

Evolution of National Style of Chinese Piano Art

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The piano timbre possesses a unique stylistic color, and with the influence of the wave of compositions incorporating national characteristics, many countries around the world actively emphasize the development of music education with national characteristics. Under this trend, how to view the national style of Chinese piano art and how to perform Chinese piano nationalized works well have been constantly studied by composers and performers at the present stage. The paper introduces the various periods of the national style of Chinese piano art. Only by understanding the development of each period can we better promote the development of the national style.

Keywords: Chinese piano, art, nationalization, style, evolution

Introduction

Since the first officially published piano piece in modern times, *March of Peace* (1915, composed by Zhao Yuanren), Chinese piano music has gone through a whole century. With the efforts of generations of composers, it has flourished by drawing nutrients from the long-standing Chinese tradition and the excellent musical cultures of the world. During the century, the national character of Chinese piano music has been basically established, and excellent piano works have been able to make their voices heard frequently in the international arena. However, unlike other areas of composition, Chinese piano music still falls short of the world level. Therefore, it is particularly important to trace the evolution and meaning of Chinese piano music to its roots, and to explore the nationality of Chinese piano works from the aesthetic logic of traditional Chinese music. The paper intends to integrate the history and nationality of Chinese piano music from its development trajectory in the 20th century and the aesthetic logic of Chinese traditional music as the focus of research.

The recent journey of the nationalization of Chinese piano art has been long, complex, and tortuous. For this reason, the paper divides it into five stages, and provides an in-depth analysis and explanation of the historical development of the national style.

Formation Initial Stage of Chinese Piano National Style Works

The development of artistic style has many influential factors. External environmental factors, especially changes in socio-historical events, have an important impact on its development. The May Fourth Movement to the eve of the September 18th Incident opened a new chapter in modern Chinese history. The May Fourth Movement advocated the ideological emancipation, and as a new cultural movement, it not only opened up the minds of the Chinese people, but also contributed to the formation of the national style of Chinese piano works. It can be seen from the historical development that some Chinese composers started to explore and try to compose works in national style with the help of piano.

The first piano piece officially published in China was the piano piece *March of Peace* written by Zhao Yuanren in the first issue of the first volume of *Science*, a magazine founded in the United States in 1915 by Chinese students. The piano piece demonstrates the trend of thought of saving the country during the War of Resistance. Thereafter, he also composed *Oucheng* in 1917 and *Children's March* in 1919, which are still milestones in Chinese piano music art, despite their infantile ideological content.

Four years later, Xiao Youmei released his first large-scale piano work, *New Raiment of Rainbows and Feathers Dance*, on the theme of Chinese national history. The composer studied the work *Song of Raiment of Rainbows and Feathers Dance* by Bai Juyi of the Tang Dynasty, made a bold artistic imagination in response to the description of the song and dance, and blended it into a unique national style artistic composition.

At the same time, the piano accompaniment works are also developing a national style. These piano accompaniments with a new national style are often in harmony with the tone of the art song, and the fusion of styles is further improved. There are many successful examples in this field, for example, the art song *River of No Return* composed by Liao Shangguo in 1920, which is highly compatible with the style of the song of the Song poetry *Nian Nu Jiao Memories of the Past at Red Cliff* written by Su Dongpo. The piano accompaniment of the art songs of the same name at that time, such as Su Dongpo's *Song of Divination*, Xin Qiji's *Song of a Southern Country*, and Bai Juyi's poem *A Flower in the Haze*, also fit very well with the national style of the art songs.

There have been successful attempts at piano accompaniment based on the Chinese folk songs. For example, in *New Poetry Collection*, published in 1928 with lyrics by Liu Dabai and created by Zhao Yuanren, there is an art song called *Cloth Selling*. The national elements are naturally integrated in the piano accompaniment, especially combining the national style of Wuxi dialect, which well captures the national tone of the song and balances the song style and singing style. It is evident that since the birth of Chinese piano music, great importance has been attached to the integration with national aesthetics.

Initial Development Stage of Chinese Piano National Style Works

During the period from the September 18th Incident to the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Chinese nation experienced the historical test and practice of the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression and the War of Liberation, creating many unprecedented miracles. As a result, the national style of Chinese piano works, fittingly, found the time to develop and began to try to metamorphose, gradually progressing to a mature and perfect style. More and more composers, based on the accumulation of their predecessors, have been more than equal to a task with the choices and fusion of stylistic elements, not only having a better grasp of European classical music, but also taking up the responsibility of being experimental pioneers and bold explorers.

In 1934, the famous Russian-American composer and pianist Alexander Tcherepnin came to China. He was obsessed with traditional Chinese folk art, and in particular, he praised highly of the works of Chinese Peking Opera artist Qi Rushan. As a result, he also called himself Qi Erpin, which means Qi Laoer. Upon his arrival in Shanghai, he decided to fund a competition to solicit piano works with Chinese flavour, and the competition also had a mandatory requirement: The composer had to be Chinese. This was the first competition in the history of the Chinese piano, and the term piano works with Chinese flavor were bandied about during the competition. The jury was composed of Qi Erpin, Aksakov, Xiao Youmei, Huang Zi, and Zakharoff. In fact,

the theme of the competition was meant to highlight the Chinese national style. In this competition, He Luting's *The Cowherd's Flute* won the first prize, while there were more second prize winners, including Jiang Dingxian's *Lullaby*, Lao Zhicheng's *Music for Shepherd Children*, Yu Bianmin's *Variations in C Minor*, and Chen Tianhe's *Overture*.

One particular concern is the work known as North and South Shepherd Boy, which is a combination of He Luting's *The Cowherd's Flute* and Lao Zhicheng's *Music for Shepherd Children*, respectively. Qi Erpin immediately recognized these two best national piano styles and brought them to Japan, where they later toured the world to great acclaim and worldwide fame, opening the doors of Chinese national piano works to the world. Nowadays, these two piano works are still regarded as masterpieces and widely circulated in many countries. Especially *The Cowherd's Flute* appears in piano lessons in many countries.

In 1945, Ding Shande successively created the national style piano work *Spring Suite*, which is a musical depiction of four Chinese style paintings, showing the beautiful natural scenery of spring and expressing the leisurely mood of tourists, and it also reflects the excellent Chinese traditional culture and the national characteristics and spirit of harmony between man and nature. The following year, Ding Shande's other work, *Sonata in E Major*, hinted at the situation of the Communist Party and the Kuomintang in the midst of negotiations, reflecting profoundly the uncertainty of the situation, and the large-scale piano suite showed the composer's sensitivity to the current situation. Among the subsequent works, the piano work *Three Overtures* demonstrates the composer's unabashed homesickness for his homeland while in a foreign country, and *Theme Variations of Chinese Folk Songs* directly uses Tibetan folk songs as a classical element, demonstrating the national style of Chinese piano works.

In 1946, the solo piano piece *Xunyang Ancient Road* of Lu Huabai embodied a pure and simple national flavor, which is unique in musical style. In 1948, his solo piano piece *Variations on a Farming Dance* was born. It shows special field work scenes with unique selection of materials, creating the working atmosphere of Chinese farmers.

In 1946, Sangtong composed the piano piece *Faraway Place*, which was written in free atonality and is considered to be the first pioneering work in the history of Chinese piano. "The vocabulary and style of the piece are not different from those of music in the contemporary world, which is not more than 20 or 30 years apart, like the 'new wave' music that emerged in the 1980s, so it can be considered as a technically advanced piano work". The pianist and composer Zhao Xiaosheng, a renowned pianist and composer, said so. Such precedence, of course, still takes into account the realization of a national flavor.

Jiang Wenye also had several noteworthy works during the period as well. In 1940, the piano piece *Sonatina* was born, while three years later, the piano piece *Moonlight Night in Xunyang* was born, which is an adaptation of the ancient Chinese national traditional Pipa song *Moonlight Night in Xunyang*, showing the long history, deep spirits of traditional Chinese national music culture and aesthetic connotation. In 1949, he also composed *Carnival Day*, which demonstrates the joy of the great Chinese people celebrating the birth of the People's Republic of China with very strong national emotions. During this period, composers from different regions composed high-quality works in the folk style. In 1946, Qu Wei composed a piano piece full of Chinese folklore, *Flower Drum*, which was an excellent work during his work at the Music Department of Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts in Yan'an. It melted the folk style and spirits of the times into a melting pot and opened the way to the creation of indigenous styles.

Development in the New Era of Chinese Piano National Style Works

In terms of timeline, the new period of piano national style works began between the founding of the People's Republic of China and the beginning of the Great Cultural Revolution. The works could not develop without the impetus of the background of the times. At that time, the whole country moved forward under the guidance of the general direction of serving the workers, peasants, and soldiers and serving the society, and the culture let a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend, showing an unprecedented presence. Such background of the times laid the foundation for the development of the national style of Chinese piano works. Piano works were not only in the period of quantitative growth, but also in the period of qualitative leap. A large number of composers began to contact the public, and a large number of composers emerged in Guangxi, Xinjiang, Guizhou, Inner Mongolia, and Tibet. They began to collect and organize various folk music, thus playing an unexpected effect; therefore, the theme of this period was to show the national style of the works.

Ding Shande came out on top. He served in the Composition Department of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music during the early days of New China and created a large number of piano works in the national style, notable for the large number, high quality, great achievements, and wide influence. *The First Xinjiang Dance*, with the theme of *Song of the Carriage Driver*, a folk music of Xinjiang Uyghur people, started the Xinjiang Boom of country music in 1950, and more composers joined the creation team subsequently, leading the Xinjiang trend of music creation. In 1953, *Happy Days*, a children's piano piece, consisted of *Going to the Countryside*, *Hide and Seek*, *Butterfly Fluttering*, *Festival Dance*, and *Jump Rope*, reflecting the new atmosphere of children's life and outlook in the new China, with a prominent national style. In 1955, *The Second Xinjiang Dance* was born, with more national characteristics than its predecessors.

Jiang Wenye also made extraordinary achievements during this period. In 1950, he composed a set of piano ensemble *Poems of Rural Seasonal Phenomena*. The piano works are: *Celebrating the Harvest*, *Lanterns at the Lantern Festival*, *Families Wearing New Clothes*, *Spring Times*, *Melons in the Garden*, *Spring Outing*, *Dragon Boat Race in Mourning for Qu Yuan*, *Nocturne in Early Summer*, *Milky Way on Qixi Festival*, *Nocturne in Late Autumn*, *Autumn Fields Intoxicated in Golden Grain*, and *Lion Dance in Spring Festival*. The above 12 pieces were composed from different months of a whole year and different festivals, not only highlighting the vernacular atmosphere, but also reflecting the unique national style, which are excellent works in the national style of Chinese piano works.

Temple Fair composed by Jiang Zuxin in 1955 selected Chinese folk music activities as its material, and there are five parts: *Artiste's Ditty*, *Old Man's Story*, *Couple Dance*, *Sheng Dance*, and *Village Opera*, which constitute the national flavor and regional characteristics. In many places, temple fair is an important event in Chinese folklore. Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism are the three major religions in China, and they have temples throughout the country. Excluding some special folk festival events, it also holds folklore, religion, folk art, folk literature, and comprehensive national culture activities. So the temple itself is profoundly Chinese national culture. *Temple Fair* is a representative of the national style of piano works in the early years of the founding of New China, as it expresses the richness of its national style through artistic approaches. The piano piece *Night of the Torch Festival*, composed by Liao Shengjing in 1954, is about the Torch Festival celebrated by the Bai Nationality people in Yunnan. It shows the scenes of horse-racing, fighting, archery, and wrestling at

the Torch Festival in Yunnan, thus celebrating the unity of all ethnic groups after the founding of New China, in a clear national style.

In 1956, Zhu Jianer composed *Flowing Water* (Overture No. 2), which has a strong national style, with the melody of the Yunnan folk song *Flowing Stream* as musical material.

The tradition of selecting folk songs as the basis for composing has been long-standing. As early as 1952, the composer Sangtong composed *Seven Small Songs on the Theme of Inner Mongolia Folk Songs*, namely *Children's Dance*, *Grassland Love Song*, *Dan Ge*, *Friendship*, *Mourning*, *Dance Song*, and *Homesickness*, by which he won the bronze medal in the 1957 World Youth Music Festival Composers Competition.

In the meantime, Wang Lisan, a composer of national-style piano pieces, also achieved world-renowned success. In 1953, he composed the piano piece *Orchid* based on the Xintianyou folk song *Orchid* from Shaanxi Province. In 1957, he also composed the piano piece *Sonatina*, which is known as the Sonatina of Chinese piano because of its strong national style, including the chapters of *After Fresh Rain*, *Under the Sun*, and *Dance of the Mountain People*. In 1956, Liu Zhuang composed the *Piano Variations* on the theme of Shandong folk songs, with *Good Scenery of the Yimeng Mountains* as the material, presenting the natural beauty of Shandong Province, the simplicity of the region and the national style.

Composed in 1958, the piano suite of Huang Huwei *Paintings of Sichuan* is based on Sichuan folk songs and consists of six pieces: *Echoes of the Empty Valley*, *String Dance*, *Morning Song*, *Lyrical Ditty*, *Spring Suburb of Rongcheng*, and *Night Meeting in Aba*, which are based on the Tibetan folk songs *The Snow on the Mountain Is Like a Flower*, the Tibetan folk song *Yilajiangbaruo* (beloved person), the Tibetan folk dance *String Dance*, the Han folk song *The Great River Rises*, the Sichuan Pujiang folk song *Song of Grass Cutting*, and the Jiangyou folk song *See My Sister Wearing Green Across the River*, reflecting a strong national style. His piano piece *Twelve Sichuan Folk Songs*, composed in 1960, includes *Mountain Song*, *Flower Drum Tune*, *Love Song*, *Seedling Song*, *Embroidering Wallets*, *Counting Toads*, *Weeding Song*, *Huangyang Biantan Ruanliuliu*, *Weeding Seedling Song*, *Kumayeer Kumiaomiao*, *Crying Tune*, and *Work Song for Stone Workers*, showing the characteristics of Sichuan music, which is based on the local Sichuan circulating folk songs, providing support for the development of the artistic style of national flavor. So to shape a strong national style, it is inseparable from the combination with regional characteristics. As Lu Xun said, what has a local color is easy to become global, that is, to be noticed by other countries. It is beneficial to China's activities if it can be seen in the world.

Chen Peixun composed a set of piano pieces with a Cantonese musical character. His piano piece *Selling Groceries*, composed in 1952, is based on the local Cantonese ditty with the same name, *Selling Groceries*, and then incorporates melodic elements from the Cantonese ditty *Dressing Table*. The work *Longing for Love* is based on the Cantonese ditty *Jade Girl Longing for Love* and *Parasitic Herbs*. In 1954, the piano piece *A Pair of Jade Butterfly* was adapted from a Cantonese tune of the same name, while *Thunder in the Dry Season* was based on the Cantonese ditties *Daffodil* and *Liu Qingniang*. All of these works have a strong Cantonese style, thus showing the charm of national art in the regional style.

In 1958, Guo Zhihong composed the piano piece *Xinjiang Dance* with a distinctive and special music style, which is as wonderful as Ding Shande's *First Xinjiang Dance*, and the piece is based on the Xinjiang Kazakh wedding song *Wedding Song* as the musical material. Chu Wanghua collected materials from the Longdong folk song *Our Leader Mao Zedong* of Gansu Province, and composed the piano piece *The Sky of Liberated*

Area. And in 1964, he collected the soundtrack interlude which was composed by Zhu Jianer for the large-scale documentary film *The Great Land Revolution*, and adapted it into solo piano piece *The Day of Emancipation*, which was written in a strong style, with the music of Shandong Lu Opera as the material.

In conclusion, Chinese piano works in this period have achieved unprecedented development in national style.

Tortuous Development of Chinese Piano National Style Works

From May 16, 1966 to early October 1976, the Chinese piano music art underwent a tortuous development, a period of history that people call the Decade of Catastrophe. Under the slogan of overthrowing the feudalism, capitalism, and revisionism, the literary and artistic circles of the country were in a dying state. Likewise, the Chinese piano art was also affected, and was even criticized as an art that has a servile attitude to foreign things.

However, the Chinese piano art did not die out under such background of the times, and it overcame all difficulties and broke through all obstacles, especially the piano works, whose national style developed in twists and turns and achieved surprising artistic achievements.

Let's look at some examples. First of all, there are the piano works based on model opera, such as the piano piece *Blood Spilled to Write Spring and Autumn* adapted from the singing in the Peking Opera *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* by Chu Wanghua, Zhao Xiaosheng, the piano piece *The Red Lantern* adapted from the singing in the Peking Opera *The Red Lantern* by Yin Chengzong and *North Wind Blowing* adapted from the music in modern dance drama *The White Haired Girl*. The most representative one is Du Mingxin's piano suite *The Red Detachment of Women*, which is based on the music of the modern dance drama *The Red Detachment of Women*. The piano suite consists of seven parts, including *The Maiden Army Practices*, *Changqing Sacrifice*, *Qinghua Joins the Army*, *The People and the Army Are One Family*, *Happy Female Soldiers*, *Chiweiduiyuanwu Cundaowu*, and *Marching Forward*. Since then, some composers began to work on traditional folk instrumental music, changing the pieces into folk-style piano works, such as the piano piece *The Moon Over a Fountain* adapted from the famous Erhu piece of the same name by Chu Wanghua, the piano piece *A Phoenix Worshipped by Hundreds of Birds* adapted from the famous Suona piece of the same name and the piano piece *Three Stanzas of Plum Blossoms* adapted from the famous Guqin piece of the same name by Wang Jianzhong, the piano piece *Autumn Moon on Calm Lake* adapted from the famous Cantonese music piece of the same name by Chen Peixun, and the piano piece *Ambush From All Sides* adapted from the famous Pipa piece of the same name by Liu Zhuang, Yin Chengzong, et al.

These adapted piano pieces inherit the style in the original folk instrumental pieces, and add a new flavor to the musical image when transformed into the piano art form.

The constraints of the political situation also forced composers to create new ideas, such as modifying and compiling new piano works according to the original style of the composed songs and folk songs, which have a strong national style, such as the piano piece *Liuyang River* adapted from Hunan folk songs by Wang Jianzhong, the piano pieces *Little Guards of the China South Sea* and *The Red Star Shining Brightly* adapted from the songs with the same names by Chu Wanghua, the piano piece *Go to Beijing With Tea* adapted by Zhao Xiaosheng, *Variations on the Theme From a Folk Song of Northern Shaanxi* and *Taiwan Compatriots, My Flesh and Blood Brother* adapted by Zhou Guangren. These adapted piano works can also serve to promote the national style and show the charm of art.

It is worth mentioning that the composition of Yin Chengzong *The Red Lantern* for piano accompaniment became an instant hit after being performed at the Beijing Cultural Palace. In 1968, the piece was also recognized by Chairman Mao, who labeled it as an innovation making foreign things serve China, and it was also performed at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing for a nationwide live broadcast. The composition of the piece is of contemporary significance, as it gave a new vitality to piano art works that were almost condemned to death at that time, and the whole of China was surrounded by the beautiful sound of the piano, which is a milestone in the history of the Chinese piano. The piece is an innovative fusion of two unrelated musical cultures, the piano and the Peking Opera, retaining the characteristics of percussion music and fusing them with the features of Peking Opera singing. It also shows the broad sound and majestic momentum of the piano, which can be described as a successful attempt in integration of Chinese and western, showing the unique charm of the integration of Chinese and western, and it allows the audience to find resonance in the artistic fusion of the piano and the Peking Opera, adding an extremely special and powerful work to the history of Chinese piano art. At the beginning of the Great Cultural Revolution, the piano accompaniment *The Red Lantern* saved the Chinese piano from the fire and laid a solid foundation for the later piano concerto *Yellow River*, which also unblocked the way for Chinese piano music.

The piano concerto *Yellow River* is also a particularly noteworthy classic, and it is the artistic peak of Chinese piano works of the time. Composed in the spring of 1969 and premiered in Beijing in 1970, *Yellow River* was adapted from the classic vocal work—*Yellow River Cantata*. This piece was composed by a composition team with Yin Chengzong as the leader, including Du Mingxin, Liu Zhuang, Chu Wanghua, Xu Feixing, Sheng Lihong, and Shi Shucheng, et al. It is based on the theme of *Yellow River Cantata* and has a strong national style, allowing the audience to feel the invincible heroic spirit of the Chinese nation and the great patriotic national spirit, especially to express the praise on the mother river of the Chinese nation—The Yellow River and the heroic sons and daughters on both sides of the Yellow River. The piano concerto is still played in many countries around the world and is a classic work of the world piano art.

From various historical signs, it seems that even encountering many setbacks, the Chinese piano national style has managed to develop rapidly during this period, which is satisfactory.

Comprehensive Development Period of Chinese Piano National Style Works

After the tortuous period of the Great Cultural Revolution, the national style of Chinese piano works has entered a period of rapid and comprehensive development. With the advent of reform and opening up, China has entered a new era and opened up a new scene, from Deng Xiaoping Theory, the Important Thought of Three Represents, and Scientific Outlook on Development to the Chinese Dream of achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, national consciousness and spirits have been raised to an unprecedented level, so do the national culture and art. Under the guidance of the spirit of the times, the national style of Chinese piano works has been developed comprehensively, systematically, deeply to a high level, forming an all-round development trend, with board themes, diverse forms, and impressive meanings.

In terms of the development of the works, the piano works of Wang Lisan are preferred because of the unique national style. His piano suite *Paintings of Kaili Higashiyama*, composed in 1979 and published in 1982, has a total of four movements: *Winter Flowers*, *Autumn Clothes of the Forest*, *Lake*, and *Sound of the Wave*, mapping four paintings by the famous contemporary Japanese painter Kaili Higashiyama with music. The composition of Wang Lisan is considered to be a pioneering move to integrate the Japanese Yamato national

style into the Chinese national style, showing the openness and inclusiveness of Chinese national style, and its unique perspective of material selection and diverse characters of thought have won this work a great reputation. The painter Kuiji Higashiyama himself could not help but highly praise after appreciating the piano piece that he believed that the composer had a deep understanding of his paintings that made him very admirable. The famous composer Hirose Kohei, chairman of the Japan Modern Music Association, called it a worldwide masterpiece, and the work was also reviewed by the Hong Kong weekly *Ming Pao* as one of the most wonderful solo piano works written in China in recent decades. The California *Shun Pao* also described the work as one of the rarest pieces of Chinese piano music to date, under the title *The Admirable Wang Lisan*. From the many reviews, it is clear that the most successful aspect of the work is the fusion of cultural diversity and the manifestation of a pluralistic national style.

The piano suite *Memories of Eight Watercolor Paintings* composed by Tan Dun consists of eight pieces with distinctive national, folk, and regional characteristics, four of which are based on Hunan folk songs.

In addition, *Five Yunnan Folk Songs* composed by Wang Jianzhong, *Departure at the Fron* adapted by Li Yinghai, *Mountain Spring* composed by Cui Shiguang, *Xinjiang Dance* composed by Chu Wanghua, *Two Cranes Listening to the Spring* composed by Zhu Hao, *The Combination of Long and Short* composed by Quan Jihao, *Scenes From Xishuangbanna* composed by Xia Liang, *The Rainbow Skirt and Feather Robe* composed by Xie Geng, the piano suite *Mountain Flowers* composed by Jiang Zuxin, the piano concerto *Butterfly Lovers* composed by Chen Gang, *Three Six* composed by Liu Zhuang, *Five Folk Songs of Jiangxi* composed by Dong Weijie, *Yao Yao* composed by Lu Pei, *Reverie* composed by Shi Zhengbo, *Second Xinjiang Dance* composed by Shi Fu, etc., represent the successful works of Chinese piano works in national style. They all blossomed, each of which shows different features.

It can be seen that during this period, the national style of Chinese piano works did present a satisfying picture of development, as if flowers were in full bloom and colorful.

Conclusion

Throughout history, the core and mainstream of Chinese piano art refers to the formation and development of piano works with Chinese national style. The development of piano works simultaneously supports the development of Chinese piano art and is the source of its energy, and the formation and development of the national style of Chinese piano works is inseparable from the development of the spirit of the times. In other words, the formation and development of the national style of Chinese piano works are inseparable from the development of the times, and it should advance with the times and deliver innovation. In order to come out of a successful nationalization road, it is necessary to maintain the organic unity between the national style and the spirit of the times, so as to promote the development of the national style of Chinese piano works.

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