

The Characteristics and Functions of Bayan Accordion in Chinese Folk Music

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Abstract

The Bayan accordion originated in Europe and subsequently became known around the world as a result of cultural exchanges and population movements. Given that the invention, construction and cultural formation of the accordion occurred in Europe, it is evident that the instrument has a strong European background. Over the course of a century, the accordion has evolved into one of the most popular instruments in China, particularly in the context of China's reform and opening up. The accordion has a wide range of audience groups in China. The modern accordion has overcome many of the shortcomings of the traditional accordion, including the body of the instrument, a single style, the model specifications, and so on. Currently, in China, the accordion is popular because the accordion's multifaceted appeal, encompassing its vibrant appearance, an array of models catering to diverse preferences, its rich tonality, expressiveness, portability, and the ability to emulate an entire orchestra, has cemented its status as a prevalent musical instrument. China has witnessed the flourishing of a plethora of accordion styles, including the keyboard accordion, bayan accordion, keyboard free bass accordion, and bayan free bass accordion. This article presented the characteristics and functions of Bayan accordion in Chinese folk music.

Keywords: Characteristics; Functions; Bayan; Accordion; Chinese; Folk Music

Introduction

China's accordion education system is currently more developed for the middle-aged and elderly population. This is due to the influence of HOHNER, who has become a prominent figure in the field. There are numerous local senior citizen universities that have emerged as a result, including the Dalian HOHNER Accordion Art Activity Centre and the Dalian Senior Citizen University, among others. The comprehensive accordion education system for the middle-aged and the elderly can be attributed to the fact that the majority of these individuals primarily utilise the keyboard accordion, which is more straightforward to operate than other types of accordion. The incorporation of the keyboard facilitates the rapid comprehension and mastery of musical theory, while the repertoire typically encompasses songs from the Chinese revolution in modern times and folk music of the Russian style. The teaching staff are graduates of Chinese teacher training colleges, holding either a Bachelor's or Master's degree. These young teachers encourage their students to participate actively in various competitions, with an emphasis on the development of hobbies and the enjoyment of life. To illustrate, the "HOHNER Cup" National Accordion Festival for Middle-aged and Older People is scheduled to take place in 2023 on the cruise ship Serbia. The event will span five days and four nights and will encompass a range of activities, including competitive

events, guided tours, social gatherings, and other forms of entertainment.

Secondly, the accordion education system in China's higher art colleges and art teacher training universities is undergoing a period of rapid development. In recent years, the majority of music education majors at colleges and universities have opted for the free bass accordion, with the most common types being the keyboard free bass accordion and the Bayan free bass accordion. This is in contrast to the traditional accordion used in China's accordion music majors and music education majors, which has led to a significant expansion in the accordion's range. This has greatly enriched the selection of accordion teaching materials and teaching forms. The incorporation of accordion professional teaching courses into the higher art college and university teaching system is justified by the fact that the free bass accordion is the most challenging of the accordion types to master. From the perspective of the teaching staff, the teachers introduced are all doctoral students at the level of international performers or champions of back-to-back international competitions, who have reached the international first-class level in terms of performance experience, teaching ability and the number of works performed. For example, Shenyang Conservatory of Music, Central Conservatory of Music, Tianjin Conservatory of Music, and so on. From the perspective of the student body, accordion students who enter higher art colleges and universities are among the most gifted students of their age in China, and they have achieved excellent results in the International Accordion Championships or the Chinese Accordion Competition. From the perspective of accordion education, the accordion theory course represents a crucial component of the curriculum. Many students lack the requisite theoretical knowledge, with significant gaps and inaccuracies in their understanding. Such an unstable foundation is likely to have a detrimental impact on the future development of students. It is essential that students gain a solid grasp of the theoretical fundamentals of the accordion, including the correct playing posture, key touching method, the use of windchest rules, the use of variators, and the correct notation method. These theories are then gradually applied to the accordion performance practice, with the aim of improving the efficiency of the accordion performance course and laying a solid theoretical foundation. In recent years, there has been a proliferation of free bass accordion exercise books and music teaching materials, which have included classical music, tango, pop music, and so on. These resources have the potential to highlight the unique characteristics of the accordion as an instrument. Nevertheless, a persisting issue is that the majority of professional colleges and professors tend to prioritise the technical proficiency and professionalism of their students, with relatively less emphasis placed on fostering their creative spirit and national spirit. This encompasses skills such as composing music, improvisation and accompaniment, and adapting Chinese folk music. In recent years, China's leading professional colleges and universities have been proactively addressing this issue. For instance, in response to China's call, Tian Jianan, a young teacher at the Central Conservatory of Music, initiated a series of scientific research projects entitled "Yan and Huang Flavours". These were conducted in the form of concerts, during which teachers and students collaborated to adapt Chinese folk music, which is divided into six suites. The first suite is: The first suite, entitled "Stories from the Land of Ancient Yan and Zhao," comprises four movements: "Little Cabbage," "Little Cattle," "Jasmine," and "Pair of Flowers." The Yan and Huang Style is a large-scale orchestral suite of twenty-four Chinese folk songs written and premiered by the renowned composer Professor Bao Yuankai in 1991. The suite's theme encompasses twenty-four popular folk songs that have been handed down for a considerable

period of time, showcasing the lives of children of the Yellow Emperor across the east, west, south, north and south of the country and their experiences of happiness, joy and sadness. The work has been performed in over 40 countries and regions, and has been met with considerable acclaim by audiences both at home and abroad (Chen, 2023).

The characteristics and functions of Bayan accordion in Chinese folk music

The Bayan accordion, a musical instrument associated with Chinese folk music, can be traced back to the early 20th century, a period of approximately 100 years during which it underwent significant musical development. During this period, the instrument was used in military music, and subsequently, following the establishment of the People's Republic of China, it gradually evolved into a specialized musical genre. Currently, the music created with the Bayan accordion is often perceived as elegant and popular. A search on the Chinese CNKI literature website for the keywords "Chinese accordion and Chinese folk music characteristics and role" yielded 74 related research papers, including 51 dissertations and 19 academic journals.

Bayan Accordion in Chinese Ethnic Music Compositions.

Primarily, the Bayan accordion employs two fundamental elements in the presentation of nationalised expression in musical works: the utilisation of a nationalised style of expression and the incorporation of a nationalised harmony.

Use of nationalized stylistic expressions.

In the creation of works of art, folk songs can be used as the primary material for creation, combining them with the national characteristics of the musical language for expression. This draws on folk songs and folk music tones for the creation of new works. Consequently, the artistic expression of the accordion, which effectively combines Western and ethnic musical styles, has a distinctive tone and character. National styles are frequently expressed through folk tones directly on the accordion. In the creative process, composers effectively integrate the various accordion variants, sound areas, and playing techniques based on the specific requirements of the musical expression in question. By employing a flexible approach to their creative work, they are able to better reflect the distinctive personality and charm of Chinese folk instruments. The accordion piece "Soldier's Glory", "Chasing the Moon with Colourful Clouds" and other creations demonstrate a profound reflection of the strong national characteristics, rooted in the genes of ethnicity. They also exemplify a transformation in the single mode of creation, with works that profoundly reflect the aesthetic habits and needs of the Chinese nation. The expression of the works into the accordion employs modern compositional techniques, combined with folk music materials, innovative genres and compositional techniques, which enrich the performance techniques of ethnic instruments. This integration of musical expression techniques and accordion playing techniques enables the construction of a diversified performance technique, thus facilitating the emotional performance of the songs.

Use of nationalized harmonies

The utilisation of harmony in the creation of music can serve to enhance the overall expressive power of the work. Furthermore, the utilisation of an ethnic harmony style can serve to enhance the emotional tone and colour of the musical expression. For instance, the accordion piece "Tianshan Yunxia" introduces novel elements to the conventional harmonic function, devises a harmonic technique with distinctive national characteristics, and exemplifies the utilisation of distinctive intervals in harmony. In order to better align with the aesthetic preferences of the Chinese people, harmonic compositions utilise fourths, fifths and harmonic intervals to construct harmonic expressions that are more compatible with the functional characteristics of pentatonic modes. This reflects the national style. The accordion piece "Tianshan Yunxia" employs a chordal form of fourth and fifth intervals in its introductory section, which serves to enhance the gravity and magnificence of the work through the juxtaposition of high and low voices separated by two octaves. The creation of music can utilise a multitude of techniques, including the incorporation of folk songs, folk tunes, and opera. Imitative timbre can serve to enhance the distinctive characteristics of national music. In the presentation of the work, the compositional structure, melodic direction, thematic development, and variations presented can be optimised, in conjunction with the national tones of the composition, in order to enrich the performance of the work (Tang, 2020).

Compositional Characteristics of the Bayan Accordion in Chinese Folk Music

The accordion art in China is highly adept at utilising the local Chinese music culture for adaptation and creation, advancing with the times, and creating musical works with Chinese characteristics that develop in parallel with the international accordion. The following four points are of particular significance:

Folk songs are utilised as creative elements.

The expression methods, styles, contents and forms of different ethnic musical arts are distinct, and thus the combination of musical expression and presentation with these characteristics can result in the creation of different musical atmospheres based on the ethnic characteristics of the musical language. The utilisation of diverse musical techniques in the presentation of musical melodies serves to enrich the image of musical expression and to more accurately reflect the national music style. The use of folk tones as the theme melody is a common practice in the creation of accordion music, which allows for the more effective expression of the moral meaning of the music. For example, "Flowers and Children" is selected from the dance drama of the same name in Northwest China. The music melody is a Qinghai folk song, and the genre is "Flowers" and "Children." The song performance style is cheerful, bright, lively, and healthy. This style profoundly embodies the optimistic and brisk character of the local people. The music adheres to the stylistic conventions of folk songs, upon which certain compositions are based. Accordion songs are created by using melodies from various nationalities and folk tunes. The creation of accordion songs is strongly influenced by ethnicity, with the styles of various regions and ethnic groups integrated into the overall performance. However, despite this integration, the distinctive Mongolian musical characteristics are evident. Consequently, the combination and creation of folk melodies with diverse local characteristics more accurately reflect the cheerful, optimistic, simple and hardworking character traits of the vast number of herders in northern China (Pan, 2024).

The accordion is used in conjunction with other instruments.

The elements of minority regions in accordion music works. The natural landscape and regional characteristics of different areas result in diverse ways of thinking, living habits and language habits among the various ethnic groups. Such characteristics are also reflected in the national character and characteristic tones. Consequently, distinctive characteristics of tone and interval are frequently observed in ethnic music compositions. The accordion solo "Return" selects tunes from Fujian "Nanyin", combining Chinese pentatonic modulation with Western compositional structure and harmonic techniques. The work has a strong, infectious effect on the audience. The art style of Nanyin is characterised by simplicity and elegance, with tunes that are both beautiful and gentle, rhythms that are rich in melody, and euphemistic expressions of emotion. As evidenced by the 2023 Spring Festival Gala, the ancient musical form of "Nanyin" has undergone a process of popularisation. In terms of accordion works, the accordion solo piece "Return" employs the "Nanyin" elegant music scale in the design of the music technique. The music is characterised by an elegant and euphemistic style, with a hint of sadness and despair. The performance of the song presents a narrative that conveys a profound sense of nostalgia for one's homeland and national characteristics. The accordion work "Peking Opera Face" represents a fusion of the Chinese national treasure Peking Opera and the accordion art form. It employs elements of national music to enhance the expressive capabilities of the accordion, thereby promoting the nationalisation of the accordion creation. The composition is a synthesis of Peking Opera and accordion art. In the performance of the work, the gongs and drums of Peking Opera, the singing voice, and the silk-string tune are integrated, creating a rapid silk-string, resounding gongs and drums, and high-pitched singing voice, which evokes the atmosphere of the opera. The composition employs the traditional Chinese musical form of multi-part, with a strong ethnic flavour, and the harmonies utilise ornamental and additional tones, incorporating the "pipa chord" expression, which combines with the melody of Peking Opera songs for variations. Furthermore, the Peking Opera's art of tightly played and slowly sung panels is employed, thus diversifying the overall performance of the work. Additionally, the techniques of playing the pipa and guzheng are integrated into the work, as are the techniques of playing Chinese folk instruments. The technique of the pipa, guzheng and other Chinese folk instruments is integrated into the composition of the work, which serves to enhance the image of the musical expression, rendering it more distinctive and three-dimensional. Furthermore, the national characteristics are more readily apparent.

The accordion is used in conjunction with other musical instruments.

The incorporation of the accordion performance technique enhances the performance technique of local ethnic instruments. The accordion piece "Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers" exemplifies the integration of national characteristics and the expression of national music genes. The creation of the piece represents the essence of Chinese national music. For instance, the incorporation of gaohu, guzheng, pipa, erhu, and other instruments with the accordion performance technique enhances the work's individuality, diversity, and richness of expression. It enriches the space of nationalisation of accordion music from many angles and levels, and thus contributes to the deepening development of accordion. During the development of accordion music in China, the accordion has been deeply integrated with the unique aesthetic and cultural interests of the nation, ultimately giving rise to a distinctive musical art form. The creation of accordion music employs a multitude of diverse techniques and expressions, including folk songs, folk tunes, opera, constructed imitative timbre, which serve to exemplify the distinctive characteristics of Chinese music. The melodic direction, song

structure, theme development, variations, and other elements of performance continue to demonstrate a remarkable diversity. In the process of the creation and development of the accordion in China, it is essential that it is rooted in the unique temperament of the nation and that it employs a variety of artistic techniques and forms of expression in order to present and better reflect the development of nationalism (Guo, 2021).

The accordion is used in conjunction with other musical instruments and other media.

The effective combination of diversified creation and local national culture must be realized. From the early 20th century to the present, the accordion art has undergone a development history of nearly one hundred years in China. Currently, Chinese accordion compositions are undergoing a process of continual improvement in terms of compositional techniques and performing arts. This is occurring in a gradual transition from a Western-oriented approach to a more traditional one. The performance techniques employed by Chinese accordionists have evolved from the traditional to the contemporary, with the incorporation of new techniques and innovations. This has led to an expansion of the field of Chinese accordion works. Currently, the accordion is undergoing development and expansion in China, and is enjoying considerable popularity and appreciation among the general public. The concept of nationalization has served as a creative catalyst, resulting in the production of a considerable number of excellent works imbued with national characteristics. The current accordion creation has gradually transcended the limitations of the "folk song and harmony" and "theme and variations" modes of expression. It has instead embraced a more nuanced approach, incorporating the artistic expression of the form through a process of in-depth excavation. This has led to the emergence of a diverse array of multi-dimensional creations, which have gradually gained popularity. The use of music language has also become more widespread, with the most popular ones being those that have been used by the public. The aesthetic qualities of the music are gradually becoming more popular, and the use of musical language is also becoming more prevalent. Typical works include "The Sun Shines in Tash kurgan", "Playing My Beloved Pipa", "The Grapes of Turpan are Ripe", "Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai", "The Hundred Birds Towards the Phoenix", "Our Career is Sweeter than Honey", "The Good News of Beijing Comes to the Border Villages", "The Sunset Xiaogu", which all exhibit a pronounced Chinese ethnic flavour and characteristics (Sun, 2023).

Characteristics of performance techniques in Bayan accordion folk music works

The technique of accordion playing is highly demanding in terms of physical mobility, requiring the player to be able to fully mobilise the shoulders, arms, elbows, wrists, fingers and neuromuscular systems of all parts of the body. These neuromuscular systems effectively cooperate to complete a series of accurate movements, which often need to be completed within a fraction of a second. This is an extremely high requirement for the player's technical movements and stable memory. The creation of accordion folk music is inextricably linked to the development of technique. The melody of the music is the most reflective of the style of hospital works, and can also bring the most intuitive feeling. From the 1970s to the present, numerous accomplished accordion players have contributed to the evolution of Chinese accordion music, influencing the creation of new works and the reform and innovation of playing technique. The integration of the accordion instrument with Chinese folk music has

been facilitated by technical innovations, resulting in the emergence of a distinctive aesthetic value (Ren, 2021).

Singing of the melodic voice in the right hand

In the sixteenth lecture of Basic Music Theory, written by Mr. Li Chongguang, the definition of melody is as follows: A horizontal monophonic progression with many independent tones, which embodies the main idea or all ideas of music and is organized in tonal and rhythmic relationships, is defined as a melody. This concept is expressed as a historically formed national characteristic and the ethnicity of music in China. In Chinese music, melody is a historically formed national characteristic and the ethnicity of music. In Western accordion works, the term "instrumentalization" is used to describe the characteristic of the melody. In the process of the nationalization of Chinese accordion works, the "sing ability" of the melody is its distinctive feature. In the process of nationalization of Chinese accordion works, the melodic "sing ability" has been developed horizontally and linearly. The melodies are beautiful and melodious, and they depict folk activities and express characters' inner feelings. This is in line with the Chinese people's listening habits. In the adaptation of folk instrumental music, the author employs the use of variations, ornaments and polyphony to reflect the "linear" characteristics of folk instrumental music melody in the accordion works (Li, 2010).

The Role of Bayan Accordion in Chinese Folk Music

Over the past century, as societal and economic conditions have evolved, the quality of life for the general population has improved, accompanied by a parallel growth in the demand for spiritual culture. Our musicians and artists are consistently engaged in the advancement of accordion music creation, with the objective of developing more distinctive national characteristics and perpetuating the Chinese national music and cultural traditions through their compositions. It is hoped that more music will be created that reflects the spirit and cultural essence of the nation. However, the rapid development of various musical instruments, such as the piano and violin, has resulted in a bottleneck in the development of accordion music. The convergence with other countries in the world, cultural exchanges and fusion enables our musicians to leverage their strengths and compensate for their weaknesses, thereby creating a plethora of excellent accordion music works. They also innovatively combine a variety of forms of performance, greatly enriching the connotation of accordion music. However, this has led to an increase in the difficulty of the performance, necessitating the involvement of more professional skills and expressive musicians to complete the music. This, in turn, has hindered the development of excellent accordion music. To a certain extent, this has impeded the popularity of accordion music among the general public. Furthermore, there are numerous deficiencies and defects in the teaching of accordion music in China. The quality of teaching varies considerably from one location to another, and a significant number of training institutes prioritise profit over the pursuit of excellence, which has a detrimental impact on the education and development of accordion music. Furthermore, the advent of various forms of music from abroad and electronic synthetic music has also had an impact on the dissemination and development of accordion music (Zhang, 2014).

As China has consistently espoused the principles of socialism with Chinese characteristics, it is inevitable that accordion music, an instrumental music with a distinctively national character, will undergo a process of localisation, nationalisation and specialisation in its future development and creation. Over the course of nearly a century, accordion music has played an indispensable role in the history of Chinese music, embodying the national spirit, musical skills, means of expression, and other aspects of artistry. The accordion continues to develop and grow in our country today, and accordion folk music conveys the ideological, cultural, and spiritual connotations of our country, the Chinese nation. This is a significant and invaluable cultural asset. The transmission, evolution and perpetuation of accordion music is therefore of great significance to our national culture (Qi, 2019).

Conclusion

The Bayan accordion, a significant instrument in Chinese folk music, has evolved over approximately a century, particularly after the establishment of the People's Republic of China. Initially used in military music, it gradually developed into a unique musical genre characterized by elegance and popularity. A search on CNKI for the keywords "Chinese accordion and Chinese folk music characteristics and role" yielded 74 research papers, highlighting its influence. The Bayan accordion's nationalized expression is evident through its integration of folk songs and national harmony, blending Western and Chinese styles to create distinctive works like "Soldier's Glory" and "Chasing the Moon with Colourful Clouds." Through techniques such as using national melodies, harmony rooted in pentatonic modes, and combining the accordion with Chinese instruments like the guzheng and pipa, composers enrich the performance of folk music. The accordion's adaptability to different musical elements, such as regional styles and folk tunes, has expanded its role in Chinese ethnic music, exemplified by works like "Return" and "Peking Opera Face." This combination of national elements with innovative techniques has shaped a diverse repertoire, contributing to the continuous evolution of accordion music in China, particularly in its performance techniques and artistic expressions.

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