

Chimes of Chu Dreams, Echoes of Sorrowful Melodies: A Review of the Chime Bells and National Orchestra Piece 'Mu Shang Shang'

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ABSTRACT

Mu shang Shang, composed by Zhao Xi in 2022 for Chime Bells and Chinese national orchestra, is part of the 2020 National Arts Fund-supported project Harmonious Resonance, which focuses on large-scale stage works and compositions. Rooted in the cultural traditions of the Chu region, the piece creatively reinterprets ancient heritage through a modern perspective. Upon its premiere, the work achieved significant success, attracting a full audience and receiving widespread acclaim. Centered on the theme of sorrow, Mu shang Shang combines traditional Chinese musical culture with modern compositional techniques. Inspired by the term Mushang and literary works such as Li Sao and Zhuzhi Ci (Bamboo Branch Lyrics), the piece conveys the history of ancient Chu and the enduring spirit of Jing-Chu culture through the harmonious interplay of instruments from the Eight Sounds tradition. Importantly, Mu shang Shang fully utilizes the unique characteristics of Chime Bells in terms of temperament, timbre, and range, making them the central focus of the composition. This approach not only demonstrates the potential of Chime Bells in national orchestra works but also provides new inspiration for the creative use of this ancient instrument in contemporary music.

KEYWORDS

Zhao Xi; Chime bells; Mu Shang Shang; Shang Shang Mu; Chu culture

Mu shang Shang is a composition by Zhao Xi, created in 2022 for Chime Bells and Chinese national orchestra. It premiered in 2023 at the Wuhan Qintai Concert Hall, conducted by Professor Tan Jun of the Wuhan Conservatory of Music and performed by the Oriental Chinese Orchestra of the Wuhan Conservatory of Music. As part of the 2020 National Arts Fund-supported project Harmonious Resonance, which focuses on large-scale stage works and compositions, the piece is deeply rooted in the cultural traditions of the Jing-Chu region while creatively reinterpreting this heritage through a modern aesthetic and perspective. As a contemporary musical work, Mu shang Shang emphasizes timbral variation as a central element, aligning with the theme of Harmonious Resonance. Through the harmonious interplay of instruments from the "Eight Sounds" tradition, the piece unfolds its narrative, weaving together the ancient and the modern in a profound exploration of cultural continuity and innovation.

Unlike many previous musical works that treat the Chime Bells merely as a component of orchestral timbre or as a solo instrument, Mu shang Shang positions the Chime Bells as both the musical and conceptual centerpiece of the composition. Throughout the piece, the Chime Bells actively participate in the development and transformation of the music, engaging in ensemble passages with the orchestra as well as carrying melodic lines independently. Furthermore, the work exemplifies Professor Zhao Xi's consistent compositional style, which is characterized by "building upon professional technical craftsmanship, integrating elements of traditional folk music and modern musical styles, emphasizing diversity in creation, and seeking a balance between technique and musicality, as well as between rationality and sensibility."¹ The composition draws its thematic material from the qin piece Li Sao and the qin song Zhuzhi Ci (Bamboo Branch Lyrics), weaving these elements throughout the work. Grounded in theoretical research on Chime Bells and centered on the theme of "Ancient Chu," the piece conveys the historical depth of Chu culture to its listeners. Through an analysis of the musical structure of Mu shang Shang, this paper aims to explore the work's overarching framework and its expressive content.

1 Creative Characteristics Rooted in Tradition

Mu shang Shang premiered on March 20, 2023, at the Wuhan Qintai Concert Hall. The program notes describe the piece as follows:

This work is grounded in theoretical research on Chime Bells, with the Chime Bells serving as both the musical and conceptual centerpiece. Through a meticulous examination of historical literature, the composition revolves around two key themes: "Mu Zhong" and "Chu Shang". It employs pitch materials derived from the progressive relationships among the "Five Tones, Six Pitches, Seven Notes, Eight Winds, and Nine Songs," as well as the corresponding modal scales. The

¹ Xu Ye. "Talents of Chu, Brilliant and Radiant: An Interview with Zhao Xi, a Young Composer at Wuhan Conservatory of Music." Drama Home, no. 3 (2014): 88.

piece is structured around the tonal relationships formed by the front and side drum tones of the Chime Bells, combined with the timbral possibilities of the "Eight Sounds," to create a cohesive and intricate musical narrative.

This composition is rooted in the theoretical literature on Chime Bells, seamlessly integrating theory with practice by applying the research findings of music historians on Chime Bells to the creative process—a rare approach in contemporary music composition. In today's musical landscape, many works fall short in addressing the relationship between theory and practice. Numerous creators merely skim the surface, superficially blending Eastern and Western musical elements without delving into the profound cultural and historical contexts behind these elements. As a result, theory and practice often remain parallel lines that seldom converge. *Mu shang Shang*, however, stands as an exemplary model in this regard, successfully bridging the gap between theoretical research and artistic creation.

The composition revolves around the two key terms, "Mu Zhong" and "Chu Shang", showcasing the distinctive musical characteristics of the Chu region. The title *Mu shang Shang* draws its inspiration from the inscription "Shang Shang Mu" found on the bell body of the Chu King Yan Zhang Bell. These characters are inscribed on the front and side drum positions of the bell, and due to the nature of bell inscriptions, they are believed to represent the pitches produced by the corresponding parts of the bell. Scholars in the field of musicology generally agree that "Shang Shang" refers to the "Shang" pitch. However, there is no consensus on the interpretation of the "Mu" pitch, with three main perspectives emerging from academic discourse.

Yang Shuda and Wu Zhao argue that the "Mu" pitch corresponds to the "Bianzhi" note, suggesting that the relationship between "Mu" and "Shang" is a major third. In contrast, Wang Dexun posits that the "Mu" pitch represents the "Qingyu" note, while Wang Zichu and Fang Jianjun propose that the "Mu" pitch corresponds to the "Qingjue" note. These differing interpretations reflect the complexity and depth of scholarly inquiry into the historical and theoretical foundations of ancient Chinese music.

However, the significance of "Shang Shang Mu" extends beyond this. According to research on the musical inscriptions of the Marquis Yi of Zeng's Chime Bells, "Mu Zhong" serves as the foundational pitch for the Chu state's tonal system, corresponding to the modern pitch of B-flat. In addition to its role as a tonal designation in Chu, it also functions as a pitch name in the Zeng state, also equivalent to B-flat.²

The term "Chu Shang" is derived from the "opening fingerings" or "modal preludes" in the traditional tuning methods of the seven-string qin music. It first appeared in the qin piece *Li Sao* by the late Tang dynasty qin master Chen Kangshi. In this piece, the composer used the "Chu Shang" mode to evoke the musical style of the Chu region during the Warring States period, indicating that Tang dynasty musicians associated the "Chu Shang" mode with the music of Chu. Modern scholars have identified the "Chu Shang" mode as a variant of the "Qing mode", achieved by tightening the second and fifth strings, resulting in a mode that is "neither entirely Shang nor entirely Yu" but distinctly characteristic of the Chu region.³

The academic discussion on the meanings of "Mu Zhong" and "Chu Shang" has persisted for over four decades, with numerous scholars contributing their perspectives and insights. While a general consensus has gradually emerged, this is not the primary focus of this discussion. What is important to note is that the composer of *Mu shang Shang* likely conducted extensive research into the relevant literature on Chime Bells, delving into their historical and theoretical underpinnings, and used this knowledge as the foundation for the creation of this work.

Secondly, the most striking impression left by *Mu shang Shang* is its extraordinary diversity in timbral variation. As a contemporary musical work, the piece showcases an exceptionally rich array of timbral shifts, with changes in tone color occurring not only between sections in response to the evolving emotional narrative of the music but also within individual sections. The selection of instrumental timbres is guided by the ancient Chinese classification system known as the "Eight Sounds". The composer skillfully utilizes instruments from the "Eight Sounds" to progressively layer and intensify the emotional depth of the music.

In the "slow" section of the piece, timbral changes occur frequently, and the overall mood is somber and introspective. At the beginning, the music establishes an ancient historical setting, unfolding the narrative gradually. This section employs instruments from the "Eight Sounds" categories of silk, bamboo, clay, metal, and gourd. The Erhu, with its bright and tender mid-range, alternates with the Qu-Di, whose mellow and clear mid-range creates a human-like vocal quality, presenting the thematic melody as if recounting a story. Following this, the Xun, with its deeper and more subdued timbre compared to the Erhu and Qu-Di, adds a layer of time-worn sorrow. In its solo passages, the Xun seems to lament a life of unfulfilled aspirations, further enriching the emotional depth of the narrative.

The "fast" segment of the musical composition showcases a vibrant interplay between two contrasting timbres. The Soprano Suona, with its taut, piercing sound and highly expressive high register, takes center stage in the instrumental texture. Conversely, the ensemble—comprising the Erhu, Sheng, Qu - Di, and plucked strings—produces a gentler, more

2 Huang Xiangpeng. "Interpreting 'Chu Shang': A Study of the Modes of Marquis Yi's Bells and Their Implications for Chu Culture." *Literary and Artistic Studies*, no. 2 (1979): 72-81.

3 Ding Chengyun. "On Chu Shang." *Huangzhong (Journal of Wuhan Conservatory of Music)*, no. 3 (2018): 12-19.

subdued timbre. This dichotomous interaction propels the music towards successive climactic apices.

In the ensuing "slow" section, the music makes a transition from intensity to tranquility. Here, the composer re-introduces the *Xun*, an instrument that elicits a solemn and introspective mood. This is further augmented by a humming vocal timbre within the ensemble, accompanied by the resounding tones of the Chime Bells. The piece concludes in a serene, almost meditative ambiance, as if the music is softly bidding its final farewell.

The musical theme of *Mu shang Shang* is deeply entrenched in traditional Chinese music, drawing inspiration from the qin piece *Li Sao* and the qin song *Zhuzhi Ci*. *Li Sao*, composed by the late Tang - dynasty qin master Chen Kangshi in the "Qiliang" mode, first emerged in the Ming - dynasty anthology *Shenqi Mipu*. An annotation in the "Qiliang" mode states: "This is the Chu mode, with the second and fifth strings tightened by one *hui*." This indicates that *Li Sao* embodies the musical traits of the Chu region and is intrinsically connected to Qu Yuan's poetic masterpiece of the same name. Thus, *Mu shang Shang* not only pays tribute to these classical traditions but also re-interprets their emotional profundity and cultural significance through its innovative orchestration and structural design.



Fig. 1 Thematic Passage from the Guqin Piece "Li Sao"

Dynasty anthology *He Wen Zhu Qin Pu*, and was later unearthed and compiled by Wang Di. A particularly notable feature of this piece lies in the opening line of its lyrics, which reads "neither Shang nor Yu". This phrase aptly captures the unique musical characteristics of the Chu region. This results in a musical texture where the distinction between the Shang and Yu modes becomes hazy, creating an ambiguity that is characteristic of the Chu musical style. The interaction of these modal elements not only reflects the region's rich musical heritage but also contributes to the evocative and mysterious quality of *Zhuzhi Ci*, making it a valuable relic for understanding the tonal and modal practices of ancient Chu music.

竹枝词

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 A musical score for the Guqin piece "Zhu Zhi Ci". It features two staves of music in a single system. The notation is in Western staff notation. Below the staves, there are lyrics in Chinese and English. The Chinese lyrics are: "非商非羽声吾伊宛转歌喉唱艳词" and "肠断那何人不识一腔青韵有谁知". The English lyrics are: "Neither in Shang nor Yu mode, my voice softly hums, With a melodious throat, I sing enchanting songs." and "Heartbroken, yet who does not know this pain? A soulful melody, but who truly understands?".

Fig. 2 Musical Score of the Guqin Piece "Zhu Zhi Ci"

In *Mu shang Shang*, the composer explicitly incorporates two ancient melodies imbued with the distinctive musical flavor of the Chu region, not only to unify the structural framework of the piece but also to enhance its Chu-inspired aesthetic to a higher plane. The A thematic material from *Zhuzhi Ci* is first presented in measures 20–22 (see Example 3), performed by the bowed string instrument section. Its core melodic motif is subsequently developed through ascending sequences and later taken up by the Qu - Di. Similarly, the B thematic material from *Zhuzhi Ci* is showcased in measures 32–33, also performed by the bowed string instruments. Unlike the A material, which is derived from the opening section of the qin song *Zhuzhi Ci*, the B material stems from the concluding section of the same piece (see Example 4). Broadly speaking, the melodic development of the entire composition is primarily driven by the evolution and interaction of these two thematic materials, which undergo continuous fragmentation and recombination to propel the musical narrative forward. This process is particularly conspicuous in the *Xun* solo passage spanning measures 50–59, where the melody is predominantly constructed from the recombination and development of the core motifs of Themes A and B from *Zhuzhi Ci*. The melodic line expands on the four-note motif (E–A–G–A) of Theme A, integrating it with the cadential figure (C–D–D) from Theme B to form an extended melodic phrase (see Example 7). Notably, after undergoing extensive fragmentation and development in the first half of the piece, the *Zhuzhi Ci* theme is presented in its entirety at the conclusion of the work (see Example 8), serving a recapitulatory function. This final presentation, transposed to B-flat and performed in a humming vocal style, evokes a sense of reminiscence and melancholy, paying homage to the original qin song while imbuing it with a new layer of emotional depth and reflective character.



Fig. 3 Theme A of "Zhu Zhi Ci"



Fig. 4 Theme B of "Zhu Zhi Ci"

The theme from *Li Sao* manifests mainly in the form of a Chime Bells melody throughout the composition. Structurally, it consists of a four - note melodic phrase built on a perfect fifth interval, featuring two pairs of repeated notes, derived from the introductory theme of the qin piece *Li Sao*. This melodic motif recurs in various guises six times across the work, serving as a unifying thread that pervades the entire composition. The first appearance occurs in measure 19, where it is presented in its original form, smoothly introducing the *Zhuzhi Ci* theme performed by the Erhu. The second through fifth appearances occur within the same section, during the "fast" segment of the piece. Here, the motif is transposed upward by perfect fifths three times—from G to D, and then to A—while its rhythmic values are progressively lengthened. This gradual expansion in both pitch and rhythm propels the music towards a climactic peak, intensifying the emotional and structural impetus of the work.

In *Mu shang Shang*, the Chime Bells function as both the musical and conceptual nucleus, unifying the composition while remaining distinct from the orchestra. Their independent role accentuates their cultural and timbral significance, creating a vibrant interplay with the ensemble. The composer positions the Chime Bells as the central element of the creative process, first establishing the foundational musical material on the Chime Bells and then allowing the orchestra to imitate, elaborate, and develop these ideas to form the complete work. The melodic progression of the orchestra is essentially an imitation or extension of the Chime Bells, while the timbral shifts within the orchestra are fundamentally rooted in the structural and textural transformations of the Chime Bells. This approach not only highlights the unique timbral and cultural significance of the Chime Bells but also creates a cohesive and dynamic interplay between the Chime Bells and the orchestra, elevating the work as a profound synthesis of ancient tradition and contemporary innovation.

The Chime Bells adopt three primary configurations—melodic, chordal, and arpeggiated—each contributing distinctively to the piece's structural and emotional development. As the composition progresses, the Chime Bells shift between these configurations to meet the narrative requirements of the music. The melodic configuration is employed to develop melodic phrases, facilitating the progression of the musical narrative. The chordal configuration, with its harmonic density, is utilized to evoke and intensify the atmospheric qualities of the work. Meanwhile, the arpeggiated configuration serves to accompany the orchestral melodies and to elaborate the textural fabric of the composition. Through these transformations, the Chime Bells not only shape the structural and emotional trajectory of the piece but also establish a dynamic and multifaceted dialogue with the orchestra, enriching the overall sonic and expressive landscape of *Mu shang Shang*.

In summary, the melodic themes derived from the qin piece *Li Sao* and the qin song *Zhuzhi Ci* serve as unifying elements that seamlessly integrate the structural components of the composition, imparting a sense of continuity and coherence. Simultaneously, the timbral diversity of the "Eight Sounds" —the traditional Chinese classification of musical instruments—distinguishes each section, infusing the work with a sense of novelty and contrast. This interplay between unity and differentiation generates a dynamic tension, enriching the piece's expressive depth.

2 The Manifestation of the "Essence of Chu Culture" in the Musical Composition

Regarding the expressive content of *Mu shang Shang*, Zhai Yuhong, in her article "Ancient and Modern in Harmony: A Review of the Chime Bells and Chinese Orchestra Concert 'Harmonious Resonance'", posits: "The piece *Mu shang Shang* does not engage in narrative or depict specific imagery; rather, it conveys an atmosphere and emotional state, evoking a sense of historical gravitas and tragic grandeur."⁴ This paper seeks to further explore the expressive content of *Mu shang Shang*. While Zhai Yuhong argues that the piece does not depict specific content or narrative but rather focuses on emotions, the author of this paper contends that although the piece lacks explicit narrative descriptions, its creation was undoubtedly influenced by the history of the Chu state. The development of the music correlates with the historical trajectory of Chu, with its "slow-fast-slow" tempo structure mirroring the rise of Chu from its humble beginnings in the southern wilderness, its ascension as a powerful state during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, and its eventual conquest by Qin. Furthermore, while the composer primarily communicates emotions, traces of imagery are still present, albeit subtly, manifesting as vague sensations rather than distinct depictions.

⁴ Zhai Yuhong, "Ancient and Modern in Harmony: A Review of the Chime Bells and Chinese Orchestra Concert 'Harmonious Resonance'", *Music Life*, no. 7 (2023): 25.

So, what emotions does Mu Shang Shang seek to convey? In the process of delving deeply into the history of the Chu state, I have gained some insights. Over two thousand years ago, in the middle reaches of the Yangtze River, there once existed a state that thrived for more than eight centuries. Whether during the Spring and Autumn period or the Warring States period, its presence was unmistakable. Phrases such as "aspiring to dominate the Central Plains", "retreating thirty miles as a gesture of courtesy", and "even if Chu has only three clans left, it will be Chu that destroys Qin" all attest to the formidable strength of the Chu state. Economic foundations determine superstructures, and such a powerful state was inseparable from its robust productive capacity, which in turn gave rise to its extraordinarily vibrant Jing-Chu culture.

2.1 Perseverance

The people of Chu have been celebrated since ancient times for their unyielding perseverance and relentless drive for advancement. Delving into the history of the Chu state, we find that its founding ruler, Xiong Yi, faced extraordinarily harsh conditions while carving out a territory in the Jing Mountains. Despite these challenges, he persistently forged ahead, and this spirit of arduous pioneering became the cornerstone of the Chu people's resilience. When confronted with skepticism, King Zhuang of Chu demonstrated remarkable determination and patience. Through years of accumulation and preparation, he ultimately astonished the world, embodying the Chu people's wisdom of achieving greatness through quiet and steady effort. In the final climactic battle between Qin and Chu, the people of Chu chose death over surrender, with not a single individual betraying their homeland or groveling to the enemy. Their lives became a profound testament to the true meaning of steadfastness.

In the third section of Mu Shang Shang, marked by its "fast" tempo, this spirit of resilience is vividly and powerfully manifested. The piercing and emotionally charged timbre of the Suona, coupled with its continuously descending melodic lines, evokes the image of a fierce enemy assault, creating an overwhelming sense of oppression. At this moment, the entire orchestra joins in unison, unleashing an ascending melodic progression that resembles the defiant battle cries of Chu warriors rising in resistance. This musical interplay establishes a stark contrast between the oppressive force of the Suona and the determined counterattack of the orchestra, symbolizing the unyielding struggle and indomitable will of the Chu people.

In this section, the Suona and the orchestra engage in a call-and-response dialogue, akin to two opposing forces locked in a fierce battlefield confrontation. They exchange musical phrases in a rapid back-and-forth, culminating in three intense confrontations. During the third confrontation, the orchestra's tonal intensity momentarily surpasses that of the Suona, symbolizing a temporary victory for the Chu warriors. This is represented by a powerful, staccato descending passage, exuding a sense of formidable strength. However, merely four measures later, the Suona's descending melodic line reemerges, now even more densely structured, akin to the enemy's frenzied counterattack. This relentless assault leaves the orchestra with no room to recover, rendering it seemingly powerless to resist.

Despite the ultimate failure of this struggle, the unwavering and fearless resilience of the Chu people in the face of war and oppression is vividly captured in the music. Their spirit, shining like a constellation of brilliant stars, is immortalized through this composition, deserving of eternal celebration and reverence. The musical narrative not only portrays the historical conflict but also serves as a poignant tribute to the enduring courage and indomitable will of the Chu people, ensuring that their legacy continues to inspire across generations.



Fig. 5 Thematic Material of the Climax in "Mu Shang Shang"

2.2 Sublimity in Tragedy

"The Qin king swept across the six states, his tiger-like gaze radiating majesty," this line from the poem vividly captures the imposing demeanor of the Qin king, glorifying the might of Qin Shi Huang as he conquered the six states and unified the realm. Yet, behind this grandeur lies the profound sorrow of the people of the six states. History always bears two faces: behind every success lies the failure of others, and the price of failure is annihilation. Even the mighty state of Chu, renowned for its resilience and indomitable spirit, could not escape the inexorable tides of history. Beneath the wheels of

history, it gradually faded into obscurity.

The overall tone of *Mu shang Shang* is one of "sorrow," with "tragic grandeur" as its central emotion. The piece features two poignant xun solos—one before and one after the "fast" section—that together narrate the tragic history of Chu. The xun's deep, weathered timbre and breath-like melodies evoke a poet recounting Chu's rise and fall. Before the "fast" section, the solo conveys the pain and helplessness before disaster, reflecting the fear and struggle of the Chu people. After the "fast" section, it becomes a mournful sigh for the devastation of war, filled with grief and sorrow, immersing listeners in the tragic grandeur of Chu's story.



Fig. 6 First Solo of the Xun in "Mu Shang Shang"



Fig. 7 Second Solo of the Xun in "Mu Shang Shang"

2.3 Open-mindedness

The people of Chu revered creativity—a form of creation that was both grand and lighthearted, elevating their open-minded and expansive cultural ethos. As recorded in historical texts, "merchants, farmers, artisans, and traders all thrived in their professions," highlighting the robust economic foundation that enabled the Chu people to fully realize their creative potential. Though Chu originated as a southern "barbarian" state, they felt no shame in this identity. They proudly embraced their "barbarian" heritage without inferiority and faced more "advanced" cultures without hesitation. By seeking wisdom externally and assimilating diverse strengths, while also looking inward to forge a unique identity, Chu culture flourished along a path of innovation and openness. This dual approach of external assimilation and internal originality became the cornerstone of Chu's cultural development, paving the way for its enduring legacy. The final section of the piece features a chant-like vocal hummed melody, performed in unison by the orchestra. The melodic material is derived from the qin song *Zhuzhi Ci* (Bamboo Branch Lyrics). Positioned at the conclusion of the composition and performed in full ensemble, this section, in the author's view, represents the composer stepping beyond the historical narrative to offer a personal reflection on the tragedy of Chu. The lyrics of *Zhuzhi Ci* express a profound sense of unrecognized talent and unfulfilled potential.

Historical records indicate that the downfall of Chu was largely due to the king's failure to value capable ministers, his arrogance, and the resulting neglect of governance. Talented individuals were left unrecognized, leading to the gradual decline of the state. By incorporating *Zhuzhi Ci* at the end of the piece, the composer not only provides a profound analysis of the reasons behind Chu's demise but also highlights the resilient and open-minded spirit of the Jing-Chu people. They courageously reflect on their tragic history, calmly dissecting the causes of their failure. This magnanimous attitude ensures that Jing-Chu culture continues to shine brightly, even after enduring the trials of time.

Through this musical gesture, the composer not only pays homage to the historical legacy of Chu but also underscores the enduring relevance of its cultural values—resilience, introspection, and the ability to rise above adversity. The piece thus becomes a timeless meditation on the complexities of history and the indomitable spirit of a people who, despite their downfall, left an indelible mark on the cultural landscape of China.



Fig. 8 Vocal Humming Passage in "Mu Shang Shang"

What *Mu shang Shang* seeks to convey is a profound sense of historical gravitas and tragic grandeur, as well as the resilience and open-mindedness inherent in Chu culture. This, I believe, is also a key reason why the composer chose Li

Sao as a musical source of inspiration. Qu Yuan's deep patriotism is deeply rooted in the hearts of the Jing-Chu people. To express this sentiment, the composer meticulously crafted the piece through careful selection of timbres and sophisticated organization of pitch, creating a rich and evocative musical tapestry that resonates with the emotional and cultural depth of Chu's legacy.

3 Conclusion

Mu shang Shang is a composition rooted in the emotional tone of "sorrow," seamlessly blending traditional Chinese musical culture with modern compositional techniques. Guided by the thematic essence of "Mushang," the piece draws inspiration from literary masterpieces such as Li Sao and Zhuzhi Ci. Through the harmonious interplay of the "Eight Tones" instruments, it conveys the history of ancient Chu and the enduring spirit of Jing-Chu culture. More importantly, Mu shang Shang fully exploits the unique tonal characteristics, timbre, and range of the Chime Bells, making them the central focus of the musical narrative. By doing so, the piece not only showcases the potential of Chime Bells in the context of Chinese orchestral composition but also offers fresh inspiration for the creative use of this ancient instrument in contemporary music.

Mu shang Shang feels like a dream, one in which I witnessed the majestic grandeur of ancient Chu, the unyielding determination and relentless pursuit of progress by its people, and the countless lives lost in the turmoil of war. Ultimately, Chu fell to the conquests of Qin. Yet, Jing-Chu culture is not a static monument but a flowing river—one that did not vanish with the fall of Chu. Instead, it has grown richer with time, enduring for millennia and remaining eternally vibrant. Rooted in the spirit of Jing-Chu, this distinctive regional culture continues to thrive.

To this day, Jing-Chu culture lives on in the hearts of its people, and cultural confidence has become a central goal in contemporary cultural development. The question of how to further develop Jing-Chu culture is of great significance, and the role of music art in this endeavor is profound. Since ancient times, music has served as a vehicle for cultural transmission and aesthetic education. Mu shang Shang exemplifies this by grounding itself in traditional musical language while employing modern compositional techniques and aesthetic sensibilities. It allows listeners to deeply feel the essence and allure of Jing-Chu culture, ensuring its inheritance and promotion for future generations.

Through its artistic expression, Mu shang Shang not only preserves the cultural legacy of Chu but also reinterprets it for a modern audience, bridging the past and present. It stands as a testament to the enduring power of music to convey cultural identity, inspire pride, and foster a deeper understanding of our shared heritage.

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