

Study on the Development of Chinese Piano Music Culture*

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Abstract—After a hundred years of development, Chinese piano music culture has been organically combined with Chinese native music culture, which has reached a considerable size. Chinese piano education has also cultivated numerous pianists who are active on the world stage. Predicting the future development trend of Chinese piano music culture by analyzing its status quo will play a role of warning and advantage development in promoting China's music cultural innovation mechanism, music education reform, piano manufacturing industry and marketing development mechanism, and may become a breakthrough in China's music cultural education reform.

Keywords—education; musical culture; development history

I. INTRODUCTION

Piano has been introduced into China since the late Ming and early Qing dynasty with a history of more than 300 years. Western piano music culture has experienced a long process of taking root and burgeoning in China, and has been gradually accepted and loved by the people. In the early stage of China's piano culture development, due to the influence of factors such as low productivity, feudal ideology and immature piano playing skills, many students with good economic conditions went abroad to explore the western piano music culture and performance skills. After their return, they brought a complete western music culture and knowledge system, injecting impetus to the new culture movement of China.

Chinese piano music culture has gone through a long development process. From the 1920s to the 1940s, Chinese piano music was in the initial stage of development. Driven by the May 4th new culture movement, music subjects were established in various universities. Influenced by the new culture movement, many advocates of music culture began to explore the creation of Chinese piano music in the 1920s. In the 1930s and 1940s, China was in a turbulent period of the Anti-Japanese War and the War of Liberation. In this period, music creation was integrated with the cultural characteristics of Chinese national tradition. After the founding of new China, music development in China was provided with a huge platform for development. Most of the

works in this period were folk music, which preserved the unique characteristics of Chinese national music and showed people's bold and unadorned character incisively and vividly. In the 17 years since the founding of the People's Republic of China, it's undeniable that Chinese piano music works not only increased in quantity, but also promoted the development of Chinese piano music culture in quality. The emotion and content of the performance are characterized by strong national flavor, lacking in breakthrough and innovation in terms of performance technique, though. Piano adaptations reached unprecedented prosperity during the Cultural Revolution. According to the subject matter, adaptations were made from "model operas", Chinese folk songs and traditional Chinese instrumental music, which promoted the vigorous development of China's piano music cultural enterprise. After the reform and opening up, Chinese society has entered a new stage of development. The collision, integration and communication of Chinese and western music cultures has brought Chinese piano music into a diversified era. Looking through the whole development course of Chinese piano creation, it can be seen that only when Chinese piano creation is rooted in the root of Chinese national culture, can it meet the aesthetic needs of modern people. In the nearly more than a century of development, a large number of Chinese piano music works have accumulated some creative materials for teaching and performance, and also laid a solid foundation for the development of piano in China.

II. A BRIEF INTRODUCTION OF CHINESE PIANO MUSIC CULTURE

As early as 1404, the earliest piano in the world — clavichord appeared in Europe. Around 1710, Christopher wray developed the first piano in Florence, which was later defined as the world's first real piano.

Piano was introduced into China in the 19th century. It is mentioned in relevant historical documents that the first piano in China was introduced by Italian missionary Matteo Ricci, which is said to be used for worship. At the end of the Ming dynasty, with the frequent trade between China and the west, western music culture also flowed into China. Later, when the Opium War broke out in 1840, the invasion of foreign powers opened China's door which had been closed for a long time and ended China's seclusion. The king of western musical instruments, piano was also brought into

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China by many foreign missionaries. Western musical instrument store in a small number of coastal cities have been built up. Since the piano was introduced into China, many pianists began to explore the piano culture with Chinese characteristics, hence comes the present Chinese piano music culture. According to historical records and the development trend from ancient to present, the earliest cultural form of Chinese piano music is based on the integration of Chinese and western music. Chinese piano music culture is not only a simple cultural form, but also a complex social phenomenon, which is the product of accumulation and historical precipitation over a long period of time.

As the king of western Musical Instruments, piano has played a vital role in the development of human music culture since its birth. Piano was introduced into China in the early 20th century. In order to integrate this foreign art form into the land of China, many musicians turned their creative perspective to the Chinese folk music, adapted and created western instrumental music, and finally achieved the integration of Chinese and western music. After the reform and opening up, many excellent piano works have been printed into people's eyes. Among them, the "the Moon over a Fountain" adapted by Chu Wanghua is deeply loved and recognized by the public. To study the music culture in Chinese piano works is of vital significance to the revitalization of the music culture of our nation.

¹A famous pianist Bao Huiqiao once remarked that, "If performers do not perform their own national works, foreign performers cannot be counted on to do as well..... I am able to apprehend these works only because I am Chinese. Although these works are still in a stage of development, you must understand them and elaborate them by using the Chinese aesthetic point of view." Therefore, it's necessary to first develop one's own music culture, so as to better integrate foreign music into it and promote the common development of music of all countries and nationalities.

III. BRIEF INTRODUCTION OF THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS OF CHINESE PIANO MUSIC CULTURE

A. *Combination of Chinese and Western Music*

1) *Chinese piano music in 1920s and 1930s*: Driven by the May 4th Movement and the New Culture Movement, Chinese society has undergone earth-shaking changes in the political, economic and cultural fields, and music discipline and music department have been established in various universities. In the 1920s, Chinese pianists' performance skills were greatly improved. However, influenced by the New Culture Movement, many advocates of music culture first developed a strong desire for exploration of the foreign music culture, and then began to explore the creation of Chinese piano music. This period was the initial stage of the development of Chinese piano music, in which Chinese musicians mainly imitated and borrowed the creative

techniques of western music, such as the works of Xiao Youmei's "New Nichang feather garments dance" and Zhao Yuanren's "March for Peace".

2) *Chinese piano music in 1930s and 1940s*: At that time, China was in a turbulent time of Anti-Japanese War and Liberation War. In this period, music creation was integrated with the cultural characteristics of Chinese national tradition. Ding Shande's piano works such as "Spring Journey", "Three Overtures" and "Variations on the Theme of Chinese Folk Songs" show his longing for light, love for life and yearn for freedom. Shao Yuanchong once said: "Whichever nation in danger loses its nation confidence and the desire to survive is completely deprived of viability and is doomed. Whereas, whichever nation keeps fighting even under conditions of oppression and danger will usher in success while paying the price and sacrifice." And the national spirit reflected by Chinese piano music in this period is incomparable in any period.

In the first half of the 20th century, the creation of Chinese piano music was gradually in the process of nationalization mainly by imitating the European piano music and. During that time, the piano music was not fully nationalized and localized in that the eastern and western aesthetic ideology was not actually integrated and the audience didn't really enter the process of artistic acceptance ² However, the exploration of music culture in Chinese piano makes up the vacancy of Chinese music.

3) *Chinese piano music after the founding of new China*: After the founding of the People's Republic of China, China has made powerful construction in politics, economy, culture and many other aspects. The new living space also provides a huge platform for the development of China's music. Most of the works in this period were folk music that preserved the unique characteristics of Chinese national music and showed people's bold and unadorned character incisively and vividly. For example the "Xinjiang dance the First" of Ding Shande, "Arethusa Flower" of Wang Lisan and the "Fifty Folk Songs and Ballads" of Li Yinghai, all has made a contribution to the music culture of Chinese piano in terms of creation. In the 17 years since the founding of the People's Republic of China, it's undeniable that Chinese piano music works not only increased in quantity, but also promoted the development of Chinese piano music culture in quality. The emotion and content of the performance are characterized by strong national flavor, lacking in breakthrough and innovation in terms of performance technique, though.

a) *Chinese piano music during the cultural revolution*: Although various fields in the society were damaged to varying degrees during the "Cultural Revolution", the development of Chinese piano music culture did not stagnate.

¹ Zhao Xiaosheng, Ms. Bao Huiqiao interview [J] Piano Artistry, 1998 (03) (in Chinese)

² Yang Yang. On the significance and contribution of Wang Jianzhong's piano adaptation in the development of Chinese piano music [D]. Northeast Normal University, 2010. (in Chinese)

Piano transcriptions reached unprecedented prosperity during the Cultural Revolution, which was also a bold innovation in Chinese history. By subject they can be divided into three categories: the first type is adaptations of "model operas", like the "To Make History with Blood" of Chu Wanghua and the "Living in Anyuan" of Zhao Xiaosheng and so on.³ These works highlight political color. Due to the limitations of the "model opera", they rarely represent the inner feelings of characters and the expression of feelings is not intense. So these kinds of works are of low artistic value. The second type is adaptations of Chinese folk songs, like "Liuyang River" adapted by Wang Jianzhong and "Red Star Shines", etc. This kind of music is mostly based on national folk songs, rich in emotion yet not lack of delicacy and tenderness, but they can limit the thinking mode and creative space of piano composers to a certain extent. The third type is adaptations of traditional Chinese instrumental music, like the adapted "One Hundred of Birds Making Pilgrimage to Pay Homage to Phoenix", "Plum Blossoms" by Wang Jianzhong, the adapted "Flute and Drum at Sunset" by Li Ying and the adapted "the Moon over a Fountain" by Chu Wanghua etc.⁴ Compared with the first two types, this category has higher artistic value. The composer kept the melody theme of the original song, and integrated the piano playing techniques, which not only combined the virtual with the real aesthetic conception, but also fit the contemporary aesthetic standards. This piano composition adapted from traditional Chinese instrumental music has been highly praised and recognized by the modern public and promoted the vigorous development of China's piano music cultural cause.

b) Chinese piano music in the 1980s: After the reform and opening up, Chinese society has entered a new stage of development. Chinese and western music cultures collide, integrate and communicate with each other, bringing Chinese piano music into a diversified era. During this period, a large number of piano works of various types of subjects were successively poured in China, like "Colourful Clouds Chasing the Moon" by Wang Jianzhong, "Eight Piano Pieces for Children" by Ding Shande, "Five Yunnan Folk Songs" by Zhu Jianer and "The spring dance" by Sun Yiqiang, etc. Some of these works are created by the musicians themselves, and some are adapted with acoustic music or folk music as the creation background. While actively using innovative techniques and techniques, they also retain the soul of the music culture of the Chinese nation in the works.

Throughout the development of Chinese piano creation, the creation of Chinese piano music can meet the contemporary people's aesthetic value needs when rooted in the root of the Chinese national culture. After more than a century of development, Chinese piano music has gradually matured and improved. Not only a large number of excellent

Chinese piano works are accumulated, but a qualitative leap has also been made in the performance and teaching piano teaching, laying a solid foundation for the further development of China's piano cause.⁵

IV. BRIEF INTRODUCTION OF CHINA'S PIANO EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT

Since ancient times, culture and education are inseparable, so is Chinese piano music culture and Chinese piano education, and the development trend of both is roughly the same.

Since piano was introduced into China in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, piano education gradually emerged. After the opium war, the piano, as an accompaniment instrument, was often used in the choir of Christian churches. Subsequently, the churches teaching piano in Shanghai, Hong Kong and other regions set up. After the failure of the "Hundred Days Reform", changes occurred in Chinese people's thinking, which led to the appearance of many western style schools where "music classes" have been set up gradually. In 1903, piano played an important role in school music class. Supported by the government, officials represented by Zhang Zhidong formulated the "Charter of the Imperial Academy" putting forward a new system of education, where played an important role in music education. In the early 20th century, Liszt's disciple held the first piano solo concert in China's history in Shanghai, which brought the finger technique for systematic learning of piano.⁶

In the 1920s, many music departments established offered piano courses, mainly to train teachers. In 1927, Cai Yuanpei founded the first professional music school in Shanghai — Shanghai Conservatory of Music, which laid a solid foundation for the rapid development of China's piano education. In the 1940s, in order to cultivate more piano talents, many young pianists voluntarily went abroad for further study in order to learn rich teaching experience and performance skills from abroad and promote the development of piano education in China when they come back.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Central Conservatory of Music was established gathering the country's best piano teachers. China's piano education has not deviated from international standards in that the Soviet Union had close contacts with China, often sending education experts to visit the Central Conservatory of Music and Shanghai Conservatory of Music, bringing superb skills and different piano music culture to China which contributed to better quality of piano teaching.

During the Cultural Revolution, piano music was listed as the decadent music of capitalism, and piano education was greatly affected. However, after the reform and opening up, China's piano education has ushered in a new era of vigorous

³ Bai Mo. On the tortuous development period of Chinese piano works' national style [J]. Home Drama, 2016 (17): 57. (in Chinese)

⁴ Mao Cui. The best carrier of inheritance and development of Chinese national music culture [D]. Hunan Normal University, 2011. (in Chinese)

⁵ Mou Yuan. Cultural value orientation of piano course in normal universities [D]. Guangxi Normal University, 2009. (in Chinese)

⁶ Lu Xinxin, Li Huiyuan. On the development history of piano teaching in China [J]. Music Space, 2015 (23): 164-165. (in Chinese)

development. Since they have learned the western music culture, music colleges continue to send students abroad. At the same time, they also introduced piano talents from abroad to absorb the essence of western music culture and integrate it into Chinese music culture. In this way could students be exposed to piano works of diversified styles, and the creators have more creative inspiration.

V. EXPLORING THE MUSIC CULTURE IN THE PIANO MUSIC “THE MOON OVER A FOUNTAIN”

A. *The Creation Origin of “the Moon over a Fountain”*

The original song of “the Moon over a Fountain” is an Erhu solo composed by Abing, a folk artist in his low ebb. Abing was originally named Hua Yanjun, born in Wuxi, Jiangsu. He was influenced by local music, folk orchestra music and religious music since young, and developed devotion to music. By the time he was 16, he had shown great music talent, for being proficient in playing wind instrument, string instruments, and singing. Erhu was one of his favorite instruments. But unfortunately, by the time he turned 30, Abing's situation had changed beyond all expectations. At first, he was poor because of taking drugs. Later, he became blind because of eye diseases. After that, he began to wander in the streets and beg for money. It was under such extreme living conditions that he tasted all the hardships and humiliations of life. Although powerless, he used his outstanding music talent to expose and criticize the darkness of the society at that time and express his love and hate. It was under such a background that “the Moon over a Fountain” came into being. The work was created in the 1940s and was subsequently appreciated by professor Yang Yinliu of the Central Conservatory of Music. Because there was no written record of the score, only through taping the music, could it be handed down and spread. The work is a portrait of Abing's life. Throughout his life, he was in a changing period of Chinese history when various social contradictions were intricate. Internal ethnic contradictions especially the class contradictions were particularly prominent and intense, and people were living in misery, which remains his most representative work. He extracted materials of Jiangsu folk music, and showed the tenacious and stubborn character of people at the bottom of society with his exquisite Erhu playing skills. Nowadays, “the Moon over a Fountain” has already become the most famous Chinese Erhu music popular at home and abroad, and has been adapted into a variety of instrumental music, among which the piano adaptation has the most far-reaching influence.

B. *The Creation Background of the Piano Adaptation “the Moon over a Fountain”*

The piano solo “the Moon over a Fountain” appeared during the Cultural Revolution after the founding of new China. It was adapted and created by Chu Wanghua, a famous contemporary Chinese pianist and composer, whose parents have received higher education, so he had read extensively since childhood. He entered the attached middle school of Central Conservatory of Music to study music

when he was young. Usually, he liked to listen to some songs and accompanied them. As time went by, he developed a strong interest in composition. Later, due to family background and other factors, he failed to enter the composition department as he wished. Instead, he entered the piano department. After entering the department, he worked hard to learn piano performance, laying a solid foundation for his future piano achievements. In 1963, he stayed in school to focus on the compilation and creation of piano works. In 1982, Chu went abroad to study and then got a master's degree in piano and composition.

The emergence of the piano solo “the Moon over a Fountain” coincided with the boom period of piano creation in China. It originated from Erhu music “the Moon over a Fountain” by the folk artist Abing (Hua Yanjun), who integrated his life experience into music and created excellent works with strong personal emotion and strong national music style. The music connotation of the work includes the implicit and introverted expression of emotion as well as the ease of the rhythm. His yearns for the unrestrained and free playing style and artistic characteristics of himself led to the ups and downs in the rhythm of his works.

At that time, the influx of western music made Chinese traditional music works in a precarious situation. In order to prevent traditional Chinese music from being occupied by foreign music elements, a group of composers set off a wave to save Chinese national music in the Chinese music circle by endowing Chinese traditional music with new vitality. Chu Wanghua, Li Yinghai and others was involved in the movement. Starting from traditional music and based on folk materials, they adapted traditional folk music into piano music with western characteristics. That's how the piano music “the Moon over a Fountain” which is played today came into being.

Mr. Chu Wanghua had studied Erhu, and there was a national cultural background and emotional tone of national music hidden in his heart. He knew that “this is the purest combination of eastern and western music” and the adapted music was praised by domestic and overseas experts. “Because of the length of the structure and the depth of the content, I positioned it as a senior level piano solo,” he said.

C. *Features of the Piano Adaptation of “the Moon over a Fountain”*

The original song itself has a euphemism and tenderness of timbre and is highly singable. Through the adaptation of Chu Wanghua, its harmonic texture, melody layout and sound level were integrated perfectly. Abandoning completely deliberate imitation, he further modified and adjusted the original music structure, matched it with full melody lines, lengthened the playing time of the whole work, and highlighted Abing's bumpy life with the main melody.

The appearance of the piano adaptation made “the Moon over a Fountain” one of the most representative works at that time, and also an important content to be learned in the music course now. This traditional music has distinctive characteristics of the time and a long history and cultural

tradition. This piece not only combines the tune and flavor of Erhu music, but also integrates the creation techniques of western music piano. "The Moon over a Fountain" reflects Chu Wanghua's deep understanding of the essence of national music. By preserving the melody theme of the original song, he preserved the national mode. And by drawing on the creation techniques of national musical Instruments and making full use of the excellent western culture, he made the perfect integration of Chinese and western music

D. The Cultural and Artistic Value of the Piano Adaptation "the Moon over a Fountain" in Today's Society

Due to the gradual westernization of music in China, the creation of Chinese piano works has experienced a bumpy process. The music culture in Chinese piano works has also gone through a long and arduous process in its development. No matter from music expressive force or form structure, Chinese piano works imply rich cultural connotation of music and embody extremely high artistic value and cultural value.

1) *Artistic value and status*: The popular piano music "the Moon over a Fountain" features distinctive national character and a long historical and cultural tradition. The whole song basically retains the characteristics of the original tune style, and the harmony texture was greatly enriched by the piano's wide range and numerous parts. The composer skillfully transformed the single melody into a multi-part national music with rich harmony and strong appeal.

The original song shows the implicit and introverted feelings, adding to the tragic atmosphere. The adaptation of the piano music keeps the emotional basis of sadness, elegance and detachment. In the climax of the music, the jump of intensity and timbre is strengthened, and the connection of left-right hand chord and left-handed arpeggio is added. So the grand momentum of the performance is produced, adding people's courage to fight against adversity, representing infinite longing for a better life. When Abing played "the Moon over a Fountain", he did not focus on catharsis of his personal grief and anger. However, his painful experience and inner sadness were inadvertently revealed. The melody is melodious, but the emotion of grief and anger is implicit. But later players more often than not exaggerate the expression of such a sad mood, so that listeners can be moved to tears. Therefore, "the Moon over a Fountain" became the image of suffering and the character of Abing has also been deeply rooted in people's minds.

"The Moon over a Fountain" is one of the best and most representative piano compositions by the famous composer Chu Wanghua. It is a great attempt to express Chinese traditional music with western instrumental music, and also a great innovation to play Chinese traditional music with western instruments. As is known to all, there are essential differences between Erhu and piano. The former is a traditional Chinese folk instrument, while the latter is a western instrument. When they combine with each other, they may collide or merge with each other. The birth of the

piano music "the Moon over a Fountain" is the product of the successful integration of Chinese and western music. Although it is difficult for the piano to show the charm of the Erhu, Mr. Chu Wanghua focuses on exploring the deeper cultural connotation of the original work and better interpreting a brand new Chinese piano music. When adapting "the Moon over a Fountain", he did not simply want to imitate the Erhu timbre with the piano, but added a large number of harmonies to the theme melody of the music, making the original single melody more full and substantial with a special flavour.

In his visit to Central Conservatory of Music, the famous Japanese conductor Seiji Ozawa could not help but burst into tears when he listened to the "the Moon over a Fountain" played by a student, Jiang Jianhua majoring in Erhu and listened to the whole song by kneeling down. It is beyond imagine that a top master could worship an Erhu work, which undoubtedly highlights the importance of "the Moon over a Fountain" in music circle. Subsequently, the American publishing house published records of "the Moon over a Fountain". This shows the far-reaching influence of "the Moon over a Fountain" in the music circle of China and even the world.

2) *Cultural value*: The cultural connotation shown in Chinese piano works is much more than the description of people or things, which is mainly reflected in artistic conception and lasting appeal. The piano music "the Moon over a Fountain" adapted by Chu Wanghua highlights innovations from the respects of artistic conception and lasting appeal.

The "lasting appeal" of the timbres in the piano piece "the Moon over a Fountain" reflects the unique cultural temperament and aesthetic taste of the Chinese people and at the same time reflects the unique thinking characteristics and cultural forms of the Chinese nation. The "lasting appeal" is obtained through the handling of the strength between the arms, the force of the touch of keys, the changes of timbre, the duration of notes and the subtle changes between the strength of notes.

It's known that the Erhu music "the Moon over a Fountain" is not about the scenery of spring water or the scene under the moon. Instead, it uses music to tell Abing's inner sadness and boredom, and to show the darkness of the old society and the misery and desolation of life. Chinese traditional music mainly focuses on expressing feelings through scenery, combining feelings with scenery and blending feelings with the natural setting. Whereas, the piano music "the Moon over a Fountain" highlights both feelings and scenery which add radiance to each other. Starting from spring water and moonlight, it depicts a wonderful landscape where "moon" and "spring" blend with each other. In such artistic conception, the inner world of the characters is highlighted, and the profound cultural connotation and strong sense of the time hidden in music are explored. Emotion is people's subjective reflection of objective existence. Theoretically, people's understanding of the scene also reflects a kind of potential emotion inside people. Just as said in the lines, "Only desolation autumn has been known to

arouse; I would say autumn day is much better than spring morn", depicting the same autumn scenes, different people have different feelings. Therefore, "scenery" is only regarded as a carrier, and the real connotation is feelings. And it is also true of piano art. Chinese piano music sends feelings in the scene and emphasizes the feelings based on the music itself.

The piano music "the Moon over a Fountain" fully explained the method of "absorbing the essence of foreign culture" and "the combination of western and eastern advantages". It is a Chinese piano music with national characteristics and the flavor of the time, which is adapted and recreated based on the local culture and combined with western musical instruments and composition techniques. In the development history of Chinese piano music, this piece of music has the characteristics of popularity and nationality. It touched thousands of listeners with its euphemistic tune and sad mood, and naturally became one of the classical representative works of Chinese national piano music. As an important part of Chinese culture, Chinese music culture reflects the charm of Oriental culture from the side. As a representative work of Chinese piano music, "the Moon over a Fountain" contains many internal factors of Chinese culture. In his creation, Chu Wanghua grafted China's folk music culture on the branches of western Musical Instruments. With the help of the unique skills and techniques of piano, he fully demonstrated the unique cultural artistic conception and charm of traditional Chinese music. The recreation of this work opened a new era for the development of Chinese piano solo, laid a solid foundation for national music to go global, and added a new chapter for Chinese piano music culture.

VI. CONCLUSION

When developing socialist art, China should not only carry forward the fine artistic traditions of its own nation, but also learn from the fine achievements of other civilizations and draw essence from them. Neither the old path of seclusion nor the evil path of right - leaning capitulationism should be followed. The utilization of foreign advantages should be really realized to create literary and artistic works loved by the masses and cultivate talents for the rejuvenation of Chinese culture so as to complete China's transformation from a cultural large nation to a cultural powerful nation. Chinese piano music culture has developed rapidly and slowly, with climax and end in different periods. But it is always based on Chinese national culture. Chinese piano music culture gradually goes international with its unique cultural connotation, creative thinking and theoretical basis.

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