

# Exploring the Connotation of Nationalism and Tragic Content in Chopin's Compositions—Take “*Andante Spianato Et Grand Polonaise Brillante, Op.22*” as an Example

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Polish composer Chopin's “*Andante Spianato Et Grand Polonaise Brillante, Op.22*”, composed in the 19th century, has distinctive features from compositional techniques to acoustic characteristics, and has very unique musical connotations, especially the often-mentioned national and melancholic features in Chopin's music. Based on the research plan, this paper aims at exploring the nationalism and tragic content in Chopin's works and further exploring the potential emotional and spiritual core of Chopin's compositions through the study of his socio-psychological situation and his unique style of compositional techniques.

**Keywords:** Chopin, Grand Polonaise, ethnicity, tragic content

## Introduction

The research of Polish composer Chopin has always been a hot topic in the domestic academic circles. Chopin's musical compositions are abundant in connotations, no matter the technical connotations or emotional connotations of his works, all of them are very characteristic of the composer's individual unique style and artistic expressive power. Among Chopin's compositions, the Polonaise is the genre in which his national consciousness and emotions are most powerfully embodied. Chopin's “*Andante Spianato Et Grand Polonaise Brillante, Op.22*”, composed at the early stage of the Polish War in 1830, is the largest Polonaise in Chopin's musical composition. At the same time, this period is also a major turning period of his gradually mature style of compositions, and this work is very representative of the composer Chopin's life in the piano composition. 19th century, under the climax of the Polish national liberation movement, the people gave a new patriotism and nationalism to this musical genre of the Grand Polonaise, and Chopin elevated this genre from the form to the connotation of an unprecedented height.

Therefore, the author chooses this work as the basis for the discussion of nationalism and tragic content in Chopin's music. Through reviewing the literature, the author finds that the musical connotations embodied in Chopin's “*Andante Spianato Et Grand Polonaise Brillante, Op.22*” are rich and diversified, and that the connotations of ethnicity and tragic content in this work are closely related to the composer's strong sense of nationalism and radical patriotism at that time, which are influenced by the social environment, and are of great

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value in the research. In the author's opinion, the interpretation of an excellent musical work is endless, precisely because excellent works not only belong to the nation, but also the spiritual and cultural wealth of the world's people. In the following, the author will sort out the musical structure of the work, the composer's life experience and psychological process, aiming at interpreting Chopin's music in the national as well as melancholic musical connotation and the composer's imaginative and sentimental spiritual world.

### **The National Emotional Source of The Work**

Ethnicity is often used to express the "national spirit", "national character", "national emotion" and other characteristics of a nation under a common cultural environment, and musical works also have the same characteristics. When we mention Chopin's music, his profound emotion towards his motherland Poland always runs through his works, which is the important kernel of the national character of Chopin's compositions. In the author's opinion, the "national" quality of Chopin's musical works mainly comes from several aspects: firstly, the composer Chopin himself permeated the works with strong national emotions and feelings towards the country and the people, which is inseparable from his life experience, and is often expressed in his works as the pride and heroism of glorifying Poland or the struggle and sadness of the country's unfortunate destiny. Secondly, when Chopin was composing, his works often incorporated the unique musical forms of the Polish nation, such as the Mazurka and the Grand Polonaise. These dance rhythms are not only familiar to the Polish people, but also have a special and typical national image in their minds. In the following, the author will discuss in detail the "national" character of Chopin's musical works.

Chopin's compositional career has always been closely linked to his nation, Poland, and his short life can be divided into two phases. The first half of Chopin's musical composition in Poland, his childhood and adolescence in Warsaw, immersed in a strong cultural atmosphere, although Poland at that time was suffering from a major political blow, but the economy has not been completely disintegrated, the capital city of Warsaw still retains the cultural spirit of the metropolis and the atmosphere of Romanticism, until the outbreak of the Polish National Revolutionary Movement, Chopin left the homeland, to begin his next stage of musical composition. 1830, Chopin began to exile in Paris, France, although in a foreign land drifted to a foreign country to talk about two phases. He often expressed in his music his strong patriotic feelings and his deep longing for his country.

In the composition of the work "*Grand Polonaise Brillante*", which was created in the period when he was about to leave his homeland, Chopin also integrated his deep feelings for the nation. At that time, Chopin was affected by the successive major events in his homeland Poland, as well as the melancholy feelings of living in another country, his thoughts and feelings were undergoing a major transformation, which prompted a significant change in the connotation from the style of his music to the beginning of the obvious change. The style and connotation of his works began to change from the earlier more ornate style to a new solemn and grim style, and the structure and compositional techniques of his works also gradually moved towards maturity.

In the book *The Composition of Chopin*, it is mentioned that "Polish nationalistic music is characterised above all by the combination of vocal and instrumental qualities" (Solovtsev, 2005, p. 11). The Polish folk music of his period, due to the prevalence of Italian opera throughout Europe in the 19th century, was influenced by arioso-style musical melodies, and thus attached importance to the sing-song nature of melodies and the sense of acoustic cantus firmus brought about by the up-and-down rise and fall of musical phrases. When Chopin lived in

Warsaw, the capital of Poland, he often went to the Bolshoi Theatre to listen to operas with his friends and relatives, and the Italian operas at that time had a great influence on the young Chopin. Therefore, in this work, the singing phrases, combined with the aria-like smooth and beautiful characteristics, together with the common dance rhythm of the Polonaise and the strong contrast between the modulations, the melody distinctly highlights the Polish national music qualities.

In evaluating the musical characteristics of this work, which is often regarded as brilliant and magnificent, Liszt once commented on the Grand Polonaise as follows: "Most of the Polonaises are characterised by a martial spirit. When we listen to the Grand Polonaise, it is as if the image of the ancient Poles as depicted in the history of Poland comes before our eyes: they possessed a sturdy and heavy body, an open and flexible mind, a deep and moving piety, and an expansive and chivalrous spirit" (Liszt, 2003, p. 20). Chopin in this "*Grand Polonaise Brillante*", complex and varied rhythms, gorgeous with a sense of rhythmic ornamentation, as well as vivid, jumping "dance" characteristics of this dance, jumping, more reflective of Chopin's sincere feelings about the customs of his homeland, the performance of the heroic and lively Polish dance joyful scene, and at the same time has the enthusiasm of the court army. At the same time, it has the enthusiasm and fearlessness of a court army. Some of Chopin's later musical works, such as "*Polish Heroic Dance in A Major*" depicts the national sentiment with a sense of toughness, perseverance and struggle, reflecting the heroic image of the army warriors facing the national crisis, resisting and sacrificing fearlessly.

### **Concrete Manifestations of National Identity in the Work**

In the composition of the Grand Polonaise, the source of the so-called ethnicity is also closely related to the traditional Polish folk dances, which were first used by Weber in his compositions, while Chopin was a further development of Weber's Polonaise compositions. Chopin did not take the original musical form of the Polish nation as a technical starting point, but rather incorporated folk themes into the modern compositional techniques that were widely popular at the time, and refined and sublimated them, "Chopin himself was not an inventor of melody, but he was as adept at chiselling melodic and harmonic structures as anyone else, cleverly blending expressions so that his music, which is usually simple, exudes a breathtaking quality of expression. that exudes breathtaking expressive power" (Popa, year, pp. 57-64). This Chopin compositional transformation blends modernism and nationalism. The Polish national spirit is vividly illustrated by a rich and colourful harmonic texture, flexible rhythmic patterns, and extensive ornamentation, which is imbued with a medieval chivalric spirit of freedom, piety and reverence, as well as a passionate and fearless masculinity, which is historically associated with the ideological core of 17th-18th century Sarmatianism.

In the *Grand Polonaise Brillante* section, Chopin uses a typical polonaise rhythm pattern in it. This is a three-beat rhythmic pattern that is upbeat, jumpy and choreographed, derived from the old traditional Polish folk dance. In the present piece, the Polonaise rhythm is often placed on the first beat of the bar, and the phrase often ends on the third beat, which makes the music full of dancing and jumping, lively and cheerful, and the large-scale use of it also carries a solemn and majestic temperament. As this kind of Polonaise rhythm has an important symbol in the culture of the Polish nation as a whole, even in the Polish national anthem, this kind of rhythm is also used in large quantities. Chopin, as the most important and greatest composer of Polonaise, evolved and improved the form and rhythm of the Polonaise.



Figure 1. The Polonaise rhythm in this piece 1.

In the middle section of the work, Chopin uses the typical mazurka rhythm, which is also taken directly from the traditional Polish folk dance, the mazurka. This dance is light and free, often performed by rural peasants, and has the most rustic, rural colours. In the mazurka, there is no class gap or inequality, but rather a sense of freedom and idleness. This dance is usually performed by a man and a woman in a group, with a variety of dance forms, and the dance steps are completely dependent on the improvisation of the dancers. The accent of the mazur rhythm is often located in the second beat of each bar or the highest and longest notes in the music, and the mazur rhythm is therefore full of freedom and improvisation.

“Traditional mazurkas are soft and light, with a feminine tendency” (Wang, 2006, pp. 34-35). In the 67th-96th bars of the line part, that is, the end part of the line part, Chopin uses a lot of mazurka rhythms with 3/4 beats, which makes this part calm and soothing, with the countryside’s idleness and softness, and the lively and enthusiastic part of the Magnificent Grand Polonaise, which is full of heroic emotions, forms a strong contrast.

Mazurka rhythm is often used with dotted rhythm and the frequent alternation of long and short notes, which is related to the fast stomping action in the dance, the flexibility of the dotted rhythm and the randomness of the rhythmic accent can well reflect the light, flexible and elegantly lazy style of music.



Figure 2. Mazurka Rhythms in Works 1.

In the section of *Andante Spianato*, the use of mazurka rhythms is mainly in bars 67-96, as the end of the work, contrasting with the arpeggios and monophonic melodic progression of the right and left hands in front of it, which pulls the temperament of the *Andante* section towards the Polish countryside-like idleness and freedom, and finally this Polish style of freedom and calmness of the *Andante* section towards the end. The overall style of this section remains calm and flamboyant, full of the popular, poppy ethnicity of the Polish nation.

### Connotations of Tragic Content in Chopin's Music

According to Yu Runyang, “Chopin’s music, like all European music with profound connotations, contains a deep human meaning. But this human meaning is not something abstract, for Chopin’s music, this meaning is embodied in the sadness, tragedy and even tragedy-drama it contains” (Yu, 2008, pp. 4-9). The “tragic content” permeating Chopin’s works has a great relationship with the social and historical background and his own psychological factors at that time.

Chopin was originally born in a harmonious family with high cultural quality in his youth, and spent a beautiful childhood in his beloved hometown, but in his youth, he suffered from the loss of his family and country and the painful experience of wandering in a foreign land, and the great contrast of this life situation and the blow of economic life made his temperament changed greatly. After his exile in Paris, he was in love with the young and beautiful female writer George Sand for eight years, which brought Chopin a sweet emotional experience at that time, and he had also added the romance of this love to his compositions at that time, but the break-up of this relationship after eight years brought Chopin a heavy psychological and spiritual blow. All these social situations sowed the seeds of “tragic content” in Chopin’s music creation, which became the characteristic of his personal style in his life’s music works.

In the *Andante Spianato Et Grand Polonaise Brillante, Op.22*, the order of the rhythmic patterns can create a sense of intense, tense tragedy-drama, for example, the rhythm of the first eight and then sixteen rhythms and syncopated rhythms, complemented by sudden changes in intensity, where the composer’s depressed and suppressed emotions are released, manifesting a kind of resistance and sadness.



Figure 3. Interaction of specific rhythmic patterns.

In addition, the work’s tense, stimulating harmonic patterns give the music a cathartic, melancholic aura, creating a dramatic mood between change and dissonance, adding a strong emotional resonance to the work.



Figure 4. Tense, exciting and sound-based.

Chopin’s “tragic content” in music creation is closely related to his own emotional connotation. Music, as the externalised embodiment of his ideological and spiritual world, is the carrier of his inner Romantic temperament and aspirations for the ideals of his family and country. In the composition of this “*Andante Spianato Et Grand Polonaise Brillante, Op.22*”, Chopin left his motherland and went to Paris during the turning period of 1830-1831. Chopin learnt of the news of Warsaw Uprising in December 1830, he felt very encouraged living in a foreign country, but at the same time, he was impatient and anxious, because he had no way to be personally involved in such an important struggle in his country. This complex emotion was blended into a single

one, and in the book of Chopin in Sorrow, Chopin wrote a precious letter to his best friend, which profoundly embodied the strong and complex emotion he felt at that time: "If I could, I would stir up all the sounds that reckless, mad, raging feelings prompt to me, so as to express the emotions of those songs sung by Jan's army. .... And I, had it not been for the fact that my father would have been already in great pain, I would have gone back at once. I curse the moment I left home. ...." (Yu, 2008, p. 7). Chopin's anxiety, deep longing for his loved ones, desire to fight with his compatriots in the motherland while he was doing nothing in a foreign country were all mixed together, and at that time, he could only express his feelings in his heart by way of creation, and bring strength to the motherland. In this work, the often strong *ff* markings, together with the large span and fast intervals of the melody, express the composer's complex feelings of indignation, exuberance and mourning.



Figure 5. Powerful mutations and big-span melodies.

In his *Grand Polonaise Brillante*, Chopin has incorporated deeper emotions, such as an idealised and sublime feeling, as the metaphysical quality of the work, so as to sublimate the musical work. His music not only has superior technical support at the writing level, but also has a deep inner connection between the melancholic connotations permeating it and the events the composer experienced at that time, such as the fall of his family and country, and his travelling to a foreign land. At that time, Chopin, perhaps, had not yet experienced the sadness and pain of the romantic emotions like the pain of lost love, and the "*Grand Polonaise Brillante*" is deeply permeated with the sombre undertones of his uninhibited wanderings and his worries about his loved ones and his nation, and his longing for struggle and hope for national victory. There is also a desire for struggle, hope for the country's victory of the exuberant excitement, all of these kinds of works have become the spiritual core of the work, to the Polish nation and the world's peoples left a valuable spiritual connotation.

## Conclusion

Chopin's compositions are a spiritual treasure for Europe and the world at large, and they are characterised by the composer's unique creative style and by emotional connotations that are strongly dependent on his own social and psychological situation. In Chopin's music and its rich and diversified connotations, ethnicity and tragic content are only a part of it, but they are deeply related to the emotional core of his music. Exploring the national and melancholic qualities of Chopin's music not only enables the author to have a further understanding of the deep emotional aesthetic core of Chopin's music, but also lays the foundation for a more comprehensive and detailed study of the composer Chopin in the future, examining Chopin's emotional-psychological situation from the inside, and exploring the musical world of the "Piano Poet" Chopin.

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