

The Application of Polyphonic Techniques in Contemporary Chinese Guzheng Compositions from “Fantasia”

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Abstract. Because of the development and progress of the times, the contemporary Chinese Guzheng compositions are continuously enriching and innovating. Some researchers have comprehensively conducted research on harmony and form structure, accompaniment and rhythmic texture, and performance techniques. However, there is still a lack of specialized research on polyphonic techniques at present. Therefore, this study uses literature review methodology and score-based analysis to summarize and organize existing literature, excavate and analyze spectral examples, find out that the application methods in contemporary Chinese Guzheng compositions are divided into three categories: Contrasting Polyphony, Imitative Polyphony, Heterophony. Guzheng composers could satisfy the creative requirements and purpose themselves more effectively, improving the expressiveness of music, enriching the performance techniques of Guzheng by using polyphonic techniques, which has significant creative and practical significance. Through the above research, this article aims to promote the development of polyphonic techniques in contemporary Chinese Guzheng compositions, fostering deeper integration with Western polyphonic techniques regarding structure and voice organization.

Keywords: Polyphony techniques, Contemporary Chinese Guzheng Compositions, Fantasia

1. Introduction

1.1. Research background

Guzheng is a traditional Chinese instrument. It has a history of over 2500 years in China. Tracing its origins, it can be found that it first appeared during the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period, and it gradually became representative ethnic musical instrument in China after a long evolution, occupies a crucial position in the history of the development of ethnic musical instruments in China. With the rapid development of Chinese music, the contemporary Chinese Guzheng compositions incorporating Western compositional techniques. While retaining its colors and characteristics of Chinese ethnic music, absorbing important elements of Western music in terms of harmony, musical structure, rhythm organization. This process constantly promotes innovation and improvement in Guzheng composition by overlaying different polyphonic techniques and weaving, enriching and expanding the music and its expressive power [1]. This article aims to explore the application and significance of polyphonic techniques in the contemporary Chinese

Guzheng composition "Fantasia" deeply through literature review methodology and score-based analysis, summarizing relevant conclusions can help deepen public understanding of the development of creative concepts and techniques in contemporary Guzheng compositions. Promoting the correlation and integration between Guzheng compositions and polyphonic techniques and facilitate the better development of contemporary Guzheng compositions in terms of innovation.

1.2. Definitions

Polyphony techniques: Polyphonic technique is a professional composition technique developed in Europe and is one of the core techniques of Western classical composition. Due to the differences in vocal relationships and movement forms, polyphonic music can be divided into three types: Contrasting Polyphony, Imitative Polyphony, Heterophony.

Contemporary Chinese Guzheng Compositions: Contemporary Chinese Guzheng Compositions refer to a type of Chinese Guzheng music creation that has been studied and absorbed Western music composition techniques since the 1980s, and is significantly different from traditional Guzheng Compositions in terms of creative concepts, harmony arrangement, musical structure, timbre, rhythm, and performance techniques.

Fantasia: This composition is a Guzheng solo composed by Mr. Wang Jianmin in 1989, written in the tone of Miao Feige [2]. Author Wang Jianmin, composer, educator, professor and doctoral supervisor at Shanghai Conservatory of Music. Vice President of the Chinese Ethnic Orchestra Society and Expert in Undergraduate Teaching Evaluation of the Ministry of Education. He has served as the head of the Department of Folk Music at Shanghai Conservatory of Music and the executive vice president of Shanghai Conservatory of Music Affiliated Middle School.

1.3. Research questions and research methods

With the rapid development of the contemporary Chinese Guzheng compositions in recent years, it is extremely important to search the innovation and development. This research aims to analyse the following two research questions: what are the application methods and types of polyphonic techniques in contemporary Chinese Guzheng compositions "Fantasia"? What is the significance of using polyphonic techniques in contemporary Chinese Guzheng compositions? Through literature review methodology and score-based analysis, this study explores in depth the polyphonic elements in the Guzheng compositions "Fantasia". Ultimately, this article hope to summarize the application methods and its value of creation, expression, and technique expansion through the above research, providing reference and basis for the contemporary Chinese Guzheng compositions creation. This study uses the literature review methodology to search for keywords such as polyphonic techniques and contemporary Chinese Guzheng compositions, and selects references related to the above two aspects. It explores the content highly relevant to this study in the literature, and summarizes, organizes, and analyzes the principles and conclusions proposed in the literature. At the same time, this study used the method of score-based analysis. By first conducting basic research on the harmony and form, performance terminology, and performance techniques of the Guzheng compositions "Fantasia", and then analyzing each part of the entire compositions separately, the polyphonic techniques and elements were excavated, and classified and summarized to draw research conclusions.

2. Literature review

In recent years, Chinese scholars have conducted in-depth research on contemporary Chinese Guzheng compositions, systematically analyzing their artistic characteristics and creative techniques, leaving valuable contributions to theoretical knowledge and practical experience.

2.1. From the historical perspective of the application and development of polyphonic techniques in Chinese music compositions

In her paper, Jiang Yuan explained that in the early 20th century, Western polyphonic techniques were first introduced into professional music creation in China by a group of musicians who returned from overseas, such as Xiao Youmei and Huang Zi. At the same time, the definition of the evolution process period was carried out: Western polyphonic techniques were initially introduced to China in the 1920s, and have gradually developed and matured since the 1980s, achieving a deep integration with Chinese music in terms of music philosophy and structure, creative mode, and figuration treatment [3].

Xu Mengdong's paper proposes that since the 1980s, Chinese composers have made new explorations of Western polyphonic techniques, and ancient polyphonic forms that were rarely used before the 1980s have also been creatively adapted and applied in the compositions of contemporary composers. Meanwhile, fugue, a musical genre that highly showcases polyphonic thinking and contrapuntal technique, has been widely used in Chinese music works from the 1980s to the present day [4].

Huang Yue summarized the development and updating process of contemporary Chinese Guzheng compositions since 1979, and conducted research from three levels: creative concepts and styles, creative techniques, and author groups [5].

2.2. Research on the application of polyphonic composition theory in Guzheng compositions

In Gong Chan's paper, fragments from the overall Guzheng compositions are mainly used to explore, summarize, and analyze in detail its unique polyphonic phenomena and the application of polyphonic techniques. Therefore, it is concluded that the polyphonic techniques used in Guzheng music are divided into three categories: Contrasting Polyphony, Imitative Polyphony, Heterophony [6].

In Zeng Fanhua's paper, examined the application of Western polyphonic techniques in Guzheng compositions by collecting and organizing examples of polyphonic techniques and etude examples in polyphony, using different eras as background conditions, and believed that it brought new musical forms and creative development. Meanwhile, innovative research on the application of polyphonic techniques in Muti-voiced Zheng and Butterfly Zheng has been added [7].

Zhang Chenyang's paper conducted an in-depth study on the polyphonic techniques of the existing Guzheng etudes, supplementing the research on the application of polyphonic techniques in Guzheng etudes [8].

2.3. From the research on the application of other comprehensive creative techniques in Guzheng compositions

Zhao Zhihua's paper conducted an overall study on the theme selection, formal structure, harmonic texture, and performance techniques of contemporary Guzheng compositions, summarizing its innovative creative techniques [9].

Su Xiaohui's paper conducted research on Guzheng music in terms of creative background, scordatura, musical structure, and polyphonic techniques. At the same time, research on the application of Xi'an drum music elements in Guzheng music was also incorporated [10].

The paper by Lv Xinman and Wei Chang analyzes and summarizes the musical and social value of the Guzheng composition "Fantasia" from several dimensions, including the inspiration of the artistic value and performance style of Guzheng under modern music aesthetics, the analysis of the music structure and creative value of "Fantasia", and the direction of modern Guzheng music creation [11].

Chao Yiwen summarized the creative ideas and concepts of "Fantasia" by analyzing the mode and tonality, harmony and formal structure, special playing techniques, and non-standard modal scales of each part of the composition [12].

Overall, several limitations can still be identified in the existing research. Firstly, the background and reference materials of the Guzheng compositions selected for research are too old, lacking modernity and novelty, and there is relatively little research on the application of polyphonic techniques in contemporary Chinese Guzheng compositions. Secondly, most of the research materials mentioned above are selected from partial fragments of the overall compositions, or briefly touch upon the study of the overall compositions, lacking a certain degree of integrity and focus. Finally, the above research is based on the analysis of the application of Western compositional techniques in Guzheng compositions as a whole and comprehensively. There is a lack of specialized analysis and research on polyphonic techniques in contemporary Guzheng compositions, and further research is needed to strengthen the application of polyphonic elements.

3. Analysis of the application of polyphonic techniques in Fantasia

To better understand the formation of polyphonic techniques, it is necessary to review their historical origins. Polyphonic music originated from the mid-9th century form of "Organon", which used Gregorian chant as the "cantus firmus" and developed it by ornamentation and decorations on its basis. With the historical development of music, polyphony has become one of the core techniques in Western classical composition, which can be roughly divided into three types: Contrasting Polyphony, Imitative Polyphony, Heterophony [13].

3.1. Contrasting polyphony

As the name suggests, contrasting polyphony refers to polyphonic music in which two or more melodic lines form distinct contrasts and differences in different aspects, such as rhythm, pitch, direction of progression, phrasing and articulation, musical personality, etc [14]. Use 20-point type for the title, aligned to the center, linespace exactly at 20-point with a bold and italic font style and initial letters capitalized. No formulas or special characters of any form or language are allowed in the title.

3.1.1. Rhythmic contrast



Figure 1. Excerpt from the Rubato section

As shown in Figure 1, the whole composition starts with the Rubato, with a free rhythm that allows the performer to express themselves. “Re”“La”“Fa”, which is the single-line melody in the upper voice is played based on the characteristics of the Rubato, with a high degree of freedom and allows considerable latitude. The arpeggios and chords on the left hand have a relatively regular figuration and rhythm, creating a striking contrast with the freer rhythmic flow of the upper voice, fully reflecting the ethereal and mysterious artistic conception that the author wants to express, gradually presenting the musical image of the misty and distant Miao mountains, enhancing the immersion and spatial presentation of the music, and making it fascinating [15].



Figure 2. Excerpts from the Largo of measures 12-22 of the complete composition

In Figure 2, in the measure 17, the upper voice of the right hand is a rhythmic pattern composed of a dot and a half note, and is played continuously by Yao Zhi. The arrangement of notes is relatively loose, forming a relaxed musical flow. lower voice of the left hand is played with a two-beat glissando and a couple of two eighth-notes, with a denser arrangement of notes that enhances the dynamic sense of paragraph progression. This results in a denser rhythmic structure compared to the upper voice. Similarly, in measure 18, the upper voice of the right hand is responsible for dense rhythms, while the lower voice of the left hand is composed of half notes and half rests, forming a more pronounced rhythmic contrast.



Figure 3. Excerpts from the Adagio of measures 28-37 of the complete composition



Figure 4. Measures 254-262 of the entire composition

The boxed sections in Figures 3 and 4 are both upper and lower voice melodies with significant rhythmic contrast. Composed of a long single-line Yao Zhi in upper voice, a complex rhythmic pattern in lower voice, or a dense rhythmic pattern in upper voice, and a smooth arpeggio and glissando in lower voice. The artist employs a polyphonic technique with strong contrasting rhythms to convey passionate and uplifting emotions, particularly highlighting the grand and expansive sound characteristics presented in Rubato.

The contrasting polyphonic techniques used in the above musical examples are all formed by the significant difference in rhythm density between two voices through writing rhythm patterns. By using rhythm contrast, it significantly enhance the recognition and hierarchy of paragraphs, create a three-dimensional music environment, enriching the musical connotation and auditory experience.

3.1.2. Contrast against a cantus firmus



Figure 5. Excerpts from the Allegro of measures 171-191 of the entire composition

As shown in the boxed section of Figure 5, the lower voice is composed of the arpeggiated tonic seventh chord cantus firmus“ $\flat$ Si(Contra Octave)- $\flat$ Si(Great Octave)- $\sharp$ Fa - $\flat$ Si”“Si- $\flat$ Si -La- $\sharp$ Fa”. In units of two measures, continuing until measure 189, and vastly strengthened the rhythm stability. The enthusiastic Miao children sang and danced, creating a joyful and lively atmosphere.

The above score example creates a contrasting polyphony by maintaining a cantus firmus for one voice to complement the other voice. By using regular and fixed patterns or melodies as a backdrop, the melody of another voice can be clearly highlighted, emphasizing the main and key melody, and expressing the main meaning and central idea clearly and distinctly.

3.2. Imitative polyphony

Imitative polyphony refers to the appearance of the same melody or the initial section with thematic characteristics, in completely identical or partially altered forms, in different voices, forming a sound effect of "one after another", and "chasing after each other". Imitative polyphony can be divided into two categories: simple imitation and canon imitation.

3.2.1. Canon imitation



Figure 6. Excerpts from the Adagio of measures 18-27 in the entire composition

As shown in the boxed section of Figure 6, the lower voice is an octave canon imitation of the Dux of upper voice. It is written as a contrasting voice using the imitation relationship at the lower octave, creating a Comes. A continuous sense of pursuit was formed in the auditory sense, as if experiencing the endless layers of mountains, overwhelming and continuous.



Figure 7. Excerpts from the end of the Largo in measures 263-269 of the complete composition

The boxed part in Figure 7 is a Canon imitation of the Dux in upper voice, while adding single notes to form chords on the basis of the upper voice structural tones, making the sound effect more

three-dimensional and rich. In the broad Largo that expresses passion, heavy chords can more fully carry emotional tension, thus achieving the author's ideal effect.



Figure 8. Excerpts from the Presto measures 248-253 in the entire composition

Figure 8 shows a clip of alternating left and right hands playing the "Da Cuo" at the end of the Presto. "Da Cuo" is a basic fingering technique in Guzheng performance, where the middle finger and big finger are used together to pluck, similar to the form of "grabbing". Due to the rapid alternation of sixteenth notes between the left and right hands in this scene, the duration between the original voice and the imitative voice is extremely short, making the auditory perception of the two voices as if they were one, forming a strict unison canon [6].

Researcher Luteken proposed that with the development of polyphonic music in the public domain, highlighting specific musical motifs or phrases through compositional techniques in the creative process has become increasingly important in enriching the auditory experience of music [16]. The above musical example uses imitative polyphony to form an imitative canon that have distinct sense of pursuit through continuous imitation of the Dux. Through continuous imitation, musical phrases have strengthened the memory points of melody segments, formed iconic melody lines, enhanced the recognition and theme of the melody segment, and left a lasting impression on the audience and performers.

3.2.2. Heterophony

Heterophony usually refers to adding ornamentation and decorations or simplifying the main melody to produce a heterophony, which unfolds in two voices in the form of different variations of the same melody.



Figure 9. Measures 12-22 of the entire composition

Figure 9 shows a segment in the slow tempo, where the low voice adds ornamentation or reduces the melody of the upper voice, resulting in a heterophony. As in the first two units of measure 14 to 15, the lower voice instrumental melody is based on the upper voice melody "La-[#]Fa-Re-[#]Fa", changing the rhythm and note arrangement order. In the first half of the measure 17 to 18, the lower voice added "^bFa" to the upper voice melody "Re-^bSi-La", while repeating "Re" and changing the

rhythm pattern. The stories of the Miao family are presented through different compositional techniques, with one sentence after another, presenting a rich and varied palette of sound colors.



Figure 10. Excerpts from the Largo of measures 263-266 of the entire composition

As shown in the boxed section of Figure 10, in measure 263, the lower voice melody slightly changes and reduces the upper voice melody "#Fa-La-#Fa-Re-#Fa", emphasizing the structural tones of the upper voice melody "Re", "#Fa", and "La", and repeating "Re" and "#Fa". In measures 264-265, the lower voice melody repeats the upper voice melody "♯Fa-Re-♭Si-La-Re" while adding "♯Mi". It has also made changes in its rhythm pattern, from the original rhythm pattern composed of dots, two-eighth notes and quarter notes, to a rhythm pattern dominated by two-eighth notes. The above is a typical example of heterophony, where the same melody is modified slightly by changing the rhythm pattern, adding or removing single notes, to form different variant melodies.

The heterophony techniques used in the above score examples not only maintains the main melody, but also decorates and emphasizes the structural notes through the lower voice, making the melody rich and colorful. It presents diverse rhythms and sound patterns in different voice, and the form is versatile.

In summary, this study summarizes, organizes, and analyzes the literature viewpoints on the analysis of polyphonic techniques in Guzheng compositions through literature review methodology. Through score-based analysis, the polyphonic techniques in "Fantasia" are excavated and analyzed. The application of polyphonic techniques in contemporary Chinese Guzheng works "Fantasia" can be roughly divided into three categories: Contrasting Polyphony, Imitative Polyphony and Heterophony. By using polyphonic techniques, composers are able to express their inner emotions in a better and more accurate way, express their work ideas, achieve creative goals, enrich the structure of their works, innovate performance techniques, and create a rich and colorful auditory feast

4. Conclusion

This study analyzes the application of polyphonic techniques in the contemporary Chinese Guzheng composition "Fantasia" by using literature review methodology and score-based analysis. It summarizes the relevant literature theories on polyphonic techniques and conducts research on the polyphony of each part of the "Fantasia". The study concludes that the application of polyphonic techniques in the contemporary Guzheng work "Fantasia" can be categorized into three main types: Contrasting Polyphony, Imitative Polyphony, and Heterophony. The use of polyphonic techniques in contemporary Chinese Guzheng compositions has the following three levels of significance: firstly, the unique structural characteristics of polyphonic techniques meet the creative needs, and the writing characteristics of polyphonic techniques that contrapuntal combination give it a unique and exclusive function in enriching the vertical structure, spatial sense, and hierarchical sense of music. When creators of contemporary Chinese Guzheng works need to shape the above musical effects, polyphonic techniques are a technique choice with significant effects, enriching the creative techniques of the works. Secondly, in terms of musical expression and expressiveness, the use of polyphonic techniques can make music more expressive and tense, with meanings such as

background narration, atmosphere setting, emotional rendering, and emotional expression. Finally, in terms of enriching performance techniques, the polyphonic techniques could combine multiple voices contrapuntally, breaking the traditional Chinese Guzheng playing technique of "right hand plucking, left hand pressing", allowing for alternating or simultaneous playing of both hands, greatly expanding Guzheng performance techniques, and broadening the range of techniques in multi-voice coordination and melody rhythm superposition, promoting innovation and progress in Guzheng performance techniques.

The author suggests that in order to better fulfill the composer's creative objectives and needs for the work, different polyphonic techniques can be used in the creation of contemporary Chinese Guzheng works. For example, using contrasting polyphony to create distinct contrasts between different vocal parts can shape the sense of musical space, create atmosphere, and convey emotions; Using imitative polyphony to emphasize and repeat a melody can highlight its characteristics and importance, create a sense of auditory pursuit, and enrich the sound effects; Using heterophony with supporting notes to decorate or delete the main melody can fully demonstrate creative techniques, enrich the structure of the work, and reflect the diversity of demonstrate the diversity of musical ideas.

In addition, the author suggests that educators pay more attention to the polyphonic techniques in Guzheng music during the teaching process and conduct performance analysis. Understand and highlight the content and emotions that the creator expects to express through the use of polyphonic techniques, and gain a deeper understanding and knowledge of the contemporary Chinese Guzheng compositions being taught, in order to comprehensively teach and inherit them. There are still many shortcomings in this article that need to be continuously supplemented and improved. Especially regarding the analysis of performance techniques using fragments of polyphonic techniques, and how to highlight polyphonic performance in teaching.

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