

# The Dissemination and Inheritance of Chinese Art Songs: A Case Study of Lu Zaiyi's Trilogy "Qiao", "Jia" and "Pan"

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## Abstract

Chinese Art Songs, a treasure integrating fine traditional Chinese culture with musical art, embody profound cultural connotations and national emotions. Taking Mr. Lu Zaiyi's trilogy "Qiao", "Jia" and "Pan" as the research object, this paper deeply explores their creative techniques, national characteristics and cultural connotations, and analyzes the dissemination and inheritance paths of Chinese Art Songs in the context of globalization in combination with the album Chinese Art Songs co-created by Shi Yijie and Chen Sa. The paper points out that Lu Zaiyi's art songs integrate Western composing techniques with Chinese national musical language, embodying the creative feature of "the integration of Chinese and Western elements". The national and familial feelings and national spirit contained in his works are highly consistent with the national strategy of promoting cultural confidence and self-improvement in the new era. The collaborative album by Shi Yijie and Chen Sa has successfully brought Chinese Art Songs to the international stage through exquisite interpretation and global release, demonstrating the cultural confidence and artistic charm of Chinese music. The research shows that the inheritance of Chinese Art Songs not only requires the unremitting efforts of artists but also needs to integrate them into the national education system, cultivate the cultural identity and aesthetic ability of the younger generation, and provide strong support for Chinese culture to go global.

## Keywords

Chinese Art Songs, Lu Zaiyi, Cultural confidence, Dissemination and inheritance

## Introduction

Chinese Art Songs are the crystallization of the integration of traditional Chinese culture and musical art, and an important embodiment of the 5,000-year-old Chinese civilization in the field of musical art [1]. Since their birth in the early 20th century, Chinese Art Songs, with their poetic genes rooted in Oriental aesthetics and the pure aesthetics of temperament, have constructed a unique aesthetic paradigm between the tradition of literati music and the contemporary auditory aesthetics. As an important carrier of the fine traditional Chinese culture, Chinese Art Songs not only bear national emotions, but also contain rich cultural connotations and aesthetic values [2].

In the report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized: "Promote cultural confidence and self-improvement and create a new glory of socialist culture." This important exposition points out the direction for the

inheritance and development of the fine traditional Chinese culture. Cultural confidence is a more fundamental, profound, and enduring force that drives cultural progress and national rejuvenation [3]. As a distinctive treasure of Chinese culture, the systematic preservation and active global dissemination of Chinese Art Songs hold great significance in strengthening this cultural confidence and effectively promoting Chinese culture worldwide.

Mr. Lu Zaiyi, a renowned contemporary Chinese composer, created the trilogy "Qiao", "Jia" and "Pan", which are important representative works in the field of art songs. These works not only won the first Golden Bell Award but also became a milestone in the development history of Chinese Art Songs for their profound emotional connotations and unique artistic style. Starting from the creative characteristics of Lu Zaiyi's trilogy "Qiao", "Jia" and "Pan", this paper discusses the

nationality and contemporaneity of Chinese Art Songs and analyzes the contemporary dissemination and inheritance paths of Chinese Art Songs in combination with the album "Chinese Art Songs" by Shi Yijie and Chen Sa, providing theoretical basis and practical guidance for promoting the innovative development of Chinese Art Songs [3].

### **Creative background and artistic characteristics of Lu Zaiyi's trilogy "Qiao", "Jia" and "Pan"**

Mr. Lu Zaiyi is a famous composer in China, known as "a musical poet with great love". His creation of art songs not only absorbs the expressive techniques of foreign art songs, but also deeply combines the characteristics of Chinese national language, national style and national emotions, forming the creative feature of "the integration of Chinese and Western elements". "Qiao", "Jia" and "Pan" are a set of vocal works with the theme of national and familial feelings created by Mr. Lu Zaiyi over 17 years. Though with different styles, all of them are full of his profound understanding of the great love for the country and family.

"Qiao" expresses the author's nostalgia for the local conditions and customs of his hometown and love for the great rivers and mountains of the motherland; "Jia" depicts a wanderer's longing for his hometown when living abroad, and also entrusts the ardent hope for the reunification of the motherland; "Pan" conveys the author's regret and anxiety for the mountain forest burned by fire, as well as the hope for the forest to regain vitality soon after the fire.

The emotional expression of these three works is progressive layer by layer, from the love for hometown to the hope for national reunification, and then to the attention to the ecological environment, reflecting Mr. Lu Zaiyi's deep concern for social reality and profound thinking about the national destiny. In terms of creative techniques, Lu Zaiyi integrates sincere emotions into the melody, based on the Western recitative composing techniques and combined with the linguistic characteristics of Chinese national music [4]. His works have achieved a high degree of unity in the integration of lyrics and music, with fluent melodies, rich emotions, and a rigorous and hierarchical structure. For example, in "Pan", Lu Zaiyi handled the lyrics exquisitely in his

creation. The lyrics "The mountain forest is burned by fire, with an anxious heart, hoping the forest regains its vitality" are perfectly integrated with the melody, and each character and each note are placed in an appropriate position, fitting perfectly without a single gap. This creative approach that deeply integrates the rhythm of national language with Western compositional techniques not only preserves the cultural genes of Chinese music but also endows the works with more universal artistic appeal.

Lu Zaiyi attaches great importance to the relationship between lyrics and music in his creation. He holds that "most vocal works are combined with language, and the language of each country relates to the history, tradition, local conditions, customs, character and temperament of its own country and nation. The mother tongue of the Chinese nation is the most distinctive and expressive language in the world, which requires composers to study and master it". This profound understanding of the relationship between language and music endows his works with unique artistic charm and cultural connotations.

### **National characteristics and cultural connotations of Lu Zaiyi's Art Songs**

Lu Zaiyi's art songs have become classics not only for his exquisite creative skills, but more for their profound national cultural heritage. His works perfectly integrate the linguistic characteristics of Chinese national music with Western composing techniques, forming a unique style of "the integration of Chinese and Western elements" - one that retains the national characteristics of Chinese music while possessing the aesthetic traits of modern music. In the trilogy "Qiao", "Jia" and "Pan", Lu Zaiyi's application of national musical elements is masterful. He excels at combining the melodic features and modal patterns of Chinese folk songs with Western harmonic techniques, creating a musical language that is both imbued with national characteristics and aligned with modern aesthetic demands. For instance, in "Qiao", he adopts the melodic characteristics of Jiangnan folk songs and, through delicate harmonic treatment, weaves a gentle and melodious musical atmosphere that immerses the listener in the scenic beauty of the Jiangnan water towns (as shown in Table 1).

Table 1. Musical form and analysis of Song “Qiao”.

Song title	Overall form	Section	Measure range (Ref.)	Tonal and harmonic characteristics	Musical and lyric imagery description
“Qiao”	Two-part form (A-B)	Section A	mm. 11-26 (Intro: mm. 1-10)	Shifts to G Major after the theme enters, stable and gentle tonality. Blends traditional European harmony with Chinese modal harmony, including the traditional harmonic progression D7-T.	Four phrases in the structure of “qi - cheng - zhuan - he” (introduction- development- climax- conclusion); alternating 2/4 and 3/4 meters. Melody follows pentatonic scale motion with small third leaps, bearing the charm of Jiangnan folk songs. Decorated by appoggiaturas and vocal embellishments; text and music integrate seamlessly, depicting the tranquil beauty of water towns and ancient bridges.
		Section B (including coda)	mm. 27-59	Tonality becomes slightly modulatory with rich, hazy harmonic colors. The coda (mm. 56-60) employs arpeggiated figurations of compound chords, using a technique consistent with the end of Section A.	Two four-phrase periods: mm. 30-45 feature symmetric structure; mm. 46-56 present the climax (non-strict recapitulation). Melody is lyrical and flowing. The coda echoes the introduction (mm. 1-11), with running arpeggios and triplets throughout, gradually slowing and fading for a lingering effect. Expresses nostalgia for hometown and love for the motherland, portraying peaceful life among the people of Jiangnan’s water towns.

In the selection of lyrics, Lu Zaiyi attaches great importance to literariness and cultural connotations. Most of his works draw on classical Chinese poetry or modern verse. The lyrics of “Pan”, for example, stem from a concern for the natural environment; its concise and poetic lines - “The mountain forest scorched by fire,

a heart filled with anxiety, hoping the woods regain their vitality” paint a heart-wrenching scene in just a few words, while also embodying hope for the future. Such careful selection and refinement of lyrics endow his works with not only musical beauty, but also literary and ideological grace (as shown in Table 2).

Table 2. Musical form and analysis of the Song “Pan”.

Song title	Overall form	Section	Measure range (Ref.)	Tonal and harmonic characteristics	Musical and lyric imagery description
“Pan”	Binary form A-B	Section A	mm. 8-20 (Intro: mm. 1-7)	G major with a gentle tonality; changing meters (including four different time signatures); rich harmonic colors, incorporating Western recitative techniques.	Four phrases structured in qi-cheng-zhuan-he (introduction-development-climax-conclusion): the first two phrases with “Come back” set to a triplet motive, creating a recitative-like, speech-like effect; the latter two phrases feature dense rhythms and sincere emotion. The contrast between triplets and repeated notes depicts inner anxiety and waiting, with relatively restrained emotion.

Song title	Overall form	Section	Measure range (Ref.)	Tonal and harmonic characteristics	Musical and lyric imagery description
		Section B	mm. 21-54	Stable tonality with brief modulations; changing meters (condensed into duple time); the piano accompaniment uses strong block chords.	The melody is expansive and flowing, in a higher register; the exclamation “Ah” brings an emotional outburst. Three calls of “Come back”, paired with a rising and falling melody, express eagerness for the return of a wanderer. The triplet motive from Section A reappears at the end, deepening the emotional intensity.
		Coda	After mm. 54	Gentle and bright altered harmonies; tonality briefly wanders before returning to the home key.	Concludes with an ethereal call of “Come back”, with melodic lines floating upward into the high register, bringing the piece to a subtle and beautiful close.

Lu Zaiyi’s art songs also reflect a profound understanding and inheritance of traditional Chinese culture, with traditional cultural elements often woven into his compositions. In “Jia”, for example, he employs the traditional Chinese cultural concept of “home”, integrating personal emotions with national sentiments to

express a deep longing for the reunification of the motherland [5]. This integration of traditional culture into modern musical creation not only enriches the cultural connotations of his works but also provides a new path for the modern inheritance of traditional culture (as shown in Table 3).

Table 3. Musical form and analysis of the song “Jia”.

Song title	Overall form	Section	Measure range (Ref.)	Tonal and harmonic characteristics	Musical and lyric imagery description
“Jia”	Binary form (A-B)	Section A (Narrative section)	mm. 6-13 (Intro: mm. 1-5)	Heptatonic Yu mode, employing pentatonic fourth- and fifth-stacked harmony; melody dominated by stepwise (2nd) and third (3rd) motion.	Structured as a question-and-answer dual phrase (two 4-bar phrases, 8 bars total). In an intimate, conversational tone, it uses imagery such as “the lamplight by the window” and “the beloved face”, embodying the gentle, reserved style of Jiangsu-Zhejiang folk songs and a quality close to poetic chanting. Performance requires delicate treatment of expression markings.
		Section B (Climax section)	mm. 16-57	Shifts to Gong mode with rich, full harmonies; relies on the baritone’s extreme upper register (a <sup>2</sup> ) to support emotional outburst.	The emotional climax of the piece, with large melodic leaps driving emotional elevation. It expresses profound longing for home and thoughtful concern for the motherland, in a deep and intense style. Performance demands steady breath support, precise diction, and the vocable “ah” sung in soft mezza voce.

In terms of musical structure, Lu Zaiyi’s works both adhere to the structural forms of traditional art songs and

introduce innovations. He is adept at applying the “linear thinking” of traditional Chinese music, emphasizing the

fluency and coherence of melodic lines in the movement of melodies, while also incorporating the rich layers of Western harmony. In “Pan”, for instance, he skillfully uses a melodic theme of “dramatic recitative”, making the entire piece sound like the singing of the protagonist’s soul and stirring the deepest emotions of the listener. This fusion of tradition and modernity grants his works both national characteristics and contemporary appeal.

### The dissemination and inheritance of Chinese Art Songs: The collaborative albums by Shi Yijie and Chen Sa

The inheritance and dissemination of Chinese Art Songs rely not only on the elaborate creation of composers, but also on the exquisite interpretation and promotion of performers. In recent years, the collaboration between the renowned tenor Shi Yijie and pianist Chen Sa has made an important contribution to advancing the dissemination and inheritance of Chinese Art Songs [6]. In 2021, Shi Yijie and Chen Sa launched their first joint album “Chinese Art Songs”, released by Universal Music. This album features seventeen enduring classic Chinese Art Songs by celebrated Chinese composers Ding Shande, Lu Zaiyi and Zhao Jiping, including “A Lovely Rose, Jingyesi” and “I Love This Land”. In 2022, the two artists collaborated again to release “Chinese Art Songs II”, which was issued globally under the Decca Classics label. Composer Zhao Jiping spoke highly of this album, stating: “From the selected songs, I perceive their profound respect and sincerity for the traditions of the past, only by being rooted in the fertile soil of national traditions can music retain the artistic conception and spirit of China. Mr. Ding Shande’s creations stand as a monument to the artistic adaptation of folk traditional melodies, and Mr. Lu Zaiyi’s art songs are masterpieces of contemporary vocal music. Moreover, the interpretation by these two young musicians has lent these art songs a new radiance and texture.”

The success of Shi Yijie and Chen Sa’s collaboration stems from their profound understanding of art songs and their consummate interpretive skills. Talking about his rendition of “I Love This Land”, Shi Yijie said: “It has been 20 years since I went abroad in 2002. Only when one leaves their hometown can they truly feel the longing and love for their hometown, their motherland and their mother. I feel that I sang the deepest voice of my heart -

I love this land.” Such a profound understanding of the works makes their interpretations not only technically flawless but also filled with sincere and genuine emotion.



Figure 1. Album “Chinese Art Songs”.



Figure 2. Album “Chinese Art Songs II”.

In the album “Chinese Art Songs”, Shi Yijie and Chen Sa delivered an especially splendid interpretation of Lu Zaiyi’s works. They perfectly conveyed the profound feelings for the country and family, as well as the national emotions embodied in Lu Zaiyi’s compositions to the audience through their voices. Take the piece Pan as an example: with his delicate vocal timbre and rich emotional shifts, Shi Yijie expressed the work’s concern for the natural environment and hope for the future in the most vivid and thorough way [7]. Chen Sa’s piano accompaniment also set off the emotional atmosphere of the song to perfection, endowing the entire piece with both exceptional artistic merit and profound expressive power [8].

The collaboration between Shi Yijie and Chen Sa is more than a musical partnership. It represents a vital

inheritance of culture. In the production of the album, they focused on exploring the profound cultural connotations of Chinese Art Songs, seamlessly integrating traditional and modern, Eastern and Western elements. The album's cover design, for instance, "evokes the aesthetic of Tang tri-color glazed pottery" and "mirrors the impression that Chinese Art Songs leave on people". This design not only embodies the unique aesthetic appeal of traditional Chinese culture but also showcases contemporary aesthetic concepts.

The success of "Chinese Art Songs" and "Chinese Art Songs II" lies not only in their outstanding artistic value but also in their far-reaching communicative significance. Through the global distribution by Universal Music and Decca Classics, Chinese Art Songs have stepped onto the world stage, allowing more international audiences to understand and appreciate the artistic charm of Chinese music. As Shi Yijie put it: "It is a great honor, and wonderful news. We hope to let more listeners around the world feel the unique charm of Chinese Art Songs."

### **Contemporary value and prospects of Chinese Art Songs**

The inheritance and dissemination of Chinese Art Songs hold not only artistic value, but also profound cultural value and contemporary significance. Against the backdrop of advancing cultural confidence and self-improvement, the inheritance and innovation of Chinese Art Songs are of great importance to carrying forward Chinese culture and strengthening cultural confidence.

First and foremost, Chinese Art Songs are an important carrier of the fine traditional Chinese culture. Integrating the literary beauty of classical Chinese poetry with the melodic beauty of music, they embody the poetic genes and aesthetic traits of Chinese culture. In the contemporary era, inheriting and developing Chinese Art Songs enables more people to understand and appreciate the unique charm of Chinese culture, and enhances their cultural identity and sense of pride.

Secondly, the inheritance and innovation of Chinese Art Songs serve as a vital pathway to promoting Chinese culture to the world. In the context of globalization, Chinese Art Songs, with their distinctive national characteristics and artistic allure, have become an important window for showcasing Chinese culture to the world. The collaborative albums by Shi Yijie and Chen

Sa have successfully brought Chinese Art Songs to the international stage through global release, allowing the world to hear the voice of China and witness the charm of Chinese culture.

Thirdly, the inheritance and dissemination of Chinese Art Songs are of great significance for cultivating the cultural accomplishment of the younger generation [9]. As Shi Yijie noted: "I have met many students, and all of them face the same problem - having no songs to sing. Young people are not good at exploring new songs and often just perform works sung by their favorite vocalists. I want to sing more 'new' songs and let children hear these underappreciated pieces." Incorporating Chinese Art Songs into the music education system can foster the younger generation's interest and love for the fine traditional Chinese culture, injecting new vitality into cultural inheritance [10].

Under the backdrop of the new era, the inheritance and innovation of Chinese Art Songs require the joint efforts of various parties. First, music education institutions should integrate Chinese Art Songs into their teaching systems and cultivate more professional talents capable of interpreting and disseminating these works. Second, musicians should continue to explore and collate the outstanding works of Chinese Art Songs and drive their innovative development. Third, cultural departments should increase the publicity and promotion of Chinese Art Songs, enabling more people to understand and appreciate them through various channels and forms.

As representative works of Chinese Art Songs, Lu Zaiyi's trilogy "Qiao", "Jia" and "Pan" possess not only artistic value, but also profound cultural and contemporary significance. They reflect Chinese musicians' profound understanding and innovative expression of national culture and demonstrate the inheritance and development of Chinese Art Songs in the new era.

### **Inheritance paths of Chinese Art Songs against the backdrop of cultural confidence and self-improvement**

The report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China explicitly put forward the goal of "promoting cultural confidence and self-improvement to forge a new glory of socialist culture", which points out the direction for the inheritance and

development of fine traditional Chinese culture. Against this backdrop, the inheritance and dissemination of Chinese Art Songs should be rooted in the era of cultural confidence and self-improvement, with innovative inheritance paths explored.

First and foremost, academic research and theoretical construction of Chinese Art Songs should be strengthened. Through in-depth research on the works of composers such as Lu Zaiyi, we can sort out the creative techniques, artistic characteristics and cultural connotations of Chinese Art Songs, and form a systematic theoretical system to provide theoretical support for the inheritance and innovation of Art Songs. Studies such as *On the Creative Techniques and Singing Treatment of Lu Zaiyi's Vocal Trilogy "Qiao", "Jia" and "Pan"*, mentioned in Reference 1, have offered an important reference for the theoretical construction of Art Songs.

Secondly, the educational popularization of Chinese Art Songs should be advanced. We need to incorporate Chinese Art Songs into the music education system and enable more students to understand and appreciate Chinese Art Songs through various forms such as classroom teaching, concerts and lectures. Talking about the response of music students in colleges and universities, Shi Yijie said: "These repertoires have aroused an enthusiastic response among music students in colleges and universities, with many people following and learning them." This shows that educational popularization can effectively boost the inheritance of Chinese Art Songs.

Thirdly, the international dissemination of Chinese Art Songs should be enhanced. We should take advantage of globalization platforms to bring Chinese Art Songs to the world through international cooperation, international performances, international record releases and other means. The collaborative albums by Shi Yijie and Chen Sa have been successfully released globally by Universal Music and Decca Classics, bringing Chinese Art Songs to the international stage and setting a reference for the international dissemination of other Chinese musical works.

Fourthly, the dissemination forms of Chinese Art Songs should be innovated. Based on preserving the essence of traditional Art Songs, we need to explore new dissemination forms such as digital music platforms,

short videos and online live streaming, making Chinese Art Songs more in line with the life and aesthetic needs of modern people. For example, the digital version of the album "Chinese Art Songs" allows audiences to enjoy these classic works anytime and anywhere.

Fifthly, inheritors of Chinese Art Songs should be cultivated. We can foster a group of professional talents capable of inheriting and innovating Chinese Art Songs by setting up special research institutions for Chinese Art Songs, holding Chinese Art Song competitions, and supporting the creation of young artists. As a vocal music teacher in a university, Shi Yijie stated that he "hopes young people can understand these songs earlier and more", and that "setting a good example for children is my bounden duty", which reflects the emphasis on cultivating inheriting talents.

### Conclusion

Chinese Art Songs are a precious treasure blending the fine traditional Chinese culture with musical art, bearing profound cultural connotations and national emotions. As representative works of Chinese Art Songs, Lu Zaiyi's trilogy "Qiao", "Jia" and "Pan" not only demonstrate the composer's exquisite artistic attainments but also embody the profound cultural heritage of China and the spirit of the times.

Against the backdrop of the era of cultural confidence and self-improvement, the inheritance and dissemination of Chinese Art Songs hold important practical significance. The albums "Chinese Art Songs" and "Chinese Art Songs II", a collaboration between Shi Yijie and Chen Sa, have successfully brought Chinese Art Songs to the international stage through their exquisite interpretations and global releases, demonstrating the cultural confidence and artistic charm of Chinese music.

In the future, the inheritance and innovation of Chinese Art Songs should be rooted in the era of cultural confidence and self-improvement. Through concerted efforts in strengthening academic research, advancing educational popularization, enhancing international dissemination, innovating communication forms and cultivating inheriting talents, Chinese Art Songs will radiate new vigor and vitality in the new era, and make positive contributions to forging a new glory of socialist culture. As Mr. Lu Zaiyi stated, "Most vocal works are integrated with language, and the language of each

country is connected with the history, traditions, as well as the local conditions, customs, personalities and temperament of its own nation.” Chinese Art Songs are the perfect embodiment of such a connection. They are not only a precious treasure of Chinese music, but also a vivid reflection of Chinese culture. Through inheritance and innovation, Chinese Art Songs are bound to shine more brilliantly in the new era, contributing Chinese wisdom and Chinese strength to the global spread of Chinese culture and the progress of human civilization.

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