

THE REVEAL OF CHINESE MUSICAL TECHNIQUE “RUN QIANG” IN BRIGHT SHENG’S PIANO WORKS “MY SONG” AND “MY OTHER SONG”

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SUMMARY. Bright Sheng (born. 1955), one of the representatives of the “New Wave” composers, has been trying to make a breakthrough in the fusion of Chinese and Western cultures in his works due to his childhood experiences and absorption of both Chinese and Western educational systems. “My Song” (1989) and “My Other Song” (2007) are two works for solo piano composed 18 years apart, in which the traditional Chinese instrumental or vocal technique “Run Qiang”润腔 is involved in both works. This paper emphasizes Sheng’s compositional style and the concept of “fusion” of Chinese and Western cultures in his musical works by analyzing how the elements of traditional Chinese “Run Qiang” in these two works that are fused with Western compositional techniques.

Keywords: Bright Sheng, “My Song”, “My Other Song”, “Run Qiang”

Introduction

The years between 1966 and 1976 were the “dark moments” of China’s Cultural Revolution for all types of scholars and cultures³. During this time, Mao Zedong’s wife, Jiang Qing (1915-1991), placed a high value on Western classical genres and encouraged composers to write in these styles.

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³ *Everett, Yayoi Uno, and Frederick Lau, eds. Locating East Asia in Western Art Music. Wesleyan University Press, 2004.*



All scholars, musicians and performers were forced to leave their schools and travel to rural and remote areas, where they were forced to stop composing or turn to folk culture as a source of musical inspiration⁴. At the age of 15, Sheng was sent to Qinghai, a Chinese province bordering Tibet, where he spent seven years working as a pianist and percussionist at the provincial music and dance theater and conducting extensive “ethnomusicological” fieldwork, which involved collecting, analyzing, and researching local folk music, as well as understanding it in its socio-cultural context⁵. In the course of his seven years of research, he not only learned about the local musical genre of “Hua’er”花儿, but was also attracted to the musical elements of neighboring regions, including the delicate Sichuan folk songs of the southern region, the bold and heroic singing of “Xintianyou”信天游 in northern Shaanxi, and the long-lasting singing or playing techniques of the plateau region.

After the end of the Cultural Revolution, ethnic style artworks provided new ideas for Chinese piano compositions. This has led to the creation of a large number of vocal or instrumental works whose inspiration is no longer limited to traditional compositional forms, but encompasses the different histories, customs, personalities and cultural traditions of the 56 ethnic groups in China. Examples included Chou’s work *Metaphors* (1960) interprets the hexagram lines of the I Ching as scales and creates eight tonal patterns based on the structure of the hexagram lines⁶; Deng and Loo explored “Yin and Yang” concept in Bright Sheng’s “My Other Song”⁷. As a result, composers began to integrate musical elements from other forms of music, such as vocal music, when composing instrumental works. Especially for these “New Wave” composers who emerged after the Cultural Revolution, their works no longer encompassed a single culture or category and began to experiment with new innovations. These “New Wave” composers in the true sense of the word were first introduced by the Chinese musicologist Wang An-Guo in his article, which implied that Chinese composers had real creative freedom and their own distinctive styles, rather than composing for revolutionary struggle and nationalism⁸. They were free to compose their favorite music and skillfully

⁴ Chang, Peter M. *Chou Wen-chung and his music: a musical and biographical profile of cultural synthesis*. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1995.

⁵ Sheng, Bright, Yolanda Kondonassis, and Jahja Ling. *Never far away*. Telarc, 2009.

⁶ Arlin, Mary I., and Mark A. Radice, eds. *Poly-cultural Synthesis in the Music of Chou Wen-chung*. London and New York: Routledge, 2018.

⁷ Deng, Qian. Loo, Fung Chiat. *The Concept of Yin and Yang in Bright Sheng’s “My Other Song.”* International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences, 12(10), 2022, pp. 303 – 315.

⁸ Wang, Anguo. *A Survey of the ‘New Wave’ Composition in Our Country*. Musicology in China (1), 1986, pp. 4-15.

incorporated elements of traditional Chinese music into Western compositional techniques, such as dance melodies of China’s ethnic minorities, using traditional Chinese vocal skills in combination with Western compositional techniques. Bright Sheng, as an important representative of the “New Wave” composers, has collected a lot of inspirations through various field trips, resulting in his works reflecting the freedom of composition and cross-cultural fusion. For example, Deng and Loo exposed the exotic rhythms and modulations in his work “Dance Capriccio”⁹.

The two pieces selected for this study, “My Song” (1989) and “My Other Song” (2007), are both manifestations of Sheng’s work on the fusion of the traditional Chinese element “Run Qiang” with Western compositional techniques. Both “My Song” and “My Other Song” are manifestations of Sheng’s ideas involving the traditional Chinese ornament “Run Qiang” in Western compositional techniques. “My Song” is based on the composer’s memories of his youthful life in Qinghai; “My Other Song” is the composer’s reinterpretation of Chinese folk melodies and characteristics after a lapse of 18 years. The process of applying “Run Qiang” in both the vocal and instrumental parts is presented, with the use of different ornaments in different types of vibrato and other forms of expression mentioned earlier.

The Background and Application of “Run Qiang”

“Run Qiang” 润腔, is a set of unique techniques for beautifying, decorating and embellishing the singing voice formed during the long-term development of Chinese folk vocal art. “Run” means embellish and “Qiang” means accent of speech (singing). It is an ornamented singing or instrumental performance technique based on a basic tone with a decorative and colorful arrangement, through the change of the tempo, pitch, intensity, speed and other musical elements around the basic melody¹⁰. Its basic characters are framed and relatively fixed, but at the same time provides a great degree of flexibility, improvisation and creativity for singers and players¹¹. From a macroscopic point of view, these techniques of embellishment can be broadly categorized into “continuous tone embellishment, broken tone embellishment,

⁹ Deng, Qian. Loo, Fung Chiat. *Revealing The Exotic Rhythm and Tonality in Bright Sheng’s Dance Capriccio*. *Harmonia: Journal of Arts Research and Education*, 23(2), 2023, pp. 264-278

¹⁰ Yan, Tiejun. *A study on the singing of modern Ker Er Qin short tune folk songs*. 近现代科尔沁短调民歌演唱研究, 2017, Northeast Normal University in China, PhD dissertation.

¹¹ Xu, Jiangzhen. *An Introduction to Run Cavity in Chinese Folk Songs* 汉族民歌润腔概论 [M]. Beijing: People’s Music Publishing House, 2009.

decorative tone embellishment, tone change embellishment, sound modeling embellishment, intensity change embellishment, rhythmic beat embellishment, and so on". From a microscopic point of view, embellishment techniques mainly include appoggiatura, mordent, fluttering, sliding, whooshing, straight tone, dulcet tone, and sound-blocking embellishment. Therefore, from the point of expression, "Run Qiang" are divided into vocal and instrumental types, and the common techniques for vocal embellishments include melodic, velocity, intensity, etc. Vocal "Run Qiang" can be classified into three types, i.e., embellishment "Run Qiang", timbre "Run Qiang", and dynamic "Run Qiang". Instrumental "Run Qiang" is a form of expression based on the form of singing, and can also be interpreted as a type of timbral "Run Qiang". This is usually used in *erhu*, *banhu*, *zheng* and other ethnic instruments. The melodic "Run Qiang" mainly consists of added appoggiatura, mordent, vibrato and glissando effects to a particular lyric or tone. The breath is relaxed when singing the vibrato, which is achieved by the vibration of the vocal cords, throat, chin and palate. While instrumental "Run Qiang" perform though high technical skill and dexterity in performance to achieve these goals. Therefore, to maximize the visualization of "Run Qiang", the melodic embellishment is one of main and important expression in instrumental "Run Qiang". It mainly consists of added appoggiatura, mordent, vibrato and glissando effects to a particular tone or pitch relationship.

Similarly, the 'Run Qiang' is comparable with appoggiatura in Western music. There are three types of appoggiaturas in "Run Qiang": the first is a single appoggiatura in which a single tone is added before or after the ornamented tone. It is very common in Chinese folk songs, for example, the northern Shaanxi folk song "Thirty Mile Shop" 三十里铺 tends to use the appoggiatura after the main pitch by sliding up a fourths for lengthening voice intonation (E.g. 1), and the fourths are more likely to emphasize the flavor of the Loess Plateau region¹²; In the second line of the Hebei folk song "Embroidered Lantern" 绣灯笼 (E.g. 2), the proceeding single appoggiatura slides down to combine the end of tone with the maintain of the nasals to form a short cadence¹³.

¹² Zhang, Zhibin. *A General Introduction to Folk Songs of Northern Shaanxi* 陕北民歌通论 [M]. Beijing: China Social Science Press, 2010.

¹³ Ju, Peng. *The use and performance of the rundown technique - Taking the northern Shaanxi folk song "Thirty Mile Shop" as an example*. 润腔技巧的运用及表现 ——以陕北民歌《三十里铺》为例. 2019, Hebei Normal University, China, Doctoral thesis.

E.g. 1



The use of back single appoggiatura in “Thirty Mile Shop”

E.g. 2



The use of front single appoggiatura in “Embroidered Lantern”

The second type of appoggiatura might be grouped in two or three notes which are noted as compound appoggiatura. The application of compound appoggiatura is also commonly used in other folk song, for example, the lyrics “Hao” and “Bai” of the “Pastoral Song” 牧歌 (an Eastern Mongolian folk song) are sung G-A-B and G-A-G in appoggiatura¹⁴ (E.g. 3), which is treated by the vocalist with the common technique of the melodic “Run Qiang”. The melodic line could be lengthened through vibrato and increase the length between phrases, to portray a sense of beauty on the grassland¹⁵.

E.g. 3

3 5-55 | $\frac{5b}{\epsilon} 7$ 6-67 | 3 5-56 | $\frac{5b}{\epsilon} 5$ --- | 5 1-12 |

羊群 好象是斑斑的白 撒在草

3 2.23 2 | 6 1.1 2123 | 1--0 ||

原上多么爱煞人!

Compound appoggiatura

The Eastern Mongolian folk song, “Pastoral Song”

¹⁴ Lan, Xiaowei. *A study on the Run Qiang technique of ethnic vocal music and its symbolic specification* 民族声乐润腔技法及其符号规范研究. 2001, Henan University, China, Doctoral thesis.

¹⁵ Han, Mulan. *A Study of the Run Qiang of Ker Er Qin Folk Songs* 科尔沁民歌润腔的研究. 2011, Inner Mongolia Normal University, China, Doctoral thesis.

The third form is usually expressed as special forms as mordents or trills, etc., and the mordent is similar to the shorter version of vibrato, but it is shorter and faster. In the Mongolian folk song “Walk on this high Xinganling”, the mordent is used from slow to fast, with the last note lengthening¹⁶. In addition to the favored use of mordents or trills in singing, these types of ornamental sounds also appear more frequently in the performance of the Chinese folk instrument, the *Banhu*. “Trilling the bow” is also a kind of bowing technique of Huqin played with the right hand, and it is mostly used at the tip of the bow, with the bow held in the right hand and quickly trilling to make an even sound, which is indicated by “彡” in the notation¹⁷. This technique is used in many local styles of huqin music. For example, in the beginning of the bar 152 of the Shaanxi style Banhu song “The Red Army Brother is Back 红军哥哥回来了”, a large number of “彡” symbols are used to represent that the notes are trilling the bow in a way to imitate the effect of the human voice¹⁸ (E.g. 4).

E.g. 4



“Trilling the bow”, the bowing technique of Huqin in the Shaanxi style Banhu song “The Red Army Brother is Back “, bar 152-155.

“Run Qiang” in “My Song”

As an art song developed orally by the people reflecting their social life, folk songs are sung with a lot of local cultural characteristics and preferences. Among Chinese folk songs, “Qin Qiang”秦腔 and “Xintianyou”信天游, which are Chinese traditional folk singing methods, are representative of the “Run Qiang” style of singing. Since the melodic of Sichuan folk song “The Sun Comes Out with Joy” 太阳出来喜洋洋 and the Northern Shaanxi folk song

¹⁶ Yan, Tiejun. 2017.

¹⁷ Sun, Yi. The art of embellishment in Shaanxi style huqin tunes 陕西风格胡琴曲的润腔艺术. *Journal of the Central Conservatory of Music* (Issue 4), No. 4, 2000, pp. 48-53.

¹⁸ Sun, Yi. 2000.

"Thirty Miles Shop" 三十里铺 which are based on "Qin Qiang" 秦腔 and "Xintianyou" 信天游, these two folk songs can be taken as representative of "Run Qiang". When Sheng collected the melodic materials of these two folk songs in Qinghai and Shaanxi in his "Silk Road Trip", he is inspired and incorporated them into the second and fourth movements of "My Song," respectively. As a result, "My Song" contains different songs from the north and south of China and are presented in different ways. The mordent in 'My song' serves to decorate the repeated Shang tone, as this was sung in 'The sun comes out with joy' (Blue box in E.g. 5). This mordent not only increase the flexibility of the melody, but also reflect the lively and cheerful mood of the music at the same time. In the same movement of 'My Song', Sheng have marked a lot of application by a mordent on the same pitch construction and same rhythm pattern in "My Song". As in E.g. 5 and E.g. 6, the mordent appears in note D, the latter half of the second beat, which forms C-D-E-D (mordent)-C-A; Sheng use this - Eb-F-G-F (mordent)-Eb-C in 'My song'. Similarly appear in bars 3 and 8 (E.g. 6), the two mordents in the melody occur in the second half of the bar and are ornamented with Shang notes; other examples including the third bar in the Eb system in which F tone is a Shang tone; the eighth bar in the Db system where the E tone is a Shang tone. The application of these mordents is also similar to the bow trilling of the Banhu mentioned earlier, in which Sheng applied this version when he imitates the Sichuan folk song "The Sun Comes Out with Joy" in "My Song", C system-D tone (Shang tone) and Eb system-F tone (Shang tone) are marked with a mordent by Sheng (E.g. 5 and E.g. 6 in blue box).

E.g. 5

太阳出来喜洋洋

2/4

中速 愉快、活泼地 四川民歌

(2̣ 3̣ 2̣ ị | 2̣ 0̣ 3̣ 0̣ | ị 2̣ 3̣ 2̣ | 0̣ ị 6̣ 0̣ | 5̣ 6̣ ị 6̣ |

2̣ 2̣ 6̣ 0̣ | 5̣ 0̣ 6̣ 0̣ | ị 6̣ 2̣ ị | 0̣ 6̣ 2̣ | 2̣ 2̣ 2̣ 2̣ 2̣ |

2̣ 2̣ 2̣ 2̣ 2̣ 2̣ | 2̣ 2̣ 2̣ 2̣ 2̣ 2̣ | 2̣ 2̣ 2̣ 2̣ 2̣) | 2̣ 3̣ 2̣ ị | 2̣ 3̣ 0̣ |

1. 太阳 出来 (罗 儿)
2. 手 里 拿 把 (罗 儿)

ị 2̣ 3̣ 2̣ | 2̣ ị 6̣ 0̣ |

喜 洋 洋 (歌 郎 罗), 挑 起 扁 担 (郎 郎 扯 光 扯)
开 山 斧 (歌 郎 罗), 不 拍 虎 豹 (郎 郎 扯 光 扯)

5̣ 6̣ ị 6̣ | 2̣ 2̣ 6̣ | 5̣ 6̣ 0̣ |

QIAN DENG, FUNG CHIAT LOO

渐强

1 6 2 1 | 1 6 2 | 2 - | 2 - :|| (2 3 2 1 | 2 0 3 0 |

上山 岗(歌 罗 罗)。
和豺 狼(歌 罗 罗)。

1 2 3 2 | 0 1 6 0 | 5 6 1 6 | 2 2 6 0 | 5 0 6 0 |

1 6 2 1 | 0 6 2 | 2 2 3 2 2 | 2 2 3 2 2 | 2 2 3 2 2 |

2 2 3 2 2) || 2 3 2 1 | 2 3 0 | **1 2 3 2 | 2 1 6 0 |**

3. 悬崖陡坎 (罗 儿) 不 稀 罕(哎 郎 罗),
3. 走了一山 (罗 儿) 又 一 山(哎 郎 罗),
4. 只要 我们 (罗 儿) 多 勤 快(哎 郎 罗),

5 6 1 6 | 2 2 6 | 5 6 0 | 1 6 2 1 | 1 6 2 | 2 - | 2 - :||

唱起歌 儿 (郎 郎 扯 光 扯) 忙 砍 柴(歌 郎 罗)
这山去了 (郎 郎 扯 光 扯) 那 山 来(歌 郎 罗)
不 愁 吃 来 (郎 郎 扯 光 扯) 不 愁 穿(歌 郎 罗)

Sichuan Folk Song "The Sun Comes Out with Joy"

E.g. 6

* 实际演奏效果为

B. Sheng, My Song, 2nd movement, bb. 3-8

Sheng once claimed that singing music full of drama is divided into two categories: happy and sad tunes¹⁹. While the preceding melodic ornamentation (mordents) may be intended to express a happy emotion (Sichuan song “The Sun Comes Out with Joy”), the special form of ornamentation and the pitch set $D_b-E_b-G_b-A_b$ [0, 2, 5, 7] in ‘My song’ by using dissonant pitch relationships such as diatonic intervals may represent sadness²⁰. As E.g. 7 showed, Sheng marked “**” some minor second ornaments, which need to simulate a glissando presentation. He required performers that the timing of the short notes needs to be played with precision, and the long notes should be slightly stronger than the short ones. In the first movement of “My Song”, there are a lot of pitch set $D_b-E_b-G_b-A_b$ [0, 2, 5, 7] formed by using dissonant pitch relationships such as diatonic intervals and special notations in Sheng’s style, which differ from the traditional embellishment approach (E.g. 7 and E.g. 8). Sheng marked a “*” in the first chord in the First Movement of “My Song” as E.g. 7 illustrated, instructing the performer needs to silently depress the sostenuto pedal of the grand piano until the end of the movement. This effect explores space and atmosphere by adjusting pitch distances, as shown in E.g. 8, when he uses a continuous downward progression of fifths. These pitch distances and pitch set [0, 2, 5, 7] depicted the distant echoes produced by people in the northern Shaanxi plateau region as they communicate through large undulating tones or engage in dialogue, which is similar as Zhang’s emphasis on flavor as illustrated in E.g. 1²¹.

¹⁹ Sheng, Bight et al.2009.

²⁰ Sheng, Bight et al.2009.

²¹ Zhang, Zhibin. 2010.

E.g. 7

mf legato

mp

Special Form as glissando

$D \flat - E \flat - G \flat - A \flat$
[0, 2, 5, 7]

- * “◇” 无声地按下琴键后，踩下三角钢琴的中踏板 (sostenuto pedal)，直至第一首乐曲结束。
- ** “♩” 此记谱标示设法模仿滑奏 (glissando) 的声音效果，短音符的时值必须精确地演奏，长音符的力度应稍强于短音符。

B. Sheng, My Song, 1st movement, bb. 1

E.g. 8

mp *PPP*

p *PPP* *PPP*

$D \flat - E \flat - G \flat - A \flat$
[0, 2, 5, 7]

attacca

- * “♩” 用手指指尖敲击钢琴内部的弦线，要以足够的力度使产生出 “mp” 的音响效果。

B. Sheng, My Song, 1st movement, bb. 2

Unlike the western notation of pentatonic music, where all the variations of pitch or rhythm are recorded in detail, Chinese folk music notation uses simple notation, where only the main pitches or rhythms, etc., are recorded. Coupled with the different musical styles of different regions in China, “Run Qiang” is a unique technique and phenomenon in the Chinese

folk vocal art to produce embellishment, flavor, and special expressive power, and it is a kind of vocal singing method summarized on the basis of the singing characteristics of different ethnic groups²². In "My Song", one of the instrumental "Run Qiang" can be seen when Sheng explores space and atmosphere by adjusting the pitch distance, as shown in E.g. 8, where the other "*" is marked in the first chord, bar 2 (E.g. 8). Here, the player is required to strike the inner strings of the piano with the tips of the fingers and to produce the dynamic of *mp* rather than the mark *pp* in the notation. Regarding the interpretation of the tapping playing strength here being required to be *mp*, this struck part could be regarded as an encore phrase of the second voice with the preceding indication of *mp*. In contrast, the change in the method of playing could be seen as an echo of the vocal "Run Qiang" and the instrumental "Run Qiang". The instrumental "Run Qiang" is similar to the vocal "Run Qiang" in that in addition to the melodic "Run Qiang" mentioned earlier, there is also the rhythmic "Run Qiang" shown in the E.g. 8. On each interval of the ever downward marching fifth, Sheng uses "-" to indicate that each note is played with a lengthened rhythm, and these lengthened rhythms cause each note to have a prolonged duration. This intentional lengthening of note rhythms may portray a foil to life in the highlands, which can create an echo effect from the penetrating sounds of the wide-open environment. Therefore, this is a more detailed depiction of the natural acoustic environment. In their communication, people are accustomed to loud, slower-paced communication, which is the various lifestyles of the people in the plateau region of northern Shaanxi.

For the use of instrumental "Run Qiang", like the extensive use of ornamental notes earlier, the composer makes extensive use of appoggiatura and glissando to imitate the sound of ethnic instrumental music in "My Song". Due to the keyboard instrument that cannot change its pitch, the superposition of the minor seconds may serve to deviate under the tonal color, thus imitating the technique of vibrato playing in traditional plucked instruments such as the *hu qin*. As an essential accompaniment or melodic instrument in "Qin Qiang" music, the performance technique of the *huqin* is rich and contains basically all the musical features and techniques of the "Run Qiang", as Sun pointed out that techniques of instrumental "Run Qiang" included the same way of glissandos, vibrato, pressure glissandos, overtones, vibrato, etc²³. The musical notation of the pressed slide, the accent sign, is illustrated in the E.g. 9 below, which is played by pressing the finger at a position slightly lower than the pitch and relying on the force of the wrist swing to drive the

²² Lan, Xiaowei. 2001.

²³ Sun, Yi. 2000.

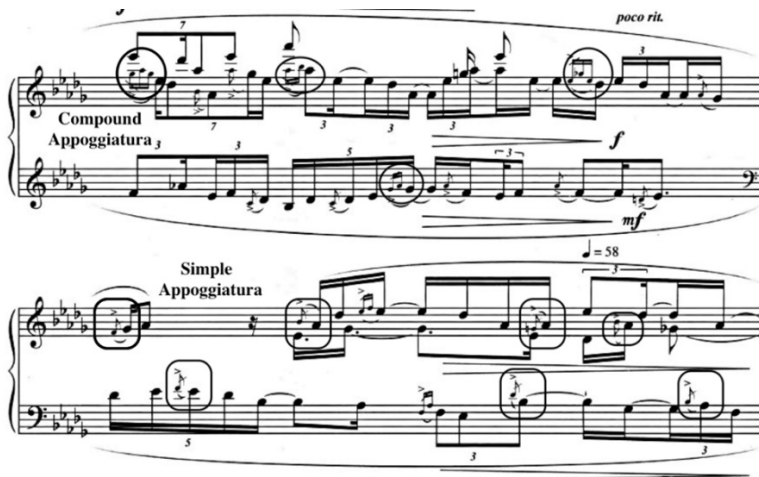
finger to press the string to produce the desired pitch. This kind of slide requires more finger force, so it is usually played with two or three fingers pressed together on the string. This technique could be reflected in the beginning of my song (E.g. 7 and E.g. 10) where for all appoggiatura notes in the score that are marked as accent marks (>), they should be played quickly and forcefully to achieve the acoustic effect of pressed slide. This could also indicate that the notes which are marked “***” by the composer need to be presented in the same way as the finger glissandos in the traditional “Run Qiang”; the short notes must be played at the exact time, and the long notes should be slightly stronger than the short ones (E.g. 7). This is similar to another illustration of “Trilling the bow”, which is indicated by “彡” (E.g. 4)²⁴.

E.g. 9



The musical Notation of the Pressed Slide

E.g. 10



B. Sheng, My Song, 1st movement, bb. 1

²⁴ Sun, Yi. 2000.

“Run Qiang” in “My Other Song”

In “My Song”, the embellishments are widely used in the first movement, especially the use of appoggiatura and mordents in the melodic embellishments, which are mainly aimed at the imitation of folk singing and *ban hu* techniques. In “My Other Song”, folk songs are no longer involved, instead it seems Sheng expresses the structure and pitch relationships in an oriental style with his own way. Even though folk songs are not explicitly used, compositional methods and traditional Chinese musical techniques are still applied in the work. Here, the embellishment technique “Run Qiang” is used in the fourth movement, where it takes the form of mordent and trill that are mainly derived from the musical accompaniment of Buddhist chanting, which uses the instruments such as *suona*, *guqin*, *guzheng*, *dizi* and *sheng*, and percussion instruments such as bells, chimes, *reba bells*, cymbals and *cha* (Chinese bronze instruments). These embellishments are mainly used in the vocal parts and passages of Buddhist melodies and are meant to imitate the “vibrato” technique of plucked instruments such as the *guqin* or *guzheng*, or the effect of rapid interval shifts in the pitch of a chanting melody (E.g. 11). Long, in her study on the imitation of *guqin* sounds and techniques in Chinese piano works, found that mordent, short trill, and appoggiatura are among the approaches in which the “vibrato” and “pressing” techniques of *guqin* and other plucked string instruments are represented²⁵. In the fourth movement, the only long trill started from bar 15 (E.g. 12).

E.g. 11

B. Sheng, My Other Song, 4th movement, bb. 1-4. The mordents and short trills in Buddhist melodies to imitate the “vibrato” technique of plucked instruments such as the *guqin* or *guzheng*

²⁵ Long, Fei. *Guqin and piano* 古琴与钢琴. Journal of Xinghai Conservatory of Music, (4), 2001, pp. 11-18

B. Sheng, My Other Song, 4th movement, bb. 15-17. Long trills to maintain long duration in imitating Buddhist chanting

This serves to portray the characteristics of Buddhist music, such as long trailing cadences, flexible melodies, and ethereal moods²⁶. This idea is corroborated in the musical score about Buddhist music, both chanting and accompanying instruments, where Buddhist music will often show the effect of prolonged repetitive rhythms with long duration²⁷, as shown in E.g. 13 and E.g. 14. In addition, this embellishment is also a typical decorative style in Chinese folk music. Wong (1995) found that besides appearing in the solo piano piece “My Song” and “My Other Song”, it also appears in other vocal works of Sheng in “Three Chinese Love Songs” (1988) such as “At the Hillside Where Horses Are Running”, “Blue Flower”, and “The Stream Flows”. In these works, the melodic contour serves both as a stylistic ornamentation and an emotional expression²⁸.

²⁶ Feng, Tainci. Study on the Chanting Music of the Benjamin Wangjia Monastery in Huangnan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Qinghai Province 青海省黄南藏族自治州苯教旺加寺诵经音乐研究, 2012, Central University for Nationalities, China, Doctoral Thesis.

²⁷ Liao, Yueh-Yin. *Three piano chamber music works of Chen Yi: "Night Thoughts", "Romance and Dance," Tibetan Tunes": An aesthetic and structural analysis with suggestions for performance.* University of Miami, 2014.

²⁸ Wong, Su Sun. *An analysis of five vocal works of Bright Sheng.* The University of Texas at Austin, 1995.

E.g. 13



Free extended rhythms in Buddhist chanting

E.g. 14



The trills of percussion instruments such as bells, chimes, *reba bells*, cymbals and *cha* in accompanying instruments of Buddhist chanting

In addition to the Buddhist vocal part containing melodic embellishment techniques, a layer of texture that also containing melodic embellishment techniques is added, located in the uppermost vocal part, as shown in E.g. 15. The melodic tones in this voice are all derived from the Buddhist melodic theme and are superimposed on the main melody, repeating the melodic in octave rapidly, in high register of the piano. Ornamental notes with an octave distance are common in the folk songs of the Loess Plateau region, and they are usually accompanied by a fast glissando at the end of a high-pitched phrase²⁹, such as in Northern Shaanxi folk song “Blue Flowers” 兰花花 (E.g. 16). This type of ornamentation accurately expresses the bright, resonant

²⁹ Zhu, Ciyuan. Analysis of Textual Choices and Musical Settings in Four Vocal Chamber Works of Bright Sheng. 2020. The University of Florida State, Doctoral Thesis.

singing style of the Loess Plateau residents³⁰. In addition to the use of octave ornaments in vocal works, octave intervals are also common in Chinese piano works, mostly used to imitate the timbre of the *suona* and the *sheng*. For example, in his analysis of composer Chu Wang-Hua's piano piece "Hundred Birds Towards the Phoenix" (1973), Ren found that bars 11-20 imitate the performance of the *suona* with the accompaniment of the *sheng*³¹. The melodic phrase of the *suona* soloist should be played in a cheerful and amusing manner, while the accompanying phrase of the *sheng* should be soft and gentle, so that the repeated pitch material of high and low voice has a strong contrast. This technique is also used in the fourth movement of "My Other Song", where the melodic pitches, which are an octave apart, mimic the melody of the *sheng* and the accompaniment of the bell in Buddhist music, making it ethereal and distant, as if portraying the loved ones were sometimes surrounding the composer himself and sometimes reaching out to his distant mother.

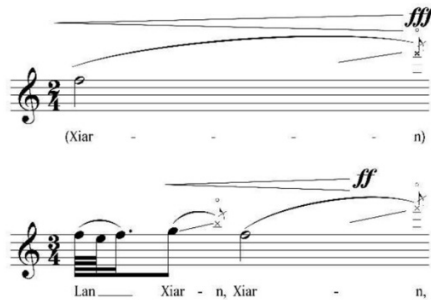
E.g. 15

The image shows a musical score for the 4th movement of "My Other Song" by Chu Wang-Hua, specifically bars 23-25. The score is written for piano and features a treble clef with a melody of eighth notes and a bass clef with a more complex accompaniment. A dashed line above the treble clef indicates an octave distance. Dynamics include (mf) and (pp). Performance instructions include (u.c.) and (Sost.).

**B. Sheng, My Other Song, 4th movement, bb. 23-25.
Ornamental notes with an octave distance**

³⁰ Zhu, Ciyuan. 2020.

³¹ Ren, Yuan. On the use and performance of ornamental tones in the piano adaptation of "Hundred Birds in the Sky" 谈钢琴改编曲《百鸟朝凤》中装饰音的运用与演奏. Literature, History and Art, Issue 4, no.1, 2013, pp. 86.



Ornamental notes with an octave distance accompanied by a fast glissando at the end of a high-pitched phrase in Northern Shaanxi folk song “Blue Flowers”, bar 5 and 15.

Discussion

Events such as the Cultural Revolution and the Reform and Opening Up have also, from a certain point of view, contributed to the development of Chinese musical culture and to the process of fusion between Chinese and Western cultures. Since the second half of the 20th century, composers have been adding musical symbols or decorative traces to their works, mostly decorative playing and singing techniques from traditional ethnic instruments and voices and fusing these Chinese elements with Western compositional structures. In piano works, due to the limited characteristics as a solo instrument, this decorative use of ornaments along with the different dynamics and varied timbre are used to enriches the effect and level of the work. Obtaining his creative inspiration from the genres and musical symbols involved in Chinese folk music, Sheng carefully applies tempo, intensity, accent, ornamentation, and other special notation to replicate the traditional vocal singing technique of “Run Qiang” to his solo piano works. This not only emphasizes the composer’s innovative personal style, but also reflects the integration of different musical cultures and characteristics. In fact, the most fascinating aspect of these fusion works is the composer’s fusion of Chinese folk songs with Western modernism, mainly derived from the dissonant harmonies, the various “Run Qiang” melodic contours, the simplicity of the Chinese folk songs and the Western modern musical timbres - to create a unique musical experience that could represent both the East and the West. An analysis of Sheng’s compositions aligns to Wong’s explanation where the composer does not

attempt to “civilize” the folk songs with modernist techniques, but rather fuses the unique characteristics of the two different musical elements into a new artistic language³². Not only are these integrated folk musical elements sounded not jarring, but on the contrary, the distinctive folk characteristics suggest a different appearance to each song while balancing the significances of the folk and the Western musical style. For example, decorative melodies such as appoggiatura or mordents that converge in the second degree are undoubtedly present in a much gentler style of the South for Chinese listeners, while high pitches, widely separated ranges, and long time-valued decorative melodic contours are the vocal characteristics of the North or the highland regions. Therefore, the revealing of the “Run Qiang” in “My Song” and “My Other Song” could correspond to Wong’s statement of Sheng’s unique “new artistic language”³³.

As a representative of the “New Wave” composers after China’s reform and opening up, Sheng has provided many references in the fusion of Chinese and Western musical cultures. Sheng’s selection of the essence and core concepts of traditional Chinese music, as well as the Western compositional concepts and techniques influenced by Western education, make the “fusion” of Chinese and Western music cultures very attractive and personal. After analyzing the use of Chinese element “Run Qiang” in “My Song” and “My Other Song”, it can be found that in the form of musical expression, Sheng conducted the approach of instrumental “Run Qiang” on Western keyboard instruments in order to express different musical scenes, instruments, folk dances and singing styles, as well as perform different arrangements and innovations in terms of melodies, rhythms and accents, etc. Sheng’s unique style offers another diversity to the presentation of traditional Chinese musical elements in Western-style musical works.

Conclusion

By analyzing the application of ornamentation in the composer’s two solo piano works “My Song” and “My Other Song”, which were composed with a gap of 18 years, this study revealed that the compositional concepts of these ornamentations are inextricably linked to the traditional Chinese vocal singing technique of “Run Qiang”, which was learned by the composer when he lived in Qinghai and studied the Qinghai “Hua’er”. The melodic and instrumental ornaments “Run Qiang” are presented in different forms by the

³² Wong, Su Sun. 1995.

³³ Wong, Su Sun. 1995.

composer. Even with the use of a single melodic instrument, the piano, the result is still colorful and diverse. These include the single mordents (front and back mordents), compound mordents, and appoggiatura, which appear frequently in the folk songs of northern Shaanxi and Sichuan, as well as the vibrato techniques such as trills and presses technique common to stringed instruments; and the ornamental intervals of octave differences that are intended to express rich emotions and to create an echoing effect.

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