

## **Ethnicity and Periodicity: On the Creative Characteristics of Shi Guangnan's Vocal Works**

Wenbo Xu

Conservatory of Music, Qingdao University, Qingdao, Shandong Province, 266071,  
China  
xuwenbo@qdu.edu.cn

Yijin Yang\*

School of Music and Dance, Heze University, Shandong Province, 274015, China  
Yangyijin1226@hotmail.com

**Abstract:** This article focuses on the vocal works of Shi Guangnan, a famous modern Chinese composer, which not only enjoy a high reputation at home and abroad, but also demonstrate their unique ethnicity and epochal character. The article firstly discusses the background of Shi Guangnan's art songs, and then analyzes the cultural connotation and the spirit of the times in these works. This analysis not only reveals the profound thoughts and techniques in Shi Guangnan's music creation, but also provides valuable references for future music creation.

**Keywords:** Ethnicity, Epoch, Vocal Works.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Shi Guangnan, a contemporary composer who is widely known in the Chinese music industry, has created numerous insightful art songs during his career, which have spanned generations of favorites and are still widely sung today (Huang, 2022; Zhang, 2022; S. Zhang, 2023). His masterpieces, such as "Toast Song", "The Grapes of Turpan are Ripe" and "On the Fields of Hope", are popular among the public (Lu, 2021; Xun, 2020; Zhao & Chen, 2019). Shi Guangnan was not only a musician, he also possessed a strong sense of responsibility for the times and national pride, having traveled across the mountains and rivers of the motherland and penetrated into the rural fields to draw inspiration from them. In his life and practice, Shi Guangnan has gained an in-depth understanding of local music, ethnic minority music, and traditional music from various regions of China. Not only does he have a detailed knowledge of this music, but he has also actively studied various forms of performance, such as various types of local operas and the art of rapping. By deeply exploring and interpreting the cultural information behind these musical works, Shi Guangnan has systematically developed his exposition and at the same time enhanced his profound understanding of

Chinese folk music (Zhang, 2021). Shi Guangnan is an outstanding composer in the Chinese music industry, who has extensive involvement and unique insights in the fields of vocal and instrumental music (Zhang & Xin, 2021). His works perfectly blend vocal and instrumental music together, showing the beauty of melody and expressing the connotation of music in depth. In terms of tune design, Shi Guangnan's works are full of rich realism, deeply reflecting the background of the times and the people's voices, while not lacking in the spirit of idealism. His art song style is unique, carrying the deep heritage of traditional music, but also skillfully integrating elements of modern music, making his works not only have distinctive national characteristics, but also rich in a strong sense of the times. Shi Guangnan understands the dual law of artistic creation: on the one hand, one must be deeply rooted in the soil of national culture and retain the essence of traditional music; on the other hand, one must keep abreast of the times and constantly innovate. This philosophy has led to his works being favored by both traditional music lovers and the younger generation. Shi Guangnan's art song compositions show obvious characteristics: elegant but not vulgar, with artistic depth and easy to sing, reaching the realm of elegance and popularity (Yimin, 2021). His vocal works have a strong ethnicity and epochal character, and these two creative features make his works not only a great success in art, but also a far-reaching influence on the subsequent song creation.

## 2. THE BACKGROUND OF SHI GUANGNAN'S ART SONG CREATION

Shi Guangnan's journey of art song creation is closely related to his short but brilliant life experience. Since his early childhood, he had an inseparable relationship with music, which originated from his father's love for opera, which made him immerse himself in all kinds of records since he was a child, and gradually comprehend the essence of them, which had a profound influence on his later art song compositions. During his school years, he was not satisfied with the ethnic and folk music courses offered by his school, and actively utilized his spare time to participate in various opera performances, thus greatly expanding his musical horizons. Shi Guangnan's enthusiasm for composition remained undiminished under the challenges of the Cultural Revolution, and he bravely composed a series of lyrical songs with strong ethnic characteristics, bringing a touch of freshness to the Cultural Revolution

at the time. His musical output reached a high point during this period and included such notable works as "Toast Song", "The Grapes of Turpan are Ripe" and "On the Fields of Hope". He especially demonstrated the positive attempts of national operas in exploring the path of national characteristics in the operas "The Hurt Locker" and "Qu Yuan". Shi Guangnan's great achievement stems from his creative concept of delving into ethnic folk music, his persistent pursuit of national style, and his creative fusion of western compositional techniques, which has opened up a new path of creative work incorporating national characteristics. Shi Guangnan's art song compositions are known for their unique themes, closely following the pulse of the times, reflecting the mainstream thinking of the times, and causing widespread resonance. The vitality, influence and infectiousness of his works stem from the choice of themes that keep pace with the times. His songs are not only expressions of emotions, but also side-by-side demonstrations of deep love for the motherland and hometown, and longing for peace, friendship and unification of the motherland. In addition, his works also include songs expressing profound emotions such as mother's love, further enriching the connotation and breadth of art songs. Shi Guangnan's art song compositions show the richness and variety of his inner world, as well as his diversity in style, creative fields and genres. This diversity makes his works adaptable to various singing styles, fully demonstrating his unique talent in music creation. He transcends the limitations of other composers, and his songs cover a wide range of themes and genres, demonstrating exceptional artistic mastery. This ability is not only reflected in his technique, but also in his deep understanding and expression of emotions and themes, making his works unique in the music world (Liu, 2021; Niu, 2022; X. Wang, 2021).

### 3. THE ETHNICITY OF SHI GUANGNAN'S VOCAL WORKS

#### 3.1 The Use of Ethnicized Harmonies

Shi Guangnan skillfully incorporated rich ethnic harmonies into his vocal piano accompaniments when composing them. This innovation not only greatly enriches the expression of ethnic vocal music, but also opens up new ways for the popularization and development of the piano in China. The chords used in piano accompaniment, although not having specific ethnic characteristics per se, show different colors of harmony and dissonance in the sense of listening (Jin, 2020). Through his

outstanding musical talent, Shi Guangnan utilized chords to the utmost, giving them profound national emotions and unique flavors. His skillful use of various chords, from augmented triads to diminished seventh chords, from ascending to descending, not only enriched the harmonic effect, but also injected distinctive national characteristics into the musical works. The combination and variation of these chords create a variety of listening experiences, from harmony and tranquility to tension and conflict, demonstrating the broad expressive power and profound emotions of music. Shi Guangnan's unique harmonic treatment not only adds to the national character of the work, but also injects new vitality and life into the piano, a Western instrument, in the Chinese music scene. His compositional approach opened up a whole new creative path for subsequent musicians. With his outstanding musical talent and keen insight into the trends of the times, Shi Guangnan successfully fused Western instruments with Chinese folk music, which not only promoted the innovative development of folk vocal music, but also laid a solid foundation for the internationalization of Chinese music (Lei, 2021). In the first bar of "On the Fields of Hope", the composer creatively adds a diatonic "5" to the genitive chord in the key of B-flat, so that the chord shows a unique national harmonic style. This diatonic, together with the root note "4" and the third note "6", form a "4, 5, 6" scale progression, which enhances the acoustic effect of the subsequent broken chords, making them more smooth and natural. The sound effect of the subsequent broken chords is enhanced, making them smoother and more natural. In Chinese pentatonic modes, the intervallic combination of a major second and a pure fourth is a fundamental element, and this combination is audibly represented by the pure fourth above the root note being reinforced by the major second above it. Conversely, the presence of the major second adds to the dynamism of the musical progression, as shown in Figure 1. In bars 1 and 4 of the score example, the right hand part skillfully utilizes a combination of intervals in the major second and pure fourth. When playing these parts, special attention needs to be paid to the syncopation in the middle voice lasting for one beat, while the skips at the end of each measure should be played shorter and lighter to maintain a steady sense of rhythm. Composer Shi Guangnan frequently uses chords stacked in fourths and fifths in his compositions. These chords are constructed by superimposing intervals of fourths and fifths, either by overlapping single intervals or by mixing and superimposing different intervals. Chords structured in fourths or fifths that are not superimposed more than four times are usually able to remain within the

pentatonic range of the same palatial system (Yin, 2019). In the song "On the Fields of Hope", the right hand part of the piano accompaniment specifically utilizes chords with a fourth and fifth structure in measures 5, 7, and 8. When playing these chords, the fingertips need to be firmly supported to ensure accuracy and stability. Emphasize the chords to avoid overloading them and to follow the emotional expression of the phrases. The liner notes create an empty and spontaneous mood, the piano accompaniment enhances the ethnic harmonic characteristics, and the sound of praise is melodious and earthy, adding a majestic atmosphere (Zhang, 2019).



**Figure 1:** Example of the Score "On the Fields of Hope".

### 3.2 Ethnic Tonal Compositions

Shi Guangnan actively explored and accumulated experience in the composition of folk music (Yuan & Yang, 2023). Recognizing the limitations of the pentatonic scale, he began to try to introduce different partials and variations to enrich and expand the tonal patterns of folk music. Through unremitting exploration and practice, he created unique folk scales such as Yan music, Ya music and Qing music, which greatly enriched the range of expression of Chinese folk music and opened up a wider creative space for composers. These innovative scales not only diversified the musical styles, but also had a far-reaching impact on the tonal and compositional expressions of music. Shi Guangnan's musical innovations not only inherited the essence of traditional music, but also skillfully incorporated modern musical language into it, creating an innovative way of expansion. On the basis of retaining the characteristics

of national music, his works introduce modern musical elements, showing deep cultural connotations without lacking in modern flavor. This creative approach, which combines traditional and modern, oriental and western musical elements, explores a new direction for the development of Chinese folk music (R. Zhang, 2023). Shi Guangnan is known for his tonal versatility and colorful musical expression in his piano accompaniment compositions, and his large-scale vocal suite *Poems of the Revolutionary Martyrs* is a clear example of this. The first chapter of this work is an adaptation of Revolutionary Martyr Deng Zhongxia's "Crossing the Dongting", and in the opening section of the movement Shi Guangnan adopts a two-part compositional technique: the A section is characterized by a shift in scale from the d-feather to the a-feather, and in the subsequent B section there is a shift to a sharply depressing rhythm. The rapid transitions between these two sections effectively create a sense of jumping and movement in the piece. Shi Guangnan's musical compositions immerse the listener in the emotional flow of the movement, feeling the return of the music from a whisper to the d-flat scale. The progression of his music is unique in that it does not follow linear laws, but unfolds through splits and loops, causing the harmonic parts to accelerate rapidly, full of tension and dynamism. When Shi Guangnan composes, he pays attention to the overall structure and integrity of the piece, but also fully expresses his personal emotions, perfectly combining the rigor and beauty of the music, which makes people appreciate the endless charm of the music (Wang, 2017).

### 3.3 Application of Ethnic Rhythms

Shi Guangnan did not simply copy ethnic elements when using them, but took an innovative approach. His musical works are not only melodiously pleasing and stylistically diverse, but also deeply express patriotism. Shi Guangnan often incorporates into his works such elements as the contrapuntal rhythms of the Xinjiang Uyghur people, the rhythms of the tambourine drums, and the rhythms of the Xinjiang sabayi. These rhythms full of ethnic characteristics not only give the songs a unique style, but also help singers better understand and master the ethnic style, deeply comprehend the composer's creative intent, and fully grasp the style of the work (Shao, 2019). "The Grapes of Turpan are Ripe" is a treasure of national style created by Shi Guangnan, which is well loved and widely sung. The piece condenses the local colors of Xinjiang, showing deep emotions and strong expressiveness, evoking a deep sense of memory. Shi Guangnan skillfully incorporates two unique

Uyghur rhythms into the overture, laying the foundation for the theme and making the melody full of ethnic characteristics (Guo, 2019). Shi Guangnan demonstrated his deep understanding of Uyghur musical traditions in "The Grapes of Turpan are Ripe". The introductory part skillfully uses triplets to show the fluency and spontaneous style of the music, which is a unique expression technique in Uyghur music. The accented chords on the first beat contrast sharply with the main theme, creating a unique musical effect. Then the twelve-stringed, three-stringed and six-stringed chords are incorporated to enhance the flow of the music, making it sound both coherent and harmonious. This technique shows Shi Guangnan's great skill in music composition, and adds endless charm to this favorite national style song. In Shi Guangnan's "The Grapes of Turpan are Ripe", the listener seems to be able to feel the unique scenery of Xinjiang. The music incorporates elements of Xinjiang's sky, grapes and Tianshan Mountains in a perfect blend. Shi Guangnan is good at simulating orchestral effects with the piano and using unique Uyghur rhythms, such as the left-hand pirouette accompaniment adding a strong ethnic flavor (Hu, 2020).

affectionately, beautifully

1. Crimean ginseng      military degree      Go to spring      to the edge      post,      Before leaving

2. Number of vineyards      autumn wind      rain,      Xiaomiaoer

**Figure 2:** Example of the Score "The Grapes of Turpan are Ripe"

The mezzo-soprano Guan Mucun was made famous by "Playing the tambourine and singing", whose tune is cheerful and based on the rhythm of Xinjiang's tambourine. Shi Guangnan's piano accompaniment for the song boldly absorbed elements of Xinjiang Uyghur folk songs and dances, especially the incorporation of sabay rhythms throughout the song, demonstrating Shi Guangnan's deep understanding of the elements of folk music and making the work novel and unique in style (Gong, 2018).



**Figure 3:** Example of the Score "Playing the Tambourine and Singing"

### 3.4 Imitation of the Sounds of Ethnic Instruments

Shi Guangnan has made remarkable achievements in music creation after more than thirty years of exploration. His works are a unique blend of Eastern and Western musical elements, reflecting the charm of Chinese music and the essence of Western music. His works contain a great deal of unexplored valuable values, demonstrating a vivid practice of cultural fusion and highlighting his unique musical talent. One of Shi Guangnan's major innovations in his compositions is the use of the piano to mimic Chinese folk instruments, passing on and developing traditional music. His compositions delve into the lifestyles of specific eras, regions and ethnic groups and elevate them into art forms. Through music, he deeply understands and expresses the spiritual world of a particular people. Shi Guangnan's musical compositions demonstrate his profound musical attainments and become a spiritual legacy that inspires and influences people's lives and ways of thinking. Shi Guangnan's musical works are the artistic transformation and expression of his personal experiences and feelings, incorporating social changes, cultural shocks and personal emotional experiences. Through his unique artistic approach, he allows listeners to enjoy the beauty while thinking about life, culture and art. Shi Guangnan's music is like a bridge connecting tradition and modernity, East and West, individual and society, realizing resonance and development in harmony and innovation (Z. Wang, 2021a). Many of Shi Guangnan's songs are deeply influenced by the music of ethnic minorities, and he has successfully combined ethnic characteristics with the spirit of the times to create musical works with ethnic flavor and characteristics of the times. For example, "The Grapes of Turpan are Ripe" (Fig. 4), with its soft and gentle melody portraying the image of a gentle and simple young girl, utilizes a

large number of Uyghur musical elements and incorporates Western compositional techniques, adding a deeper and more lingering and touching quality than the traditional Xinjiang folk songs. Shi Guangnan's "The Grapes of Turpan are Ripe" employs folk dance music techniques and incorporates Uyghur hand drum rhythms to present an ode to love that transcends the boundaries of ethnicity, country and region. He skillfully utilizes the structure of alternating rhythms between the first and last sixteen stanzas, giving full play to the breadth and flexibility of piano music, and integrating ethnic musical characteristics into the work. Shi Guangnan's innovative approach demonstrates extraordinary talent and creative spirit in music creation, using the piano to imitate ethnic instruments and bringing a unique style to more works.



**Figure 4:** Example of the Score "The Grapes of Turpan are Ripe"

#### 4. THE PERIODICITY OF SHI GUANGNAN'S VOCAL WORKS

##### 4.1 Reflecting the Background of the Times

Shi Guangnan's musical works are not only a display of artistic creation, but also a record of and response to the spirit of the times. His works are deeply rooted in the background of the times, following the pace of the times, using music as a medium to vividly depict the notes and melodies of the times. In the early days of reform and opening up, Chinese society was

filled with the longing and pursuit of a better life. Shi Guangnan captured the pulse of the era with his unique artistic insight, and created a series of musical works that were both hopeful and passionate. These works not only reflect the people's yearning for a better life, but also become a powerful force that inspires people to join in the trend of national construction and social development. With the rapid development of modernization, environmental issues have gradually become the focus of common concern of the whole society. Against this background, Shi Guangnan has not avoided this key issue, but has instead used music as a medium to make a strong appeal for environmental concern and protection of the earth. His works not only incorporate his deep concern for the natural environment, but also express his firm expectation for sustainable development, conveying to the society the important message of green environmental protection. Shi Guangnan is able to grasp the pulse of the times so closely because he has always stood at the forefront of the times, paying keen attention to the changes and development of society. He is not only an outstanding musician, but also a witness and active participant of the times. His works not only reflect a deep understanding of the times, but also a positive echo and expectation of the spirit of the times. Through his music, we can feel the pulse of the times and comprehend the progress and development of society (Wang, 2020).

#### 4.2 Showing the Spirit of the Times

Shi Guangnan's music is not only an outstanding creation of musical art, but also a profound interpretation of the spirit of the times. His works fully demonstrate the spirit of the times, which is positive, enterprising and truth-seeking, and become a great motivation for people to go forward. Shi Guangnan's musical language is full of passion and highly infectious. Through the skillful use of melodies, rhythms, harmonies and other musical elements, he perfectly integrates emotions and thoughts, forming a unique and fascinating musical charm. This charm not only attracts listeners deeply, but also inspires people's inner resonance and strength. In Shi Guangnan's works, we can feel his love for life and his vision for the future. His music melodies are full of optimism and upward movement, letting people feel the beauty of life and the light of hope. At the same time, his works are also full of the pursuit of ideals and the exploration of truth, leading people to continuous thinking and self-improvement (Z. Wang, 2021b). Shi Guangnan's musical works not only reflect the context of the times, but also lead the spirit of the times. His music has become a force to be reckoned with, inspiring people to pursue higher goals. When facing

difficulties and challenges in life, Shi Guangnan's music gives people courage and confidence, making them believe that no matter what kind of difficulties they face, they can overcome them with perseverance and realize their dreams and ideals. Shi Guangnan's music profoundly reflects his understanding and expression of the spirit of the times. He not only focuses on the aesthetic value of music itself, but also on how music can serve as a powerful social and cultural force that influences and inspires people's lives and thoughts. His musical works became the symbols of an era, representing the spiritual outlook and cultural pursuit of that era. Through his music, we can not only enjoy the beautiful melodies, but also feel the pulse and heartbeat of an era.

#### 4.3 Integration of Diversified Musical Elements

Shi Guangnan's music creation transcends the limitations of domestic music tradition, and he deeply understands that music is a borderless art form. Therefore, he constantly explores and absorbs elements of Western music and skillfully blends them with the characteristics of Eastern music. This cross-cultural musical fusion not only gives his works a strong national character, but also expands his international vision, making an important contribution to the world's musical and cultural exchanges. Shi Guangnan has an in-depth understanding and research of Western music, and he is good at combining Western compositional techniques and expressive methods with the traditions of Eastern music. In his compositions, he not only borrowed the harmony, rhythm and structure of Western music, but also dug deep into the essence of his own national music to preserve its unique flavor. This combination of Eastern and Western musical elements not only greatly enriches his musical expression, but also enables his works to reach a wider audience and spread globally. In his specific musical compositions, Shi Guangnan has demonstrated great skill in skillfully blending eastern and western musical elements. Utilizing modern compositional techniques and arranging techniques, he combines a variety of ethnic instruments and sound textures to create a unique musical style. This style combines the softness and elegance of Eastern music with the passion and intensity of Western music, bringing listeners a whole new musical experience. The innovation of this musical style not only demonstrates his deep understanding of the art of music, but also reflects his pursuit of cultural fusion. Through this cultural fusion, Shi Guangnan's musical works demonstrate a unique aesthetic vision and artistic expression. His music is not only an auditory enjoyment, but also a cultural and emotional exchange. Through his music, listeners can feel the

intertwining and dialog of different cultures, and thus understand and appreciate more deeply the beauty of music in different cultural contexts.

#### 4.4 Innovative Development

Shi Guangnan's philosophy of music creation is to inherit the tradition and be innovative at the same time. He knows that traditional music is the treasure of Chinese culture and the foundation of the development of national music, so he always insists on in-depth study and research of traditional music. But at the same time, he also realizes that traditional music needs to keep pace with the times and adapt to the needs and aesthetic concepts of modern society. Therefore, he constantly tries to innovate on the basis of tradition, so that his works have both national characteristics and new ideas. In terms of musical form, Shi Guangnan is good at utilizing modern composing techniques and arranging methods, combining elements of traditional music to create novel musical forms. He utilizes western compositional techniques such as polyphonic harmony and polyphony, and combines them with ethnic instruments and vocal cadences, so that his works have a rich sense of musical hierarchy while maintaining the flavor of ethnic music. At the same time, he also incorporates elements of modern electronic music and jazz into his works, injecting new vitality into traditional music. In lyrics creation, Shi Guangnan also focuses on innovation. He is good at combining the mood of traditional poems with modern language styles to create lyrics that are both poetic and contemporary. His lyrics have the flavor of classical literature and the imagery and language style of modern poetry, making his works both deep and easy to sing. Shi Guangnan's innovation is not only reflected in the music form and lyrics creation, but also in his creative thinking and concept. He always keeps an open mind, tries new musical elements and expression methods, breaks through himself, and pursues a higher artistic realm. This innovative spirit makes his works always keep freshness and vitality, and makes a positive contribution to the inheritance and development of folk music.

### 5. CONCLUSION

Shi Guangnan's art song compositions are not only deeply rooted in rich cultural soil, but also excellently demonstrate the ethnicity and epochal nature of Chinese vocal works. He skilfully uses nationalized harmonies, tonal patterns, rhythms and imitates the sounds of national

instruments to create musical works with profound national characteristics. At the same time, Shi Guangnan's vocal works follow the pulse of the times, reflect the background of the times, show the spirit of the times, and realize innovative development on the basis of integrating diversified musical elements. These achievements have made his works an important symbol of the development of modern music in China, demonstrating an excellent example of the fusion of Chinese and Western music.

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