

The Fusion of Chinese and Western Music: Musical Characteristics and Performance Techniques of the Piano Adaptation of "Lan Huahua"

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Abstract: Wang Lisan's piano piece "Lan Huahua" is based on the folk song of northern Shaanxi, an independent and complete piano work with a distinctive Chinese style. This work conveys the theme idea of "Lan Huahua" through the piano, which not only applies the form of folk songs to tell the content of the story and the melodic direction, but also boldly draws on the tonal and harmonic relationship of foreign piano music, breaking through the situation of a single mood of the piano work, making the mood of the piano work richer and more artistic. Piano music works adapted from folk song are the artistic crystallization of Chinese composers in exploring the development of the fusion of Chinese and Western music, which can better highlight the color of traditional Chinese national culture and provide more elements for the development of Chinese piano music.

Keywords: Fusion of Chinese and Western Music; Piano Adaptation of "Lan Huahua"; Musical Characteristics; Performance Technique

1. INTRODUCTION

Northern Shaanxi folk songs are an important part of local folk music culture in Shaanxi Province, with strong local characteristics and rich cultural connotations. Among the many folk songs in China, northern Shaanxi folk songs have gradually formed into a unique folk song genre by virtue of their special geographical environment and humanistic influence. The subject matter of northern Shaanxi folk songs is extremely wide, and superimposed words and picaresque techniques often appear in the lyrics, with high and bright melodies, reflecting the simple and heroic character of the northern Shaanxi people. In recent years, an increasing number of have paid attention to the artistic charm of northern Shaanxi because the continuous dissemination and development of northern Shaanxi folk songs. The lyrics of the songs are related to production, life, love, war and other aspects, reflecting the thoughts, feelings and life experiences of the people in northern Shaanxi, as well as their concerns and thoughts about their hometowns, relatives, beliefs and social changes. As a widely known folk song in northwest China, the free rhythm, wide range and flowing

melody of the "Xin Tian You" reflects the living environment of the people in the region. Therefore, most of the works of "Xin Tian You" have a large span of jumping in, a wide range of tones, and a melodious rhythm. "Lan Huahua" is one of the typical representatives of the Shaanxi folk song "Xin Tian You", which has a high melodiousness and melodiousness, and the lyrics are full of the local life atmosphere of northern Shaanxi, which expresses the unremitting pursuit of happy life and beautiful love by the women in northern Shaanxi, and it has a very high research value (Chen, 2012). By study of northern Shaanxi folk songs, we can gain a deeper understanding of the history, culture and social development of the northern Shaanxi region, explore the expression forms and singing techniques of northern Shaanxi folk songs in folk vocal music, and reveal their unique singing styles and artistic characteristics. This study takes the piano adaptation of the northern Shaanxi folk song "Lan Huahua" as the research object, starts from the generation background of the northern Shaanxi folk song "Lan Huahua", explores the thematic meaning of the song, and analyzes its musical characteristics and performance techniques by combining the research method of music morphology (Li, 2021).

2. BACKGROUND OF THE COMPOSITION OF THE FOLK SONG "LAN HUAHUA"

2.1 Composition of the folk song "Lan Huahua"

The folk song "Lan Huahua" is based on the story of Ji Yanling, a girl from the northern Shaanxi Province. Because the girl is handsome, dexterous, elegant, and often wears blue calico clothing, people call her Lan Huahua. The story is about the Lan Huahua who falls in love with a Red Army soldier but is temporarily separated by the Red Army's eastward march. Under the oppression of her parents' order and the words of a matchmaker, Lan Huahua is forced to marry and suffers a lot. Lan Huahua was persistent and refused to accept her fate. She was depressed all the time and became sick with longing, and died of the illness at the age of 24. After the Red Army soldiers returned to Shanbei, they composed this song "Lan Huahua" by writing a little song about their inner thoughts about Lan Huahua. The folk song "Lan Huahua" not only criticizes the stubborn traditional thinking and ritual problems in the early feudal society; it also glorifies the spirit of women in the new era who rebel against arranged marriages, fall in love freely, and are strong, brave, and steadfast (Y. Li, 2022). Later, with the reform and opening up of new China, people's

spiritual and cultural levels improved, and folk music flourished. In the 1970s and the 1980s, a group of excellent composers that appeared in China, who traveled north and south of the Yangtze River, penetrated deep into the grassroots, went to various places to pick up the wind, collected musical elements, and created many popular folk songs. The folk song "Lan Huahua" is a typical example of these works (Liang, 2023). "Lan Huahua" belongs to the folk songs of northern Shaanxi, the terrain of northern Shaanxi is dominated by the high loess slopes, the ecological environment is poor due to the landscape of thousands of ravines, and the people of northern Shaanxi, under the influence of this living environment and the revolutionary history and culture, have formed the character of simplicity, diligence, courage, optimism, boldness, ruggedness and open-mindedness of the national style, and the sadness and bleakness of the meaning (Zhang). "Lan Huahua" originates from life and is above life; it adds artistic flavor on the basis of real life. The work has many innovative places, which add new era music elements and innovate traditional music. While innovating, it also retains the characteristics of traditional folk music, so it is a vocal work with era, innovation and ethnicity. According to the types of songs, "Lan Huahua" belongs to the tune of "Xin Tian You", which is composed according to one's heart, singing about love, faith, firewood, rice, oil and salt, etc., and is sung in accordance with the sky. On the high slopes of the loess, people singing with indulgence express their inner emotions and express their inner feelings. "Lan Huahua" uses the singing form of "Xin Tian You", in the process of singing, it skillfully uses the conversion of true and false voices and dialect, both dragging the long sound and flinging the sound, and adds some decorative notes in the high register, using this very characteristic singing form, it can better express Lan Huahua's longing for her love brother. The folk song "Lan Huahua" can describe tangible, concrete things that are closely related to people's lives, as well as express abstract, intangible emotions that are deeply felt (Feng, 2013).

2.2 The Significance of the theme of the folk song "Lan Huahua"

There are many works on the theme of "Lan Huahua", including instrumental music, vocal music, literature, film and television. It is inevitable that the artistic works on the theme of "Lan Huahua" are produced. In the field of music, the theme of the story of "Lan Huahua" is selected from the local folk music materials in northern Shaanxi Province, and one of the important reasons why people like the works of "Lan Huahua" is that these "Lan Huahua" themed music works extol the idea of

good love and free love. Love is an unchanging topic in people's lives, and wherever there are people, there will be criticism about love. The reason why the love story of "Lan Huahua" has been passed down to this day is that it is the most sincere and simple emotion from the depth of the heart, which expresses unadorned love through the form of art, so that people can get the resonance of the emotion. The theme of "Lan Huahua" benefits from showing people the revolutionary spirit of the new era of tenacity and the pursuit of freedom. Overall, it has influenced several generations of people from the founding of New China to the 21st century on a moral level, praising the people of the new era for their courage to break through feudalism and their resolute revolutionary spirit to fight against the old society to the end, and the ideas reflected in the song also had a certain impact on the custom of arranged marriages by the parents in the feudal society at that time (Ho, 2011).

3. THE USE OF "LAN HUAHUA" THEME IN THE WORK

3.1 Variations on the theme of "Lan Huahua"

Wang Lisan, a famous composer in China, has made important contributions to the creation and development of modern piano music in China (Zhao, 2022). Mr. Wang adheres to the cultural philosophy of "Having a broad mind and being able to accept and accommodate various things" in his music creation, which enriches his piano music. In the development of Chinese piano music, not only has it integrated the stylistic expression of traditional music, but also draws on the structural forms of Western composition techniques. Therefore, it can still demonstrate the connotation and national significance of traditional Chinese music culture in terms of content expression. In 1953, the piano piece "Lan Huahua" was composed based on a Northern Shaanxi folk song. This was Wang Lisan's first piano work. Although it was based on the folk song "Lan Huahua", the work had already been separated from the folk song in terms of formal expression. Compared with Wang Zhixin's piano accompaniment of "Lan Huahua", Wang Lisan's piano adaptation of "Lan Huahua" was an independent and complete piano work with a distinctive Chinese style, which did not serve to enhance the emotions of the singer; Instead, the theme of "Lan Huahua" is conveyed through the piano, not just by adapting the form of folk songs to tell the story and the melody, but by boldly borrowing from the tonality and harmony of foreign piano music, breaking through the single mood of piano works and making them more

emotional and artistic (Liang, 2023).

3.2 Structure of the piece

Wang Lisan's piano arrangement of "Lan Huahua" is a formal structure that combines the principles of variation and ternary form (Yan, 2020). The exposition consists of a theme and a single variation, totaling 16 measures. The exposition begins in D-scale mode and concludes with the main chord of D-scale mode. Following the exposition is the development section, which includes three variations: the second variation includes multiple transpositions from G-scale mode to D-scale mode and then to F-scale mode; the third variation occurs in bE commercial mode and concludes with the main chord of bE commercial mode; the fourth variation returns to the main theme and transposes to D-scale mode, ending with the dominant chord of D-scale mode. Finally, the recapitulation is an expanded phrase that echoes the theme, transposed to D-scale mode and ending with the main chord of D-scale mode. Composers also have distinct characteristics in their creative processes. First, the exposition presents the theme melody, which describes the simple and beautiful image of the protagonist Lan Huahua. The main plot of the story is reflected in the development section. The theme is reprised, making the entire structure of the piece unified and complete. Second, the composer adopts a technique of variation in the creation of the formal structure. By varying the theme of "Lan Huahua", decorating the theme melody, and using different accompaniment textures and rhythms, the melody becomes rich and diverse, not just a single melodic line. This allows for a more colorful sonic effect, better managing the emotions of the protagonist, and depicting a richer storyline (He, 2020).

3.3 Thematic analysis

The piano piece "Lan Huahua" is created in a form that combines the techniques of character variation and ternary structure principles (J. Chen, 2022). The entire piece is divided into three sections: The first part consists of the theme music and Variation 1 of "Lan Huahua," presenting a lyrical theme. By lengthening the melody line, the fluidity of the music is enhanced. Compared to the theme melody, Variation 1 is eight degrees higher in pitch, with a combination of intervals and chords, resulting in a richer and brighter sound. Through musical expression, it vividly depicts the beautiful, intelligent, and simple image of Lan Huahua as a young girl. The second part is composed of Variations 2 and 3, which belong to the

development section. In this section of the music, the composer extensively expands and enlarges the development of the music to depict Lan Huahua's indignation, panic, and excitement, reflecting her firm belief in resisting the feudal ethics of the old society and pursuing free love with courage and devotion. The third part consists of Variation 4 and the ending section. Variation 4 is a reprise of Variation 1, with a sharp contrast in emotional expression between the two parts, which is the composer's expression of their emotions towards countless women like Lan Huahua who refused to submit to the oppression of feudal ethics. However, Lan Huahua ultimately failed to escape the cruel fate, so the composer used an expanded technique in the ending section by quoting Variation 2 with a sorrowful melody tone, ending the story with a tragic atmosphere. Overall, the theme idea and emotional details are exquisitely integrated into the piano piece "Lan Huahua" (Jin, 2021).

4. MUSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PIANO ADAPTATION OF "LAN HUAHUA"

From the analysis of Mr. Wang Lisan's works, his creative style can be summarized as follows: First, he absorbed elements from both Chinese and Western cultures in a natural and unrestrained manner, imbued with strong ethnic colors. Second, he adapted the original melodies according to the content described in the folk songs, using a unique and distinct variation technique. Third, his creative materials carried profound meanings and characteristics of popularization. His piano piece "Lan Huahua" combines traditional music with modern techniques, using tonalities and harmonies drawn from ethnic music, making it a new Chinese music that combines both national characteristics and contemporary features. This has made a significant contribution to the creation and development of Chinese piano music (Zhang, 2024).

4.1 Typical of the times

The piano works created after the establishment of the People's Republic of China can be summarized in the following characteristics: First, the practice of "using foreign ideas to benefit China" where composers integrate elements of Chinese folk music with Western creative thinking, naturally integrating them into their own creations. Mr. Wang Lisan's adaptation of "Lan Huahua" is an example of this, combining D-scale mode and d minor. Second, the creation of piano pieces with titles. Having

a title can better reflect the artistic conception, which also closely connects piano music with literature. "Lan Huahua" directly uses the song's name as the title, giving performers a sense of familiarity with the piece, making it easier to understand the work. Thirdly, the melodies of the works are mostly based on folk music or national modes, making the created pieces easily popular among the masses. D-scale mode runs throughout "Lan Huahua," with some sections modulating to E-scale and G-scale modes. Finally, in terms of harmony, there is the emergence of stacked harmonies, such as pure fourths and fifths, which give the music a more Chinese flavor.

4.2 Intense northern Shaanxi flavor

"Lan Huahua" was originally a Shaanxi folk song that is deeply rooted in people's hearts. Mr. Wang Lisan directly used its theme music, ensuring that the adapted piano piece "Lan Huahua" still retains the rich flavor of Shaanxi folk songs (Hu, 2021). The genre of "Xin Tian You" represented by works such as "Lan Huahua" is characterized by relaxed rhythm, sonorous sound, and a wide range of melodic fluctuations in some pieces, while others appear relatively calm. Some music is grand and some is gentle and slow, with different ways of expression in different pieces, providing greater flexibility in piano composition. Due to the strong regional characteristics of Shaanxi folk songs, piano works adapted from these songs also possess unique stylistic features. By listening to and playing Mr. Wang's "Lan Huahua" piano work, we can truly feel the honest, hardworking, and optimistic strong demeanor of the people in northern Shaanxi region, as if we can see the historical background of the music and imagine the various scenarios of the story development, and ponder about the society at that time.

4.3 Variable speed and intensity

In Mr. Wang Lisan's piano adaptation of "Lan Huahua," there are many speed, intensity, and expression terms marked, which can help us easier to understand the connotations expressed in Wang Lisan's musical works by analyzing these notations. In the piece, the playing speed for Lento (slow) is marked as 48, Andantino (moderately slow) is 72, Piu mosso (quicker) is 80, Grave (slow and serious) is 48, Agitato (agitatedly) is 126, Appassionato (passionately) is 96, and there are multiple *allegretto* (return to original speed) markings. These terms require speeds ranging from slow to fast, which not only indicate the playing speed but also suggest segmentations of the piece, making the structure of the work clearly presented. Of course,

there are many other musical terms, such as *motto accel* means to play faster and faster, *ff* indicates a strong playing force, *calando* requests to play slower and weaker, *sottovoce* asks to produce a soft and low sound, and these are compared with previous heavy accent markings. All of these allow us to more accurately understand and perform the piece.

4.4 The unique art of harmony

In the creation of the piano piece "Lan Huahua", Mr. Wang Lisan organized the harmonies based on the melody and emotions of the music, with bold and free creativity, enriching the artistic effect of "Lan Huahua" (Cheng, 2020). He employed stacked harmonies, such as pure fourths and fifths, and arranged both major and minor harmonies on the pentatonic melody, seamlessly integrating the ethnic melodies with Western harmonies. He also utilized various altered chords and dissonant chords, such as in measure 35 where he placed the tonic and the altered tonic within the same chord to create a dissonant harmony effect, allowing the characters' emotions in the piece to be effectively expressed.

5. PERFORMANCE TECHNIQUES FOR THE PIANO ADAPTATION OF "LAN HUAHUA"

Mr. Wang's adaptation of the piano piece "Lan Huahua", with 88 bars, is a work of compound three-part structure consisting of three parts, A+B+A1.

5.1 Part A Performance Analysis

The first part of the work, Part A (bars 1-16) (Example 1), consists of themes a (bars 1-8) and a1 (bars 9-16).

Figure 1

From measure 1 to measure 8, it is the theme part a phrase of the piece. The main melody of the song "Lan Huahua" is used directly as the beginning, so that the melody flows out slowly like a song, depicting the image of a kind and beautiful Shaanbei girl. 1-2 bars are accompanied by a diatonic harmony in the left hand, and in the right hand there is a single tone plus a chord labeled with a *pp* notation on the last two beats, played at a slow tempo (*Lento*), which needs to be controlled by the strength of the hand, the speed of the keys is slow, and the touch of the keys is soft. Play the first two bars with only one pedal, so as to keep the harmony of the music coherent. Be sure to pay attention to the phrasing and the wrist breathing movements.

A1 is bars 9-16, the second appearance of the theme melody, and it is distinguished from the theme music by the changes in tempo, melody and accompaniment weave. The tempo is played with a *cadenza* (*Andantino*), whereas the theme just starts to come out with a slow *cadenza* (*Lento*), so it is played a little faster at the moment.

In the right hand, we can see that the melody in bars 11-12 is an octave higher than in bars 3-4, playing the small-word group II and small-word group III. The melody in bars 13-16 is composed of octave chords, and the right hand chords should be played in a neat and coherent manner, with the melodic notes standing out, and the intensity of the playing should be varied from gradually stronger to gradually weaker.

The accompaniment of the left hand is a syncopated rhythm in the lower part of bars 9-12, so pay attention to the elasticity of the left hand to make the music more flowing. 13-16 bars are short arpeggios composed of sixteenth notes, so pay attention to the evenness and smoothness of the sound. The first variation makes the piece sound richer and more rhythmic than the theme section.

5.2 Part B Performance Analysis

The B part of the piece (bars 17-61) (Example 2), in contrast to the previous A part, with great changes in tempo and mood, is the composer's portrayal of the inner workings of the character of Lan Huahua, showing Lan Huahua's resistance to the feudal forces and her steadfastness and indomitable character.

Figure 2

Measures 17-34 are the b section of the B part, depicting the panic and anxiety of Lan Huahua when she is forced to marry the landlord. In bars 17-24, the melody appears in the left hand, with the right hand as the accompaniment pattern, playing to emphasize the melody in the left hand voice, the right hand breaks down the chords lightly, and at the same time, pay attention to the right hand doubling of the melody tone slightly prominent. bars 25-34 is back to the right hand's high octave of the main melody, with the left hand as the accompaniment. This section of music feels like different voices are taking turns singing the song. So when playing this part of the music, you must be clear about which hand the main theme is in, and at the same time, the sixteenth notes and syncopated rhythms of the accompaniment part should be played clearly and accurately, and the sound should not overpower the main theme, but not lose the fluidity. It is even more important to strictly regulate yourself in terms of fingering.

The tempo is noticeably faster in comparison to the A section, with measure 33 suggesting that we are playing extremely fast (*mottoaccel*), and then slowing down again in measure 34, in preparation for the music to come. Measures 35-43 are the connecting part of the middle section, which uses many dissonant chords and a combination of many strength notations to add to the tragic color of the piece. It reflects Lan Huahua's loneliness and helplessness, and her sadness at being forced by the feudal forces. In bars 35-36, the lowest note of the piece, E-flat, is marked *ff*, and the right hand has an accent mark, which emphasizes the pain and anger of Lan Huahua. When playing, the hand should be prepared in advance, and the lower keys should be neatly placed in the bottom, using the arm strength to play the effect of strong notes. In bars 42-43, the sound is weakened, but there is a syncopated rhythm in the left hand accompaniment, which is accelerated when playing, in order to connect with the latter part. The music at this point is the calm before the storm, hinting at the more intense music that will follow as the orchids fight back valiantly. The piece (bars 44-61) is the c section of the B part, which is the climax of the whole piece. The tempo and mood are very different from the previous ones, showing Lan Huahua's rebellion and accusation against the feudal forces. The tempo (*Agitato*) is required to be the fastest, with 16 consecutive bars of sixteenth notes in the right hand and a series of diatonic scales, mainly downward, in the left hand in this part. Playing this part requires good hand fundamentals. At the beginning, you should practice slowly and play the sixteenth notes clearly and accurately, and then gradually go back to the original speed. This part requires: first, fast touching of the keys by the fingers, both down and away from the keys, and agile alternation of the fingers to avoid "sticking" of the sound. Second, the low fingers should be played close to the keys to produce a clear, grainy sound with minimal finger movement. The double stops in the lower register can be skipped, making them short and bouncy, and emphasizing the restlessness of the melody. 44-49 bars feature alternating two- and three-measure changes, which make the music sound tense and full of tension. The sustain pedal can be dotted on the first note of each beat to add to the effect of the tone expressed by the music. In this passage, the player must be full of emotion, and bring out the strong and brave, indomitable spirit of resistance and struggle of Lan Huahua.

5.3 Part A1 Performance Analysis

Measures 62-88 are the A1 part (Example 3) of the recapitulation section

of the whole piece of "Lan Huahua", the third appearance of the theme melody, which extends the theme. The speed of this part is marked as 96 per minute, which is slightly faster than the speed of part A. The emotion expressed should be fuller, higher and louder than the previous theme music, which will sublimate the character image of Lan Huahua's courage to fight against feudalism. In playing to grasp the speed and rhythm accuracy, and requires playing octave chords stronger, finger keys, the use of the torso and the body to push the power to the bottom of the key, play a full sound effect, in order to highlight the sublimation of the theme of music. Measures 75-88 are the short coda section, which is similar to measures 35-43 of part B. The coda section is a short coda section. There are hints of musical terms in this section almost every bar, so keep an eye out for them when playing. The main continuity that starts at bar 82 continues until the end, allowing the music to become quiet and fade out, and it is important to pay attention to the changes in 2/4 and 5/8 beats when playing, and to have good control of the hand strength, both gently and to make the music coherent. This part shows that Lan Huahua ultimately failed to escape the bondage and oppression of the feudal forces, and the story ends in tragedy, which is sad.



Figure 3

6. THE VALUE OF THE FOLK SONG "LAN HUAHUA" IN PIANO ADAPTATIONS

In the development of China's piano music, if we want to incorporate more ethnic elements, we must seek creative inspiration from traditional culture. Composer Wang Lisan himself has a strong interest in China's traditional culture, and has always insisted on researching traditional culture for many years. The accumulation of previous research is also fully reflected in his piano music composition practice, he is good at drawing nutrition from traditional music works. With his many years of experience in piano music composition, he incorporates traditional folk song elements into it, and at the same time, while utilizing them, he also has an in-depth understanding of the historical background and geographic and humanistic environment of the creation of different ethnic musical works, and creates them by combining with his own understanding and feelings of traditional folk songs. By drawing on the theme of northern Shaanxi folk song "Lan Huahua", he created a piano adaptation, which played a driving role in the development of piano music in China, including the use of Western musical compositional institutions that also inspired many Chinese composers. Once the piece was released, it received a lot of attention. The piano adaptation enhances the power of the original folk song's expression. The original folk song tells the story of "Lan Huahua" through melodic narrative expression. The piano piece adds harmonic expression on the basis of the original theme melody, and integrates the treatment of compositional structure and tonality to make the presentation of the work with nationalized emotion, which not only enhances the composer's creative height, but also produces an important role in promoting the creation of piano adaptations in China afterward (C. Chen, 2022). Melody is the most expressive element in a musical work. China's folk music works all have clear melodic lines and distinctive modes, and different musical works also have distinctive character traits. Composers have directly quoted traditional folk tunes in their compositions, so that the piano music shows a distinctive national style, integrating the traditional music elements of China into western compositional techniques, broadening the expression of national music, and presenting the characteristics of national music with a simple structure and clear melodic lines (X. Li, 2022). When composers choose the materials of traditional music works, they also need to fully understand the creative background, artistic connotation and emotional thoughts of the original works, so that they can more accurately express them in their subsequent compositions, so that China's traditional

music elements and national culture elements can be better integrated into the creation of piano music works, and so that they can better promote the prosperity of China's piano music.

7. CONCLUSION

Piano music works adapted from folk songs are the artistic crystallization of Chinese composers in exploring the fusion of Chinese and Western music, which can better highlight the color of China's traditional national culture, and at the same time provide more elements for the development of China's piano music. The author recognizes the traditional Chinese music culture and appreciates the significance of the development of contemporary society and culture by playing the piano works adapted from folk songs. The piano works created from folk music also provide many practical directions for later composers to refer to in their creations, such as the use of harmony and the specific embodiment of ethnic elements, etc., which will greatly help the inheritance and development of traditional music culture while promoting the development of China's piano music.

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