

APPLICATION OF PEKING OPERA ELEMENTS INTO PIANO MUSIC

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Abstract

Peking Opera not only plays a key role in traditional Chinese culture but also embodies the essence of Chinese culture. The integration of piano, a representative occidental musical instrument, with Peking Opera elements renders Chinese piano music a unique charm different than those from other countries. This research indicates that there are some differences between Chinese music and Occidental music in rhythm, expression terms, comprehension of music and many other aspects. The research was designed to elaborate how to connect the ideological connotations in both Chinese and Occidental piano music, and in other words, how to interpret the playing techniques unable to be expressed on a staff in the Occidental musical system. Based on specific piano music works and through comparative analysis method, it was discussed how Peking Opera elements are specifically applied into the piano music and how to interpret such application. The integration of piano and Peking Opera allows more people to understand this Chinese art form, which simultaneously facilitates the inheritance and development of Peking Opera music in new forms.

Keywords: Melody of China, Peking Opera, clapper type, singing tune and Chinese piano music

Introduction

With the continuous advancement of our economy, everything in China has been innovating on a daily basis, so does Peking Opera. The art form has become an absolute mainstream during the cultural thoughts renaissance. As one of five traditional Chinese opera art forms, Peking Opera, reaching its peak during the Qing Dynasty, has seen a long history of development. The art form mainly consists of interpretation, singing tune, facial makeup and costume, which is of high degree of identity. Singing, reciting, physical posture and acrobatic fighting movement are four kinds of basic performance of Peking Opera. On this basis, traditional Chinese art system with Peking Opera at its core has grown increasingly sound during its development.

Elements of Peking Opera are frequently seen even in the modern pop music composition. Artistic elements concerning the singing tune of Peking Opera have been widely adopted in various modern music works, such as rap, ballad and some Chinese-style music with certain traditional folk music elements. Thus, the rich cultural deposits of Peking Opera exert a profound cultural influence, deep into all aspects of Chinese artistic life. In particular, since

modern times, the integration of Occidental culture and traditional Peking Opera elements has given birth to works with ever-lasting charm.

In contrast, Chinese piano art, seeing a development history only a hundred years though, has soon transformed to the creative development stage from its initial imitation and learning period under the in-depth influence of cultural background. In the 1930s, the Chinese piano circle first came up with the proposition of “Chinese style”. Then, a series of Chinese piano works, represented by the Shepherd Boy Piccolo by He Luting (1934), were released. The root-seeking awareness thus penetrated into the inner heart of Chinese composers. For quite a long time to come, those Chinese composers often adapted or composed piano works by virtue of folk music elements, among which many elements from Peking Opera were indispensable. They have creatively integrated elements of Peking Opera with piano music, and skilfully contrasted Occidental music elements and oriental ones. They have thus expressed rich ancient melodies in modern form and gradually developed a means of artistic expression easier to be accepted by the general public.

Many kinds of operas have been evolving in China. Opera music with its own regional features has developed upon various regions, dialects and cultural contexts. Peking Opera music shares no similarity to its occidental counterpart composed by composers from scratch or with reference to existing works. Instead, with new lyrics, it adopts some commonly tunes mainly based on fixed clapper types and tune names. Besides, the music score of Peking Opera is often recorded in Chinese characters rather than some special characters like musical notation. Based on a pair of phrases (the upper phrase and the lower phrase), Peking Opera music consists of seven scales and highlights the rhythm and melody changes in variation. It adopts various connections and changes in clapper types (A kind of percussion instrument named “clappers” is used to mark the pattern of rhythm) as the basic means of musical statement of the entire play or the whole scene, so as to express various dramatic emotions.

Peking Opera serves as a key component of intangible cultural heritage of China. It not only inherits and carries forward the historical and cultural tradition and the cultural and artistic charm in the form of “living” traditional cultural expression but also is incorporated into the innovative of the times. It realizes an organic integration of traditional culture and modern culture during the development of new era through the up-to-date re-creation of both content and form of expression. Peking Opera has derived rich opera types and music genres during the process of its historical deposition. In a sense, it has contributed abundant composition resources to the nationalization process of Chinese piano music. By transplanting Peking Opera elements into piano music, composers display the national charm and spirit of traditional Chinese music while giving a full play to the musical expressive force unique to piano, in which the essence of piano music with Chinese style lies.

1. Application of Theme from Peking Opera into Chinese Piano Music

The value and potential of Peking Opera elements in subject matter is the most direct and appealing reasons why they can be widely applied into Chinese piano music.

It is the most intuitive way to adopt a title relevant to Peking Opera as the music theme. This practice can not only articulate the musical image but also convey the type of Peking Opera elements in the music. The Pi Huang, the title of a piano solo composed by Zhang Chao, a young composer, is reminiscent of two tones of Peking Opera: Xipi and Erhuang. Consisting of ten periods, the whole music describes wonderful and appealing scenes of Peking Opera through piano score by virtue of variations in clapper type of Peking Opera. The Moments of Peking Opera by Chen Qigang is also a piano music composed with Peking Opera materials as its theme, whose title “the Moments of Peking Opera” summarizes the Peking Opera scenes to be depicted in an intuitive manner. The Peking Opera Fugue by DuanPingtai is adapted from the original tunes of Erhuang in Peking Opera. This work incorporates the tonal characteristics and structure of Peking Opera into the Occidental polyphonic music creation techniques so as to replace the tonal distribution pattern of polyphonic music. This technique shows a typical Chinese folk music style. The Chinese Opera Suite by Zhu Xiaoyu comprises three ditties with different themes, the Selected Peking Opera Piece, the Qin Opera Style and the Yu Opera Piece. There are many similar works that directly reflect Peking Opera elements in their titles. They can be taken as a direct embodiment of the emphasis on traditional culture by Chinese piano music.

2. Application of Clapper Types from Peking Opera into Chinese Piano Music

Each region and ethnic group of China has its own musical style. Traditional Peking Operas serve as a key and unique form of music and thus have a profound influence on Chinese musical styles. Rhythm is the most representative feature of Peking Opera music. The opera art forms in different regions in China all have rich and distinct clapper types and rhythms. The so-called “clapper type” refers to the “beat and rhythmic forms” in Peking Opera music. The strong and weak beats in traditional Chinese music are represented by “ban” and “yan”, respectively, of which the “ban” indicates a strong beat while the “yan” indicates a weak beat. From the perspective of the Occidental rhythm system, one “ban” and three “yan” is equivalent to 4/4 beat, one “ban” and two “yan” is equivalent to 3/4 beat, and one “ban” and one “yan” is equivalent to 2/4 beat. Each opera form is featured by a different clapper type. For example, ErhuangYuanban is commonly adopted in Peking Opera. Andante sostenuto is often used in Qinqiang opera. Kuaisanyan is usually applied in Yu Opera. The clapper type varies upon the type of Chinese operas in a diverse manner. The basic speeds of some commonly adopted clapper types in Peking Opera corresponds to those in Occidental expression terms in the diagram as below:

Clapper type	Ban and yan	Beat marks	Expression terms	Speeds
Yuanban	One ban and one yan	2/4	Andante	73-77
Andante sostenuto	One ban and three yan	4/4	Largo	45-49
Two-eight ban	One ban and one yan	2/4	Andante	73-77
Two-six ban	One ban and one yan	2/4	Allegretto	108-126
Flowing ban	Ban without yan	1/4	Vivace	132-139
Sanban / No ban	No ban or yan	卩	Rubato	None
Allegro	Ban without yan	1/4 2/4	Allegra	110-131
Duoban	Ban without yan	1/4	Presto	168-177
Daoban	One ban and one yan	4/2	Rubato	None

The clapper type of Peking Opera is very unique so it cannot correspond to the Occidental expression terms and speeds in a direct and complete way. In fact, they can only correspond to each other under certain conditions for a more intuitive comprehension. There are no fixed time and speed values in the clapper type of Chinese works. As a result, the speed for each work is marked as required by specific emotions. The speed here does not refer to the clapper-type speed but the generally comprehended speed of their corresponding expression terms.

“The Occidental percussion music sets a quite stringent requirement on rhythm training and possesses a relatively unified standard. On the contrary, Chinese counterpart is relatively free in the performance of rhythm, pulse and beat”. (Ma Rui, 2018) Chinese musical works are essentially different from the Occidental counterpart in rhythm. Although the two types of music share many similarities, their feelings expressed are somehow different. It is a unique musical creation technique of Peking Opera to express the mental states and emotional changes in various people through variations in “clapper type” (namely rhythm) and speed. During their composition of many Chinese piano works, composers use the flexibility in clapper type and the gradual change in speed of Peking Opera for reference so as to arrange the structure of their works. This practice inherits the aesthetic taste of single and linear flowing into our inner world in the classical Chinese aesthetics.

According to the categorization of ban and yan, the clapper type can be divided into one ban and one yan (2/4 beat), one ban and three yan (4/4 beat), ban without yan (1/4 beat) and no ban or yan (Sanban). The most typical clapper types of Chinese opera music have been listed as below for illustration.

2.1. Yuanban

Yuanban serves as the most fundamental rhythm in Peking Opera, from which andante sostenuto, allegro and flowing ban are developed. It’s usually featured by duple or quadruple time, with symmetrical upper and lower sentences, simple structure and moderate speed. Usually, a work moves smoothly through narrative periods at a mid-tempo yuanban, develops into adagio for lyricism, and changes to flowing ban or allegro when dramatic conflict

intensifies. When it comes to free rhythm, a work usually adopts sanban or wobbling ban as its main expressive form. Character mood and personality as well as plot development can be reflected in the changes of clapper type.

Many piano works composed with Peking Opera elements prefer to adopt the rhythm of yuanban in the initial narrative part. For example, the melody theme part of the Huangpi by Zhang Chao (1995), adopts yuanban. This kind of direct narration technique can display the theme more neatly and articulately.

2.2. Wobbling Ban

【原板】
Largo pacatamente (♩ = 46)

L. *8^{va}*, R. *tr*

mp *pp* *mp*

una corda *tre corda*

Wobbling ban is the type of ban without yan. That is to say, each beat is strong and there is no weak beat. It is featured by fast accompaniment and slow singing. This performance style adopts the slow singing speed with a singing tune of sanban and superimposes a compact accompaniment. It highlights the characteristics of fast singing tune and slow rhythm. Thus, it forms a sharp contrast and lays a foundation for the depiction of inner conflicts in characters and the rendering of dramatic musical atmosphere. In particular, the accompaniment with a quick rhythm serves as the “catalyst” for creating dramatic conflicts.

For example, the Sheng Dan Jing Mo Chou by Wang Amao (2007), draws on the rhythm of wobbling ban in Peking Opera. The high-pitched part of the performer’s right hand adopts two notes repeated continuously to simulate the rhythm of intensive drumming of leather drum, creating an intense and pressing atmosphere. The melody on the left-hand part of the piano performer goes single and coherent, and imitates the slow rhythm of human voice in singing.

2.3. Duoban

Duoban is a commonly seen clapper type in Peking Opera. It is usually a chanting that stresses each syllable or word. It is a typical style of ban-without-yan singing tune with short and compact sentences and strong voice. It’s featured by a short rhythm of one or duple time, which is easy to express angry emotions. Different from the 2/4 and 4/4 beats in the Occidental music theory, there is no periodic law of strength and weakness in the rhythm of Duoban. Instead, its each word is sung with the same strength but variable volume as the melody progresses.

For example, the Huangpi by Zhang Chao (1995) adopts the expression form of duoban. The rhythm of 1/4 beat intensifies the already fast rhythm and the staccato technique throughout

the performance process is meant to imitate the singing technique that stresses each syllable in duoban.

【垛板】
Presto sdegnoso (♩ = 144)

178

sf *sf* *mp* *staccato*

2.4. Sanban

“Sanban” is also derived from the rhythm of Peking Opera. The rhythm of the Occidental music is fundamentally unchanged while the rhythm of Peking Opera is relatively free. For example, there is a clapper type of no ban or yan in Peking Opera, also known as “sanban”. It is similar to Rubato in the Occidental musical work. Sanban mentioned herein is slightly different from, rather than the same as, Rubato. First of all, they have different musical notation. Generally speaking, the first three strokes of the Chinese character “San” are marked on the score as the beat mark of sanban period. Some scores are accompanied by musical terms of ad libitum (ad lib. for short), A piacere (impromptu performance) or the Chinese word for “free speed”. Many of the bar lines in a score marked with sanban are dashed or those scores are written with no bar lines. Example for score, the Flute and Drum Melody at Sunset Moment by Li Haiying (1975).

There is no concept for sanban in the Occidental music theory. “In Occidental music creation practice, There is no sanban music, beat mark of ‘サ’ or dashed bar line mark”. (Xiang Qiankun, 2008) while in Chinese piano works, there are a large amount of sanban music. Furthermore, composers adopt a special notation mark of “サ” and “dashed bar line” to compose music. This practice enriches the expression forms of piano music. “One can say that the definitions of beats in European music theory did not include the sanban-like beats with unevenly divided tempo, nor was there any position for sanban-like beats in the classification and notation of beats”. (Peng Shiduan, 1989) Europe once was ruled by theocracy and religion monopolized science and culture. As a result, most of the musically proficient artists were clergymen and priests and religious music was in an autocratic position during the development of the Occidental music. Those artists brought in keyboard instruments in order to enrich and complete religious activities. Thus, polyphonic thought has gradually come into being. The pitch and length of notes have been clearly defined in the staff, leaving no place for the free prose rhythm from monophonic music” (Joseph Machlis, 1998) All of those factors have

facilitated the gradual weakening of “dispersing” elements in the Occidental music and their development toward an orderly and unified direction.

In simple terms, Rubato in the Occidental musical works is accented, evenly divisible, rhythmic and regular. When represented in traditional Chinese music, those features can be called “with both ban and yan”. There is neither bar lines (or those features will be represented by dashed bar line) nor the strong or weak beat in the so-called free beat in traditional Chinese music. That is to say, the notes are not limited by strength or length, and the beat thus can be called “no ban or yan” in the name of traditional Chinese music.

3. Application of Melodies from Peking Opera into Chinese Piano Music

Another important reflection of Peking Opera in piano music is the design of melody and singing tune of Peking Opera. The melody and singing tune of Peking Opera stem from dialects. For this reason, dialects in different places serve as key indicators of the musical styles of different opera genres. They also serve as the main part that piano music draws on and absorb.

3.1. Application of Melody from Peking Opera Accompaniment

Accompaniment music serves as a critical component of the art of Peking Opera. They are integrated with human singing tunes. Both complement and reinforce each other, creating increasingly full and complete musical images through this performance art. Therefore, the adoption of accompaniment melody from Peking Opera is the key to firmly grasp the elements and reflect the style of Peking Opera.

The music of Peking Opera is of strong tonality. Accompaniment serves as a powerful supplement to singing skills of Peking Opera performers. They closely correlate and complement each other. Therefore, instrument players adopt performance skills frequently in accompaniment melody of Peking Opera so as to achieve the best using effect.

Here, one has to mention Jinghu, a musical instrument that goes well with Peking Opera. Jinghu, also known as Huqin, is a stringed instrument for accompaniment, and mainly adopted to tune up all singing tunes and to assist in the performance of Peking Opera music. Jinghu players continue displaying the unique “diminution” characteristic of Peking Opera mainly through the adoption of rhythmic technique of “reciprocated portamento”. For this reason, in piano playing, most players imitate the “reciprocated portamento” by overlapping the “second pitch interval” in rapid succession. Although incomparable to the coherent portamento made by traditional stringed instruments in tone quality or musicality, it can express the subtle changes in pitch intervals. Therefore, the performance effects on the Piano and the Jinghu are quite similar. The reciprocated portamento of Jinghu is imitated by grace notes of “second pitch interval” for more than half of the thematic rhythm tones in the Pihuang and the Sheng Dan Jing Mo Chou. Such treatment enriches those works with more elements of “diminution” in Peking Opera.

It is because Zhang Chao, the composer of the Pihuang, has integrated “diminution” elements into the rich sound and expressive force of this work that it exhibits a distinctive personality color among many piano solos. By virtue of acoustic measures with rich Peking Opera elements, the composer expresses the melodic undulation, the rhythm, the music strength and a series of changes in musical colors. Simultaneously, by making use of some harmonic techniques that expand scale colors, the composer can also create sound tones to reflect the unique charm of Peking Opera.

To strengthen the artistic appeal of Peking Opera with accompaniment is a platitude topic. Furthermore, it’s particularly problematic to deal with the harmony issue is a thorny task. Due to the tradition of piano music, harmonic techniques apply to music in major/minor mode. However, when it comes to the music in opera mode, there are general modal and structural differences between the two modes of music, and thus many inconsistencies between two modes of musical works. Based on the long-term practice and exploration by the author, it has been concluded that the basic traditional thinking pattern on harmony can be inherited by opera accompaniment. On this basis, the composer can manifest the unique rhythm of Peking Opera in appropriate combination with its musical features. Furthermore, this can also enrich and expand the tone and expressive force of the harmonic sound of piano music in an indirect manner.

3.2. Application of Singing Tune of Peking Opera

The singing tune system of Peking Opera is very abundant and complete. The piano works in China have been evolving so far. Based on the previous research on application of Xipi, Erhuang and general Beijing accent, many composers have made various references to the traditional singing tunes of Peking Opera during their process of composition.

The Lost Diary by Wang Xiaohan also exhibits the distinctive features of Beijing accent. The framework of this work as a whole is composed of three movements, namely the Facial Makeup, the Nursery Rhyme and the Hutong. Among them, the Facial Makeup expresses the diversity and variation in facial makeup mainly through the Xipi tone with strong Beijing accent, the melodic movement and the staccato. Its dominant melodic motive “C-B-G” is running through and deeply fused into almost each voice part and tune. The theme melody and the polyphonic structure part complement each other with flexible leaps and bounds. The final abrupt and strong ending manifests its characteristics of opera.

There are a total of 10 pieces in the Beijing Wanhua Collection, a piano repertoire composed by Jiang Wenye. Each piece of work displays their own features, originality and novelty. Among them, the most characteristic piece should be the Willow Catkin. Appreciating this piece of music, one cannot help but to create an image of fine resemblance in his mind, the north spring catkins fluttering in the wind and flying all over the sky. The theme melody of this music contains a strong Peking Opera element — Beijing accent. The main melody of this music takes “D-E-G” as its core sound, and the theme melody is full of changes, constantly beating and billowing along with sanban rhythm in the undulating melody and singing tune. In

this way, the music creates a musical artistic image of traditional culture characterized by willow catkins flying, floating and undulating in the wind.

The Impression of Peking Opera — Xipi Adagio is a piano prelude composed by Zhang Xudong with reference to sostenuto of Xipi from Peking Opera, whose eye-catching title directly expresses the elements that the work is designed to convey. Andante sostenuto is the speed of the prelude and some fragments from Xipi singing tunes are its musical motivation. Its presentation form is sanban, between which there is one or two octaves. The Xipi singing tune, played alternately in high and low pitch areas, brings forth a pure and ethereal mood and sets off a musical effect by imitation through alternate playing between tone clusters. Superimposed musical degrees are subject to constant sequence and modulation, and gradually form the dual tonality. This piece fully manifests the integration and penetration of singing tune elements in Peking Opera.

Conclusions

Throughout the seven decades of development in China's piano art, most composers and pianists have focused on the adaptation and reproduction of Chinese folk songs or melodies with no exception. Most of them draw materials from folk songs, operas and ethnic archaic music in China. While preserving their basic theme melodies, they conducted polyphonic, harmonic, three-dimensional and decorative processing to their works. Those classic works have been pursued by the most of piano players, and even appreciated and favored by the audience worldwide. Even so, those few Chinese-style piano works are far from sufficient to facilitate the development of traditional Chinese music in the new era. Meanwhile, this situation also proves from another perspective that more breakthroughs should be made in the development of composition themes for piano music and the utilization of local music resources in China.

The integration of piano and Peking Opera is enhancing day by day in the artistic development path. Their increasingly closer correlation forms a pattern of mutual fusion. Although cultural inheritance reflects the people's cultural identity with their own national cultures in each country and region, it's the combination of nationalization and internationalization that elevates cultural inheritance to a new height. From the perspective of international culture, many excellent foreign dramas can also be appreciated by and spread among Chinese people. Chinese opera culture calls for innovation in concepts, dramatic properties and artistry. Only in this way, can artists compose excellent art works in conformity with the current public aesthetic taste. The integration of Peking Opera and piano art works as one of such kinds of innovation.

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