

Image Aesthetics Characteristics of Chinese Piano Music

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Keywords: image; piano music; image aesthetics; art

Abstract. The image aesthetics is an important aspect of China's contemporary aesthetics, and the word "image" also widely appears in art textbooks. At the very beginning, the image comes from people's demand of expressing something which can't be explained, and it is mainly reflected at aesthetic activities on art objects via some unique feeling ways such as imagination and intuition. In the art activities of piano music, the process from musical creation to music appreciation endows image with unique aesthetic characteristics. On the basis of deep analysis on image, this paper further explains image aesthetics characteristics of China's piano music, and also analyzes the image aesthetics characteristics in China's famous piano music *Three Stanzas of Plum-blossoms* and *Flute and Drum at Sunset*.

0. Introduction

With continuous improvement of social civilization and continuous development of art culture, the image aesthetics gradually becomes an important part of China's traditional aesthetics and it is widely active in China's art activities. In China's artists' opinion, the art and image can't be separated from each other; the image is the form, subject, and method of art as well as reflected artistic style. In China's art activities, the image is a kind of abstract generalization method and a kind of non-objective psychological natural revelation. In China's piano music, the image aesthetics plays a main role; in the music score of piano music, there are many works with image aesthetics characteristics so that we can image and feel image of music. In terms of creation ideas, the non-objective sound is often used. Therefore, the image aesthetics causes great influence on China's piano music.

1. Overview of image aesthetics

1.1. Cognition on image and image aesthetics

Chinese famous scholar Jiang Xudong thinks: "The image is a kind of newly-born, advanced, and intentional design image produced in subject's brain on the basis of accumulating large quantity of representation in the past; it is uncertain that it has existed, and the content is partial to subject's wish and conception." The systematic research related to image initially originates from western countries, and their research on image is divided into several different means, including primitive thinking, aesthetic psychology, and symbol aesthetics. However, Chinese researchers divide the image into generation, structure, property, and function, etc. to carry out research; meanwhile, due to connection between image and art, they divide the image into art image, music image, and literary image. As for artists, Chinese famous scholar Sun Meilan shows that they mainly process their subjective emotion and objective thing in the brain as image, that is, the image is the result obtained after the artists have true feelings on specific objective things in the life and a series of association happens. In a word, the image is the common feature possessed by various kinds of art. In terms of current scholars' research on music image, the scholar Qiao Shen thinks: "The image is the basic element of all experience activities and transcendent activities, and the psychological intermediary link that the artists and art receivers commonly have in art activities." So far, the thinking way of image aesthetics can complete this transition from concrete to abstract form. In China's traditional image aesthetic thinking, the interest and realm of some literary works are completed by shaping aesthetic image, which is reflected in Chinese traditional verses, ditties, odes and songs. Therefore, the image aesthetics has deep origin in China's literary works.

The occurrence of China's image aesthetics has inseparable relation with all things in the nature, and China's image aesthetics generally pays attention to originating from the nature and returning to nature. The life images in artistic works are obtained via artists' repeated deliberation combined with their perception, emotion, and experience for the purpose of detaching from the world. China's image aesthetics fully considers the spiritual element of meaning and material form of shape; the

meaning mainly reflects artists' thoughts, emotion, and personality, and it is also the most important aspect which reflects the beauty in image aesthetics; the shape is the carrier of meaning, and it will change according to the change of external environment. The relation between meaning and shape is just the relation between unlimited expansion of subjective spirit and finiteness of objective image; the meaning is determined based on shape, and then the shape is further drawn based on meaning, thus there exists active relationship between meaning and image. The research shows that the image can be divided into interior and exterior structure; there exists tight relation among substance, emotion, and awareness of exterior structure; in a sense, the interior structure is a kind of dynamic frame which mainly takes shape and meaning as elements and the meaning plays a main role.

1.2. Levels of image aesthetics

In art activities, when the image is beyond the demand level of ideographic expression and seeks for meaning beyond image, the image aesthetics gradually comes into being. After people have experience, opinion, and perception on some things, the images come into being, thus people's aesthetic level is greatly improved. The relevant theoretical research shows that the image can be divided into three levels, that is, using shape to express meaning, blending of shape and meaning, meaning beyond shape; this not only shows the development process of image, but also shows the existence way of image. Firstly, it is using shape to express meaning. The wording of "shape" appeared in the Book of Changes for the first time, and it was a kind of symbol used to show natural changes, with abstraction and figurativeness; later, in many works in the Book of Songs, many men of letter utilized the "shape" of nature to express their feeling and will. Gradually, the image becomes an aesthetic feature of Chinese poems and has strong aesthetic appeal. Secondly, it is blending of shape and meaning, that is, mutual unification of people's subjective consciousness and natural object. This level mainly appeared after Wei and Jin Dynasties. At that time, the society was under unrest, and large quantity of men of letters lived in natural landscape and expressed themselves in universe, all things on the earth, and life perception. The peak period of blending of shape and meaning is in Tang Dynasty; at this time, the image required mutual blending of heart and objects as well as high unification of body and soul. This realm of mutual blending of meaning and shape shows a kind of important aesthetic feature and it promotes another level of image, that is, meaning beyond shape. It can be said that the level of meaning beyond shape is the highest pursuit of art; this level transfers the object as affection and further expresses the connotation contained in the shape; then, people's aesthetic activities also reach a new realm.

2. Image aesthetics of piano music

China's piano music has a short history. The piano is a kind of western keyboard instrument belonging to western countries; after mutual communication and development between the East and the West, the piano was introduced into China and then quickly blended into China's profound and extensive art culture, and the artists also have created large quantity of piano music works with traditional Chinese cultural features. After introduction into China, the piano music mainly pays attention to the combination of romantic charm and affection, and the creation of artistic conception can reflect the thought of image aesthetics.

2.1. Beauty of image of China's piano music

In the aesthetic range of China's piano music, the beauty of image plays an important role, and the aesthetic category of mutually opposite and mutually dependent "shape" and "meaning" has a profound influence on our appreciation on beauty of piano music. In the creation of beauty of piano music, the artistic conception is also sought; in the performance process, the artistic conception expressed through performance is used to express the feelings, and this is most common technique in piano music performance. Another realm pursued by China's piano music is to stimulate deeper feelings as the scene when the feeling and scene are mutually blended, and then the feelings further generate illusion in imagination, thus constituting a new image. In this process, both the creator and appreciator concentrate on inner feelings, form aesthetic association in thoughts, break away from the reality to obtain illusory interest and charm through abstract and illusory sound. The famous musician Feng Xiaogang thinks that the beauty of image of piano music is that people blend their

past aesthetic experience and life perception into musical sounds and then establish a kind of unique presentation active architecture in their inner world through imagination after they perceive the composer's image world contained in music score through sense organ and association. We often say "carefully listen to the music", that is, we need to seek for music image through soul and feeling, catch the feelings contained in the music through "experience" and "understanding", and then draw a painting of music image in imaged world. The construction of piano music image is not merely realized through subjective imagination and association; the appreciators shall carefully feel the image and understand the feelings contained in artists' works. The beauty of image of China music is reflected at early time, and the well-known story about Boya and Ziqi is a specific and vivid description on beauty of music image. As a kind of demand of feeling transmission and illusory carrier of will, the image of music plays an important role in musical creation, development, performance, and appreciation process. Therefore, the beauty of piano music is shown through emotional exchange between people and objects, and between people and people. In order to seek for the beauty of music image of higher level, people shall attentively understand philosophy of nature and significance of life, so as to deliver and experience the meaning beyond shape reflected in piano music.

2.2. Image aesthetics characteristics of piano music

The beauty of image of piano music is reflected in artist's creation, performer's performance, and appreciator's listening, and all of those things are developed based on image. The image is artist, performer, and audience's emotional ballast, and it determines creator's mental motivation and audience's emotion to a great extent. In general, the musical creation and appreciation is the construction and association of music image. Therefore, most of piano music has a common aesthetic characteristic – core of image; all things are generated based on image, and the level of music image determines the creation and appreciation level of music.

In all art activities, the music image is most complicated. The sound itself has strong specificity, thus the music has a different form of existence; furthermore, the music is connected with reality through "meaning" and "shape", thus the image aesthetics of China's piano music has multiple characteristics and shows beauty of freedom in terms of time structure and beauty of flexibility in terms of volume concept; in terms of connotation expression, more attention is paid to skill and emotional demand. The beauty of image of China's piano music is firstly reflected at flexible time image, and this is mainly realized through music score; take the piano music *Three Stanzas of Plum-blossoms* recomposed by Wang Jianzhong according to China's famous archaic music: this music depends on music score to master the sound to realize continuous repeated reproduction of sound and spatialization of time, which can not only meet our auditory feeling, but also can meet our visual feeling, and make us get a clearer knowledge of ups and downs in sound, melody and rhythm, and function of melody and easily remember the music in our mind. The theme music of *Three Stanzas of Plum-blossoms* totally appears for three times: at first time, it appears in high-pitch area; the clear melody of single tone shows the artistic conception of plum blossoms in a vivid way before us under the background of low-pitch five-degree chord.

At the second time, the theme music appears in left-hand low-pitch melody part. It seems that the solid and pure tone in middle and low-pitch area shows the artistic conception of plum blossoms in severe cold under the background of crystal clear double sound in high-pitch area.

At the third time, the theme music returned to high-pitch area, and the emotion and rhythm of music become excited; the left hand breaks the chord arpeggio in a quick and flowing way, which greatly promotes the ups and downs of melody and forms strong contrast with stable and ease melody in previous two times; in this way, a beautiful and touching plum blossoms are performed.

Besides, compared to western music score, China's piano music score never pursues for perfectness of music score deliberately, thus the music has a higher image degree, and more free time; there is blank reserved in material expression of music, which creates profound meaning. Take the famous piano music *Flute and Drum at Sunset* recomposed by Li Yinghai as an example: the introduction part slowly pulls open the prelude from drum sound, and this is a section in free rhythm with inner tense and sense of rhythm. The speed at this place changes from slow to quick;

after the force is enhanced, it gradually becomes weak; in peaceful night, this drum sound comes far from the river, which lets the audience feel drum of antique beauty.

Secondly, the structure of China's piano music shows certain beauty of image. After the piano is introduced into China, it is certain that it will contain the beauty of structure of China's traditional music; in terms of composition method, some variation and development methods are adopted so as to make structure image of music show a beauty of flexibility. Thirdly, no matter what kind of image aesthetics characteristics exist in music in terms of time, space and structure, as for us, the most important thing is to research the image aesthetics characteristics of musical composition materials. It is recorded in the Book of Music: "The sound is the shape of music". This is also the starting point for research on image aesthetics of China's piano music. It can be found that China's piano music has some "centrality" characteristics of traditional music; in the performance process, it seeks for the variation of sound itself so as to realize implicit and touching musicality and create strong beauty of image. Finally, the most important thing is that the symbolic image of China's piano music has very strong image aesthetics characteristics, which benefits from China's traditional culture with long history. The music symbolism has deep cultural origin in China, and it was once applicable in symbol of music image to stimulate people's rich imagination; however, the musical image and musical form can't be separated from each other. In *Flute and Drum at Sunset*, according to the structure and content of music, Chinese traditional landscape paintings emerge before us through conclusion on 10 titles, that is, bell and drum in building, setting sun, moon above Dongshan, wind and water, shadowy flowers, water and cloud, fishing songs, wave beating the shore, rip current, and return, which shows harmonious relation between musical language and image.

3. Function of image aesthetics on piano music

In some sense, the essence of art is aesthetic image; as a kind of complicated art, the music has strong infection, and the image beauty of music plays a major role, that is, when people listen to music, they can have beautiful image in their mind. In the process of appreciating piano music, the application of image can make people obtain more funs beyond musical form. For example, when we listen to *Flute and Drum at Sunset*, we will think of the aesthetic orientation of "man is an integral part of nature" in traditional Chinese landscape culture; when we listen to *Three Stanzas of Plum-blossoms*, we will think of the scene about plum blossoms described in Mao Zedong's poem. Therefore, the aesthetic value of image plays an important role in current aesthetic process; it greatly influences our thinking and experience when we appreciate the music, and also has far-reaching significance for development of China's piano music.

In conclusion, the piano music, an art treasure produced in western countries, further shows its artistic charm after it is introduced into China; meanwhile, the introduction of piano music also makes China's traditional art culture obtain further development; the piano music inherits China's unique image aesthetic spirit and makes such spirit have a full expression.

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