

The Experiment Technique Innovation of Tone System in Shanxi Contemporary Orchestral Work

Yanan Wen

Schoof of Music, Shanxi University, Taiyuan, 030006, Shanxi, China

yananwenpiano@sina.com

Abstract. Shanxi Province is located on the Loess Plateau in northern China, the unique geographical environment makes Shanxi nurture a profound and enduring traditional culture and art, such as the folk song and Opera. The rich musical heritage inspires contemporary composers to constantly draw material from it to integrate into their own music creation, especially the distinct folk tunes which are conceived as Mass spiritual creation of past people. While fusing the regional folk tunes into the modern orchestral practice so that the innovative medium fully develops the material without losing the soul of traditional music, composers are experimenting with diverse strategies. Some of them focus on the tones which derives from the representing melodies, resulting an indigenous modern tones system construction. The others dig in the literature, history and other humanistic aspects of Shanxi for sound design. All these practice present multiple interpreting paths.

Keywords: Tone system experiment, experiment technique innovation, Shanxi music, Contemporary orchestral

1 Introduction

Chinese traditional music has always been dominated by linear gestures, and even in multi-voice instrumental ensembles and operas, the melody has consistently played a decisive role. The melody born in the pentatonic mode system has remarkable characteristics in its melodic spin, emotional expression and linguistic factors. At the beginning of 20th century, due to political, current situation and other social factors, the traditional music viewing "harmony" as the core of the aesthetic makes it lack of functional and enlightening spiritual role, was weakened by the introduction of modern "school song", and then was soon completely westernized. Traditional music was thus undermined by Western music systems, notation, and the quantification of musical parameters.[1] This also triggered people's intrinsic activities of protecting, inheriting and innovating the traditional music. Especially after the founding of the People's Republic of China, modern music works integrating the characteristics of traditional music emerged in an endless stream, such as various art song, piano transcription and national orchestral work. In this context, Shanxi music as a precious mineral deposit

of Chinese music database, has been composed by more and more musicians as material, presenting many classic model of Chinese contemporary music works. Hence, this article focuses on the tone system innovation in contemporary Shanxi symphonic works from the perspective of mutual learning of civilization. Based on the empirical sorting, analysis and comparison of representative works composed in recent years, the artistic concept, cultural identity and narrative strategy of the creative group will be compared and explained. The article will further describes the diversified paths and prosperity of the concrete practice of contemporary music nowadays. Moreover, this article will also provide a functional reference for the academic topic of Shanxi contemporary orchestral music and the development of Shanxi music school.

The regional folk music of the Loess Plateau is its unique spiritual and cultural heritage, the composers have presented many excellent models in the practice of integrating western music technique with local folk music, and has already caught many scholars' attention. In this respect, LanWeiwei (2016) and Feng Peng (2022) has analyzed composer Wang Danhong's orchestral suite "Shanxi Impression" written in 2016, the inheritance of Shanxi folk music elements and the innovative use of folk instruments, as well as the artistic quality, material translation and the contribution for orchestra development are fully exemplified. Sun Yiming (2011), Han Jinsong (2020), Zhang Ping (2012), Wang Tianchen (2014) and others focused on the Compoer Zhao Jiping's orchestral work "Qiao Family Courtyard" written in 2007, they deeply discussed the mining, sorting, application, reference of Shanxi folk tones and the blending of western ensemble with Shanxi's traditional musical instruments. Jing Zuoren (2012) and others discussed the orchestral suite "Shanxi Capriccio" composed by Xu Zhenmin in 2011, focusing on how Shanxi folk songs are constructed as metamaterial in a symphonic form.

The embodiment of modernity in Shanxi orchestral works is not only the methodology of Art Music to break through the original context of refining materials, but also the innovative practice of deepening the integration of western modern composing technique with Shanxi music, giving the familiar element with new sensory experience and different cultural meaning to folk materials. Pang Bo (2022), Zhang Zhihai (2016) and others analyzed the symphonic suite "Murals of the Yellow River" written by Wang Xilin in 2013, they fully discussed the tone refining, motivic transformation and abstraction of Shanxi music materials, as well as the integration of western modern technique and the practice of symphonic thinking. Wang Hui (2014), Zhu Jingyan (2016), Li Shuzhen (2019) and others focused on another symphony suite "Taigu Yangge" composed by Wang Xilin in 2010, they analyzed how the core tone series extracted from folk tune elements to shape the thematic image and promote the emotional expression.

These different types of Shanxi orchestral work contains various composing thinking, they represent diversified spiritual expression of composers in different ages within distinct time spans, aesthetic standpoint and sense of value. In this aspect, Gao FeiLi (2021) and others conducted research on the concept of "Shanxi Style" symphony, the associate research situation and the status of "Shanxi Style" symphony, pointing out that the current research of "Shanxi Style" symphony

presents scattered conditions, lacking systematic analysis and a profound overview. Jia Guoping (2019), Cao Fangfang (2021) and others discussed in-depth the new thinking of contemporary composers, artistic ideas and interpretation strategies on the orchestral work "The Landscape of Northern Country" composed by Jia Guoping in 2018.

Through the research reviewed above, currently there are substantial studies on the Shanxi orchestral work in the academic circle, especially the analysis about Shanxi Folk musical material integrating Western modern composing technique which is making a great progress. Among the scholars, there are also professional reviewers and theorists further made comparison and evaluation on the fusions, trying to give some Empirical summary for future reference. However, the innovation of tone system applied in each work is rarely discussed and examined, the tone system determined how the composer would select folk material, design the sound construction and make their aesthetic expression. It is the comprehensive manifestation of differently individual humanistic cultivation and diverse artistic concepts. It is also the internal motivation of the evolution of the continuously emerging work in recent years. Mutual learning among civilizations is the intersection of different people's ideas in time and space, which requires researchers to break through the surface notes to identify and interpret the fusion of Western modern technique with Shanxi traditional music. By examining the tone system innovation, this article will help Shanxi orchestral works continue to forge ahead in new opportunities, constantly embody new connotations and achieve new significance.

2 The Experiment of Tone System Based on Folk Tune

The choice of specific mode and musical language commonly used in a region are deeply influenced by its dialect, geographical environment and folk customs.[2] In Shanxi folk songs, a large proportion of the "Zhi" mode and fourth-fifth intervals of three tone series GAD [0, 2, 7], are its distinctive folk music features than other regions.[3] Please See figure 1,



Fig. 1. a folk song from lishi county in Shanxi

These explicit characteristics of music have become important material for contemporary composers to interpret Shanxi music. The composers have also formed different strategies when integrating these folk tunes. For example, in order to reflect the original flavor of regional music colour, "Shanxi Capriccio" directly applied the original tunes of Shanxi folk songs in many passages. As a comparison, in order to present the modern poetic timbre sound rendering, "The Landscape of Northern Country" quoted two traditional tunes but hidden in the background which giving a defamiliarization effect of the tune. On the other hand, The Murals of the Yellow

River" showing a more compromised approach. Composer Wang Xilin, a native of Jishan County of Shanxi province, has worked and lived in Shanxi for 14 years, the intimate experience of Shanxi folk music makes him pay special attention to the modern transformation of Shanxi music. His treatment of folk tune is not the direct transcription or collage in general meaning, Instead, he conducted a large number of experiments in symphonic fusion of folk music material by applying these rustic tunes as meta-material to construct a modern pitch system, such as taking the characteristic interval, melodic spin, pentatonic modes and other genes as the fragmented motivation to compose a new melody which endows the folk music with novel sensory experience.

In the four-movement symphonic suite "Murals of the Yellow River ", Wang depicted the deep, broad and majestic side of the Yellow River that he felt in Qikou, Shanxi Province, north of the Yellow River, rather than just the image of the Hukou waterfall bursting in common sense. In the first movement "The Rising Sun on the River - Images of Qikou", Wang tries to express the predawn Yellow River, sparkling waves, sunlight flashing on the river, a chapter of descriptive music from cold to warm. In the beginning of exposition, Wang used the Shanxi three tone series [0, 2, 7] to develop a melodious theme while the triadic form of the [0, 2, 7] is also slowly spread out in harmony, which rendering the sonority vertically and horizontally in Shanxi flavor. Please see figure 2:



Fig. 2. 1st theme in Shanxi three-tone series

If taking this theme compare with other same type of theme-based composition, Wang not only gives the theme further extension by projecting the familiar sound memory and cultural identity, but also fully excavates the potential of the three tone series 'pitch system. For instance, Wang manipulate the prototype with transposition, retrograde, inversion, division, amplification and such kinds of deformation techniques to enrich the pitch set content. Moreover, Wang made it become the sound leitmotiv of Shanxi gene based on which to construct the other themes with different temperament. Thus, the leitmotiv organically connects the whole four movements.

Taking the second theme as an illustration (see figure 3), another melodic reconstruction based on the three tone series of Shanxi music. Wang expanded the potential interval relationship of the three tone series by reorganizing the internal interval, such as the entry of continuous fourth interval and the introduction of continuous seconds, result in presenting a huge and with humanistic connotation temperament of a new theme. Compared to the first theme which constructed in long value notes with quicker embellishing figuration around the main note, the presentation of the first theme embodies an improvisational character which just like a folk song's quality. The second theme utilizes more steady rhythm and has a expressive contour up and down, the melodic content is more narrative with a de-

termined quality. Although both themes are rooted in the three tone series [0, 2, 7], composer Wang rearranged the appearance to transform the thematic characters which is a technique practice from the Romantic era in western music. The composer extols the Yellow River with a novel language which originating from folk music yet is not confined to it, it's an aria that the composer perceives based on his time and personal experience.



Fig. 3. second theme in three-tone series

In the symphonic development of the themes, Wang often deploys imitations and modulations among different voices and instrument combinations. Through the superposition of voices and the increasing number of imitation parts, gradually forms the intensive sound "plane" weaving, that is, through the change of sound density to form a "qualitative" conversion. For instance, the passage begins in measure 43 where the theme built in leitmotiv proceeds simultaneously in nine parts, transforming the theme into a chaotic sound "plane". The previously perceptual modality of the foreground material recedes to the dense sound mass layer in the background, which provides a new experimental path for the symphonic and modern pitch system technique based on Shanxi.

Through the above two examples, it can be summarized that the composer extracts the characteristics of folk tunes and reconstructs them by means of modern pitch technique, making the folk idiom become the meta-material for their creation. This kind of practice gives the traditional material new life and soul, and is also a successful case of modern experimental innovation of Shanxi folk tone.

3 The Experiment of Traditional Heterophony Within Western Polyphony

In China, the traditional multi-voice music is often presented in heterophony, for example, the wrapping cavity of the instrumental group to singer in the Chinese traditional opera, and the improvisation of the bass accompanying the top in folk instrumental ensemble.[4] This traditional practice shows that these homogeneous lines blend and complement in different voices, reflecting the ideology and aesthetics of "harmony". Nevertheless, in contemporary symphonic polyphony, conceiving the music material with multiple cultural sounds so that it not only involves the traditional spirit of "harmony", but also roots in the modern acoustics is always a challenging issue which motivate composers to experiment boldly. In this direction, composers present diverse sound design by using multiple polyphonic techniques. In the partial movements of "Shanxi Impression" and "Qiao Family Courtyard" where the melody is relatively important, more traditional techniques such as

thematic construction, modulation in multi-voices, traditional heterophony are used. In "Murals of the Yellow River" and "Taigu Yangge", in order to show the different sides of the musical image and the profound feelings of the composer, more western modern composing techniques are applied, such as the micro-polyphonic, voice-complex and tone cluster, presenting a variety of sound with great sensory stimulation. In the "The Landscape of Northern Country", in order to show the free and flowing image changing, the technique of timbre superimposition is applied without explicit melody layer.

3.1 The Experiment on Micro-polyphony

In the second movement "The New Tune of Blooming-Toccata For Orchestra" of "Murals of the Yellow River", Wang still utilized the Shanxi three tone series [0, 2, 7] as meta-material to trigger a figuration motive. This motive is characterized by the interplay of grouping pulse with the given beat and unfolds in each part simultaneously. Please see figure 4:



Fig. 4. Opening motive of 2nd movement in three-tone series

Each part starts simultaneously and imitates each other right away at intervals with an eighth note. Since originating from the same tone series, the color actually does not change. But due to the compact setting of register, there are a fast sound crossing, delaying and imitating in a narrow range similar to the western micro-polyphony technique. Composer purposely presents the dynamic change of one chord, which is a creative interpretation of the Chinese traditional spirit of "Harmony". Different from the western micro-polyphonic which takes seconds as the basic material, [5] Wang innovate to take the Shanxi three tone series as the raw material which injecting softness and regional color into the sound collision. The originally dissonant modern sound technique is hence experimented with new sensory experience by Wang. Furthermore, the intertwining figuration soon evolves into the background, and another layer of Ligeti's three-part micro-polyphony was built on top simultaneously which involves supposed seconds with [0, 2, 7]. Besides these two sound levels, Wang superposes a contrasting lyrical three-part melodies built in [0, 2, 7] and applies a numerical control rhythm of chordal version of [0, 2, 7] in the base which brings the contingency into this experimenting passage.[6] The four compound layers present a complex and heterogeneous sound aggregate, reflecting Wang's innovative interpretation of Chinese traditional spirit of "harmony".

3.2 A Multi-voice Experiment of "Beat Tightly and Sing Slowly"

"Beat tightly and Sing slowly" is a common way of expression in Chinese folk music and opera. It's a style of performance practice that upon the stable rhythmic pulse, singing freely without the control of strict rhythm. It highlights the contrast and change of rhythm, which is an important means to express emotion.[7] Wang presents this conventional pattern in some symphonic attempt and innovates to integrate this pattern into multi-voice sound complex. See figure 5:

Firstly, the "Sing slow" part here is expressed by the western micropolyphonic technique. Through the subtle orchestration, speed of moving and dynamic changeing, Wang rendered the originally fuzzy "net" sound to the effect of lament. It gives a personalized perceptual definition to the technical rationality of micro-polyphony and the ontology of timbre-acoustics. On the other hand, the striking experiment breaks through the limitation of specific tones in previous tradition and directly graft the expression of mood as the goal abstracting from the tones. This attempt also shows a new method of free lyrical expression on the tight and steady rhythm point of the timpani. Interestingly, the precisely rhythmic Chinese cymbals are simultaneously given the effect of linguistic through the gradual dispersion of the rhythm, highlighted in the overall sound and becoming a free anthropomorphic expression.[8] Moreover, another lyrical melodic layer is also stacked on these three sound layers which makes the music even more complex with extremely sensory stimulation.



Fig. 5. Multi-voice sound complex

This section is so overwhelming for composer Wang experimented the tone construction in three dimensions. The first dimension is about the melody in foreground played by woodwind ensemble. The skeleton of the melody here is around the three tone G, Bflat, C [0, 2, 5], which is derived from the opening three tone series [0, 2, 7] by changing the stepwise motion opposite direction resulting a minor third with perfect fourth, instead of previously perfect fourth with perfect fifth intervals. The interval content is hence renewed with a more expressive color while remain a close connection to the themes throughout the whole piece. The second dimension is about the application of micro-polyphony. This technique is already applied in many other sections, but here it remains its originally vague quality of sound by constructing the lines in pure seconds. The cornet ensemble starts on the same note with similar downward motion in chromatic with subtle rhythmic variations to deliver a blurring sound effect which cancels the sounding of each peculiar notes. Wang makes this layer of sound as the background to settle down the lamenting atmosphere and thick foundation acoustically. The third dimension is about the pulse sensation. The percussion group functions as the steady pulse of the whole passage while inserting an expressive beat sequence, which resulting in a rhythmic counterpoint at the bottom between the Timpani and Chinese percussion. As discussed in part 3, the "beat tight" and "sing slowly" is originally a musical practice applied in Chinese traditional opera that performs between singers with percussion to deliver a intense expression, Wang experimented the vocal effect on the percussion by giving the Chinese percussion here a linguistic quality. As we can see, the Chinese percussion break through its traditional role of accompanying melody with less emotion involved, the distinct rhythm in gradual retard clearly involves more expression without words, giving a despondent effect. The three dimensions of sound construction from different types of technique categories all work together to deliver this extremely vibrating passage.

4 The Experiment of Interpreting Strategy

In a work, the musical substance and sound imagination are the result of the composers' unique thinking, while the creative thinking is the comprehensive manifestation of aesthetic concept and interpreting strategy. The orchestral work "Shanxi Impression" tries to describe the history, culture and soundscape of the Yellow River within nine movements, which is a musical narrative written by the composer after the field investigation, personal experience and contemplation. There are not only the vivid creations of folk music life such as "powerful gongs and drums" and "flowering tune", but also the historical reproduction of "Zou Xi Kou" and "Returning Home". The "Mural of the Yellow River" is the impression of the composer after watching the Yellow River on a seldom toured bank, the impression involved composer's compound emotional expression of Shanxi memory and Shanxi life experience. Hence, the musical strategy is through depicting the Yellow River to express the composer's own thinking. Therefore, this piece is full of abundant ideological and emotional expression.

In contrast, Jia Guo Ping's "The Landscape of Northern Country" takes a different perspective to interpret Shanxi elements. This work was inspired by the "Snow – to the tune of Qin Yuan Chun" written by Mao Zedong in Liu Village, Shilou County, Luliang, Shanxi Province in early 1936. Jia makes full use of the grand and rich sound of orchestral to express the images of "thousands of miles of ice freezing, thousands of miles of snow floating, mountain like silver snake dancing, red makeup wrapped" and others in the poem vividly. As a native of Shanxi who was immersed in Shanxi folk music during childhood, Jia does not use any explicit folk melody, but fully embodies the characteristics of the music to express emotional dynamics through the weaving of timbre and sound. Jia brought the work to the world's top stage and premiered at Carnegie Hall in New York on the evening of October 22,2018.

For the perspective of interpreting strategy, Jia didn't search materials from Shanxi's folk music heritage, but conceived around Shanxi's literature, imagery, history and other humanistic aspects. Jia's conception enriches the approach of theme-based composition, which also represents the Chinese post "new-trend" musicians' effort for deliberating, enterprising and innovating. In the use of related historical music materials, Jia also shows a unique path. Jia chose to defamiliarize the melody quotes from the two classic songs "The Great Wall Ballad" and "The Yellow River Ballad". By the deformation of the original tune such as stretching the notes' value and changing the orchestration, the quotes are melted in the background which creates the tension between the quoted text with the actual sound. As a cultural symbol, the quotes help to shape the image of the title "Up and down the Yellow River", adding a touch of humanity to the construction of timbre-acoustics[9].

5 Discussion

As the previous parts exemplified, the tone system from building to innovating is changing in time, while the Shanxi's musical element either in obvious melodic tune form or in the recessive background is coexisting diversely. This experimenting quality of tone system in different work shows composer' different artistic preference and humanistic cultivation. For the Composer outside Shanxi, such as Wang danhong, Zhao Jiping and Xu Zhenmin, all compose with close reference to the Shanxi's traditional music. They feel the Shanxi's folk idiom more sensitive which is rather different than their own music context. They aim to protect the original flavor in their orchestral work to inherit the musical temperament and spread the music to a wide audience. For the two composers who has close relation with Shanxi's culture, they compose in more avant-garde spirit. Wang xiling prefers experimenting the folk material to newer sound for artistic inspiration, not fully abandoned the melodic shape and familiar soundscape, in a more compromised approach that the Western modern technique is thoroughly fused with Shanxi folk music. By doing so, no previous melody could be recognized in the pieces but no one will feel far away from their own music tradition. Jia prefers a more timbre-sound approach to relate the Shanxi theme, perhaps he is so familiar with Shanxi folk music that he choose completely striking way to interpret his hometown in music.

When we investigate the Chinese contemporary music on Shanxi theme, we couldn't consider the music environment in the worldwide to have a sober cognition on what questions these composer are facing and why they experiment on the tone system to come up with such diverse orchestral works. As we all know, the western music came into none-tonality practice since Schoenberg in early 20th when western classical music came into China as mentioned in the introduction. It means when we carefully study the so called "common practice" system, the real situation in western music world is already very different for breaking up with their own music traditions. During this time, Chinese composers studied, absorbed and finally created their own music language, such as the application of western harmony, polyphony and composing in western genres like chamber music, symphony and art song. This practice of studying and assimilating different civilization to improve our own is Chinese national spirit of "harmony", just like many current Chinese national instruments is from different cultures or countries in ancient times, such as Pipa, Erhu, Yangqin, Suona and son on. The vital core is they could always find their own path, no matter how attractive the masterpiece or the instruments sounds. Until the western modern music came into more Chinese composers' ears after 1949 especially around 1980, the striking sound, technique, multiple music styles and artistic concept no-doubtingly give them a thoroughly shock who master the "common practice" not too long enough. During this time, there are quite a few Chinese composers firstly step ahead to study western modern music, who were called the "New Trend" composers in China, Many of them got success in music world internationally and did great contribution in the development of Chinese contemporary music. What they did is that they experiment with different aspects of Chinese culture with western modern technique. In order to get more inspirations outside their current musical context, they started to dig in Chinese ancient thoughts, mythology, Chinese Language as well as the Chinese traditional music. More importantly, they exploited their own artistic concept while doing so, such as the inspiration from the four tunes of pronunciation in language, traditional spirit of the "harmony" from Confucianism, the view of nature from Taoist philosophy. As a result, their approaches are much richer than early 20th, they have more freedom than their precursors who composing in "common practice". Around the beginning of 21th century, the frequent cultural communication make Chinese composers want to chase their personal goal in the abundant musical resources without the given title "New Trend" or "Post-New Trend". Till now, on one hand they could express themselves by very modern approach to fully explore the sounds without cultural restrict, on the other hand they could also integrate more Chinese traditional music to inherit the music with modern forms. The composers and the pieces analyzed in this article is right in this context. This discussion explained why the composers have different musical strategies and conceive different sound.

6 Conclusion

This article analyzed the experiment technique innovation of tone system in contemporary Shanxi orchestral work, centering on the overall practice of material refining, technique integration, tone system, and strategy in interpretation. This article applies two dimensions during research: horizontal and vertical, macro and micro; on the one hand, to compare and comment on microscopic materials in the tone system construction; On the other hand, to explain the different interpretations of similar subject from the perspective of diachronic. In this way, the multiple aspects of contemporary composers' tone system construction from the perspective of mutual learning between civilizations are summarized, making the works present their unique meaning and the spirit of current times. The key point in this article is to deduce the innovation of tone system obtained from the empirical music analysis, in which different composers utilized and experimented on the Shanxi's music. In the part 2 and part 3, this article focus on explaining the selection of folk material, western modern technique application, image conceiving, emotional expression and other aspects. This article also exemplified various aesthetic concept and narrative strategy behind the tone system construction. The composers in different times and humanistic cultivation make them have differently personalized understanding of "Shanxi", "musical techniques" and "emotional expression". The difficulty lies in the interpretation of the composers' artistic thinking and the extension to the cultural influences behind them. The artist goal in each work is their personalized taste, which not only needs to find the commonality from the individuality and summarize the rules from the commonality, but also explore the driving factors that determine individuality from humanistic cultivation and cultural impact.

From above two cases analyzed in detail, we can make the conclusion that the tone system is influenced by the extraction of Shanxi's elements, composing technique experiment and disparate aesthetics. The main point is that the presentation of the tone construction is the result of composer's thinking and artistic preference. No matter the Shanxi's element in explicit perceptually foreground, or as cultural symbols hidden in the background. The musical expression is deeply rooted in their special experience, thinking and narrative strategy. They offered diverse types of model to relate and interpret the theme of Shanxi. As two artists who deeply rooted in Shanxi's culture, they interpreted Shanxi in different strategies. Through transformation and experiment of Shanxi's music materials, Wang finally presented personal expression containing his profound experience and aesthetic appreciation, making his symphony with Shanxi's flavor become the classic representative of contemporary theme-based composition. Jia's pioneering music concept, international vision and professional discipline, made him choose to create the image of Shanxi from the perspective of humanity. They actually represent the innovative composers who experiments on musical language continuously, demonstrating diverse narrative strategies of Shanxi[10], offering a realistic modeling function for the creation and promotion of Shanxi theme orchestral works.

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