the framework of professional music education system construction. Through active participation in major events, the Pinghu School, under the collective efforts of inheritors like Cheng Wujia, Yang Dajun, and Yang Shaoyi, established a dominant position in performance practice, instrument innovation, and curriculum development. This period of institutionalised growth accumulated valuable “academic capital,” laying a solid foundation for its resilience in extreme environmental conditions.

Although the Pinghu School appeared to experience a “discontinuity” during the Cultural Revolution, its artistic vitality did not truly wane. This starkly contrasts with the natural demise of schools like the Wuxi School due to internal decline, illustrating that the “decline” of the Pinghu School was essentially a superficial manifestation of external political forces, rather than a loss of artistic value. Yang Shaoyi's steadfast efforts during the Cultural Revolution—conducting clandestine lectures, rescuing archival documents, and recording audio materials—exemplify the fundamental principles of cultural and personal resilience within the context of heritage preservation and ideological resistance. However, it is imperative to recognise that his artistic achievements are not incidental but are deeply rooted in a comprehensive artistic system collaboratively constructed by multiple generations of the school since the late Qing Dynasty. From the foundational framework established by Li Fangyuan's *Li Collection* in 1895, through Zhu Ying's institutional transformation at Shanghai Conservatory of Music in the 1930s, to the post-1949 professional innovations by Cheng Wujia, Yang Dajun, and others, this well-defined

scholarly trajectory endowed the Pinghu School with a distinctive “cultural genome.” This interconnected accumulation of knowledge and institutional safeguards also endowed the school with robust cultural resilience, thereby deconstructing the erroneous narrative of a “decline upon the founding of the nation”—A truly declining school would not possess such systematic resistance and regenerative capabilities after resource depletion. Without the prior establishment of professional authority, Yang Shaoyi’s “academic capital”, which he defended with his life, would have been rendered valueless.

The inheritance trajectory of the Pinghu School elucidates the survival logic of traditional Chinese art amidst 20th-century political upheavals: it demonstrates that resilience is not a passive trait, but a historical construct activated by specific individuals. This model reveals a critical dialectic: systematic development during periods of stability creates “capital”—the institutional frameworks, canonical repertoires, and scholarly authority—which, in turn, empowers individual agents to enact meaningful preservation during times of crisis. The Pinghu School’s survival, therefore, offers a paradigm for understanding how traditional arts can navigate modernity not merely by resisting change, but by converting historically accumulated strength into the capacity for the future.

Chapter 4

Analysing Decline: Internal Crisis, External Pressure (1974-1990s)

4.1 Introduction

In October 1976, the decade-long Cultural Revolution concluded, thereby initiating a comprehensive resurgence of Chinese musical culture under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping 邓小平 (1904-1997) and other leaders. As the political climate improved, the majority of musicians previously classified as “rightists” were rehabilitated, professional orchestras and ensembles were reestablished, conservatories resumed admissions, and previously suppressed masterpieces were restored to public visibility. *The Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party*, 中国共产党第十一届中央委员会第三次全体会议, convened in December 1978 and established the policy of Reform and Opening-up, a pivotal juncture that profoundly altered the trajectory of artistic development in China.¹ Following the opening of the nation’s borders, Sino-foreign musical and cultural exchanges experienced an unprecedented surge: foreign musicians frequently visited China, introducing modernist artistic currents and compositional techniques; concurrently, Chinese musicians actively engaged in international discourse through study abroad programs, performances, and academic lectures. Within this open and inclusive atmosphere, China’s musical culture began its comprehensive revival from the ruins of the Cultural Revolution.

Amidst this wave of change, *pipa* artistry has flourished, presenting a thriving landscape characterised by systematisation, professionalisation, and internationalisation.² On the one hand, under the influence of Western compositional techniques, a wealth of outstanding modern works has emerged, achieving significant expansion in both form and subject matter. On the other hand, the conservatory-centred professional training system became increasingly refined, cultivating versatile performers and, through systematic

¹ “Reform” refers to internal restructuring of the planned economic system, while “Opening-up” denotes the external liberalization of the national borders to attract foreign direct investment and technology transfer. This policy marks the inception of China’s economic acceleration and integration into the global market. For more information about the policy, see official website: http://english.scio.gov.cn/m/featured/chinakeywords/2022-07/13/content_78321936.htm, accessed 10 February 2026.

² See Ju (2014) and Wu (2015) for further details.

pedagogy, significantly raising the overall performance standard while producing numerous outstanding musicians.³ Meanwhile, the *pipa* frequently appears on the international stage, with its modern repertoire becoming more deeply integrated into the global dialogue of contemporary music.

This transformation, however, presented traditional *pipa* schools with both opportunities and severe survival challenges. The professional education system now prioritises cultivating versatile talents rather than specialists in any single school. The transmission of traditional repertoire tends to preserve it in its original form, with little room for innovative interpretation. Concurrently, the modern composition and evaluation systems increasingly favour large-scale contemporary works and technical virtuosity, drifting further from the introspective, restrained literati aesthetic of schools like Pinghu and Chongming. Consequently, traditional music has become increasingly marginalised within the diverse landscape of Chinese national music. As musicologist Qiao Jianzhong observed, “Although so-called folk *pipa* and traditional arts still possess some space for existence, they have largely been supplanted by formalised academic education” (Qiao 2014, 4).

However, the various traditional schools did not passively endure this upheaval. Their approaches to seizing opportunities and responding to challenges differed markedly, leading to a profound restructuring of the landscape of traditional *pipa* schools—specifically, the emergence of the Wang and Pudong schools, which gradually surpassed the previously dominant Pinghu School, establishing themselves as the most influential contemporary schools. Conversely, the Pinghu School experienced a continual decline in social recognition and faced imminent disintegration of its transmission system, resulting in a critical survival crisis. This stark contrast raises the central issue of this chapter: under identical historical turning points, why do the fates of different schools diverge?

Previous studies frequently attribute the decline of the Pinghu School to a disconnect between its musical style and contemporary aesthetic demands. As Chen Zemin noted: “post-1949, the Pinghu School experienced a noticeable disconnection from contemporary trends, with its scholarly music and self-entertaining style struggling to meet the stage performance demands of the new China” (cited in Tang 2012, 19), thereby contributing to its marginalisation within the evolving musical landscape.⁴ However, explaining the decline

³ The versatile talents embody standardized advanced techniques and Western music theory, capable of bridging traditional and modern repertoires, and proficient in solo, concerto, chamber music, and various performance formats.

⁴ See Tang (2012) for more discussions on the reason for the decline of the Pinghu School.

solely through the lens of “stage adaptability” is insufficient to elucidate its underlying reasons fully. My study finds that the decline of the Pinghu School was a complex process driven primarily by an internal crisis of transmission, compounded by external environmental changes.

Therefore, in this chapter, I conduct an in-depth analysis of the reasons behind the decline of the Pinghu School from two perspectives. Internally, by comparing the Pinghu School with the more influential Pudong School and Wang School of the same period, I examine critical gaps across three dimensions: inheritance strategies, identity formation, and aesthetic adaptation. This will reveal the fundamental internal causes of its decline. Externally, I examine how the new artistic ecosystem emerging after Reform and Opening-up—encompassing the reconfiguration of mainstream aesthetic paradigms, the standardisation of academic education systems, and the centralisation of platform resources—interacted with these internal weaknesses, thereby accelerating the Pinghu School’s marginalisation.

This study pursues a dual objective: first, to conduct an in-depth analysis of the specific causes underlying the decline of the Pinghu School; second, to use this case as a basis for constructing a universal analytical framework for understanding the modernisation of traditional artistic schools. By situating the Pinghu School within the macro context of China’s socio-cultural transition since the Reform and Opening-up policy, the study seeks to elucidate the widespread challenges faced by traditional arts in the context of modernity. This investigation not only has significant implications for the historical study of *pipa* art but also provides profound insights for contemporary efforts to preserve intangible cultural heritage.

4.2 Internal Factors

The intrinsic roots of Pinghu School’s decline lie in its inadequate response to three pivotal challenges during periods of historical transformation. Firstly, following the passing of the core inheritor, the disruption of the transmission chain coupled with the absence of brand development, failed to transform their artistic legacy into a public cultural asset. Secondly, the residual impact of the collectivist educational philosophy during Zhu Ying’s era, within an evaluative system increasingly emphasising school identity, has paradoxically diluted the inheritors’ identification of school and their sense of heritage reciprocity. Lastly, its restrained and introspective literary aesthetic has lost its core competitiveness on the

modern stage, where aesthetics emphasises dramatic tension and immediate impact. These three interrelated predicaments, mutually reinforcing one another, collectively constitute the intrinsic reasons for the Pinghu School's gradual loss of vitality and marginalisation within the modernisation process.

4.2.1 Disrupted Transmission and Branding Deficits

As a living art form, the *pipa* tradition's perpetuation is critically dependent on its inheritors, whose musical activities directly influence the school's impact and vitality. Master Lin Shicheng astutely observed, "The prosperity of each school is contingent upon the emergence of exceptional talents during a specific period. Without such individuals, the school's influence may wane, potentially leading to its demise" (Lin 1997, 36). However, a comparison of the divergent fates of the Pinghu, Wang and Pudong schools at similar historical junctures reveals that the mere existence of individual inheritors is insufficient to guarantee a school's flourishing. The necessary condition lies in whether these inheritors possess a conscious awareness and capacity for branding, and whether they can transform personal skills into disseminable, sustainable public cultural assets. The lineage of Pinghu School, from Li Fangyuan and Zhu Ying to Yang Shaoyi, has historically adhered to a model led by prominent figures. The sudden passing of Yang Shaoyi in 1974 directly resulted in the discontinuation of this transmission chain. Conversely, the demise of Li Tingsong in 1976, amidst the Cultural Revolution's prolonged persecution, did not precipitate the decline of the Wang School. This comparison suggests that the loss of a core inheritor constitutes a significant setback but does not constitute an insurmountable blow. The critical factor is whether capable, self-aware successors emerge to sustain the school's vitality through continuous branding and propagation efforts. The practices of Lin Shicheng and Li Guangzu 李光祖 (1943-2018) exemplify models for achieving such continuity.

Pudong School: Lin Shicheng's pivotal contribution to the branding of the Pudong School lies in his transcendence of individual artistic inheritance (see Figure 4.1).⁵ Upon his return to the Central Conservatory of Music in 1979, Lin primarily established a comprehensive academic pipeline for the Pudong School that spans from affiliated elementary and secondary schools to undergraduate programs. Within this pedagogical framework, he not only defined the Pudong School's artistic principles as a central model and aesthetic foundation but also cultivated a cohort of influential performers, including Liu

⁵ For more information about Lin Shicheng's achievements, please see Wang (2013).

Dehai and Wu Man 吴蛮 (b. 1963).⁶ Crucially, he undertook a series of rescue and rebranding initiatives of the nearly extinct Pudong School. In terms of documentation, he collated and published core collections, including the *Yang Zheng Xuan Pipa Score* and *Ju Shilin Pipa Score*, establishing authoritative textual references for the school. In theoretical development, he authored a series of specialised papers including “An Initial Exploration of the Pudong *Pipa* School” (1982), establishing for the first time an interpretative framework for the school from historical, technical and aesthetic perspectives. In dissemination practice, he recorded and published extensive audiovisual teaching and performance materials, transforming the school’s classic repertoire and performance standards into accessible, widely disseminable teaching resources, thereby significantly advancing the school’s popularisation.



Figure 4.1: Portrait of Lin Shicheng in his youth, c. the 1950s (cited in Shanghai No. 1 National Musical Instrument Factory and Shanghai Museum of Chinese Musical Instruments 2007, 92).

Wang School: Li Guangzu’s pivotal contribution to the branding of the Wang School lay in his strategy of leveraging stage performances, authoritative publications and international academic dissemination (see Figure 4.2).⁷ As the third generation of the Wang School, Li Guangzu has consciously cultivated the school’s public image since becoming a professional musician with the Central Orchestra 中央乐团 in 1972. In 1979, he performed Li Tingsong’s transmitted score of “The King of Chu Doffs His Armour” at the National

⁶ Liu Dehai was recognised as a leading figure in contemporary *pipa* artistry, while Wu Man has attained international acclaim as a world-class performer (Fan 2023, April 26). See Wu Man’s personal website for further details: <https://wumanpipa.org/>, accessed 10 February 2026.

⁷ See Cui (2020, 2023a, 2023b) for further details on Li Guangzu.

Higher Art Institutions at the Pipa Teaching Experience Exchange Conference (*Guojia gaodeng yishu yuanxiao pipa jiaoxue jiaoliuhui*, 国家高等艺术院校琵琶教学交流会; hereafter, the Teaching Experience Exchange Conference), explicitly labelling the “Wang School” name and version origin in a formal performance for the first time, thereby establishing the school’s independent artistic identity. Regarding the transmission system, he recorded and released the vinyl LP of the *Chinese Music Masters and Famous Performers Classics—Li Guangzu, The Overlord Lays Down His Armour* (*Guojia zhongguo yinyue dashi mingjia jingdian—Li Guangzu, Bawang xiejia*, 国家中国音乐大师名家经典—李光祖, 霸王卸甲) in 1981, followed by the compilation and publication of the *Pipa Ancient Tunes: Performance Scores by Li Tingsong* (*Pipa guqu: Li Tingsong yanzou pu*, 琵琶古曲: 李廷松演奏谱) the following year. This established a dual-track transmission model combining “audio-visual recordings and written documentation”, laying an authoritative and disseminable foundation for teaching and research within the Wang School. On the international stage, he has not only demonstrated his artistic mastery through concerts but has also delivered specialised lectures at academic institutions such as the University of California, Berkeley, introducing the Wang School as a complete academic system to the global scholarly community.



Figure 4.2: Portrait of Li Guangzu (n.d., cited in Chen, 2022).

Pinghu School: In stark contrast to the proactive development of the Wang and Pudong schools, the transmission of the Pinghu School faced severe setbacks due to multiple blows. The direct cause of this interruption was the systematic destruction of its core transmission forces by political campaigns: Yang Shaoyi’s failure to be rehabilitated

after the Cultural Revolution directly led to his son, Yang Yusun, being politically marginalised. Despite his extraordinary talent, this inheritor was highly sought after by over forty musical ensembles from the central government, military, and local units; however, due to political vetting, he was unable to secure employment. Additionally, a work-related injury inflicted lasting physical impairment on his right hand, ultimately leading to his complete transition away from professional music practice (Bai 1992, 47-50).⁸ Meanwhile, Yang Dajun shifted his pedagogical affiliation to the Wang School, while Fan Boyan and Chen Gongze focused on advancing the Chongming School, leaving the Pinghu School without its pivotal custodian of artistic lineage at a critical historical juncture.⁹

Despite the commendable efforts of Yang Shaoyi's disciples, such as Ren Hongxiang 任鸿翔 (1942-1999) and Li Jianzheng 李建正 (b. 1940)—in scholarly compilation and tradition preservation—e.g., Ren Hongxiang performed traditional Pinghu School pieces at the Teaching Experience Exchange Conference and compiled and published the *Thirteen Pieces of Pipa Music of the Pinghu School* (*Pinghupai pipa shisan shou*, 平湖派琵琶曲 13 首) in 1990; Li Jianzheng produced a mimeographed edition of *The Modern Translation of the Thirteen Sets of Pinghu Pipa School* (*Gupu jinyi—Pinghu pai shisan tao daqu*, 古谱今译—平湖派十三套琵琶大曲), which he distributed to the academic community—these endeavors have remained confined to textual compilation, falling short of evolving into a conscious brand building movement.¹⁰ Despite Yang Shaoyi having conducted pioneering work in systematic score revision and comprehensive recordings as early as the 1960s, the subsequent lack of sustained operational capacity within his successor generation prevented these potentially foundational achievements for revival from being activated. Unlike the systematic efforts of Lin Shicheng and Li Guangzu, which were mobilised for dissemination, these remnants remained dormant over the long term.

4.2.2 Diluted Identity and Reciprocity

⁸ See Bai (1992) for further details on Yang Yusun's life after Yang Shaoyi's passing.

⁹ Both Fan Boyan and Chen Gongze represent a similar pedagogical trajectory that bridges the Chongming and Pinghu schools. They initially studied the Chongming School under the master Fan Shaoyun. Subsequently, they enrolled at the Shanghai National Conservatory of Music, where they became disciples of Zhu Ying, thereby acquiring the traditions of the Pinghu School.

¹⁰ Ren Hongxiang began his studies under Yang Shaoyi in 1958. Following his graduation, he served as a *pipa* lecturer at the Xi'an Conservatory of Music in 1980. Over decades of pedagogical practice there, he cultivated a succession of Pinghu School inheritors, significantly contributing to the continuation and dissemination of the Pinghu School in the Northwestern region. See Wu (2010) for further details on Ren's artistic background; Li Jianzheng graduated from Xi'an Conservatory of Music in 1962 under the tutelage of Yang Shaoyi. See Li (2021) for further details on Li Jianzheng's music career.

Another primary factor contributing to Pinghu School's decline is deeply rooted in its intrinsic collectivism cultural core, exhibiting a fundamental conflict with the progressively reinforced academic paradigm of "regarding the history of schools as the entire history of the *pipa*'s development" (*yi pai dai shi*, 以派代史) following the Reform and Opening-up policy.¹¹ This contradiction has resulted in the disintegration of collective heritage identity and mutual reciprocity awareness, preventing its illustrious history from transforming into sustained vitality.

Wang Fandi sharply observed that "school traditions are fluid, dependent on the actions of their disciples, influenced by their teachers, and whether they still uphold the banner of the school," as well as "whether students sincerely acknowledge the nurturing provided by their respective school" (cited in Tang 2012, 32). From this perspective, the decline of the Pinghu School demonstrated an inevitability from two aspects: firstly, the failure to establish a sustainable inheritance system, lacking influential core inheritors as artistic benchmarks as we discussed above; secondly, subsequent disciples exhibited weak identification with the school, neither consciously cultivating transmission awareness nor actively contributing to the school's development. Consequently, Wang Fandi concluded that "from this standpoint, the Pinghu School appears to lack the potential for further expansion; decline is an unavoidable process" (*Ibid.*).

From my point of view, this predicament can be traced back to the early formation of the school's educational philosophy. As a pioneer of conservatory-style (*Xueyuan pai*, 学院派; Stock 1996, 145) pedagogy, Zhu Ying, during his tenure at Shanghai Conservatory of Music in the early 20th century—a time characterised by strict secrecy regarding technical mastery (as discussed in Chapter 2)—advocated and implemented a collectivist approach that transcended individual school boundaries and emphasised holistic artistic development. He proactively dismantles the artistic barriers between the Southern and Northern Schools, consciously transcending the traditional repertoire constraints of the Pinghu School in teaching practice, extensively integrating strengths from various styles to cultivate students' comprehensive artistic literacy (see Chapter 2). This modern, professionalised pedagogical model contrasts sharply with the traditional master-apprentice transmission prevalent in folk practices. Zhu Ying's practice essentially treats the entire *pipa* community as a higher-level

¹¹ The concept of "using the history of schools as the entire history of the *pipa*'s development" refers to a paradigm in which the lineage and narrative of a specific school dominate the historical account of the entire *pipa* art form. Liu Dehai has explicitly criticised this tendency, pointing out its excessive emphasis on vertical master-disciple relationships and other issues. For detailed discussion, see Liu (2015).

collective that needs to advance together, prioritising its overall modern transformation over the interests of any single school. This value orientation, which prioritises the goals of a larger collective over individual or subgroup interests, is closely aligned with the core logic of collectivism as defined in Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory.¹² During the first half of the 20th century, this pedagogical philosophy exerted a profound influence: it not only established a broad perspective for inheritors and cultivated versatile artists proficient in multiple styles but also facilitated the rapid emergence of the Pinghu School as a leading authority in the PRC, thereby securing its pivotal role within the professional music education framework (see Chapter 3).

Nonetheless, in the second half of the 20th century, this collectivism became a double-edged sword. While it encouraged greater success and contributed to the proliferation of *pipa* art, it simultaneously weakened its distinct identity as an independent School due to the lack of clear recognition of the Pinghu School lineage. The subsequent influence of this concept is clearly evident in the practices of the Pinghu School's inheriting community. Despite numerous distinguished inheritors affiliated with prestigious higher music education institutions, an effective lineage system remains undeveloped. Systematic transmission efforts under the Pinghu School nomenclature are seldom undertaken, leading to a gradual erosion of societal recognition of its distinct identity.

Since Cao Anhe first designated and distinguished different stylistic schools of *pipa* in 1953 (Cao 2021/1953, 334-339), the scholarly community has gradually coalesced around a consensus and research trend regarding the history of schools as the entire history of the *pipa*'s development. This approach has facilitated the theoretical development of *pipa* art, clarifying previously ambiguous transmission and lineage. However, it has also introduced complex cognitive effects related to identity and affiliation within the discipline. Compared to the 1930s, when various schools engaged in free exchange and mutual borrowing, the post-1949 period, particularly after the Reform and Opening-up policy, artists' identity recognition gradually shifted towards a single school, as the theoretical systems of these schools became increasingly systematised. Prominent artists who had studied multiple schools often gravitated towards adopting the most renowned school as their primary identity marker under the influence of mainstream academic discourse and

¹² The concept of "collectivism" as a cultural dimension, as defined by Geert Hofstede, describes societies where individuals are integrated into strong, cohesive "in-groups" from birth, emphasising loyalty, interdependence, and the prioritisation of group goals over personal ones. See Hofstede (2010) for further details.

stylistic prestige, deliberately downplaying their lineage connections to other schools. This shift has exerted a particularly detrimental impact on the Pinghu School, as the collective advantage previously established by its lineage under a collectivist paradigm has been transformed into a developmental impediment within the new academic evaluation framework. Notably, during the dynamic process of reputation fluctuation among different schools, as the prestige of the Pinghu School diminishes, artists tend to avoid associations with less esteemed schools, thereby perpetuating a vicious cycle.

By contrast, the Pudong and the Wang schools established sustainable mechanisms for succession through institutionalised transmission of their legacy and distinct identity markers. In the Pudong School's lineage, Master Shen Haochu's final act of dedication involved weekly correspondence with disciple Lin Shicheng, including personally excerpted *pipa* scores, accompanied by solemn instructions to compile and publish Pudong School repertoires and preserve its playing techniques to prevent extinction. This end-of-life entrustment exerted profound influence: at that time, Lin Shicheng, already a renowned Shanghai physician, resolutely abandoned his prosperous practice, closed his clinic, and relocated his family to Tianjin to dedicate himself to *pipa* education, without stipulating any demands regarding professional titles, academic ranks, or remuneration in his new appointment (Lin & Lin 2011, 75). Lin humbly summarised his lifelong pursuits, stating, "I have only done two things in my life—preserving excellent *pipa* scores and transmitting the characteristics of the Pudong School" (cited in Central Conservatory of Music, 2022); The transmission of the Wang School's pedagogical lineage is equally compelling: on his deathbed, Wang Yuting bequeathed his cherished "Zhang Boyan *pipa*" 张伯年琵琶 as a token to Li Tingsong, who in turn passed it to Li Guangzu before his own passing. At the 2001 Fiftieth Anniversary Commemoration Concert of Mr Wang Yuting's Passing 纪念汪昱庭先生逝世五十周年琵琶演奏会, Li Guangzu orchestrated the "Zhang Bonian Pipa Transmission Ceremony", formally bequeathing it to Hao Yifan 郝怡凡 (b. 1956; see Figure 4.3). The trajectory of this token's transmission across time and space not only traces a clear lineage of inheritance but also crystallises the school's identity and historical memory in tangible form.



Figure 4.3: At the Fiftieth Anniversary Commemoration Concert of Mr Wang Yuting's Passing, Li Guangzu (left) conducted the transmission ceremony for the fourth-generation inheritor of the Wang School, pictured here with the fourth-generation successor Hao Yifan 郝怡凡 (was holding "Zhang Bonian *pipa*" on the right) (*Ibid.*).¹³

Zhu Ying's advocacy of collectivism has gradually lost its voice amid a discourse that emphasises singular school affiliation. When a school's transmission lacks institutionalised bonds of recognition and a conscious mechanism for mutual enrichment, even with a glorious history and numerous skilled practitioners, it struggles to coalesce into a cultural community with enduring vitality.

4.2.3 Aesthetic Dislocation

The decline of the Pinghu School is closely linked to the crisis of its aesthetic traits of literati music in the context of modern performance arts. Before the 20th century, traditional musical performances were predominantly held in teahouses, private residences, or scholarly gatherings (*yaji*, 雅集).¹⁴ These venues fostered an intimate atmosphere that emphasised personalised taste and the delicate expression of internal emotions. Consequently, the Pinghu School cultivated a "study-style" aesthetic characterised by subtlety and restraint rather than ostentation, with a philosophy focused on conveying

¹³ Hao Yifan is a renowned *pipa* performer and educator, is a professor at the Central Conservatory of Music and a recognised fourth-generation inheritor of the Wang School. Her enduring commitment lies in pedagogical development and the succession and dissemination of the Wang School. She has overseen the revision and republication of Li Tingsong's *Performance Scores* (*Li Tingsong yanzoupu*, 李廷松演奏谱) and has organised commemorative and pedagogical concerts for the Wang School across multiple regions.

¹⁴ *Yaji* was a private gathering of Chinese literati for artistic exchange. Music was a central activity, often featuring performances on instruments such as the *qin* or *pipa*, as well as poetry recitals, serving as a vital occasion for the creation, performance, and exchange of traditional music.

meaning through implication, embodying the introspective and reserved qualities typical of literati cultural pursuits.

However, following the Reform and Opening-up period, performance venues gradually shifted towards acoustically engineered concert halls and grand theatres (see Figure 4.4). This transition imposes new requirements on traditional performance modalities. As Liu Dehai emphasised, “simply transferring conventional musical forms without adaptation to modern concert hall architectures is unlikely to appeal to contemporary audiences” (cited in Fang 1992, 17). He underscores that modern concert performances demand artistic attributes characterised by “exaggeration, focus, and refinement” (*Ibid.*). In this historic transformation, the Pinghu School’s aesthetic principle of “opposing excessive expression”—with its emphasis on subtle tonal variations and restrained, inward-looking expression—appears out of place on modern stages that prioritise immediate impact and dramatic tension.

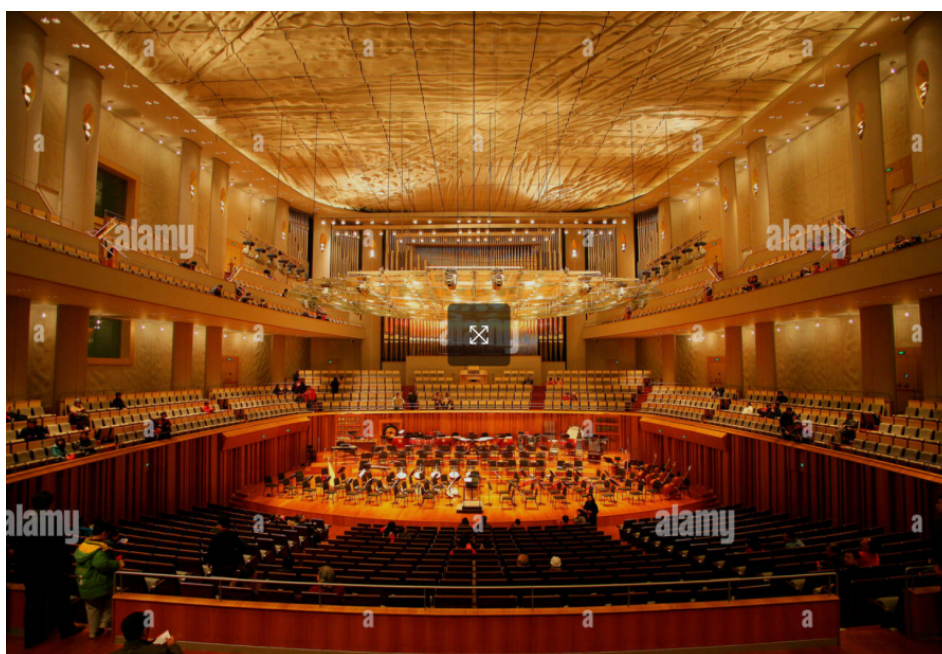


Figure 4.4: National Centre for the Performing Arts (*Guojia da juyuan*, 国家大剧院) in Beijing (Zhu 2008).

Compared to other styles, the aesthetic characteristics of the Pudong and Wang schools more effectively align with the demands of contemporary theatrical presentations. The Pudong School is renowned for its “extreme contrast between hardness and softness” (Lin 1982, 67), exemplified by its grandiose military pieces’ elements and delicate, refined literary pieces components, often demonstrating a dramatic transformation in expression from one performer to another—an effect akin to “two entirely different individuals” (Chen

1990. 54).¹⁵ This absolute tonal contrast enhances its expressive capacity within professional concert halls, satisfying modern stage requirements for dramatic tension while preserving traditional musical profundity. The Wang School is distinguished by its “simple and sincere, openly expressive” approach, emphasising an artistic pursuit of “reducing complexity to simplicity”. Its refined and vivid style facilitates adaptability in transforming from an enclosed “study room” environment to a public “square” setting (Liu 2015, 59). Despite their stylistic divergence, both schools, with their distinctive artistic qualities and expressive power, serve as vital carriers of traditional music within the context of modern stage performance.

This adaptive variation is fully reflected in specific works. Taking the “Lament of Zhaojun” (*Zhaojun yuan*, 昭君怨) segment of the “Song at the Frontier” as an example, the Wang School employs concise and straightforward techniques to express emotion directly, whereas the Pinghu School utilises intricate syllabic densification to transform simple melodic lines into dense, detailed sound clusters (see Figure 4.5). Although this dense notation and elaborate tone approach exemplifies the refined aesthetic of literati music, it also diminishes the immediacy of emotional impact. In the first section of “Yulunpao,” where the Pudong School uses only twenty-one measures to evoke a martial, sombre atmosphere through layered rhythmic progression, in contrast, the Pinghu version extends over a hundred measures, employing extensive double and triple repetitions, repeatedly elaborating on single motifs to deepen the artistic conception. While this long-lasting sound and resonance technique may reveal delicate nuances in scholarly appreciation, it risks being perceived in modern theatrical contexts as structurally loose and rhythmically sluggish.

Wang School version:



Pinghu School version:



Figure 4.5: A comparative analysis of the actual performance between the Wang School and the Pinghu School.

¹⁵ “Yulunpao” (i.e. “The King of Chu Doffs His Armour”) and “The Moon Rises High” performed by Lin Shicheng: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p39jVIXmyl8;> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gAgcFM5lXGA>, accessed 10 February 2026.

The decline of the Pinghu School was thus far from a mere aesthetic obsolescence, but rather an adaptive crisis triggered by the transformation of artistic spaces. As music shifted from private spaces to public stages, the artistic strengths of the Pinghu School were quietly eroded, even transforming into an aesthetic barrier. This transition also reveals that the vitality of traditional artistic schools depends not only on their intrinsic artistic value but more crucially on their capacity for dialogue and adaptation within an ever-changing historical context.

It is noteworthy that historical evidence demonstrates the Pinghu School's keen self-adaptive consciousness: as early as the 1930s, Zhu Ying produced numerous modern compositions proactively aligning with contemporary trends (see Chapter 2); after the founding of the PRC, artists like Yang Dajun and Cheng Wujia advanced instrument modifications and new works, continuously exploring the Pinghu School's viability within modern performance spaces (see Chapter 3). However, following the Reform and Opening-up policy, this innovative adaptation mechanism failed to sustain. Consequently, the issue is not intrinsic to the stage's adaptability; rather, the deeper problem lies in the absence of core figures with a sense of branding and execution capabilities following the fragmentation of the inheritance chain, resulting in an inability to sustain the school's creative vitality in the new era.

Upon analysing the aforementioned internal factors, it becomes evident that the decline of the Pinghu School was not incidental. Its fundamental roots can be traced back to Zhu Ying's tenure at Shanghai Conservatory of Music, during which his collectivist pedagogical philosophy laid the groundwork. While this approach cultivated open-minded professionals in the early 20th century, the subsequent emphasis on singular stylistic academies in the post-1949 period gradually diminished the sense of traditional allegiance and scholarly reciprocity among inheritors. The sudden death of the core inheritor exacerbated this waning identification, impairing effective collective action, which ultimately led to the fragmentation of transmission and the failure of brand development. A school deprived of its organisational core inevitably struggles to proactively adapt its subtle, scholarly aesthetic to meet the demands of the modern stage, thereby falling into a downward spiral of declining competitiveness. This erosion of competitiveness further accelerates the loss of talent and public attention, exacerbating the fragmentation of its legacy. Thus, the predicament of the Pinghu School was not the accumulation of three separate issues, but rather a series of interlinked problems. The failure of any single link

would trigger and accelerate the entire cycle, which was precisely the underlying reason for its eventual defeat in the competition with the Wang and Pudong schools.

4.3 External Factors

The decline of the Pinghu School must also be examined within the broader context of the dramatic transformation in China's musical landscape following the Reform and Opening up. The external pressures stem primarily from three mutually reinforcing shifts. Firstly, the rise of the new "Liu School" represented by Liu Dehai, which came to dominate mainstream aesthetic preferences, coupled with the relative marginalisation of traditional music under globalisation, collectively squeezed the survival space of traditional schools. Secondly, the higher music institutions centred in Beijing and Shanghai command pivotal resources and discourse authority, placing the Pinghu School, isolated in the northwest, at a disadvantage in the contest for influence. Thirdly, the specialised education system centred on music conservatories, with its pursuit of standardisation and normalisation, subtly eroded the distinctive expressive characteristics of traditional schools. These three shifts do not exist in isolation; collectively, they constitute a new screening mechanism that restricts the Pinghu School's capacity for adaptation and its developmental prospects.

4.3.1 A Paradigm Shift: The Liu School and Globalisation

The Impact of the Modern Paradigm

With the innovation of musical trends and breakthroughs in performance techniques, *pipa* artistry has entered a modern developmental peak exemplified by Liu Dehai (Figure 4.6). Trained initially under Lin Shicheng in 1954, Liu Dehai entered the Central Conservatory of Music in 1957, where he studied performance techniques from masters of various traditional schools, including the Pinghu School (Yang Dajun), the Chongming School (Cao Anhe), and the Wang School (Sun Yude). Concurrently, he engaged with other instruments, including the cello, *qin*, and piano, cultivating an artistic style that is both deeply rooted in tradition and transcendent of specific schools. This scholarly approach—"drawing on the strengths of various schools to forge a unique style" (Qiao 2014, 5)—enabled Liu to modernise the *pipa* art form while preserving its essence. In the late 1970s, Liu's *pipa* artistry reached its zenith, establishing him as a leading figure in contemporary *pipa* artistry. His innovative contributions are regarded by academia as the most influential artistic breakthroughs following the zenith of the five major schools in the first half of the 20th

century. Professor Liang Maochun characterises Liu Dehai's artistic practice as "Liu School" 刘派, emphasising that in the study of contemporary Chinese national musical instruments and *pipa* art development, "Liu School" stands as a highly prominent and objectively significant phenomenon that is indispensable for scholarly investigation (Liang 2004, 4).¹⁶



Figure 4.6: Portrait of Liu Dehai in 1962 (Qiao 2014, 5).

However, the rise of the "Liu School" signifies more than the prosperity of a single stylistic school; it marks the deepening of the modernist transformation in *pipa* art, reshaping the evaluative criteria and aesthetic paradigms of this musical tradition. When the new paradigm becomes mainstream, it not only establishes new standards but also directly challenges the foundations of traditional schools, leading to a gradual decline in their authority in artistic discourse and public influence.

This paradigm shift directly impacted the survival space of traditional schools. The Teaching Experience Exchange Conference (1979) serves as a critical window into this transformation.¹⁷ Although the meeting gathered inheritors from all major traditional schools, discussions on school distinctions were scarce under the political climate. The concert data exemplifies this trend: during the conference, a total of 29 pieces were performed, with only 5 traditional school pieces accounting for 17%.¹⁸ A longitudinal

¹⁶ For an in-depth analysis of Liu Dehai's pedagogical thought, see Yang (2007). For an exploration of the philosophical dimensions of his *pipa* art, see Li (2013).

¹⁷ For further details on this conference, see Feng 2004, 15.

¹⁸ The concert featured 18 programs, including 13 solo *pipa* performances. Regarding traditional schools, Ren Hongxiang performed pieces from the Pinghu School, "Wild Geese on the Sandbank" and "The King of Chu Doffs His Armour"; Fan Boyan and Yin Rongzhu collaborated on "Selections From the Yingzhou Ancient

comparison with the Textbook Conference in 1961 (see 3.2.3) reveals an irreversible marginalisation of traditional schools: in 1961, traditional repertoire still dominated, with the Pinghu School maintaining significant artistic influence (see Chapter 3); by 1979, the concert program structure had undergone a fundamental shift, with modern compositions created after 1949 becoming mainstream. This trend became increasingly pronounced over the coming decades. Empirical data from the 2009 Chu-Han Cup National *Pipa* Competition 楚汉杯全国琵琶大赛 compellingly illustrate the profundity of this transformative process: regarding the performance of the designated piece “Ambush from All Sides”, 70% of participants favoured Liu Dehai’s modern arrangement. This indicates that, although traditional schools have not been entirely excluded from the performance repertoire, their influence has significantly diminished, and they no longer hold a dominant position.

The Decline of Traditional Ecologies

However, when viewed within a broader social and cultural context, the Liu School’s relative prosperity in the *pipa* domain is merely a limited flourishing within traditional music. It cannot conceal the marginalisation crisis faced by the *pipa* and the entire national instrumental music in the process of modernisation. As Liu Dehai articulated:

For more than 30 years of Reform and Opening-up, I have been in a state of resistance against historical determinism, wavering, worrying, pondering, and contemplating a new path for the *pipa*. Faced with the negative impact of Western postmodernity, especially on Chinese traditional culture, the momentum shows no sign of abating. (Liu 2015, 188)

This phenomenon is closely linked to the socio-cultural transformation following China’s economic reforms: the 1990s marked the comprehensive implementation of a socialist market economy, propelling rapid economic growth and significantly elevating living standards, which in turn spurred a surge in spiritual and cultural consumption. Under this backdrop, Western musical instruments such as the piano, violin, saxophone, and guitar gained widespread popularity nationwide; although traditional Chinese music experienced notable development—exemplified by the *guzheng*, whose student enrollment increased from a few thousand in the mid-1980s to 3 million in 2009, representing a 300-fold growth (cited in Ding 2010, 76)—the disparity with Western instruments remains stark. A 2010 survey by Ding Yan of three major music institutions in Nanjing revealed that 91.7% of students studied Western instruments (1, 193 individuals), compared to only 8.3% (108

Tune School”; Lin Shicheng presented the Pudong School classic “Ambush from All Sides”; and Li Guangzu performed the Wang School version of “The King of Chu Doffs His Armour”.

individuals) studying traditional Chinese instruments. The stark contrast between 802 piano students, accounting for 61% of all instrument students, and only 62 *guzheng* students, representing a mere 4%, vividly underscores Liu Dehai's assertion of the traditional music's "transformation beyond recognition" amidst the wave of modernization (*Ibid.*, 76-77).

This external market pressure has exacerbated the dissemination challenges faced by traditional schools. As public attention and educational resources increasingly favour Western instruments and a handful of national instrument stars, those schools lacking a distinct contemporary identity find it ever harder to enter the public eye. The personal observations of several lineage inheritors corroborate this: Pudong School inheritor Li Guohun 李国魂 (b. the 1940s) candidly admits, "I feel that the Pudong School is now somewhat marginalised; of course, this is not solely about the Pudong School, it appears that distinctive school characteristics are less emphasised nowadays" (Cited in Liu 2015, 49). Similarly, Pinghu School inheritor Yang Baoyuan notes, "Perhaps it is not just the Pinghu School, all traditional schools have fallen behind in musical style compared to contemporary aesthetic standards" (cited in Tang 2012, 27). These firsthand accounts reveal that traditional schools, as cultural products of specific historical eras, now confront an existential crisis in the post-Reform and Opening-up context of globalisation—a shared challenge demanding a collective response from the broader artistic community.

4.3.2 Centralised Resources and Discourse

The contemporary development of traditional *pipa* schools exhibits a marked state of imbalance, a phenomenon intrinsically linked to whether different schools command core platform resources, thereby securing both discursive authority and dissemination channels.

The core art platform plays a pivotal role in empowering and amplifying the development of artistic schools through its distinctive advantages in policy support, faculty expertise, talent acquisition, and dissemination channels. The experiences of Zhu Ying and Wei Zhongle offer a stark contrast to this. During his tenure at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, Zhu Ying established a significant professional influence on the Pinghu School. Nevertheless, following his departure, the school's presence in Shanghai gradually waned, failing to establish a stable lineage of transmission. In stark contrast, Wei Zhongle's long-term teaching at the same institution not only systematically consolidated the Wang School's pedagogical framework but also expanded its influence throughout southern China, cementing the Shanghai Conservatory of Music as one of the core bases for

transmitting this tradition. This comparison demonstrates that core artistic platforms serve not only as venues for the transmission of skills but also as strategic resources for the survival and development of artistic traditions. Exceptionally accomplished inheritors, whose individual artistic talents and teaching achievements combine with the continuity, authority, and influence of core platforms, can transform these into strategic advantages for the long-term survival and widespread dissemination of their school. Conversely, without the institutional support of such platforms, even individuals of remarkable achievement may see the collective influence of their school fade with personnel changes.

The core platform's advantage manifests more profoundly in the production of discourse authority and the shaping of aesthetic standards. Although contemporary music education systems have formalised in structure, their foundational teaching model persists in the traditional one-to-one oral transmission approach. As Huang Rijin has revealed, the limitations of this teaching model mean that "the depth of teaching content remains heavily dependent on the teacher's personal preferences and stylistic background" (Huang 1991, 51). Within this mechanism, teachers' pedagogical practices often bear distinct personal biases. Their daily instruction, evaluations, and performances directly define what constitutes "orthodoxy" and "excellence," thereby reinforcing specific school transmission pathways. Upon graduation, their students disperse across institutions nationwide, sowing seeds that continually consolidate and disseminate their school's artistic concepts. These further cement the authority of respective schools, creating a virtuous cycle of transmission.

Within this framework, schools that fail to secure a position on the central stage inevitably face marginalisation, regardless of their orderly lineage or significant artistic merit. The developmental trajectory of the Pinghu School's later period, centred upon the Xi'an Conservatory of Music, epitomises this reality. Its remote north-western location presents a disadvantage in resource acquisition. Compared to Beijing and Shanghai, it faces objective gaps in attracting high-calibre students, securing specialised funding, and upgrading teaching facilities. This directly constrains the breadth and depth of its talent cultivation. More crucially, geographical marginality directly results in a structural absence of voice. Though this school has established a robust transmission system in the northwest through the successions such as Yang Shaoyi and Ren Hongxiang, its artistic concepts and achievements struggle to gain entry into mainstream dissemination channels and academic evaluation systems dominated by core urban centres. The result is that, regardless of its

intrinsic artistic merit, its contemporary visibility and influence have been significantly diminished, gradually fading from the spotlight defined by central platforms.

4.3.3 Standardisation in the Conservatory System

Following the Reform and Opening-up, China's music education system has increasingly adopted a concert-stage model of professionalism modelled on Western conservatories. Curriculum structures, teaching methods, assessment criteria, and training approaches have become more uniform. This shift has raised technical standards and stage readiness, but it has also constrained the transmission of indigenous musical traditions and their distinctive pedagogies.

A noteworthy phenomenon in contemporary *pipa* performance is observed: although contemporary performers achieve technical mastery, their interpretations of the same traditional repertoire often exhibit a clear tendency toward stylistic convergence. Even when their musical handling appears similar to that of earlier generations of performers, audiences generally sense a certain ineffable charm being lost. Hu Jianbing's critique is incisive: "under the disciplinary framework of the Western conservatory-style music system, both the literary and martial melodies of the *pipa* have become homogenised performance models, with fixed bar lines acting as constraints that stifle the vibrant essence of traditional artistry" (Hu 2018, 60). This demonstrates that the academic system systematically erodes the artistic individuality of the Pinghu School by standardising techniques, heritage, and aesthetic principles.

The Deterioration of Improvisational Capacity

The *gongchepu* in traditional Chinese music serves as a skeletal pitch recording methodology that emphasises core melodic tones. Its fundamental principle lies in providing performers with considerable scope for secondary creative elaboration—necessitating the integration of personalised ornamentation, variations, and improvisational techniques during interpretation.¹⁹ Consequently, the same core notation can give rise to a diverse array of artistic renditions, reflecting dynamic interpretive variance. However, during the transformation of the modern music education system, the widespread adoption and standardisation of staff notation and instructional materials have posed significant

¹⁹ Zhang Boyu emphasises that "this creative interpretative mechanism based on backbone notation constitutes the foundational basis for the formation and development of Chinese traditional *pipa* schools" (Zhang 2013, 26).

challenges to traditional notation systems and their compositional philosophies.²⁰ The current pedagogical paradigm emphasises developing students' interpretative skills of existing works rather than encouraging autonomous expressive techniques, leading to mechanical performance based on notation and a gradual erosion of improvisational competencies intrinsic to traditional music.

The improvisational tradition of the Pinghu School is thoroughly exemplified in the interpretative practices of its representative performers. Empirical analysis of extant recordings reveals that disciples including Fan Boyan, Wu Mengfei, and Yang Shaoyi do not mechanically adhere to the notated scores but instead employ elaborate ornamentation and flexible rhythmic modifications. Taking Yang Shaoyi's arrangement of "Xunyang *Pipa*" as a case study, a comparative analysis between the score's notation and actual performance recordings of the initial eight bars preceding the phrase "Huarui San jiongFeng" 花蕊散迴风 demonstrates that performers introduce creative alterations in each bar, specifically: (1) the addition of ornamental notes through techniques such as *sou* 擞 (ㄅ), *dai* 带 (ㄆ) and *na* 捺 (ㄇ); (2) the disruption of established rhythmic patterns to allow expressive tempo variations (see Figure 4.7 and 4.8).²¹ This phenomenon of score deviation results in a vivid expressive flow, exemplifying the Chinese traditional aesthetic principle of "enhancing tone with ornamentation" (*yiyun bu sheng*, 以韵补声).²²



Figure 4.7: The original musical notation of the "Huarui San jiongFeng" passage from "Xunyang *Pipa*" (Yang, 1963).

²⁰ Hu Jianbing critically examines this phenomenon, asserting that: "Current music education predominantly adheres to Western theoretical frameworks...resulting in the systematic marginalisation of traditional musical elements such as the *gongchepu*...Veteran musicians were traditionally expected to demonstrate their improvisational skills, yet contemporary maestros have increasingly Westernised their pedagogical approach, effectively discarding indigenous practices" (Hu 2018, 60).

²¹ Please refer to the provided link for the audio recording of Yang Shaoyi's performance of "Xunyang *Pipa*": https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1t5411t7jW/?spm_id_from=333.337.search-card.all.click&vd_source=92841bc271dcdb3a839db12045976c11, accessed 10 February 2026. The musical notation in the text corresponds to the segment from 37'' to 1'01'' in the recording.

²² Embellishing the melody using techniques such as *rou*, *na* and *lun* with the left hand to enhance the musical expressiveness and regional characteristics.



Figure 4.8: The actual performance recording of Yang Shaoyi’s rendition of the “Huarui Sanjiong Feng” passage from “Xunyang *Pipa*” (recorded c.1972; the audio recording was supplied by Zhang Ming).

In the context of contemporary academic pedagogical frameworks, the performance practice of the Ping School exhibits a stark contrast: the performer Wang Tao 王涛 (b. 1961) adheres strictly to the score’s notation as the definitive reference, meticulously following markings related to pitch, rhythm, and dynamics to ensure precision and conformity (see Figure 4.9).²³ Despite the aesthetic quality of tone and adherence to performance standards, comparative analysis with Yang Shaoyi’s version reveals a sense of stagnation, as if constrained within a framework, resulting in a loss of vitality and expressive nuance. As Gao Hejie pointed out: “Original music with potential for variability has been rigidly codified into fixed scores and routine training, thereby inadvertently sacrificing the intrinsic vitality and expressive essence of the composition (Gao 2019, 53). The deterioration of this improvisational proficiency is a primary factor contributing to the gradual erosion of the distinctive artistic characteristics and the decline in sustainable developmental momentum of the Pinghu School of *pipa* art.



Figure 4.9: The original musical notation of the “Huairui San jiongFeng” passage from “Xunyang *Pipa*” by Ren Hongxiang from the Pinghu School (Ren 1990, 75-76).

²³ Wang Tao is a *pipa* player who is an Honorary Professor at Zhejiang Conservatory of Music, former Director of the Zhejiang Opera and Dance Theatre Traditional Music Ensemble. Recording of Wang Tao’s performance of “Xunyang *Pipa*”: https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1KV411v7RQ/?spm_id_from=333.337.search-card.all.click&vd_source=92841bc271dcdb3a839db12045976c11, accessed 10 February 2026. The musical notation in the text corresponds to the segment from 1’21” to 1’54” in the recording.

The Normalisation of Pitch and Timbral Expression

The standardisation of the pitch system has reshaped the understanding and expression of traditional musical expression: modern *pipa*, through the adoption of equal temperament via additional bamboo frets, objectively diminishes the rich microtonal nuances characteristic of traditional music. This trend is further reinforced within contemporary pedagogical frameworks: systematic sight-singing and ear training as foundational curricula embed the concept of fixed pitch, yet concurrently lead to a gradual decline in performers' perceptual sensitivity to non-equal-temperament intonations. Paradoxically, the distinctive microtonal ornamentations prevalent in traditional music are increasingly deemed “intonation errors” under the standardised auditory paradigm. Wen Jian's assertion that “purifying tone quality through correct performance techniques to achieve accurate pitch is a fundamental prerequisite for tonal beauty” (Wen 1995, 96-97) elucidates a paradigm shift in auditory aesthetic standards.

A comparative analysis of the “The Green Lotus” performances by two generations of performers—Fan Boyan (recorded in 1967), Yang Shaoyi (1973), Wang Tao (2000) and Yang Yi 杨艺 (2022)—reveals the evolutionary trajectory of *pipa* performance practice within the Pinghu school amid modernisation.²⁴ Research indicates significant discrepancies between traditional and contemporary performers in the application of *tui* and *la* techniques. For instance, in the notation from F # to A, both Fan Boyan and Yan Shaoyi deviate from the standard pitch of the equal temperament system, transforming what is originally a minor third interval into a minor second (F to G $\flat$, see Figure 4.10).²⁵ Given that the minor second is a dissonant interval, this approach results in perceptual discomfort and perceived “inaccuracy” from a contemporary aesthetic perspective.²⁶

²⁴ Yang Yi is a *pipa* teacher at the Affiliated Middle School of Tianjin Conservatory of Music.

²⁵ Recording of Fan Boyan's performance of “The Green Lotus”: https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1gr4y1g7Yf/?spm_id_from=333.337.search-card.all.click&vd_source=92841bc271dcdb3a839db12045976c11, accessed 10 February 2026; This audio recording was produced by Shanghai Radio in 1967. Due to technological limitations of the era, pitch deviations may have occurred during the transfer process. Additionally, the tuning state of the instruments and the performer's playing habits could contribute to pitch discrepancies. Considering these factors, my analysis will primarily focus on the intervallic relationships. Yang Shaoyi's performance, although slightly superior to Fan's [due to recording quality issues preventing precise data acquisition], remains markedly below the standard pitch.

²⁶ Although Yang Shaoyi's rendition was slightly higher than Fan's—though precise data could not be obtained due to recording quality—it remained notably below the standard pitch.

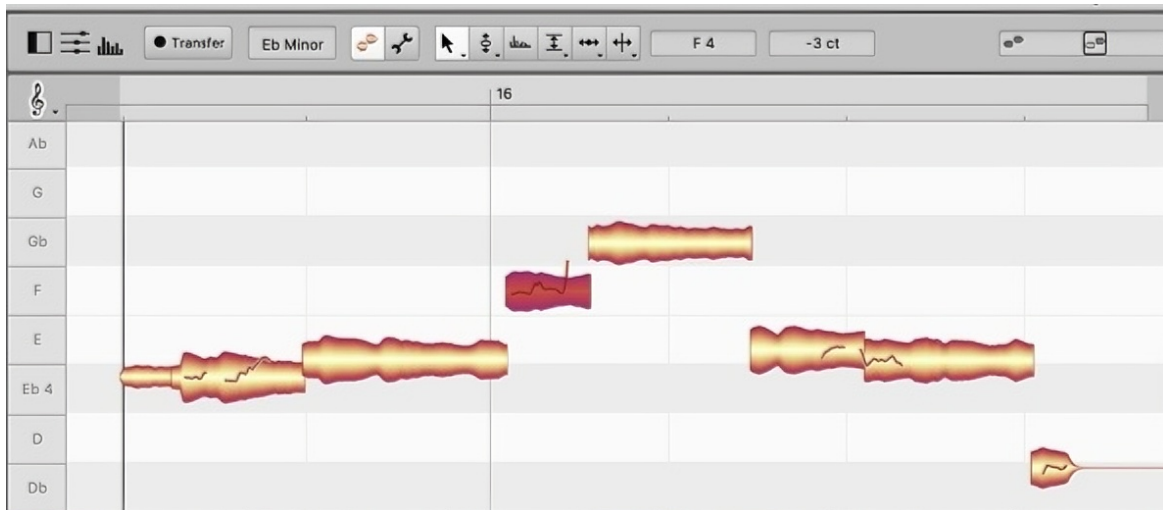


Figure 4.10: The actual pitch produced by Fan Boyan’s performance, as measured using Melodyne software, is F4 - 3 cents and $\flat$ G4 - 4 cents (conducted by Zhang Menglong, 2025).

Notably, a marked shift in traditional tuning practices is observed in contemporary performances: Wang Tao and Yang Yi’s pitch accuracy is significantly improved, adhering strictly to standardised pitch within the composition (F4–A4, see Figure 4.11).²⁷ Clearly, under the influence of the modern educational framework, contemporary performers unconsciously engage in deliberate “modification” of traditional artistic techniques that are inherently characteristic. The discrepancies in pitch modulation reflect deeper issues of artistic heritage: contemporary performers, under the constraints of academic training, unconsciously adopt equal temperament as the standard, leading to the standardised reform of traditional stylistic timbral expressions. Consequently, even performances claiming affiliation with the Pinghu School tend to homogenise, resulting in a loss of authenticity and distinctive characteristics inherent to the school.

²⁷ Recording of Wang Tao’s performance of “The Green Lotus”: https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1ph411k7Zu/?spm_id_from=333.337.search-card.all.click&vd_source=92841bc271dcdb3a839db12045976c11, accessed 10 February 2026.

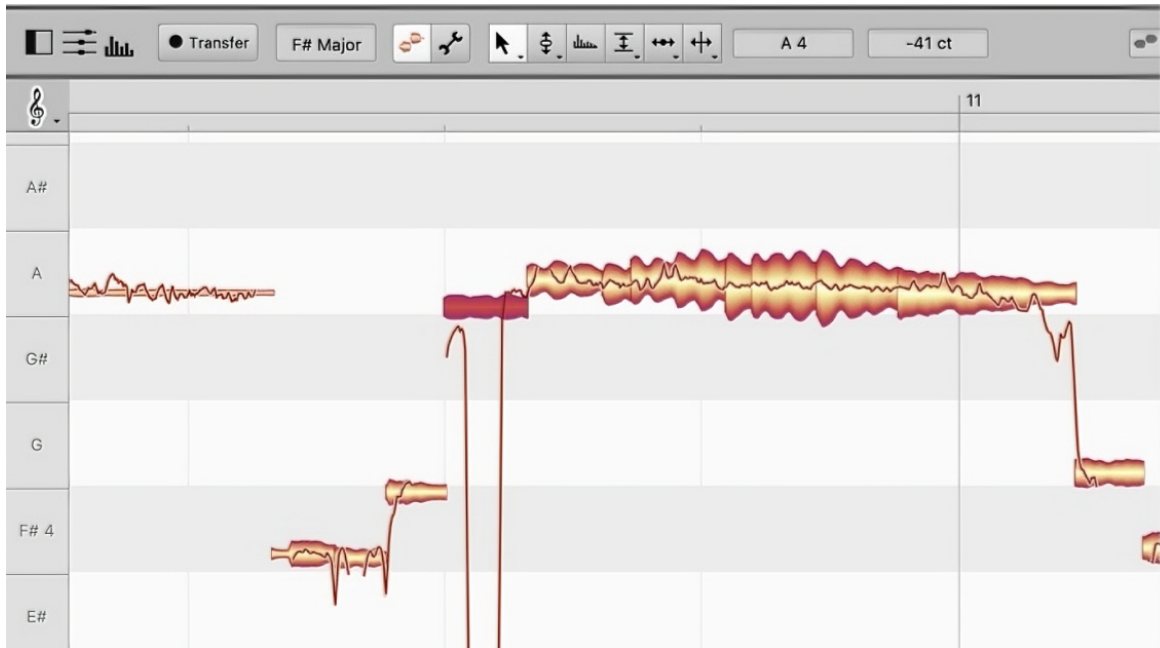


Figure 4.11: The actual pitch produced by Wang Tao’s performance, as measured using Melodyne software, is F4 - 33 cents and A4 - 41 cents (conducted by Zhang Menglong, 2025).

This phenomenon engenders a dual cognitive dilemma: on one hand, contemporary audiences, influenced by standardised auditory training, tend to classify characteristic pitch variations in traditional performances as “intonation inaccuracies”; on the other hand, traditional performers perceive that modern interpretations have diverged from the artistic essence of the Pinghu School.

The Standardisation of Aesthetic Criteria

“Harmony in Diversity” (*He er butong*, 和而不同) as a highly esteemed aesthetic principle in contemporary discourse, has profoundly influenced the modernisation trajectory of national music since its proposal by Liu Dehai in the 1970s.²⁸ Liu Dehai emphasises establishing “a unified cognitive system across the domains of composition, performance, and pedagogy” (cited in Fang 1992, 18), proposing that students should ideally “lack allegiance to any particular school of thought,” and asserts that “pedagogical approaches focusing solely on differences without acknowledging commonalities cannot be regarded as advanced or scientific” (*Ibid.*). The core objective of this philosophy is to standardise fundamental performance techniques, thereby laying a “modern, scientific” and professional

²⁸ Here, “harmony in diversity” specifically refers to a goal pursued in the development of contemporary traditional Chinese music (especially in academic education): that is, striving for standardisation and uniformity (“harmony”) in techniques, notation, and training methods, while simultaneously maintaining the unique aesthetic characteristics and expressive nuances of different traditional artistic schools (“diversity”).

foundation for national music to meet the requirements of orchestral symphonisation and internationalisation. However, in the pursuit of “harmony,” technical specifications often unconsciously erode the “diversity” upon which traditional schools depend for their existence. This leads to a tendency towards uniformity in aspects such as tonal treatment, dynamic variation, and musical expression, thereby risking the diminishment of the richly diverse characteristics of these schools.

By conducting a diachronic analysis of various performance interpretations of Pinghu School’s “The Green Lotus,” a clear trajectory of aesthetic paradigm shifts in the modernisation of *pipa* artistry can be delineated. The interpretations by early performers Wu Mengfei (recorded c. 1960) and Fan Boyan (recorded in 1967) exhibit a narrative style characterized by a “dense point” (*miji de dian*, 密集的点; Qi & He 2023, 39) texture: the waveform analysis reveals a densely packed soundscape with relatively balanced amplitude dynamics, and a stable tempo curve [with Fan Boyan’s version exhibiting a tempo range of approximately 94-187 beats per minute, with a fluctuation of 93](see Figure 4.12 and 4.13), indicating an overall consistent rhythmic progression.²⁹ This treatment emphasises crisp, precise articulation, combined with a clean, natural synchronisation of rhythmic accents. The dynamics lack pronounced fluctuations in intensity and tension, resulting in a straightforward and organic musical narrative. This approach exemplifies the Pinghu School’s traditional aesthetic of “rich and ornate yet pure and elegant” (Yin & Yang 1983, 28).

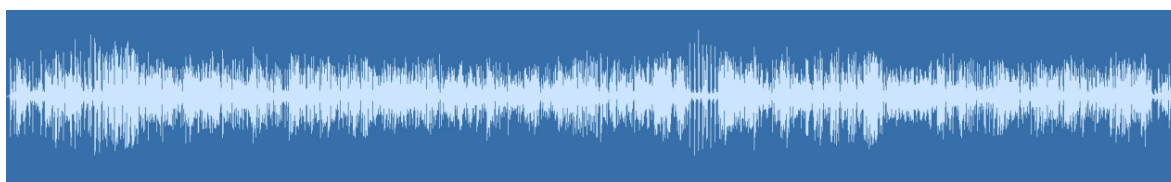


Figure 4.12: Waveform diagram of Fan Boyan’s performance of “The Green Lotus” (measured by Zhang Menglong by using Logic Pro software, 2025).

²⁹ Qi Kun and He Wanwan conducted an experimental comparative analysis of A Bing and Liu Dehuai’s performances of “The Green Lotus.” They observed that Abing’s interpretation emphasizes “dense point,” whereas Liu Dehai’s approach favours “bright and clear line.” They attribute this divergence to the gradual attenuation of stylistic distinctions among contemporary *pipa* schools, highlighting a significant factor in the evolution of modern *pipa* performance practice. For more information, please see Qi & He (2023).

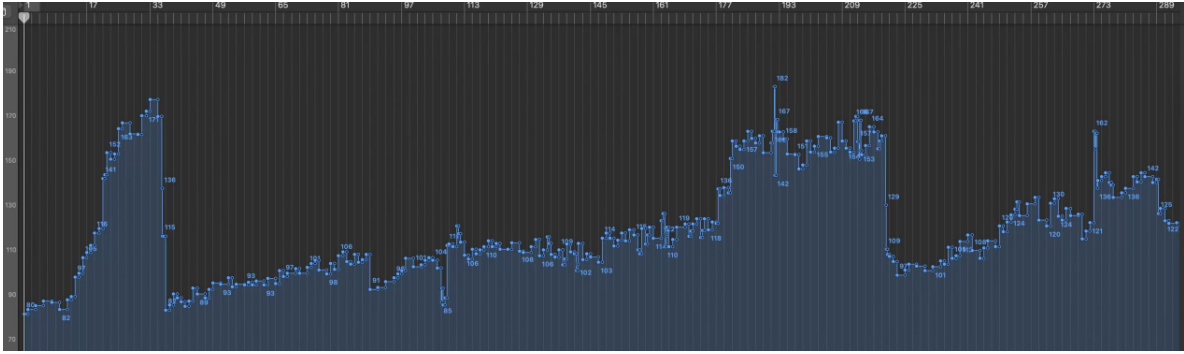


Figure 4.13: Tempo range of Fan Boyan's performance of "The Green Lotus" (generated by Zhang Menglong by using the intelligent speed analysis function of Logic Pro software, 2025).³⁰

In stark contrast, contemporary performers Wang Tao (recorded in 2000) and Yang Yi (recorded in 2022) demonstrate a theatrical interpretive approach characterised by "bright and clear line" (*shulang de xiantiao*, 舒朗的线条) (Qi & He 2023, 39). They employ delicate *rou* nuances, vibrato techniques [A longer wave pattern can be observed in Figure 4.11] to extend spatial perception, and incorporate pronounced dynamic variations alongside significant tempo fluctuations (Wang Tao's tempo range expanding from 80 to 182 beats per minute, a difference of 102) (see Figure 4.14 and 4.15), thereby sculpting highly tensioned melodic contours. Waveform analysis reveals pronounced dynamics contrast and an increase in musical silence or space. This processing approach enhances the dramatic expressiveness of musical narration, indicating a shift in aesthetic focus from traditional "artistic conception creation" to modern "emotional rendering," aligning with contemporary stage performance and aesthetic demands.

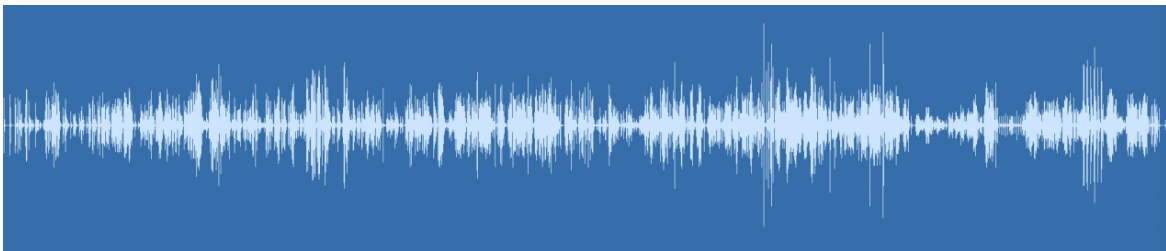


Figure 4.14: Waveform diagram of Wang Tao's performance of "The Green Lotus" (measured by Zhang Menglong by using Logic Pro software, 2025).

³⁰ This curve diagram aims to macroscopically depict the overall fluctuation trends and tension structure of the entire piece. Due to the lengthy duration of the composition, the densely packed numerical labels in the diagram are difficult to display clearly. Therefore, the focus should be on the overall shape of the curve, contrasts between sections, rather than specific instantaneous velocity values.

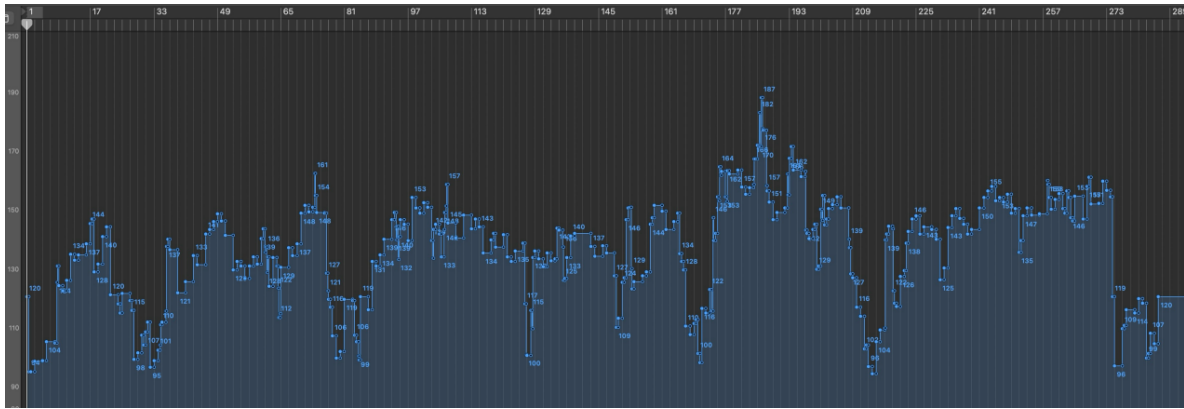


Figure 4.15: Tempo range of Wang Tao's performance of "The Green Lotus" (generated by Zhang Menglong by using the intelligent speed analysis function of Logic Pro software, 2025).³¹

Therefore, the standardisation of conservatory education constitutes a crucial external factor contributing to the decline of the Pinghu School. When what is regarded as the essence of the school—its "charm" and "flexibility"—was deemed "deviations" within the context of standardisation, this system did not actively abolish the Pinghu School but gradually undermined its artistic foundation, causing its unique aesthetic expression to gradually lose its space for existence amid increasingly uniform standards.

In summary, the new artistic ecosystem established post-Reform and Opening-up era has created an adverse external environment for the Pinghu School, affecting aesthetic paradigms, educational frameworks, and resource allocation. The rise of the "Liu School" has reshaped the competitive landscape, while the standardisation of academic education has eroded its stylistic distinctiveness. Moreover, the resource advantages of core platforms have deprived them of more opportunities to be heard. These three pressures are interlinked, collectively reshaping the rules governing the survival and evaluation of *pipa* artistry. This dynamic not only rendered the artistic practices of the Pinghu School difficult to integrate into the mainstream but also interacted with its inherent weaknesses, ultimately accelerating its historical marginalisation.

4.4 Conclusion

The decline of the Pinghu School at the end of the 20th century was not an isolated artistic phenomenon but rather a pivotal transition driven by a confluence of internal inheritance rupture and external environmental upheavals amidst the broader modernisation movement.

The predicament of the Pinghu School reveals a universal proposition that transcends both musical instruments and national borders: in the global modernisation

³¹ *Ibid.*

process, traditional art forms rooted in specific cultural contexts collectively face an existential crisis stemming from imbalances within their cultural ecosystems. The universality of this crisis becomes strikingly apparent through cross-cultural comparison: in the Chinese context, as local opera traditions transitioned from village stages to modern theatres, their original ritual functions and community bonds consequently dissipated; traditional Chinese painting, having migrated from private study rooms into the museum system, now finds its brushwork and ink aesthetics at odds with contemporary visual tastes.³² On an international scale, Japan's Noh theatre faced near-extinction following the Meiji Restoration as Western culture flooded in; India's classical music tradition has likewise seen its long-established improvisatory practices increasingly circumscribed and formalised under the dual pressures of the recording industry and standardised institutional education.³³

These seemingly disparate art forms share parallels with the Pinghu School's trajectory, collectively revealing a similar pattern: The fundamental cause of the decline or even extinction of many traditional arts often lies not in diminished intrinsic artistic value, but in the collapse or irreversible transformation of the entire cultural ecosystem upon which they depend for survival. This ecosystem encompasses their specific transmission systems, aesthetic communities, performance spaces, and even the corresponding rhythms of daily life. The decline of the Pinghu School stands as a profound microcosm of this epochal predicament.

In response to this global crisis of cultural survival, the UNESCO-led framework for safeguarding ICH emerged. This signifies the international community's collective awakening to the preservation of cultural diversity, particularly the holistic conservation of the cultural ecosystem. Its objective is precisely to harness institutional and convention-based mechanisms to re-cultivate or restore the conditions for survival and development of living traditions endangered by the onslaught of modernity. In Chapter 5, I shall focus on the identity reshaping and turning point experienced by the Pinghu School within the new global institutional framework and discourse system of ICH.

³² For further on local opera traditions in the contemporary world, see Wu & Wang (2025); On the transformation of Chinese figure painting from private studios to the museum system, see Li (2020).

³³ On the modern crisis of Noh theatre, see Diego Pellecchia (2012); Shifts in the practice of Indian classical improvisation is described in Vikram Sampath (2022).

Chapter 5

Transmission and Challenges in the Age of ICH Safeguarding

5.1 Introduction

At the beginning of the 21st century, as globalisation advanced, the movement to safeguard ICH gained significant momentum worldwide. On October 17, 2003, the 32nd session of the UNESCO General Conference adopted the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the ICH* (hereafter, the *Convention*), aiming to “promote international cooperation in the protection, respect, and promotion of ICH” (UNESCO 2003), marking a new phase in global ICH preservation. The *Convention* defined its subject as the “traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants” (UNESCO 2003), a broad category that encompasses oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, and festive events.

China officially acceded to the *Convention* on August 28, 2004, becoming the sixth contracting party, thereby initiating the systematic development of its ICH protection framework. However, China’s concepts and practices for protecting ICH have a long history, with systematic efforts to rescue indigenous and folk traditional cultures dating back to the 1950s. For example, in 1950, scholars such as Yang Yinliu and Cao Anhe conducted fieldwork to document and preserve folk music scores from genres such as *Sunan shifangu* 苏南十番鼓 and *Shifan luogu* 十番锣鼓.¹ In 1979, the Ministry of Culture and the Chinese Artists Association initiated the compilation of the *Ten Compendia of Chinese Folk Literature and Art* (*Zhongguo minzu minjian wenyi jicheng zhishu*, 中国民族民间文艺集成志书), a project that took 30 years to survey and organise information on nationwide folk arts.² These pre-ICH preservation activities laid essential groundwork and accumulated valuable experience for the development of the ICH protection system in the 21st century.

To fulfil its obligations as a signatory state, China has gradually established an institutionalised protection system centred on the Law of the People’s Republic of China on ICH (*Zhonghua renmin gongheguo feiwuzhi wenhuayichan baohufa*, 中华人民共和国非物质文化遗产保护法), supported by a four-tiered (national, provincial, municipal, and county) representative project registry system and a mechanism for recognising

¹ For further details on their fieldwork, see Chinese National Academy of Arts (2013).

² For further details on the compilation, see Yan (2019).

representative inheritors. As of now, China has registered more than 100,000 exemplary projects at all levels, including 1,557 nationally designated ICH representative projects; over 90,000 inheritors at various levels have been identified, among whom 3,068 are national inheritors.³ This top-down, institutional framework provides vital legitimacy and sustainable resource guarantees for the preservation and development of traditional cultures. Chinese authorities have also paid attention to the opportunities for international cultural promotion offered in the ICH domain: as of 2024, China has 44 projects inscribed on the UNESCO ICH list, ranking first in the world.

Under this institutional framework, many art forms, including traditional music, have gained new development opportunities. In 2008, “*Pipa Art*” 琵琶艺术 (ID: II-119) was included in the second batch of the National ICH List, with the Pinghu School and Yingzhou Ancient Tune School being inscribed concurrently as its significant components; the Pudong School was later added in 2011 as an extension project.⁴ This institutional recognition marks the beginning of a new phase in the history of the Pinghu School.

The recent situation of the Pinghu School vividly illustrates the achievements and challenges of preserving ICH. By the early 21st century, the inheritance of Pinghu School had fallen into a severe crisis. Tang Xiaofeng’s 2012 investigation into the survival status of the Pinghu School revealed: “Locally in Pinghu, the tradition of Pinghu School is almost extinct. Few local people know that there was once such a traditional school that had a profound influence on modern *pipa* performance” (Tang 2012, 12). This critical situation has gradually improved following the implementation of ICH preservation efforts. Through institutional mechanisms such as directory registration, heir certification, and targeted financial support, representatives of the Pinghu School have gradually achieved a significant transition from overseeing the mere preservation of techniques to organising a comprehensive, institutionalised inheritance. This institutionalised protection has not only reconstructed the talent cultivation pipeline but also facilitated a multidimensional development across performance, education, scholarly research, and dissemination.

However, institutionalised protection, while bringing revitalisation, also conceals new challenges. As a disciple of Zhu Dazhen, a national inheritor of the Pinghu School, and a researcher in ethnomusicology, I have found through long-term participatory observation

³ For further details on the implementation and discourse of ICH policy in China, see Howard (2012) and Zhang, Yao & Schippers (2015).

⁴ For further details, see the following websites:

Pinghu School: <https://www.ihchina.cn/art/detail/id/12691.html>;

Yingzhou Ancient Tune School: https://www.ihchina.cn/project_details/12690;

that the ICH safeguarding system manifests a dual effect in practice. Its positive aspect is that it successfully constructs a stable inheritance framework and ecology for the school, transforming it from endangered to systematically protected; nonetheless, on the other hand, this system is prone to conflict with the prevalent “technical virtuosity” tendency in contemporary professional musical education during its specific implementation—an approach that overemphasizes indicators such as performance speed, intensity, and technical complexity, while relatively neglecting the awakening and cultivation of cultural subjectivity. This may result in learners focusing on the precise imitation of techniques and struggling to attain an understanding of the repertory’s cultural logic and spiritual values, thereby risking the transmission of the Pinghu School’s music devolving into the passing on only of relatively superficial demonstrations of skill.

In this chapter, I focus on the ICH protection practices of the Pinghu School, examining its revival process within a framework of institutional preservation and the practical challenges it faces today. I first delineate the reconstructed ecological system of inheritance supported by ICH policies; then, through fieldwork that incorporates both insider and outsider perspectives, I analyse the mechanisms of rupture between “technique” (*shu*, 术) and “cultural spirit” (*dao*, 道) in the professional transmission domain; finally, through long-term tracking of Zhu Dazhen’s inheritance practices, I explore the possibilities of achieving an inheritance model that “unifies cultural spirit and technique” (*daoshu heyi*, 道术合一).⁵

5.2 Institutional Activation: Reconstructing the Heritage Ecosystem

5.2.1 Establishing Legitimacy

Faced with the near-extinction of the Pinghu School locally, China’s accession to the *Convention* provided a critical institutional opportunity for its revival. The first step of institutional intervention involved the establishment of a legitimate inheriting authority and identity. In 2003, the Pinghu City Government initiated systematic conservation efforts,

⁵ The “unity of cultural spirit and technique” is a core concept within China’s traditional intellectual framework. This term typically denotes the interdependent, dialectical unity between fundamental principles, values, or the spiritual essence (cultural spirit) and specific methods, skills, or practices (technique). This philosophy was not first articulated by any single individual in a singular text, but rather crystallised gradually over the long course of intellectual history. See Gai (2021) for further details.

successfully locating Zhu Dazhen, the son of the master Zhu Ying, through specialised surveys, and officially recognising him as a city-level inheritor.⁶

After five years of application, Pinghu School was elevated through three levels—from municipal to provincial to national ICH status in 2008. Concurrently, Zhu Dazhen achieved recognition as a national inheritor. This process was far more than the updating of a simple registry entry: its deeper significance lay in marking the Pinghu School's transition from a regional folk craft to its formal incorporation into the national cultural heritage framework sustained by legal and institutional bases. A safeguarding system aimed at providing sustainability was subsequently established. Pinghu City authorities constructed a three-tiered mechanism at the national, provincial, and municipal levels: regarding financial support, in addition to the central government's fixed subsidies for national inheritors, Pinghu City also specifically issued the "Pinghu *Pipa* Art Preservation Plan" (*Pinghu pipa yishu baohu jihua*, 平湖琵琶艺术保护计划; Wang, 2013), which established inheritance studios and training bases, allocating funds of RMB 300,000 to support the transmission and development of this school of art. In addition, the city established a comprehensive performance evaluation and incentive system. This includes implementing differentiated annual rewards for inheritors and a tiered reward scheme for transmission bases, effectively translating policy guarantees into sustainable motivation for inheritance (Zhejiang Provincial Department of Finance, 2023).

5.2.2 Building a Transmission Chain

To ensure the intergenerational transmission of Pinghu School, a comprehensive talent cultivation network spanning all age groups and hierarchical levels was established. In 2007, the Pinghu Municipal Government initiated campus-based transmission, gradually establishing heritage bases across multiple primary and secondary schools, laying the groundwork for a skills inheritance network. In 2009, facing the practical challenge of succession raised by Zhu Dazhen's advanced age, the ICH Centre introduced Li Qinghui 黎庆慧 (b. 1984) as a new generational force.⁷ Subsequently, the inheritance system was progressively refined: in 2011, a professional apprenticeship studio was established,

⁶ For more information about Zhu Dazhen, please see the official website: https://www.ihchina.cn/ccr_detail/1018.

⁷ Li Qinghui, a graduate of Xi'an Conservatory of Music, has been actively involved in the preservation of the Pinghu School through the Pinghu Talent Introduction Policy. Currently serving as the Director of the Pinghu ICH Protection Center, she has long been dedicated to the teaching, inheritance, and promotion of the Pinghu School.

implementing a dual mentorship model with Zhu Dazhen and Li Qinghui collaboratively instructing (see Figure 5.1); in 2019, higher education resources were further integrated by appointing *pipa* professor from the Xi'an Conservatory of Music, Ren Chang 任畅 (b. the 1970s), to establish a master studio catering for advanced students; by 2022, the inheritance domain expanded to the Pinghu Elderly University, ultimately forming a comprehensive lifecycle inheritance chain encompassing youth, adults, and seniors.⁸



Figure 5.1: Zhu Dazhen teaches adult students (Li, 2011).

More recently, the Pinghu School has transitioned from regional inheritance to specialised educational development. The Pinghu School Pipa Art Heritage Project (*Pinghupai pipa yishu chuancheng*, 平湖派琵琶艺术传承), implemented from 2019 to 2021, led by the Shanghai *Pipa* Professional Committee of the Shanghai Musicians Association, in collaboration with five specialised institutions, including the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, established a two-year systematic curriculum for 102 students.⁹ In 2022, the Pinghu School Pipa Art Performance Talent Training Programme (hereafter, Talent Training Programme), organised by the Central Conservatory of Music, focused on professional performers with already outstanding skills, aiming to cultivate leading figures capable of carrying forward the school's future development through intensive theoretical training and artistic reflection (see 5.3).

It is worth noting that this “pyramid” talent structure is not fragmented. Promising students emerging from primary and secondary school bases can advance to adult studios

⁸ Ren Chang is son of Yang Shaoyi's disciple Ren Hongxiang, and associate professor of *pipa* at the Xi'an Conservatory of Music.

⁹ For further details on the project, please see:

https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MzA5NzgXNzU1MQ==&mid=2650416766&idx=2&sn=e125a99676180d39d7f038ad53c10326&chksm=889580debf209c80e2056a0b72dd7346844b7991e5ad9223291d01109b1bd739461e7cf31b0&scene=27, accessed 10 February 2026.

for further training; meanwhile, specialised institutions' programs supply grassroots education with teachers equipped with systematic knowledge and performance skills. This vertical mobility and reciprocal reinforcement ensure the continuous circulation of “talent vitality” within the ecosystem, addressing the issue of inheritance gaps.

5.2.3 Activating Influence

Under the framework of institutional protection, Pinghu School members have extended their contemporary transmission domain through three main approaches: academic research, stage practice, and media innovation.

By hosting high-level academic forums in 2013 and 2019, Pinghu ICH Center successfully brought together authoritative national scholars and inheritors such as Qiao Jianzhong 乔建中 (musicologist), Li Jingxia 李景侠 (*pipa* performer), and Yang Baoyuan, systematically planning the rescue, preservation, and development pathways of the Pinghu School.¹⁰ These activities not only directly led to foundational publications such as the *Collection of Papers on Pinghu School Pipa Art (Pinghupai pipa yishu wenji, 平湖派琵琶艺术论文集)*, but also revitalised academic research across the country. The results of these efforts are reflected in a literature search of the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database. As of December 2025, when searching with the keyword “Pinghu Pipa School”, the annual average number of related publications increased significantly from 1.36 articles for the period 1982-2007 to 5.9 articles for the period 2008-2025.¹¹

Through the consecutive hosting of the 2014 and 2020 editions of the China Pinghu Pipa Invitational Competition (*Pinghu pipa yaoqingsai, 平湖琵琶邀请赛*), as well as the Pinghu Heritage (*Pinghu yiyun, 平湖遗韵*) series of concert performances, the Pinghu School has not only provided a professional platform for practitioners to showcase their skills but has also effectively increased the social awareness and recognition of the tradition (see Figure 5.2). In terms of international communication, Li Qinghui actively participates in international cultural exhibitions and performances, travelling to countries including Canada, Japan, and Mauritius. Domestically, she has been involved in cultural exchange and poverty alleviation programs in regions such as Guizhou and Guangxi, which are centered

¹⁰ Qiao Jianzhong is a renowned Chinese musicologist who has long served as a member of the Expert Committee for the Protection of National ICH.; Li Jingxia is a professor at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, having long dedicated herself to the transmission, research and teaching of the artistry of various *pipa* schools. See Pinghu City Intangible Cultural Heritage Centre (2014) for their discussions on the Pinghu School.

¹¹ Search results for “Pinghu Pipa School” on CNKI: <https://www.cnki.net/>.

on the theme of ICH. These multidimensional practices have significantly enhanced the social influence of the Pinghu School.



Figure 5.2: Zhu Dazhen performs with his students (China Art News, 2021).

In the field of artistic innovation, the Pinghu School has achieved a groundbreaking development in recent years. The Chinese first *pipa*-themed musical, “*The Pipa on the Lake: A Century of Heritage of the Pinghu School*” (*Hushang pipa xing: Pinghupai pipa bainian chuancheng jishi*, 湖上琵琶行: 平湖派琵琶百年传承纪事), premiered in 2019, combines theatrical narrative with classical repertoire and presents the historical evolution and artistic characteristics of the Pinghu School. Meanwhile, the documentary *Pinghu Pipa School* was officially commissioned in 2021, aiming to present the school’s distinctive artistic value through the documentation of eleven representative pieces performed by Zhu Dazhen. In 2025, Li Qinghui was invited to appear on the “*Walking with Hui*” 与辉同行 live broadcast by the Killed Culture IP, attracting over 100,000 viewers in a single session, thereby achieving a successful integration of traditional art forms with modern media platform.¹²

Under the collaborative efforts of the government, inheritors, academia, and society, the Pinghu School has undergone a remarkable transformation from an endangered ICH to a widely acclaimed element of cultural and artistic significance. As Li Qinghui recalled: “When I first came to Pinghu city 15 years ago, the Pinghu School was virtually unknown... of the 50 people selected for the base, only five remained by the end. Today, after 15 years of extensive promotion, the Pinghu School has gone from obscurity to widespread acclaim

¹² A recording of the performance is available at: https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1BaGCzeE9A/?vd_source=92841bc271dcd3a839db12045976c11, accessed 10 February 2026.

(Li, 2003). It is a complex project driven by institutional safeguards, systematically reconstructing its transmission ecology. Institutions first confer a legitimate identity and a stable framework; the education system then injects sustainable “lifeblood” and cultivates talent; and diverse dissemination channels expand its broad “survival space.” These three elements are interdependent and mutually nurturing, jointly facilitating the transformation of Pinghu School, an endangered craft, to a vibrant cultural heritage, providing a replicable paradigm for the preservation of similar intangible cultural assets.

5.3 The Alienation of Inheritance: The Disjunction Between Technique and Culture

However, although this meticulously constructed institutionalised inheritance ecosystem has rescued the Pinghu School from the brink of extinction, it has done so in the context of a historical legacy deeply rooted in China’s specialised music education system—the implicit hegemony of “technicism”. The root of this dilemma can be traced to the higher education reform in China during the mid-20th century. The reorganisation of higher education in early New China, which separated music departments into independent conservatories (see Chapter 3), advanced musical professionalisation at a high cost: it created an institutional segregation that isolated music students from the broader academic ecosystem. As scholar Liu Ching-chih has argued, this isolation deprived them of interdisciplinary resources, university library collections, and exposure to diverse scholars, ultimately constraining their horizons in musicology and aesthetics (Liu 2010, 300-01). This institutional legacy fosters a cultural environment where music learners often grow indifferent to theoretical and humanistic education, allowing a technocentric paradigm to become the prevailing consensus in performance circles—a consensus that further marginalises the role of theory and culture in musical transmission.

Consequently, a fundamental conflict has emerged: on one hand, the ideal goal of ICH preservation is the holistic transmission of skills and cultural connotations; on the other hand, the core agents involved in transmission [from apprentices to educators] are predominantly cultivated within a “technical virtuosity” academic system. This historically formed paradigm functions as a powerful “default setting,” profoundly influencing perceptions and behaviours within the transmission domain.

In March 2022, I participated in the Pinghu School Pipa Art Performance Talent Training Programme organised by the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing and

presided over by Professor Zhang Hongyan, in a dual capacity.¹³ The program aimed to “enable students to learn and perform the classical pieces of the Pinghu School while gaining an in-depth understanding and mastery of the late Qing Dynasty *pipa* playing techniques characteristic, as well as the rich traditional cultural connotations and aesthetic principles” (Central Conservatory of Music, 2023), and established a pedagogical framework of theory-practice-presentation-reflection. The 25 participants comprised employed professional performers and university instructors, all possessing master’s degrees or higher academic qualifications, constituting a high-calibre cadre of skill transmitters. The program embraced 23 specialised seminars (comprising 57.5% of the total curriculum), featuring lectures by 22 multidisciplinary experts, including musicologists and composers, with content that extended beyond broad overviews to include in-depth discussions of musicology, theories of ICH preservation, and aesthetic philosophies. In the practical component, 13 performances of Pinghu style repertoire were arranged (constituting 32.5% of the workshop). These were conducted through hands-on instruction by the inheritors of the Pinghu School, including Guo Shaohua 郭少华 (b. 1959), Zhang Ming, Li Lianfang 李莲芳 (n.d.) and Liu Xifeng 刘西峰 (b. 1943), to ensure the precise transmission of the school’s core performance techniques.¹⁴ Ultimately, the artistic presentation was accomplished through three high-quality concerts, complemented by two thematic symposiums for scholarly synthesis (the final curricular 12%), thereby establishing a comprehensive pedagogical cycle spanning from theoretical foundation to practical application, and from exhibition to reflection.¹⁵

As a *pipa* performer trained at the Central Conservatory of Music, my insider technical expertise facilitated my seamless engagement in these exchanges, allowing me to become deeply involved in core activities such as ensemble rehearsals and repertoire studies. Concurrently, as a doctoral researcher in ethnomusicology, I systematically observed and documented lecture participation, transmission dynamics between experts and apprentices, and other contextual interactions as an outsider. This duality of insider/outsider provided both access to the field—gaining trust through shared background in performance

¹³ Zhang Hongyan is a *pipa* performer, educator, professor and doctoral supervisor at the Central Conservatory of Music, head of the Department of National Music, and director of the Center for ICH Conservation and Research at the Central Conservatory of Music.

¹⁴ Guo Shaohua entered the Xi’an Conservatory of Music in 1973, studying under Yang Shaoyi; she later studied under Yang Shaoyi’s son, Yang Yusun. Liu Xifeng was admitted to the affiliated middle school of Xi’an Conservatory of Music in 1958, studying under Yang Shaoyi. Li Lianfang studied under Wang Tianjian and Li Jianzhen, disciples of Yang Shaoyi between 1970-1975, and later studied under Yang Yusun.

¹⁵ See Chen & Gao (2023) for further details on the project.

training—and a critical perspective, enabling me to maintain an analytical distance for reflective observation. Based on this composite perspective, I clearly observed that the “technical virtuosity” notion rooted in academic pedagogy triggered a series of structural ruptures with regard to the inheritance of Pinghu School material and approaches. This rupture manifested a clear stepwise trajectory: it began with a devaluation of theoretical connotations at the cognitive level, extended to an identity crisis among the inheritors, and ultimately manifested as an alienation of aesthetic practice.

5.3.1 Cognitive Fracture: The Implicit Hegemony of Technological Fetishism

During a 30-day fieldwork, I observed a highly illustrative phenomenon of behavioural differentiation: participants exhibited markedly distinct engagement patterns in theoretical lectures versus practical sessions. During the theoretical lectures, which commenced at 10 a.m., participant engagement declined sharply over time. Initially, attendance discipline remained relatively high, with learners typically arriving around 9:50 a.m. and almost all being seated before the scheduled start. However, after the first week, there was a noticeable delay in arrival times, with participants arriving progressively later, generally between 9:55 a.m. and 10:05 a.m. By the third week, rates of tardiness and absenteeism had further escalated, with some participants even leaving midway through sessions after initial sign-in. During the lecture, the participants’ attentional engagement exhibited a comparable decline trend. I observed frequent occurrences of smartphone use, interpersonal conversations, and even sleep, with these behaviours becoming increasingly prevalent as the session progressed (see Figure 5.3).



Figure 5.3: Members doze off and use their mobile devices during the lecture (Gao Yanming's photograph, April 18, 2023).

In stark contrast, the practical sessions commenced at 2 p.m. On the program's opening day, as I stepped out of the lift at 1:40 p.m., the sound of *pipa* playing drifted from the soundproofed rehearsal hall over ten meters away—eleven participants had already arrived early to practice. Ongoing field observations indicated that participants had begun arriving incrementally around 1.30 p.m., reaching over 95% attendance by 1:55 p.m. Upon entering the rehearsal hall, attendees promptly engaged in preparatory activities such as tuning their instruments and sightreading scores. Additionally, over 70% spontaneously utilised mobile device stands to record the instructional process throughout.

During the instructional session, the students demonstrated intense focus and engagement: when the instructor demonstrated critical technical techniques, students promptly recorded the demonstration with their smartphones; for key technical points and difficulties, they meticulously annotated the sheet music with pens; peer interactions consistently centred on the comprehension and application of specific techniques. Notably, during the 120-minute lunch break, continuous observation revealed that each day, two to three attendees forwent rest to practice independently in the corridor outside the rehearsal hall. This spontaneous enthusiasm for performance practice sharply contrasted with the passive attitude toward theoretical coursework, and this behavioural pattern demonstrated remarkable consistency throughout the 30-day program.

This technological preference further permeated informal interaction scenarios: during breaks in practical courses, participants spontaneously formed intensive discussion

groups centred around mentorship, where natural clustering consistently revolved around hands-on topics such as fingering techniques and tone control (see Figure 5.4). Notably, even during theoretical lectures, when experts demonstrated performance, the entire classroom exhibited immediate attentional engagement—manifested by a collective instant of recording via smartphones and a surge of inquiries focused on performance techniques and practical aspects (see Figure 5.5).



Figure 5.4: Participants ask Guo Shaohua (left, April 28, 2023) and Zhang Ming (right, May 22, 2023) for guidance during the break. Photograph by Gao Yanming.



Figure 5.5: Participants record the expert's performance demonstration segments on their mobile devices during the lecture (Gao Yanming's photograph, April 25, 2023).

This stark behavioural differentiation between theory and practice indicates that conservatory-based education has cultivated a cognitive filter, rendering inheritors highly sensitive to quantifiable skills and selectively disinterested in the cultural soil that nurtures

these skills. This deeply ingrained technological idolisation not only shaped learners' behaviours but also significantly influenced their standards for evaluating the value of inheritance, even serving as a benchmark for self-assessment and qualification verification among inheritors, thereby provoking a deeper crisis of subjectivity.

5.3.2 Subject Fracture: The Self-Deconstruction of the Inheritors and the Judgment of the Other

Among all theoretical lectures, one of the most anticipated segments by participants was the live demonstration and exchange with Zhu Dazhen. Since he is the son of Zhu Ying, trainees naturally assumed that his skills were derived from a rigorous, traditional apprenticeship system within his family, capable of faithfully reproducing the authentic style of classical works. However, when Zhang Hongyan explicitly stated that Zhu Dazhen had not been directly apprenticed to his father but was primarily self-taught and learned fragmentarily from Fan Boyan, an immediate reaction of surprise and doubt arose among the audience. This phenomenon was further confirmed during informal exchanges afterwards: some trainees, upon learning of my own experience studying under Zhu Dazhen, were eager to verify whether he indeed lacked formal mentorship and to assess his actual performance level. Once I confirmed that the facts aligned with Zhang Hongyan's account, multiple participants collectively questioned, "Then how can he be considered a national inheritor of the Pinghu School?" (personal communication, May 17th, 2023).¹⁶ This seemingly simple inquiry profoundly reflects the structural contradictions in contemporary ICH preservation: academics and practitioners narrowly equate "ICH transmission" with "technique replication," prioritising the precise reproduction of traditional repertoire as the primary criterion when assessing inheritors. This technocratic criterion not only causes external recognition crises regarding the identity of inheritors but, more alarmingly, is unconsciously internalised by the inheritor group, leading them to actively adopt the same set of value coordinates for self-assessment and self-discipline.

During practical sessions, I observed a highly instructive phenomenon: four inheritors of the Pinghu School exhibited pronounced psychological anxiety and tendencies toward self-devaluation when engaging with professionals from the music conservatories. A typical scenario involved attendees eagerly requesting the inheritor to perform a complete

¹⁶ This dialogue record is from an informal group discussion on May 17, 2023. To protect the rights of the respondents, all participant names have been omitted. All five participants clearly expressed similar doubts.

demonstration before beginning each new piece, aiming to intuitively grasp the distinctive artistic style and expressive nuances of the Pinghu School. Unexpectedly, these highly respected masters *all* exhibited evident hesitation in response to such requests: Liu Xifeng repeatedly deflected, stating, “I’m not an expert, you are the experts” (Fieldnotes, April 20th, 2023) and only agreed to perform a very short paragraph after persistent insistence from the members. Similarly, Li Lianfang prefaced her performance by emphasising, “You are all professional musicians, I cannot compare to you,” and even admitted, “I have practised at home for a long time for this performance, please forgive any imperfections” (Fieldnotes, May 8th, 2023). This display of insecurity and self-deprecation among professional musicians starkly contrasted with the authoritative image expected of the Pinghu School. This anxiety not only stems from technical inferiority, but it is also rooted in the current music education system’s overemphasis on performance techniques, academic credentials, and competition awards as quantifiable metrics. Consequently, these inheritors unconsciously internalised technocratic evaluation standards, leading even officially recognised ICH inheritors to diminish the cultural significance of their own transmission.

The trainees’ disappointment and scepticism towards Zhu Dazhen’s “non-orthodox apprenticeship,” along with the self-deprecation of legitimate inheritance figures in front of professional trainees, are seemingly contradictory phenomena that, in fact, jointly reveal a deep-seated value dilemma in ICH transmission. The root cause lies in the current protection system’s implicit adherence to a logic: the “technical virtuosity” concept originating from academic training has transcended local knowledge itself and has become an invisible standard for evaluating the effectiveness of inheritance. This standard not only moulds trainees’ stereotypical perceptions of “orthodox inheritance” but also unconsciously internalises them within the inheritor group, thereby undermining the foundation of their cultural subjectivity.

Ultimately, when technology becomes the sole criterion for measuring value, and even the inheritors begin to question the cultural significance they carry, a “subject fracture” has already formed. This fracture will not remain only at the conceptual level; it will inevitably be exposed in the moment music sounds, in the ears of the audience, and in the insurmountable aesthetic divide between the stage and the audiences.

5.3.3 Practical Fracture: The Manifestation of Aesthetic Colonialism

In concert practice, aesthetic conflicts driven by “technical virtuosity” were manifested in highly dramatic ways. Zhang Hongyan insisted that the three recitals strictly adhered to

traditional interpretative standards: no cuts to repeated sections of classical pieces, no amplification equipment used, and the authentic original sound preserved to showcase the essence of ancient compositions. Yet this “archaeological” approach to historical authenticity encountered significant challenges to acceptance in the practical performance.

My observations indicated that at the concert’s onset, the audience maintained a high level of attentiveness, creating a solemn and anticipatory atmosphere. However, as the performance progressed, approximately three to four minutes into each piece, noticeable attentional dispersion emerged—audience members began checking their phones and whispering to each other. This trend becomes more pronounced in the second half, with some patrons in the rear seats gradually departing early. Post-performance interviews further corroborated this aesthetic dissonance. My friend, an accomplished tuba steeped in Western classical repertoire, attended as the spouse of a participant. His perspective, coming from within the professional music world yet outside the traditional Chinese plucked instrument, provided a candid critique that cut to the heart of the conflict. He explicitly stated: “These pieces hold absolutely no interest for me whatsoever. I believe the Pinghu School’s obsolescence is inevitable” (personal communication, May 23rd, 2023). A friend outside the music circle also remarked, “The pieces are all too long, and the music lacks any sense of tension” (personal communication, May 23rd, 2023).¹⁷ Clearly, audience expectations have been shaped by the performance paradigms developed over the past few decades. They are accustomed to modern aesthetic standards that emphasise dramatic tension and emotional contrast (see Chapter 4), which fundamentally diverge from the simple, restrained interpretive style characteristic of the Pinghu School.

What is thought-provoking is that this aesthetic disjunction not only exists among the audience but also manifests within the attendees, who experience the same contradictions within their own aesthetic frameworks. Take “Manchu General’s Order” as an example: the melodic framework of this ancient composition was later adapted into a popular song “A Man Should Strengthen Himself” (*Nan’er dang ziqiang*, 男儿当自强). Despite this shared framework, the final artistic expression of the two works diverges significantly: “A Man Should Strengthen Himself” employs an exuberant G major key with passionate lyrics, exuding heroic grandeur.¹⁸ In contrast, “Manchu General’s Order” is

¹⁷ To mitigate social desirability bias, I conducted informal interviews with four on-site participants to obtain more spontaneous internal perspectives.

¹⁸ Recording of “A Man Should Strengthen Himself”: https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1kb411A7JT/?spm_id_from=333.337.search-card.all.click&vd_source=92841bc271dcdb3a839db12045976c11, accessed 10 February 2026.

composed in a somber D minor key, utilising a rare alternate tuning—lowering the first and third strings by a perfect fourth and a minor third respectively, changing the tuning from A–D–E–a to A–B–E–E [fourth string to the first string]—resulting in a pitch lowered by an additional four degrees.¹⁹ This distinctive tuning technique, combined with the predominantly *shuangyinlun* [using only one finger of the left hand to press the same fret on both the first and second strings while the right hand performs *lun*, 双音轮], with occasional *sao*, ultimately produces a sound effect that is oppressive and monotonous as compared to than the anticipated majestic and heroic military aura of the popular song. Set aside the expansive tonal range and virtuosic techniques of contemporary *pipa* compositions, this five-minute piece, with its limited technical demands and repetitive melodic structure, struggles to meet the aesthetic expectations of modern audiences. This dissonance became particularly nuanced during rehearsal sessions: although nine performers [including me] maintained solemn expressions during the official performance to convey the authority of a military general, rehearsals often evoke involuntary laughter due to the piece’s monotony. One participant even jested: “I finally understand why the Pinghu School has been lost” (Fieldnotes, April 21st, 2023).²⁰ This seemingly casual jest vividly reflects the awkward position of traditional music within the aesthetic framework of contemporary professional performers.

From cognition to subjectivity, and then from subjectivity to practice, this clear fracture chain reveals a dilemma of contemporary ICH preservation. Institutionalised protection systems can save a tradition from the endangered list and provide the necessary ecological environment for its survival. However, if the “technical virtuosity” mindset is not reflected upon, all efforts may merely serve to carefully preserve a “shell of technique,” while the true cultural spirit that granted the tradition life quietly dissipates. The alienation of transmission, driven by this techno-centric approach, compels us to confront a more fundamental question: in an era where the academic establishment often prioritises technical proficiency as the primary metric for artistic evaluation, how can those intangible cultural values—which resist quantification—continue to endure? How, then, are we to strike a balance between technical mastery and cultural significance?

¹⁹ Recording of “Manchu General’s Order”: https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV12o4y137Ku/?spm_id_from=333.337.search-card.all.click&vd_source=92841bc271dcdb3a839db12045976c11, accessed 10 February 2026.

²⁰ This comment was heard by the author during the rehearsal in 2023.

5.4 Toward Unity: An Ethnographic Journey from Outsider to Cultural Guardian

The name Zhu Dazhen is unfamiliar within the *pipa* community, seemingly emerging into public eye only with the recognition of the Pinghu School's *pipa* artistry as a part of ICH. Dramatic turns mark the life trajectory of this senior: although immersed in his father Zhu Ying's performances from a young age, he did not receive formal instruction; following Zhu Ying's death in 1954, he studied under Zhu Ying's disciple, Fan Boyan. After returning to Pinghu in 1962, he gradually withdrew from performance, ultimately ceasing entirely by 1983. This hiatus persisted for over two decades until, in 2004, when the Pinghu School was designated as ICH, the 60-something Zhu Dazhen was re-engaged by the Pinghu City Cultural Centre (*Pinghushi wenhuaguan*, 平湖市文化馆). As he recalled, "After more than 20 years, I picked up the *pipa* again. Having did not touch the strings for many years, I felt somewhat apprehensive" (cited in Li 2014, 227). Such a background has led to scepticism regarding his legitimacy and representativeness within the *pipa* domain: Wang Fandi openly stated, "Although Zhu Dazhen has some familial heritage, under the current state of the Pinghu School, no one can truly represent its transmission" (cited in Tang 2012, 33). This assessment reflects the near-extinction of Pinghu School at the dawn of the 21st century. Nevertheless, Zhu Dazhen, with limited formal education, primarily self-taught, and seemingly unlikely to epitomise the orthodox transmission of Pinghu School artistry, resolutely dedicated himself to teaching and transmitting the art. Driven by a strong cultural mission, he reignited the nearly extinguished Pinghu School tradition, transforming himself from an "outsider" to a "guardian" of its heritage.

Since August 2018, I have visited Zhu Dazhen. This seven-year engagement has witnessed the transformation of my identity and academic trajectory. Initially, I was merely a visitor driven by academic curiosity; however, through interaction, I was deeply touched by his spirit and proactively became his disciple, shifting my identity from outsider to insider. Through close contact with him, I not only learned the performance techniques of the Pinghu School but was also inspired by his wholehearted dedication to the cultural inheritance mission. It is this sense of spirit that awakened my innate consciousness of cultural transmission, prompting me to select Pinghu School as my doctoral research focus and actively participate in the protection and dissemination of this tradition. The following analysis employs an ethnographic approach to Zhu Dazhen's cultural practices to explore how, within the contemporary ICH protection framework, it is possible to transcend a solely

technical evaluative paradigm and re-establish a cultural consciousness grounded in values. By examining his transformation from an “outsider” to a “guardian,” along with my own shift from an “observer” to a “participant,” we may identify a new pathway toward restoring the traditional synthesis of moral principles and technical skills.

5.4.1 The Temporal Whisper of an Ancient Pipa

In the summer of 2008, while I was working at a university in Hangzhou, I unexpectedly learned that the Pinghu School had originated in proximity. This discovery inspired me to seek an audience with the renowned inheritor, Zhu Dazhen. Before dialling, I hesitated over the keypad, contemplating the likelihood of rejection from this master. Surprisingly, upon explaining my purpose, he responded affirmatively without hesitation.

The following morning, I drove for an hour and a half from Hangzhou to reach an ageing residential compound built in the 1980s in the centre of Pinghu City. As my car turned into the residential compound, I spotted an elderly gentleman standing at the building’s entrance. With his hands clasped behind his back and a kindly expression on his face, he seemed to be waiting for someone.

It was midday during the peak of summer, with the intense solar radiation casting a scorching light upon his posterior. An intuitive premonition arose that this individual might be Mr Zhu Dazhen. His gaze remained fixed on my vehicle as I promptly halted and approached him. With a mixture of anticipation and slight hesitation, I inquired, “Are you Mr Zhu Dazhen?” He nodded in affirmation and extended his hand, responding, “Yes.” A surge of emotion arose within me—I had not disclosed the specific arrival time, yet he had persisted at the doorway, solely to welcome my arrival.

He led me to a small room on the right side of the house—unwilling to engage in pleasantries, Mr. Zhu eagerly moved through the room searching: pulling out a yellowed *gongchepu* from the bottom of a camphorwood chest, retrieving treasured old photographs from a deep drawer, and finally carefully holding out a slightly curled handwritten score—an inherited work by his father, Zhu Ying.

After carefully placing the score of “Wild Geese on the Sandbank” on the music stand, I took out my *pipa* and attempted to play it. As the music played, Mr Zhu suddenly straightened his stooped back, his gaze fixed intently on each of my fingerings. After a moment, he approached the corner of the room and retrieved an old *pipa* from a heavily worn case.

The surface of this instrument had oxidised into a deep amber hue, with the overlay of the ledge showing fine crack patterns. The gaps between the frets were also filled with spots of green mould, and the yellowed silk strings wrapped around the tuning pegs silently told of its age (see Figure 5.6).



Figure 5.6: Zhu Dazhen's ancient *pipa* (Gao Yanming's photograph, August 28th, 2018)

He remained silent as he handed the instrument into my arms, without uttering a word. The moment my hand touched the body of the instrument, an ancient aroma of rosin and tung oil wafted over. "It is quite old, the tonal quality is probably not very good," I was thinking. Surprisingly, when my fingers plucked the strings, this seemingly weathered old instrument emitted a clear, luminous tone, distinctly different from the dull sound typically associated with an aged *pipa*.

I eagerly performed the melody, observing the vibrations of the strings, while Mr Zhu stood beside me, hands clasped behind his back, attentively observing my execution.

"You are like the master of this instrument," Mr Zhu suddenly spoke, with a peculiar gleam in his eyes.

I hesitated briefly—we had only known each other for a little over ten minutes, and this sudden compliment left me momentarily at a loss for words, attributing it to the well-meaning encouragement of a senior.

The sound of the music continued. After a little while, he softly added, "This *pipa* is for you".

My fingers were paused on the string, and I looked at him in disbelief—this gesture of generosity was too abrupt, far beyond what a first-time visitor would typically receive. I

instinctively declined. Seeing that I did not accept, he ceased to insist, and our conversation naturally shifted back to the music.

Many years later, I finally comprehended the meaning behind his seemingly abrupt words that afternoon. It was only then that I realised the deep teacher-student bond between us had quietly taken root from the very moment I had first played a note. Perhaps in that fleeting instant when I plucked the strings, the clear and resonant sound of the old *pipa* conveyed to him the long-lost echoes from the depths of memory. Maybe during the rotation of finger positions, he heard the lingering reverberation of his father Zhu Ying's teaching; or perhaps amidst the rhythmic nuances, he recognised the once-familiar vitality of the Pinghu School.

Upon initial observation, Zhu's vigorous demeanour nearly obscured his chronological age—his gait was steady, his gaze piercing, and his speech devoid of signs of ageing. However, when he grasped the *pipa* to demonstrate the unique techniques of the Pinghu School, the physical traces of time on his body became immediately apparent. His finger joints exhibited rigidity due to ageing, and the normally fluid sliding technique became sluggish, with his fingertips struggling to move across the strings, occasionally slipping. Despite this, he appeared oblivious or indifferent to these limitations. His entire focus was dedicated to the transmission of music, repeatedly demonstrating and explaining, even as his movements could no longer perfectly replicate the rhythmic nuances stored in his memory. His expression was intensely focused, exhibiting a form of unwavering reverence, as if the mastery of technique outweighed the corporeal constraints.

At that moment, I was profoundly moved. In his somewhat clumsy yet earnest demonstration, I perceived not only the perseverance of an elder artist but also an almost ritualistic commitment to cultural inheritance. I immediately proposed to undertake a systematic study with him, and he responded almost instinctively, with unwavering conviction: "As long as you are willing to learn, I will teach you without reservation."
(Figure 5.7)

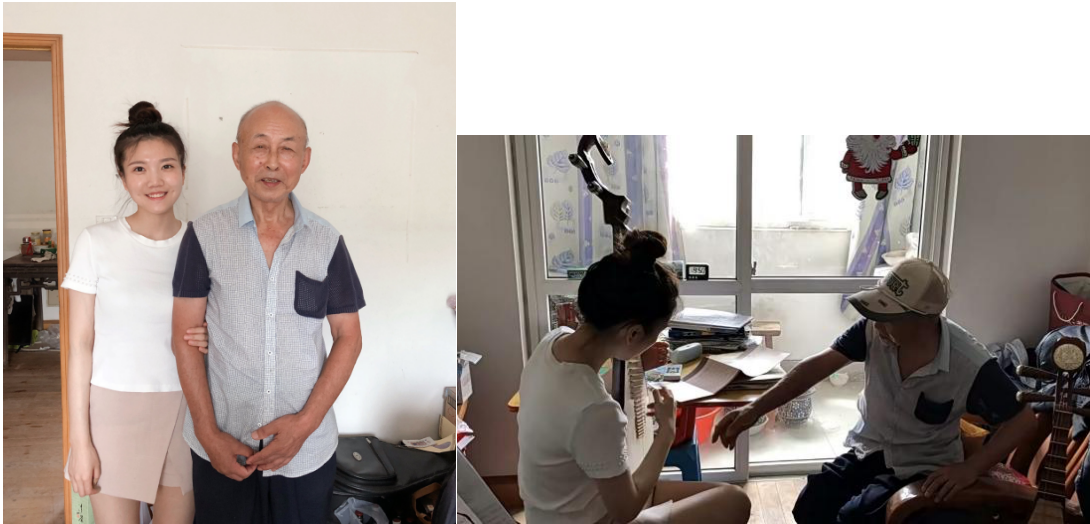


Figure 5.7: My first meeting with Zhu Dazhen (Gao Yaming's photograph, August 28th, 2018).

It was my immense good fortune to have crossed paths with Mr Zhu Dazhen. In the years that followed, I frequently travelled to Pinghu to visit this elderly gentleman who lived alone.²¹ In these interactions, I drew near to him, driven both by my curiosity and pursuit of the Pinghu School of *pipa* artistry, and by a genuine, heartfelt concern. As he grew older, I often sensed in his words a helplessness regarding the transmission of the state of the art. This feeling only strengthened my resolve: I wanted to do something meaningful for him, for the Pinghu School. Yet compared to renowned masters, I felt my own strength was meagre, unsure where to begin.

The turning point came in 2022. As I prepared to apply for a doctoral program and began conceptualising my research topic, I immediately realised this was a precious opportunity to study and advance the transmission of the Pinghu School. Perhaps by combining my academic path with my performance strengths, I could find a way to fulfil that original aspiration.

5.4.2 A Heritage Ceremony Beside the Statue

In August 2022, on the eve of my departure to Ireland to pursue doctoral studies, I paid a dedicated visit to Mr Zhu [83 years old] and informed him of my research proposal titled “The History and Heritage of Pinghu *Pipa* School.” Upon hearing this, the elder, traditionally known for his gentle Wu dialect speech and refined Jiangnan scholarly demeanour, suddenly displayed a distinctive spark in his eyes. What surprised me even more was that he immediately suggested we visit the Pinghu City ICH Centre together—

²¹ His family and children had all passed away, and he had lived by himself for many years.

despite our four-year acquaintance and the centre being just a few kilometres from his residence, this was the first time he had voluntarily proposed such a visit. This unexpected request made me keenly aware that my research held extraordinary significance in his mind.

At the entrance of the ICH Centre, a solemn bronze statue of his father, Zhu Ying, stood prominently. Upon entering, Mr Zhu grasped my sleeve, guiding me toward the left side of the statue. Initially unsure of his intent, I observed him retreat a few steps, and with a tremulous hand—affected by Parkinson’s disease—he solemnly raised his smartphone.

At the time, I did not fully comprehend the significance of this act; however, upon reflection, I cannot help but feel emotional, with tears welling up. Zhu Dazhen bent down, his hands trembling but his resolve firm, to take a photo of me with the bronze statue of Mr. Zhu Ying. Through his lens, the steady figure of the statue and my face seemed to form a silent dialogue across time and space. He carefully adjusted the composition, checked the screen repeatedly, and took the photo again and again until the result met his criteria.²²

This seemingly simple gesture carried ceremonial significance: as if silently announcing to his father that the Pinghu School had found its next inheritor.²³ In that moment, the silent gaze of the bronze statue, Mr Zhu’s trembling hands, and my solemnly standing figure together formed a vivid tableau of succession.

Returning to his old residence, cluttered with sheet music, Zhu Dazhen’s recollections surged like a tidal wave. Leaning at an angle in his armchair, he commenced narrating his childhood memories—his deceased son, his late wife, and his early years in Shanghai under his father’s guidance. Parkinson’s disease intermittently disrupted his narration—he would often close his eyes mid-sentence into deep reflection, resembling sleep, only to suddenly awaken and continue his incomplete narrative. These fragmented reminiscences resembled the fluctuating tempo of a Pinghu-style *pipa* composition, with abrupt accelerations and decelerations.

At parting, I softly asked, “May I take one more photograph with you?”

He sat on the polished rattan chair, his body like a bow bent by the passage of time, unable to straighten easily. Upon hearing my request, he paused briefly, then slowly inhaled, supporting himself on the armrests, his knuckles turning white from the exertion. His back

²² Unfortunately, the photo was stored on Mr. Zhu’s mobile device and was later permanently lost due to accidental hardware damage.

²³ Although I have studied under him for many years, I have never referred to myself as an inheritor. Through long-term field research and learning, I have deeply understood the cultural significance and expectations embodied in the identity of an inheritor. Out of respect for this responsibility and reflective on my own dissemination approach, I prefer to position myself as an ongoing learner and disseminator.

trembled, gradually lifting upward like an old tree stubbornly extending its branches in the wind. Ultimately, he was unable to straighten his waist fully, but his shoulders had already tried to open backwards, his head slightly raised, and his cloudy eyes briefly shone in the sunlight (see Figure 5.8).



Figure 5.8: Zhu Dazhen and Gao Yanming (Gao Yanming's photograph, July 24, 2022).

Time flows between us. Four years ago, my gaze still sparkled with youthful exuberance, but now it has settled into a mother's serenity; and he, once upright and tall, has been bowed by the passage of time into a curved silhouette, even his breathing has become gentle and slow. Yet, when he smiles, wrinkles ripple like waves, and the curve of his mouth remains familiar, as if pain quietly retreats at that moment, leaving only a pure, almost transparent smile.

Later, I placed this photograph in the most prominent spot on my desk. Whenever my gaze passes over, I see not only a moment of farewell but also a metaphor about the essence of inheritance: while skills and theories are indeed the framework of transmission, what truly imbues it with vitality are these moments that cannot be recorded in catalogs or measured by metrics—a trembling yet solemn shot, a posture raised with all one's strength, a memory flowing between periods of illness, and a smile that traverses time, silently passed on. This may very well be the most moving flesh-and-blood living heritage beyond institutional protection.

5.4.3 A Silent Lesson in Cultural Heritage

In May 2023, early summer in Beijing, the air carried the fragrance of locust blossoms. I was seated in the venue of the Talent Training Programme at the Central Conservatory of Music, eagerly anticipating seeing Mr Zhu again.

However, the bad news arrived unexpectedly. The conference organising team informed us that Mr Zhu had been uncontactable for several days.

Eighty-three years old, suffering from Parkinson's disease, somnambulism, and living alone. I hurriedly and tremblingly dialled that familiar number, the busy signal echoing sharply outside the empty auditorium. My mind kept flashing with ominous predictions.

The next morning, two teachers hurriedly returned from Pinghu, bringing a heartbreaking image—the old house appeared dim and damp in the footage: Mr Zhu was curled up on a thin bed, like a withered yellow leaf. Parkinson's disease had robbed him entirely of autonomous movement, with his eyes always closed and his lips trembling so severely that he could hardly produce complete syllables when speaking.

“Mr Zhu, we would like to ask you to talk about the Pinghu School...” the young teacher softly inquired.

Silence. A long silence.

Just as we thought the elderly man had fallen asleep, a faint “mm” escaped from his cracked lips. This response exhausted all his strength, yet it was resolutely heart-wrenching.

The two instructors collaboratively “moved” him from the bed to the chair—an action that was challenging yet they managed with precision. His body resembled a marionette, entirely dependent on external support, with an aged face contorted by pain.

Faced with the continuous inquiries from the instructors, he maintained his eyes tightly closed, his body held in a statuesque stillness, as if immersed in a semi-conscious state, murmuring indistinct fragments of speech.

However, when the discussion shifted to the Pinghu School's distinctive performance techniques, the elderly musician suddenly exhibited a reaction—he abruptly opened his clouded eyes, extended his trembling arms, and instinctively reached toward the nearby *pipa*. The instructors promptly handed him the instrument, placing it into his embrace.

“The index finger... needs to be... like this,” Zhu muttered. While gesturing urgently above the strings with his withered, branch-like hand, attempting to demonstrate the techniques of *guaxianlun* 挂线轮 and *manlun* 满轮. However, he seemed unaware that his

trembling hands, even when exerting maximum effort, only futilely glided through the air without ever making contact with the strings.

The entire room in Beijing was eerily silent, only the indistinct murmurs of the elderly and the suppressed sobs of those present intertwined. I saw tears glistening at the corners of Zhang Hongyan and other teachers' eyes, and I could no longer hold back the falling tears either. In that moment, I wasn't bothering to scrutinise whether his hand position was correct or if the notes were accurate—every framework for technical judgment was utterly invalid in the face of this body struggling with utmost effort to convey the spirit of the music.

The footage of the recording ultimately froze on his finger suspended above the strings—that is an incomplete *guaianlun*, yet for me it embodied the most complete interpretation of the Pinghu School heritage (see Figure 5.9). The experience compelled me to consider a fundamental question: When we discuss musical heritage, what are we truly talking about? Is it the precision of notes or the continuity of spirit? Is it technical excellence or an awareness of the “cultural spirit”?



Figure 5.9: Screenshot of Zhu Dazhen demonstrates the technique of the Pinghu School on video (Gao Yanming's screenshot, May 18, 2023).

5.4.4 The Unity of Cultural Spirit and Technique

The “silent *pipa* lesson,” along with the preceding narratives of encounter and ritual, transcends a mere biographical account of an individual inheritor. Collectively, they constitute a significant case study that compels a reevaluation of Zhu Dazhen's two decades of transmission practice within the broader discourse of ICH safeguarding. When learning that Pinghu School faced the crisis of being lost, this “outsider” who had set aside the *pipa*

for decades stepped forward. His simple question— “How can we continue to pass down the valuable legacy left by Mr Li [Li Fangyuan] and my father [Zhu Ying]? Although my father never explicitly asked me to do so, I believe it is my responsibility to carry on this heritage” (Zhu, Ni and Wang 2015, 43)—expressed the essence of inheritance beyond technique: an internal sense of mission rooted in life, originating from cultural awareness and identity (cultural spirit). His dedication vividly exemplifies the philosophical inheritance of the “unity of cultural spirit and technique” in its transmission, validating the incisive synthesis within traditional Chinese wisdom degrading the relationship between “cultural spirit” and “technique”—namely, “Having cultural spirit without technique, techniques can still be sought; having technique without cultural spirit, one merely remains within technical boundaries” (Zhang, 2018). When the cultural essence of the cultural spirit is deeply rooted in life, even if the physical expression of technique becomes imperfect, the transmission and practice can still foster a vitality that transcends mere technique.

The “cultural spirit” embodied by Zhu Dazhen is a form of cultural self-awareness and identity that transcends technical aspects. In my initial interview with Zhu, he candidly expressed his dissatisfaction with the current state of the Pinghu School’s transmission and directly identified the core issue as: “They are not playing in the Pinghu style but the conservatory style” (Fieldnotes, August 28th, 2018).²⁴ This critique points to the standardisation inherent in the academic training system, which, as analysed in Chapter 4, has tended to erode the traditional expressive qualities of regional schools. To counteract this homogenization, he participated in almost all inheritance activities, both large and small, with the aim of presenting to the public what he perceived as authentic Pinghu School music. The authenticity Zhu Dazhen championed stemmed from his upbringing immersed in the tradition of this school—listening to his father play and teach at home from a young age, surrounded by relatives and locals who practised it.²⁵ This long-term immersion in his native cultural environment, combined with his continued refinement of technique under his father’s disciple, collectively shaped his understanding of the authentic essence of the Pinghu School. Currently, as one of the last living links to the authentic Pinghu musical tradition, this immersive upbringing has given Zhu an unshakable conviction in the school’s authenticity.

²⁴ Personal conversation with Zhu Dazhen in 2018.

²⁵ He once told me: “When I played the instrument for fun, my father sometimes would come over to guide me on how to express the music.” Additionally, he mentioned that during his childhood in Pinghu, he was surrounded by performers of the Pinghu style music, and his family and friends also played music of this tradition.

However, this form of authenticity faces a significant identity crisis within the conservatory-style system. I clearly remember that upon learning of my acquaintance with Zhu Dazhen, a senior inheritor simply exclaimed, “There probably isn’t much more to ask him” (Fieldnotes, August 14th, 2025). In the eyes of many peers, Zhu’s only apparent value lay in how far he could provide insights into that period of his development, which might offer some clues for a better understanding of Zhu Ying. I have identified a compelling cognitive cycle underlying this phenomenon: Some inheritors, due to pedagogical lineage, are convinced of their orthodoxy; however, when confronted with the conservatory-style performers, they neglect the value of their own tradition, revealing a pronounced lack of technical confidence. Conversely, they question Zhu Dazhen’s orthodoxy, citing “lack of systematic mentorship” and “technical limitations.” This paradox highlights a dilemma in contemporary ICH preservation: under the dominance of “technical virtuosity”, value assessments are prone to being reduced to a one-dimensional pursuit of genealogical orthodoxy and technical perfection, thereby obscuring the fundamental significance of cultural subjectivity and emotional identification.

It is in this context that Zhu Dazhen’s practice demonstrates its deconstructive significance. Unlike those inheritors whose identities are only temporarily activated within specific activities, Zhu Dazhen’s sense of identity is integrated and coherent.²⁶ He neither needs to declare nor to deliberately demonstrate it, nor to showcase technical prowess—as soon as he holds the *pipa*, he embodies the Pinghu School. His very presence holds an irreplaceable symbolic significance for all those engaged with the Pinghu School. Precisely because he remains present, appearing at various events, the world can tangibly feel that the art of the Pinghu School remains a living tradition to this day. More critically, he faithfully serves the “cultural spirit” of his cultural consciousness with imperfect “techniques.” In the course of a seven-year relationship, I never witnessed him exhibit any doubt or hesitation due to missed notes or technical imperfections. As demonstrated in the “silent *pipa* lesson”, even when his body was extremely weakened, he persisted in gesturing with his fingers in the air, embodying an unwavering commitment to his imagined performance. This transcendent perseverance beyond technical limitations contrasts sharply with the self-denial expressed by other inheritors when facing academic performers. This perspective, prioritising cultural awareness over technical perfection, offers significant methodological

²⁶ These performers primarily identify as instrumentalists within the context of conservatory training or orchestral ensembles, rather than as Pinghu School inheritors. Their role as inheritors of the tradition is typically only temporarily invoked and contextually meaningful during specific Pinghu School-related events.

insights for contemporary ICH preservation: authentic, dynamic inheritance involves transforming craft into a vehicle of culture rather than making culture subordinate to techniques.

Ultimately, his practice revealed the dialectical relationship between “cultural spirit” and “technique”: in this, “cultural spirit” is the essence of skill, and skill is the embodiment of “cultural spirit.” In Zhu Dazhen’s context, his cultural spirit acted as an intrinsic sense of mission that drove him from being an outsider to a custodian; technique is the pathway through which he embodies this cultural spirit. His skill may be imperfect, but because it serves the sincere cultural spirit, it becomes more compelling, successfully awakening the cultural consciousness of his inheritors. This cultural self-awareness has taken root and sprouted within me over seven years through countless poignant moments: the wait at the building entrance, the trembling fingers demonstrating techniques, and the silent *pipa* lesson—all forming a comprehensive cultural context that transcends technical training. In this culturally immersive environment infused with warmth, I inherit not only the musical scores and techniques of the Pinghu School but also the emotions, memories, integrity, and spirit. It is this deep connection rooted in emotional resonance and cultural identity that awakens my cultural consciousness, transforming my approach from passive learning to active transmission. This inwardly driven inheritance dynamic is fundamentally what sustains the continuous vitality of traditional art. When the transmission no longer depends on external discipline but arises from internal cultural self-awareness and value recognition, tradition can truly exist in the present and progress toward the future.

5.5 Conclusion

The protective practices of the Pinghu School demonstrate the significant effectiveness of institutionalised preservation within the context of ICH. From the establishment of inscription systems to the implementation of transmission mechanisms, and from dedicated funding support to multi-tiered educational networks, this systematic framework not only rescued an endangered school of thought but also crucially constructed a self-sustaining ecological system for cultural transmission. Similar successful experiences can also be observed in *Guzhen* Art 古琴艺术—through ICH recognition, the *qin* has transitioned from

scholarly studios to public classrooms.²⁷ While preserving traditional essence, it has also gained popularity among young audiences through innovative dissemination methods.

However, this study further reveals that institutional support, while providing external conditions for the survival of traditional art forms, also faces challenges related to internal transmission. The rupture between “technique” and “cultural spirit” in the Pinghu School’s inheritance similarly manifests in *Kunqu* transmission.²⁸ When young performers overly emphasise vocal technique and physical discipline, they often neglect the unique scholarly temperament and poetic expression inherent to *Kunqu*. This phenomenon underscores that ICH preservation must go beyond superficial technical transmission and delve into the deeper cultural connotations.

Therefore, in my view, the future of Pinghu School and similar ICH needs to rely on the construction of a new paradigm of “unity of cultural spirit and technique.” This implies:

In terms of cognition, the misconception of “technical virtuosity” must be broken, and inheritance should be liberated from the narrow framework of “technique replication,” recognising that its essence is a process of constructing cultural subjectivity.

In practice, preservation efforts need to shift from focusing on technique conservation to cultivating an ecosystem that nurtures cultural consciousness. This entails that the education system must place equal emphasis on theoretical learning, cultural immersion, and technical training, fostering inheritors with profound cultural literacy and firm cultural confidence.

Under the intertwined forces of globalisation and modernisation, the continuity of traditional Chinese art hinges not merely on institutional support, but on practitioners’ ability to consciously reinterpret and revitalise their heritage. When we safeguard the essence of traditional arts while providing them with space for contemporary development, traditional art forms such as the Pinghu School can transcend their simple “heritage” status and become dynamic cultural resources that nourish the spiritual lives of modern society.

²⁷ The *Gunqin* Art was inscribed by UNESCO in 2003 as a “Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity,” and was included in China’s first batch of national ICH list in 2006 (ID: II-34). For more information, please see https://www.ihchina.cn/project_details/12484/.

²⁸ *Kunqu*, designated by UNESCO in 2001 as one of the first “Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity,” was listed in China’s first batch of national ICH in 2006 (ID: IV-1). For more information, please see https://www.ihchina.cn/project_details/13134/. See Lam (2018) for further discussions.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.1 Summary of Findings

Viewed from the perspective of historical ethnomusicology, this study systematically examines five critical historical phases of Pinghu School *pipa* art, revealing its developmental trajectory and cultural significance from the late Qing Dynasty to the present. Since its founding by Li Fangyuan, the Pinghu School has been carried forward by successive generations of prominent inheritors, including Zhu Ying, Yang Dajun, Yang Shaoyi, and Zhu Dazhen. Collectively, they have composed an extensive epic documenting the school's adaptive and innovative progression amidst a century of profound social and cultural transformations in modern China. Each generation of custodians has maintained an open and inclusive stance, actively responding to societal transformations while preserving the school's essence. They have also continuously explored contemporary methods of transmission that resonate with current cultural contexts, ensuring that Pinghu School remains vibrant and distinctive across different historical periods. Analysing its developmental trajectory, the most notable commonality among these key inheritors is their proactive engagement with "modern" techniques and ideas, positioning them not as conservative guardians but as pioneers who leverage advanced innovations of their respective eras to revitalise and reform traditional practices.

In the context of internal strife and external threats during the late Qing Dynasty, the musical sphere was broadly perceived by elite strata such as Li Fangyuan as indicative of a deteriorating societal morality. In the face of this cultural crisis, Li Fangyuan's compilation of the *Li Collection* transcends mere music transcription, representing a conscious act of cultural reclamation amidst a cultural crisis. Its core strategy revolves around leveraging Confucian pedagogical principles as the ideological foundation, employing the method of "using the ancients' words as a pretext" and utilising literary reconfiguration of subheadings to address the prevailing issue of "obscene and vulgar songs" at that time. This initiative aims to elevate the *pipa* from a folk craft to an art form recognised within the scholarly and literati cultural sphere, thereby reshaping the instrument's cultural identity and value coordinates during the late Qing period when traditional ritual and musical order was in flux (Chapter 1).

In the early 20s, amidst the widespread admiration for Western music among modern intellectuals, Zhu Ying responded proactively with a forward-looking vision: He pioneered the integration of the *pipa* into the emerging framework of professional higher education in music, dismantling traditional schools' barriers, and advocating for the fusion of Eastern and Western music, and powerfully propelled the transformation of national music into a formalised academic discipline and its modernisation. His conviction that "national music is not backward, but underdeveloped," coupled with his creative practice embodying the "salvation through music" philosophy, both demonstrated a visionary consciousness that transcended his era. The first generation of professional inheritors trained by him engaged in extensive practice across teaching, performance, and composition, thereby further expanding the school's social influence and collectively advancing the deepening development and widespread dissemination of Chinese *pipa* artistry during the first half of the 20th century (Chapter 2).

Following the establishment of the PRC, the implementation of national cultural policies and the widespread development of specialised conservatories facilitated the active engagement of inheritors such as Yang Dajun, Cheng Wujia, and Yang Shaoyi of the Pinghu School in advancing the country's musical arts. Between 1949 and 1966, they served at various music conservatories, devoting themselves to establishing teaching systems. Concurrently, drawing upon their artistic expertise, they played active roles in a series of national cultural initiatives, including the Music Week, instrument reform projects, and conferences on teaching materials, becoming pivotal forces in advancing the modernisation of music education (Chapter 3).

During the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, the development of traditional music was severely restricted by the prevailing socio-political environment. Yang Shaoyi employed clandestine methods—including secret instruction, scholarly writings, and recordings—to sustain the transmission of the musical heritage under extreme conditions. His endeavours demonstrate that the apparent "decline" of the Pinghu School during this period did not signify the exhaustion of its artistic vitality, but rather an active adaptation of its transmission methods under specific historical conditions. His perseverance preserved crucial artistic genes for the school's subsequent revival, while also illustrating an alternative pathway through which traditional arts might seek continuity amidst crisis (Chapter 3).

Entering the 21st century, faced with the Pinghu School's ambiguous identity and declining transmission vitality, Zhu Dazhen's most critical resource is the national ICH

protection system. His primary objective is to secure official recognition and protective cultural status for this school. Through active participation in heritage inscription efforts and representing the Pinghu School at various public events, Zhu strategically leveraged the framework provided by national cultural policies to continuously promote the school's development and dissemination. In the era of new media, his disciple Li Qinghui further utilised contemporary channels, such as live-streaming platforms and musical theatre, to expand the modes of expression and dissemination of the Pinghu School. This series of endeavours has not only brought the Pinghu School back into the public cultural consciousness but also provided a significant model for the institutional survival and innovative dissemination of traditional arts in the contemporary era (Chapter 5).

The most abiding insight offered by the transmission of the Pinghu School lies in this: the vitality of traditional art does not reside in rigidly preserving formal integrity, but rather in each generation's capacity to transform the core spirit of tradition into practices that address the challenges of their own era, guided by clear cultural consciousness. From Li Fangyuan's literati-inspired adaptation of the *Li Collection*, Zhu Ying's institutional groundwork, the systematic development after the founding of the PRC, clandestine preservation during the Cultural Revolution, to contemporary revitalisation through ICH frameworks—each phase represents inheritors' creative responses to the question of “how tradition endures” under specific historical constraints and existential pressures. The period of decline from the 1980s to the early 21st century serves as a counterpoint: when practitioners lack the cultural self-awareness to transform traditional spirit into contemporary practice, tradition may stagnate even amidst an increasingly open external environment (Chapter 4).

As we can see in Chapter 5, various efforts have been made in recent years to revive and promote the Pinghu School. Yet many of these efforts proceed without a clear understanding of the tradition's history: what enabled it to thrive in the past, what strategies its inheritors developed to sustain it through periods of crisis, and why it lost momentum in the late twentieth century. What this study suggests is that effective action in the present depends on a grounded understanding of the past. The Pinghu School's history reveals a pattern: periods of vitality were marked by inheritors who possessed a clear cultural self-awareness—an understanding of what the tradition stood for and how it could be reinterpreted for their time. Conversely, decline set in when such awareness faded. For those working today to sustain the Pinghu School, the lesson is not to look for a fixed set of

techniques to preserve, but to cultivate the kind of reflective engagement that allows each generation to ask what the tradition's core spirit demands of them in their own context. In this sense, the study offers not only a historical account but also a framework for thinking about what makes transmission sustainable across time.

6.2 Limitations

Firstly, this study traces the century-long transmission history of the Pinghu School, analysing its trajectory of rise and decline primarily through historical, social and human dimensions. Consequently, the focus of analysis is placed upon its lineage of transmission, artistic concepts, institutional adaptation, and the practice of its inheritors.

Within this framework, this study has not undertaken a similarly in-depth technical analysis of the music itself of the Pinghu School, such as musical scores, musical structures, performance technique systems, or the sonic evolution. Though the text also addresses the interpretation and comparison of musical scores, with the primary aim being to decipher the cultural concepts, interpersonal interactions, and historical contexts embedded within these scores, rather than undertaking a purely musicological or acoustic deconstruction of the musical itself. Although this research has yet to delve deeply into the technical intricacies of music, it enables us to focus more precisely on the continuity and transformation of the Pinghu School within its historical and socio-cultural context, thereby providing a vital socio-historical perspective on its transmission. Furthermore, it lays the groundwork for future studies that integrate the analysis of music itself.

Moreover, this research faces challenges related to the scarcity and inaccessibility of primary materials. For instance, there is a limited availability of direct documentation on Li Fangyuan and his family, and the absence of original audio recordings of Zhu Ying from modern times hampers in-depth analysis of individual stylistic development and historical performance practices. Consequently, reliance on secondary sources, such as later transcriptions of scores and textual accounts, becomes necessary. Additionally, the official archives of pivotal events in the early nation-building period, such as Music Week and Textbook Conference, including meeting minutes, original programs, and policy drafts, are currently preserved at the Chinese Academy of Arts but are not publicly accessible. The limitations inherent in these historical sources necessitate a reliance on indirect evidence or plausible scholarly inference for certain aspects of this study, which may compromise the analytical precision and accuracy of the arguments presented.

Lastly, my emotional bond with Zhu Dazhen did not originate from any preconceived academic purpose but rather stemmed from a pure respect for his spirit of transmission. Over the course of our seven-year association, our relationship transcended mere technical instruction, becoming deeply enriched by daily conversations, shared walks, and exchanges of perspectives. The role of researcher only gradually emerged in the fourth year. Precisely for this reason, my dual identity as both a practitioner of the Pinghu School and an researcher has proved a double-edged sword in this research: on the one hand, this insider status, deeply rooted in daily interactions, has been a crucial advantage enabling me to gain access to the field, acquire the internal perspective and comprehend their spiritual world; on the other hand, the emotional investment and value identification cultivated over time also compel me to continually reflect upon my own position and inclinations within the narrative.

During the writing process, I have frequently found myself deeply moved by the criticisms levelled at Li Fangyuan by later generations, the misunderstandings surrounding Zhu Ying, the tragic fate of Yang Shaoyi, and the orthodox challenges faced by Zhu Dazhen. To some extent, this emotional resonance obscured the critical analytical distance required, leading me towards sympathy, understanding, and even defence. Unconsciously, this has reinforced the tragic undertones of the school and the idealised portrayal of its inheritors. Though the research consistently emphasised cross-verification through documents, genealogical records, and multiple sources to achieve narrative balance, I must candidly acknowledge that the interpretative perspectives formed through long-term emotional investment remain an underlying tone that this study cannot entirely shed. While serving as a window for deeper understanding, they may also constitute the root cause of insufficient analytical distance. The historical panorama ultimately presented emerged through an ongoing dialogue with these vivid individuals, each imbued with their own emotions, stances, and lived experiences.

6.3 Directions for Future Research

Existing research has primarily focused on the developmental trajectories of individual *pipa* schools. Future studies could transcend such singular genealogical histories to examine the cross-school communication networks among the five major *pipa* schools. This can be approached through both horizontal and vertical dimensions: horizontally, by focusing on the cross-school network centred in Shanghai, analysing specific interactions (such as competition, borrowing, and collaboration) between key figures during particular historical

periods to reveal the true dynamics of artistic relationships; Vertically, it is necessary to examine how these diachronic exchanges and interactions have continuously shaped the musical texts, performance techniques, and artistic philosophies of each school, while tracing their trajectories of change. This perspective transforms the history of the *pipa* from a series of isolated “school genealogies” into a dynamic narrative of continuous exchange and mutual influence between schools, thereby enabling a more comprehensive and authentic understanding of the instrument’s overall artistic evolution. In this regard, the multi-generational biographical approach—tracing artistic transmission and transformation across generations of *pipa* masters—offers a particularly valuable methodological lens for future cross-school studies.

Pinghu School’s musical tradition is founded on the *Li Collection*. Future research could employ genomic tracing to identify which sections of the thirteen major compositions originate from the *Hua Collection*, folk tune catalogues, or other existing musical sources. Particular emphasis could be placed on analysing how Li Fangyuan elevated these original materials into suites through techniques. Building upon this foundation, research may be expanded along two dimensions: firstly, by conducting a longitudinal genealogical study through comparative analysis of specific differences between the *Li Collection* and later transmitted scores by Zhu Ying, Yang Shaoyi, Ren Hongxiang and others, thereby tracing the evolutionary trajectory of Pinghu School music within the lineage itself; Secondly, representative pieces from the *Li Collection* can be compared with the same pieces transmitted by other *pipa* schools. By analysing the similarities and differences in musical treatment and performance techniques across various versions, one can explore how different schools interpret the same musical source material. This approach allows for the artistic characteristics and historical standing of the Pinghu School to be situated within a broader context.

As illustrated in Chapter 2, the activities and influence of Zhu Ying and his disciples during the period from 1930 to 1949 remain insufficiently explored. Future research could undertake an in-depth collective biographical analysis of the “Zhu Ying School.” This approach would conceptualise Zhu Ying and his disciples as an integrated group, with particular emphasis on the historical gap between their graduation from the Shanghai Conservatory of Music and the founding of the PRC. By examining their correspondence, articles, and recorded materials, it could analyse their shared artistic concepts, educational philosophies, and historical contributions to the modernisation of Chinese music education in the 20th century. Such research would deepen our understanding of these pioneers of

modern *pipa* pedagogy, offering significant supplementation and refinement to the existing framework of the five major schools.

Future research, building on Chapter 3, could further investigate how the national artistic system, professional educational institutions, and cultural policies have collectively shaped the modernisation trajectories of traditional art forms. Within the same frameworks, how have distinct domains (e.g., traditional opera, handicrafts, folk dance) individually undertaken adaptation, adjustment, and innovation? Do the similarities and differences in their adaptive strategies stem from divergences in the inherent nature of the art forms themselves, or are they correlated with resource allocation during specific historical periods?

The three external pressures identified in Chapter 4 collectively constricted the development of the Pinghu School. This reflects a broader pattern of restructuring within China's artistic ecosystem amid modernisation. This framework offers a valuable lens for examining the trajectories of other art forms and for cross-cultural analysis. Future research could apply it to compare how China, Japan, and South Korea—each with distinct cultural policies, academic systems, and degrees of market involvement—have shaped the evolution and survival of their respective traditional arts in the modern era.

Chapters 3 and 4 collectively challenge the established narrative that the Pinghu School declined after 1949. This discovery offers new avenues for research in related fields, with future studies potentially expanding their scope to encompass other traditional cultural domains, such as opera, crafts, painting, folk rituals, and the transmission of technical heritage. Future research may examine the mechanisms of formation of “decline” narratives across various fields, analysing dominant historical sources and discursive structures while paying attention to overlooked local practices and informal transmission networks. Such research contributes to a more comprehensive portrayal of the authentic state of traditional culture within the modernisation process, thereby providing a solid empirical foundation and theoretical reference for contemporary cultural heritage conservation efforts.

Building on the practical disconnect revealed in Chapter 5, in which contemporary performers prioritise technique over cultural understanding, subsequent research may undertake medium- to long-term tracking studies of trainees who have completed their training. The core inquiry is to examine to what extent and in what manner trainees transform and apply the Pinghu School techniques, repertoire, and knowledge they have acquired into their routine teaching, performance, or creative practices. What specific challenges do they encounter in this process? And what factors support or hinder their

ongoing transmission of this tradition? The significance of this study lies in its capacity to furnish empirical evidence regarding the efficacy of contemporary transmission within the Pinghu School. Its findings may directly inform subsequent efforts to refine talent cultivation models and establish supportive, sustainable transmission ecosystems, providing decision-making guidance grounded in authentic feedback.

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Glossary

Featured Chinese Individuals

Pinyin	Chinese characters	Comments
Abing (Hua Yanjun)	阿炳 (华彦钧)	Blind Wuxi folk musician
Cai Yuanpei	蔡元培	Chinese philosopher, educator and reformer
Cao Anhe	曹安和	Musicologist and Chongming School member
Chen Duxiu	陈独秀	Key leader of the New Culture Movement
Chen Gongze	陈贡则	Pinghu School member
Chen Jilue	陈济略	<i>Pipa</i> performer and educator
Chen Mufu	陈牧夫	Southern School representative
Chen Tianhe	陈田鹤	Composer
Chen Tianle	陈天乐	Wang School member
Chen Yonglu	陈永禄	Wang School member
Chen Zhong	陈重	<i>Pipa</i> and erhu performer and educator
Chen Zemin	陈泽民	<i>Pipa</i> educator, performer
Chen Zijing	陈子敬	Pudong School member
Cheng Wujia	程午加	Pinghu/ Wang School member
Ding Shande	丁善德	Pinghu School member
Duan Shanben (Seng Xiashi)	段善本 (僧段师)	Tang Dynasty <i>pipa</i> performer
Fan Boyan	樊伯炎	Pinghu School member
Fan Shaoyun	樊少云	Chongming School member
Fan Zeng	范增	Warrior and strategist of the Chu state during the late Qin Dynasty
Fan Ziyun	樊紫云	Chongming School member
Guo Shaohua	郭少华	Pinghu School member

He Lüting	贺绿汀	Modern composer
Hu Shi	胡适	Modern Chinese philosopher and thinker
Hua Qiuping	华秋苹	Founder of the Wuxi School
Huang Zi	黄自	Modern composer and educator
Ji Kang	嵇康	Wei-Jin period philosopher, writer, and <i>qin</i> performer
Jiang Fengzhi	蒋风之	Modern <i>erhu</i> performer and educator
Jiang Jiaqi	蒋家骥	Late Qing Dynasty Scholar
Jiang Jieshi	蒋介石	Chinese political and military leader
Jiang Tai	蒋泰	Chongming School member
Ju Shilin	鞠士林	Founder of the Pudong School
Kang Kunlun	康昆仑	Tang Dynasty <i>pipa</i> performer
Kang Youwei	康有为	Late Qing dynasty scholar and reformist
Kuang Yuzhong	邝宇忠	Contemporary <i>pipa</i> performer
Li Dazhao	李大钊	Key leader of the New Culture Movement
Li Fangyuan	李芳园	Founder of the Pinghu School
Li Guohun	李国魂	Pudong School member
Li Guangzu	李光祖	Wang School member
Li Jianzheng	李建正	Pinghu School member
Li Jingxia	李景侠	Contemporary <i>pipa</i> performer
Li Lianfang	李莲芳	Pinghu School member
Li Qiyu	李其钰	Pinghu School member, Li Fangyuan's father
Li Qinghui	黎庆慧	Pinghu School member
Li Rongsheng	李荣声	Northern School member
Li Tingsen	李廷森	Pinghu School member
Li Tingsong	李廷松	Wang School member
Li Yu	李渔	Ming Dynasty playwright
Lin Gufang	林谷芳	Contemporary Chinese musician and critic
Lin Jiaqing	林嘉庆	Pudong School member

Lin Shicheng	林石城	Pudong School member, educator
Liu Bang	刘邦	Founding emperor of the Han Dynasty
Liu Dehai	刘德海	Contemporary <i>pipa</i> master
Liu Tianhua	刘天华	Modern <i>erhu</i> and <i>pipa</i> musician, composer and educator
Lu Chunling	陆春龄	Contemporary <i>dizi</i> performer
Lu Xiutang	陆修棠	Modern <i>erhu</i> performer and educator
Liu Xue'an	刘雪庵	Modern Chinese composer
Mao Zedong	毛泽东	Founder of the Chinese Communist Party
Hao Yifan	郝怡凡	Contemporary Wang School member
Hu Yuepeng	胡悦彭	Late Qing Dynasty Scholar
Pei Shenfu	裴神符	Tang Dynasty <i>pipa</i> performer
Qiao Jianzhong	乔建中	Contemporary Chinese musicologist
Qing Zhu	青主	Modern musicologist, composer and aesthetician
Qu Wenjun	曲文军	Contemporary <i>pipa</i> performer
Ren Chang	任畅	Pinghu School member
Ren Hongxiang	任鸿翔	Pinghu School member
Ruan Xian	阮咸	Wei-Jin period scholar, <i>ruanxian</i> musician
Shen Haochu	沈浩初	Pudong School member
Shen Zhaozhou	沈肇州	Chongming School member
Song Meiling	宋美龄	Chinese political figure
Sun Yude	孙裕德	Wang School member
Sun Zhongshan	孙中山	Revolutionary and political leader
Tan Xiaolin	谭小麟	Pinghu School member
Tang Xianzu	汤显祖	Ming Dynasty playwright
Wang Anshi	王安石	Song Dynasty politician, economist and poet
Wang Junxi	王君锡	Founder of Southern School
Wang Mang	王莽	Founder of the Xin Dynasty
Wu Bojun	吴伯君	Pinghu School member
Wu Bochao	吴伯超	Modern Chinese <i>erhu</i> performer and educator

Wu Junsheng	吴俊生	Contemporary <i>pipa</i> performer
Wu Jinglüe	吴景略	Modern <i>Qin</i> musician
Wu Mengfei	吴梦飞	Pinghu School member
Wu Man	吴蛮	Contemporary <i>pipa</i> performer
Wang Rongchen	汪蓉琛	Pinghu School member
Wang Shaoxian	王绍先	Pinghu School member
Wang Tao	王涛	Contemporary <i>pipa</i> performer
Wang Wei	王维	Tang Dynasty poet, painter and musician
Wang Xunzhi	王巽之	Pinghu School member
Wang Yuting	汪昱庭	Founder of the Wang School
Wang Zhaojun	王昭君	Ancient female
Wei Zhongle	卫仲乐	Wang School member
Wu Zhenping	吴振平	Modern Chinese <i>qin</i> performer
Xiao Youmei	萧友梅	Chinese music educator and composer
Xiang Yu	项羽	The king of the Chu dynasty
Yang Baoyuan	杨宝元	Pinghu School member
Yang Dajun	杨大钧	Pinghu School member
Yang Shaoyi	杨少彝	Pinghu School member
Yuan Xiangfu	袁翔甫	Late Qing Dynasty Scholar
Yang Yi	杨艺	Contemporary <i>pipa</i> performer
Yang Yusun	杨毓荪	Pinghu School member
Yang Yinliu	杨荫浏	Modern Chinese musicologist
Yin Rongzhu	殷荣珠	Chongming School member
Yuan Zuzhi	袁祖志	Late Qing Dynasty writer and poet
Zeng Qingrong	曾庆蓉	Pinghu School member
Zeng Zhimin	曾志忞	Modern music educator
Zhang Hongyan	章红艳	Contemporary <i>pipa</i> performer, educator
Zhang Liang	张良	Han Dynasty politician
Zhang Ming	张鸣	Pinghu School member

Zhang Pingzhou	张萍舟	Wang School member
Zheng Tisi	郑体思	Pinghu School member
Zhou Houqing	周厚卿	Late Qing Dynasty <i>pipa</i> performer
Zhou Shaomei	周少梅	Modern <i>erhu</i> performer
Zhu Dazhen	朱大桢	Pinghu School member
Zhu Quan	朱权	Ming Dynasty prince, scholar and <i>qin</i> player
Zhu Ying	朱英	Pinghu School member

Instruments, Genres, and Technical Terminology

Pinyin	Chinese characters	Comments
<i>bin'erxi</i>	鬻儿戏	A type of traditional local opera
<i>erhu</i>	二胡	Two-stringed fiddle
<i>di (dizi)</i>	笛 (笛子)	transverse bamboo flute
<i>gongchepu</i>	工尺谱	Traditional form of transposable notation
<i>guoyue</i>	国乐	“National music,” generic term for progressive and professional music based on regional traditions
<i>guanzi</i>	管子	A Chinese wind instrument, historically referred to as <i>bili</i> 篳篥.
<i>huaguxi</i>	花鼓戏	Flower-drum opera, a regional folk theater form
<i>jingju</i>	京剧	Beijing opera
<i>Jinü tanci</i>	妓女弹词	A performance form that emerged during the late Qing dynasty through the fusion of <i>suzhou tanci</i> with the courtesan community.
<i>kunqu</i>	昆曲	Literary and historical drama form from Jiangsu Province
<i>minzuyinyue</i>	民族音乐	Folk or ethnic music
<i>pipa</i>	琵琶	four-stringed, pear-shaped lute
<i>qin (guqin)</i>	琴 (古琴)	seven-stringed zither

<i>ruanxian</i>	阮咸	Ancient, round-bodied plucked lute
<i>shifan luogu</i>	十番锣鼓	“Ten Variations”, a percussive ensemble music
<i>sanxian</i>	三弦	three-stringed, long-necked lute
<i>sunan shifangu</i>	苏南十番鼓	A traditional instrumental ensemble forms prevalent in Southern Jiangsu Province.
<i>suzhou tanci</i>	苏州弹词	Narrative singing from Suzhou
<i>yinxi</i>	淫戏	A historical term for “lewd opera”, referring to performances censored for indecent content
<i>zheng (guzheng)</i>	筝 (古筝)	Multi-stringed, movable-bridge zither

Appendix I: Correspondence Chart Between the Structure and Subheadings of Each Version of “Gyrfalcons Seize Cranes” with Chinese Text

Score	<i>Hua Collection</i>		<i>Casual Conversation and Private Notes</i>		<i>Li Collection</i>		<i>Yangzhengxuan Pipa Score</i>	
Year	1819		1860		1895		1929	
Title	Gyrfalcons Seize Cranes		Wild Geese on the Sandbank		Gyrfalcons Seize Cranes		Wild Geese on the Sandbank (Gyrfalcons Seizes Cranes and Big Wild Geese)	
Prelude	1	Leaving the Nest (<i>lichao</i> , 离巢)	1	Prelude	1	Leaving the Nest	1	Taking Flight from the Nest (<i>fenyong chuchao</i> , 奋羽出巢)
Main	2	Searching for Feathers (<i>souyu</i> , 搜羽)	2	1. Geese Flying in the Moonlight (<i>yanfei mingyue</i> , 雁飞明月)	2	Searching for Feathers	2	Preening in the Reed Marsh (<i>luting souyu</i> , 芦汀搜羽)
	3	Searching the Mountains (<i>xunshan</i> , 寻山)	3	2. Second Part	3	Searching the Mountains	3	Crossing the River in Formation (<i>jiezhhen dujiang</i> , 结阵渡江)
	4	Stretching the Wings (<i>tingchi</i> , 挺翅)	4	3. Stretching the Wings (<i>ting</i> , 挺)	4	Stretching the Wings	4	Soaring Over the Wu Gorges (<i>zhishang wufeng</i> , 直上巫峰)
	5	Flying in the Clouds (<i>xiangyun</i> , 翔云)	5	4. The Geese are in a Figure of Eight (<i>yanpai bazi</i> , 雁排八字)	5	Flying in the Clouds	5	The Flock Journeys Afar (<i>lianqun xiaju</i> , 连群遐举)
	6	Spotting the Cranes (<i>piehe</i> , 瞥鹤)	6	5. Shooting a glance (<i>pie</i> , 瞥)	6	Spotting the Cranes	6	Circling with Strength (<i>huixuan tingchi</i> , 回旋挺翅)
	7	Capturing the Cranes (<i>buhe</i> , 捕鹤)	7	6. Capturing (<i>bu</i> , 捕)	7	Capturing Cranes	7	Crisscrossing the Cloudy Sky (<i>zongheng yunlu</i> , 纵横云路)
	8	Hunt and Capture (<i>zhuina</i> , 追拿)	8	7. Geese Lodging in Xiaoxiang (<i>yansu Xiaoxiang</i> , 雁宿潇湘)	8	Hunt and Capture	8	Clamoring Across the Firmament (<i>changkong liaofei</i> , 长空嘹唳)
	9	Slight Battle (<i>xiaopu</i> , 小扑)	9	8. Raging Battle (<i>da</i> , 大)	9	Slight Battle	9	Vast and Hazy Expanse (<i>wanli weimang</i> , 万里微茫)

	10	Raging Battle (<i>dapu</i> , 大扑)	10	9. Failure (<i>bai</i> , 败)	10	Raging Battle	10	Brushing the Layered Heavens (<i>cengxiao tiaoyu</i> , 层霄挑宇)
	11	Failure (<i>baifei</i> , 败飞)	11	10. One Goose Patrols (<i>guyan xungeng</i> , 孤雁巡更)	11	Failure	11	Aslant the Gale (<i>fengji xingxie</i> , 风急行斜)
	12	Through the Clouds (<i>chuanyun</i> , 穿云)	12	11. Gyrfalcons Seizes Cranes (<i>haiqing puhe</i> , 海青扑鹤)	12	Through the Clouds	12	Scattering to the Horizon (<i>sanzhu Tianya</i> , 散逐天涯)
	13	Air Combat (<i>kongzhan</i> , 空战)	13	12. Twelve	13	Air Combat	13	Foraging on the Cold Sands (<i>hantan mishi</i> , 寒滩觅食)
	14	Capture in the Grass (<i>lüe cao</i> , 掠草)	14	13. Thirteen	14	Capture in the Grass	14	Dispersing Over the Grasslands (<i>fenfei lüe cao</i> , 分飞掠草)
	15	Fluttering Wings (<i>pingsha</i> , 平沙)	15	14. The Crane's Call (<i>yansheng tianji</i> , 雁声天际)	15	Fluttering wings in the sand	15	Alighting on the Flat Sands (<i>puluo pingsha</i> , 扑落平沙)
	16	The Crane's Call (<i>heming</i> , 鹤鸣)	16	15. Fifteen	16	The Crane's Call	16	Their Cry Fades at Hengyang (<i>shengduan hengyang</i> , 声断衡阳)
	17	Flying Separately (<i>tuozong</i> , 脱纵)	17	16. Sixteen	17	Liberation		
			18	17. Flying Separately (<i>qunyan zongheng</i> , 群雁纵横)	18	Flying Separately (<i>fenfei</i> , 分飞)		
			19	18. Eighteen				
Postlude	18	Returning to the Nest (<i>guichao</i> , 归巢)	20	Postlude	19	Returning to the Nest	17	Harmonizing with Companions (<i>yongyong helü</i> , 嘒嘒和侶)
							18	Homeward under the Moonlight (<i>daiyue guichao</i> , 带月归巢)

Appendix II: Comparison of the Subheadings of the *Li Collection* and the *Hua Collection* in “Huaiyin’s Attack on Chu” with Chinese Text

Collection	Prelude	Pre-battle preparation	During the battle	Post-battle
<i>Hua Collection</i>		1. Opening the Gates and Firing Cannons (<i>kaimen fangpao</i> , 开门放炮) 2. Playing Wind and Percussion Instruments (<i>chuida</i> , 吹打) 3. Appointing a Leader (<i>dianjiang</i> , 点将) 4. Arranging Troops in Formation (<i>paizhen</i> , 排阵)	7. Setting up an Ambush (<i>maifu</i> , 埋伏) 8. Engaging in Small-scale Skirmishes (<i>xiaozhan</i> , 小站) 7. Shouting Loudly (<i>nahan</i> , 呐喊) 8. Engaging in Large-scale Battles (<i>dazhan</i> , 大战)	9. Suffering a Defeat in Battle (<i>baizhan</i> , 败战) 10. Crossing the Wujiang River (<i>wujiang</i> , 乌江) 11. Competing for Achievements (<i>zhenggong</i> , 争功) 12. Singing Triumphant Songs (<i>kaige</i> , 凯歌) 13. Returning to Camp (<i>huiying</i> , 回营)
<i>Li Collection</i>	1. Column Camp (<i>lieying</i> , 列营) * 2. Division Camp (<i>fenying</i> , 分营) * 3. Military Drums (<i>jungu</i> , 军鼓) * 4. Bugles (<i>zhanghao</i> , 掌号) * 5. Firing Cannons (<i>fangpao</i> , 放炮)	6. Blowing and Beating while opening the Gates (<i>chuida kaimen</i> , 吹打开门) 7. Appointing a Leader 8. Arranging Troops in Formation 9. Marching in Formation (<i>zoudui</i> , 走队) *	10. Setting up an Ambush 11. Engaging in a Small-scale Skirmishes 12. The Battle of Gaixia (<i>Gaixia dazhan</i> , 垓下大战) 13. The Sound of a Million Troops (<i>baiwan junsheng</i> , 百万军声)	14. Xiang Yu’s Defeated Formation (<i>Xiang Yu baizhen</i> , 项羽败阵) 15. Crossing the Wujiang River 16. The Triumphant Sound of the Army (<i>zhongjun zoukai</i> , 众军奏凯) 17. The Various Generals Vie for Credit (<i>zhujiang zhenggong</i> , 诸将争功) 18. Disassembling the Formation and Returning to Camp (<i>shouzhen huiying</i> , 收阵回营)

Appendix III: Comparison of Subheadings in Different *Pipa* Schools' Versions of “Yulunpao” with Chinese Text

Scores	<i>Hua Collection</i>	<i>Li Collection</i>	<i>Yangzhengxuan Collection</i>	<i>The King Chu Doffs His Armour</i>
Year	1819	1895	1929	1956
Schools	Wuxi School	Pinghu School	Pudong School	Wang School
1	Prelude (yinzi, 引子)	Beating Drums (yinggu, 营鼓)	Beating Drums	Beating Drums
2	First	Discussing Military Business in the Tent (shengzhang, 升帐)	Discussing Military Business in the Tent	Discussing Military Business in the Tent
3	Second	Appointment of Generals (dianjiang, 点将)	Appointment of Generals	Appointment of Generals
4	Transition	Organizing the Army (zhengdui, 整队)	Organize the Army	Organize the Army
5	Fourth	Re-appointment of Generals (er dianjiang, 二点将)	Lining up (Troops) (paizhen, 排阵)	Lining up (Troops)
6	Fifth	Entering the Arena (chuzhen, 出阵)	Entering the Arena	Entering the Arena (first)
7	Little Winds (xiaochui, 小吹)	Starting the Battle (jiezhan, 接战)	Start the Battle	Entering the Arena (second)
8	Sixth	Fighting Fiercely in Gaixia (Gaixia hanzhan, 垓下酣战)	Fighting Fiercely in Gaixia	Starting the Battle
9	Seventh	Songs of the Chu Dynasty (Chuge, 楚歌)	Songs of the Chu Dynasty	Fighting Fiercely in Gaixia
10	Eighth	Farewell to Yu Ji (Bieji, 别姬)	The Sound of War Drums, horns and armour	Songs of the Chu Dynasty
11	Golden-haired Lion (Jinmao shizi, 金毛狮子)	The Sound of War Drums, horns and armour (gujiao jiasheng, 鼓角甲声)	All the Troops Return Home	Farewell to Yu Ji
12		Breaking out of the Enemy's Siege (chuwei, 突围)		The sound of war drums, horns and armour
13		Pursuing Troops (zhuibing, 追兵)		Breaking Out of the Enemy's Siege
14		Catching up with the Cavalry (zhuqi, 逐骑)		Pursuing Troops
15		All the Troops Return		Catching up with

		Home (<i>zhongjun guili</i> , 众 军归里)		the Cavalry
16				All the Troops Return Home