

Research on the Historical Process of Sinicization of Art Songs

Xia Ziyue

School of Music, Nanjing Normal University, P.R.China

Published: 15 June 2019

Copyright © Ziyue.

Abstract:

Art song refers to a category of songs, a form of song genre. Chinese art songs have a long history of development. In terms of different historical periods, Chinese art songs have different forms and artistic characteristics. The sinicization of art songs is reflected in the combination of creators, excellent Chinese poems and perfect music, which constitutes the rich cultural deposits of Chinese art songs. This paper studies the historical process of sinicization of modern art songs.

Key words: art songs; sinicization; historical process.

With the continuous development of vocal music creation and singing in China, the sinicization of art songs has been increasingly prominent. In fact, the development of art songs in China has experienced a long period. There are some great creators of art song in different historical periods and these songs convey a unique artistic characteristic. This paper will introduce the art songs briefly at first, then study the historical process of sinicization of art songs since the 20th century, and finally looks into the prospect of Chinese contemporary art songs.

I. A Brief Introduction to Art Song

"Art song" has different concept of narrow sense and broad sense. In terms of narrow sense, art song refers to an art form developing from Germany and Austria from the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century. In terms of the history development of music, this period was in the transition period from classical music to romantic music. In the following one hundred years, Art songs and European romanticism flourished and declined which were gradually inherited and developed by some composers and singers. In this period, art songs only represented the romantic feelings of the bourgeoisie and had strong national characteristics. They combined poetry and music together perfectly and showed extremely high artistic characteristics. In terms of broad sense, art song is defined in contrast to folk songs, opera works, religion, children's vocal music and chorus works. It is different from different from popular songs in contemporary society. In modern society, "art songs" are not limited to art songs of German and Austrian in the romantic period. In a word, no matter in which period of art songs, the theme, artistic characteristics and aesthetic norms of art song will never be changed. The characteristics of art songs are mainly as follows. First, art song is a kind of short and delicate art form. Secondly, art song is integrated with poetry and accompaniment, which has strong artistic characteristics. The accompaniment instruments are mainly piano and there are also other instruments, including orchestra. Third, acoustic part designation of art songs is relatively strong, including tenor and soprano, baritone and mezzo-soprano, bass and alto, etc. Most of them are solo works, and art songs all express an independent and complete thought, paying more attention to the expression of personal feelings. Fourth, Art songs are usually written in the form of chamber music rather than square culture, and their performance venues are mainly medium and small indoor venues.

Chinese art songs originated from German and Austrian art songs. It has not only absorbed the characteristics of German and Austrian art songs, but also added the unique Chinese language and excellent folk music materials. The concept of art songs is not limited to that in the romantic period. Many scholars in China believe that art songs are created by serious music composers, which are essentially different from the forms of spread-orally folk music. Besides, the development of art songs in China has a close relationship with China's actual national conditions. Some excellent drama episodes, film and television songs and adapted folk songs have been included in the category of art songs. In this way, the scope of Chinese art songs is relatively large. Chinese art songs are short and delicate songs, and their singing methods include two different forms, bel canto and Chinese folk style singing. In Chinese art songs, the lyrics and the accompaniment is a unified whole. Most of the lyrics are from the works of ancient or modern poets, which are implicit, beautiful and concise. In the accompaniment of Chinese art songs, there are piano, Chinese national instruments, western instruments and orchestral instruments accompaniment. Some of them would use computer music production accompaniment. Besides, Chinese art songs are mainly performed by solo with various forms of performances, including indoor performances and large venues performances. All in all, Chinese art songs emerged and developed in a special historical and social background, which leads to special artistic value of it. In different historical periods, its creation, performance and development all have different style characteristics.

Since the 20th century, the development of Chinese art songs can be roughly divided into three stages: before the founding of New China, at the early time of New China and from the 1980s to the present. The research on the historical process of sinicization of art songs cannot avoid these three stages. The

following part analyzes the historical background, artistic features and works of representative writers in these three stages.

II、 The Development of Sinicization of Art Songs Before the Founding of New China

(I) Historical background

No matter what kind of music, its generation and development are inseparable from a certain historical background and environment; Chinese art songs are the same. In modern times, China was in a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society with unrest politics and bullied people. After the failure of the Reform Movement of 1898, the bourgeoisie represented by Liang Qichao combined with the actual national conditions of China at that time and put forward the strategy of learning from western culture. In particular, music classes were added in schools, which started the process of music education in schools. Until now, there are many forms of songs in Chinese music history with foreign tunes and local lyrics.

In the early 20th century, western music theory gradually began to spread in China. It is worth mentioning that the emergence of school music in China enables more Chinese people to gradually learn western knowledge and skills, which has played a very important role in promoting the development of music in modern China. In the early 20th century, song creation in modern history started. In this period, the main creating form of music writer is combine the foreign music tune and Chinese local lyrics together. Representative works include "Man the First High Ambition" and "Yellow River", which are created by Shen Xingong, "Farewell" created by Li Shutong.

Since the 1920s, great changes have taken place in China's politics, economy, culture and other aspects, especially after the May 4th Movement. Since then, many Chinese intellectuals have undergone great changes in their ideas. In order to promote the rise of China, they began to actively seek for new ideas and new knowledge. In this period, music education and music creation in China also developed and a variety of music associations, organizations and institutions emerged. In this way, music publications with various styles were published and music in China ushered in a new era. In this period, the creation methods of art songs also developed rapidly. Many musicians who had studied abroad have reformed and recreated some traditional Chinese songs with the help of western innovative techniques, and then created some artistic works full of contemporary characteristics. When creating Art songs, artists attach great importance to the musical structure and tonal layout, which changes the artistic form and spiritual connotation of songs. In this period, representatives of art song creator include Qing Zhu, Zhao Yuanren and Xiao Youmei. They created songs mainly in the form of school music and attaches great importance to the description of situation, the molding of artistic conception and the writing of piano accompaniment. These already have more obvious difference with school songs and gradually began to show more innovative characteristics. Therefore, Chinese modern art songs have preliminary development. In 1930s, Chinese society became turbulent again and social and ethnic contradictions were unprecedentedly acute. A new style of Art songs formed when composers created songs combining with real life.

(II) Artistic features

In the 1920s, many composers devoted themselves to the creation of art songs, among which the creation of Mr. Qing Zhu was very representative. As early as 1920, Qing Zhu created a very

representative art song –“The River of No Return”, which was based on ancient poetry and created with a unique way of composing music. The main feature of his art songs is the use of classical Chinese poetry. “The River of No Return” is almost the start of Chinese art songs and has a very high value of artistic appreciation. However, the lyrics of this song are old-fashioned. It is a manifestation of China's traditional culture, but to some extent, it sets limits to the spread. It is difficult to be understood and promoted by the public so that the deep thoughts can't be conveyed.

Therefore, it makes sense that Qing Zhu's songs with high artistic value did not get a good spread. When creating, Qing Zhulearned from the creation techniques of western art songs, but it is still in a stage of simple imitation and does not fully integrate with the local music culture of China. Qing Zhu's artistic creation is greatly influenced by the western romantic music school and the classical music school, and his artistic creation pays more attention to the characterization of characters' psychology and personal emotions, which is worthy of learning for modern art composers.

Zhao Yuanren is another writer who also has outstanding achievements. In the creation of art songs, Zhao Yuanren drew lessons from the functional harmony of Europe and made Art songs based on it, combining the unique artistic thinking of China with the creation techniques of the west so that all the works of Zhao Yuanren are full of Chinese characteristics.

In the actual creation, it is not simply an imitation of the European music creation techniques, but an exploration of the creative mode of "Chinese school" art songs on the basis of national aesthetics habits and a bold attempt of the unique form of "Chinese national harmony". In terms of the actual melodies, they are not used in the form of stanzas as before, but integrate specific emotions in the creation of music. Zhao Yuanren has a large number of art works, such as “Listening to the Rain”, “Weaving Cloth”, “Autumn Bells”, “Selling Cloth Ballads”, “Going up the mountain”, “How could I help thinking of her” and so on. Zhao Yuanren's art songs were widely spread at that time because of their beautiful melodies and artistic conception. Specifically, in “Listening to the Rain”, Zhao Yuanren effectively combined the lyrics and music together and gave play to the artistic value of the piano, shaping the role of the situation and showed the artistic conception of the song. In this work, piano accompaniment is also used to imitate the sound of rain drops so as to create an artistic conception of continuous rain, which fully shows the expressiveness of piano. In the creation and exploration of art songs, Zhao Yuanren's works have a very unique artistic exploration value, especially the national charm in the creation of art songs, but also have a very significant contribution.

In the 1930s, China's society became turbulent, and its social economy was severely damaged. Social and ethnic contradictions were worsening. In this special period, Art songwriting turned its attention to the struggle for national liberation. National, revolutionary and mass are the main characteristics of Art song creation in this period. Through the creation of art works, the composer conveys his personal feelings to social reality, combines artistic creation with real life, and then the Art songs contain strong national characteristics and the spirit of The Times. In terms of creative methods alone, art song creation in this period is diversified, no longer like the early 20 s, just simple imitation of western music. Chinese traditional and national harmony are used in the creation of art songs, which develops a new style of art song creation. The composer also absorbed the advantages of western music culture in the actual creation, then combined it with the traditional Chinese culture and created Art songs with

unique national characteristics. During this period, the creation of Chinese Art songs gradually became mature.

At the handover time between 1920s and 1930s, Shanghai National Music College was established, which played an important role in the history of professional music education in China. Representative composers include He Luting and Huang Zi and they started the second important development stage of Chinese national style creation. There are mainly two types of subject matter in Art songs. One is the classical poetry. In the actual creation, the composer puts corresponding tunes on some of the essence of ancient Chinese poetry, which forms an Art song that can be sung. The works such as "Xing Sangzi • Other Love" by Xing Xinghai, Liu Xueyu's "Spring Night Luo Cheng Smelt", Ying Shangneng's "My lyrics" and Qingzhu's "I live in the Yangtze River" fully show the rhythmic beauty of Chinese classical poetry, but also use the music language to express the artistic conception of poetry. These works also possess elegant, noble and pure flavor of the Chinese classical culture. Another theme lies in the "left-wing cultural movement" and the anti-Japanese national salvation movement in the late 1930s. The main theme of The Times is focused on the war of national independence and liberation. In this particular period, composers grasped the era theme and created Art songs with strong theme, like "Singing in the Night" by Xing Xinghai, "Flying Flower Song" by Nie Er, "Great Wall" by Liu Xuezheng, and "Flag of the Flag" by Huang Zi. They integrate the real feelings into the artistic creation in which the complex thoughts and feelings are intertwined with the music language. The revolutionary elements can play a role in the ideological education of the people, which have very positive practical significance and have a strong ideological guiding role. .

III、 The Development of Art Songs in the Early Days of New China

(1) Before the Cultural Revolution

In the decades between the founding of New China and the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution, the creation of Chinese art songs paid great attention to the masses. In the strict sense, there were fewer Art songs due to the influence of special historical forms. After the founding of New China, the industry is waiting for the future. The state attaches great importance to the development of art. It has formulated a series of policies to promote the development of Chinese art songs. In this period, there are mainly three types of art songs. The first is the processed and adapted folk songs with accompaniment; the second is composing accompaniment of Art songs for ancient poetry; third, composing accompaniment of Art songs for modern poetry. In the mid-1950s, due to the inconsistent understanding of Chinese and Western music theory and singing, a debate on indigenous and foreign singing was erupted in the music industry. Although these two kinds of singings existed at the same time in the end, this debated is of great help to the development in vocal art. This debate is a very important proposition to Chinese composers, which can reflect the social appearance and spiritual outlook of the new era, and can highlight Chinese characteristics in terms of lyrics, tone, harmony, melody, accompaniment, aesthetics, etc. The representative musicians in this period include Ding Shande and Li Yinghai.

Ding Shande is one of the most famous contemporary musicians in China. He has made great achievements in his creation and education. His representative works include "Mysterious Flute", "Lovely Rose" and "Maira", etc. These art songs are formed after the compilation and adaptation of folk songs. There are other works, such as "Yan'an Night Moon" and "Love Gives Me Sunflower",

which are very popular in China. Through the works, it is not difficult to see that Ding Shande has in-depth research and investigation on the music styles of different regions in China. Combining modern composition techniques and Chinese folk song styles skillfully, he created and collated folk song styles in various region. Another person, Li Yinghai is a famous composer and music educator in China. His vocal works are large in number and there are about ten art songs in the style of folk songs. Among them, "Ga Wo Li Tai", "The River Is Dripping", "Under the Silver Moonlight" and "Lark, You Wonderful Singer" are famous. Li Yinghai's folk song adaptation works maintain the original style of folk songs, and also shows the unique artistic characteristics of folk songs; and the ancient poetry art songs he created has melodious artistic features. Adding Chinese style accompaniment, the rhythm of language and the elegant mood are expressed.

(2) During the Cultural Revolution

In the decade of the Cultural Revolution, Chinese culture has become a "political weapon" under the political suppression and Art songs are no exception. The theme of love has been completely abandoned and there wasn't an art song based on poetry in the long period of time. The content and form are very monotonous: the lyrics are dull, the scene is boring and the tone is also simplified. The main appreciation of people in this period is the "Quotation Song" and eight model operas. Although the art songs have not been developed during this period, they can maintain previous status. In this period, many works have been labeled as "Feudalism, Capitalism and Revisionism" while works that are composed based on Mao Zedong's poems are very common. Li Jiefu is a contemporary Chinese composer and educator. During the Cultural Revolution, he composed around 30 pieces of works for Mao Zedong's poems, such as "Qin Yuan Chun. Snow", "Two Poems of Seven Rhys. Send the God of Blast", "Busuanzi. Ode to Plum Blossom" and "Langtaosha. Beidai River".

These works are excellent works that are based on boldness and do not lose grace. In 1971, Premier Zhou began to preside over the central work and encouraged the literary and artistic innovation. The work created by Shang Deyi, "The Millennium Iron Tree Blossoms" added vitality to the creation of art songs. The work combined the technique of European flower cavity with the Chinese five-tone pattern, celebrating the health industry at that time.

In fact, after the founding of New China, Chinese music culture began to enter a new stage. Music lovers created a large number of art works, maintaining the spirit of the new era. However, Cultural Revolution is a certain hindrance to the creation of Art songs and the development of Chinese music history.

IV. The Development of Chinese Songs in the 1980s and the Present

(1) Historical background

Since the reform and opening up, China's art songs have achieved unprecedented development. Cultural Revolution suppressed people's thoughts and with the opening of shackles, art songs have sprung up. In the 1980s, under the rapid development of society, the new idea of "reform and opening up" was encouraged and supported and art songs continued to prosper.

A variety of composing theories sprang up, creative techniques and aesthetic concepts have been applied in artistic creation, and gradually a new situation formed with unique subject matter, unique

techniques, diversified concepts and language. During this period, there are many excellent composers, such as Luo Zhongrong, Shang Deyi, Shi Guangnan, Zheng Qiufeng and Lu Zaiyi. In present China, the forms of art song creation and singing competitions has become more diverse with the carrier of music publications and TV media and their artistic nature has been greatly improved. The composers, who have basically received strict and professional learning, possess professional theoretical knowledge and technical basis. Among them these people has prominent achievements: Gu Jianfen, Wang Zhixin, Zhang Qianyi, Xu Peidong and Liu Cong.

Since the 1980s, the creation and development of Art songs has been in an unprecedented golden age. As far as the lyrics are concerned, the selection of song lyrics has become broader. In addition to some modern poetry, many ancient excellent poetry works have been chosen. The rhythm of the poetry reflects the beauty under the lines and highlights the charm of Chinese culture. In terms of music, most of them use the Chinese five-tone pattern, music scale and harmonies. Especially in the singing, they pay more attention to the clear articulation and sweet sound. In this way, Chinese art songs have become more mature. Chinese art songs can highlight the style of Chinese characteristics in language, subject matter, and composition techniques, which leads the trend of China.

(2) Artistic characteristics

Since the 1980s, the creation of Chinese art songs has entered a stage of unprecedented prosperity and development. A large number of Art songs have been created and the artistic styles and application techniques of art songs have been significantly improved. Representatives of Art songs during this period include Liu Xijin, Shang Deyi, and Liu Cong. Liu Xijin's representative work is "Song of the Swan", which witnesses the unique charm of Chinese songs. Liu has made bold attempts and explorations in aspects such as music literature and creative style. Innovation is the typical characteristic during this period and it makes the music works more perfect. Besides, Shang Deyi is also a famous composer and educator during that period. In the context of the new era, there are many representative works of his Art songs, such as "Spring Wind Dance", "The Joy of the Torch Festival", "The Prairie in July", "The Motherland is in My Heart", "This Year's Plum Blossom" and "The Bells of Notre Dame de Paris". All of these works are regarded as a model of vocal works.

The theme of Shang Deyi's art song is closely related to reality. Many of his works use the form of songless songs and the creative techniques of coloratura skillfully. Besides, another composer, Liu Cong, also has many art songs of high quality. His works are mostly used as vocal music materials in music colleges of the university, including the vocal music teaching, vocal music competitions and concerts. His representative works include "Hometown Love". "Birds sing in the wind", "Please don't say", "The Dream of Wet", "In the Green Valley" and "Zhuoma in the Dream", etc. Most of his works presented the common natural scene including mountain, river, flower and birds, which are fresh, ethereal, natural and textured.

V. Prospects for the Sinicization of Contemporary Art Songs

When talking about the prospects for the sinicization of contemporary art songs, we need to summarize and organize the creation of Chinese modern art songs and to study some representative achievements and historical development clues at first. As far as the current situation is concerned, there have been a large number of papers and monographs, but there are still many shortcomings in

the actual understanding of art song. It is far from enough to analyze the nationalization techniques contained in the works of art songs and most of the study only stayed in the preliminary arrangement of historical materials. The researchers also only focused on vocal music students. The recent development trend of new art songs and the study of national style are not enough. For the exploration and research of new tendencies, it is necessary to analyze the new music technology, comparing and analyzing it from the theoretical point of view so that we can achieve the purpose of judging the new phenomenon to ensure that the development of Chinese art songs can get some guidance.

Secondly, bold innovation and exploration of the creative method is also needed. In the form of Chinese art songs, the popularization and popularization orientation is more and more obvious, which should be regarded as a good phenomenon generally speaking. It contributes to the further prosperity and development of Art songs. However, as a higher-standard cultural form, the exploration of Art songs should be integrated into the innovation of music technology. In addition, we need to encourage the young composers to apply and innovate the creation of modern techniques, integrating the aesthetics of the times and the national taste into the works. They can conduct regular seminars and creative activities, or some creative competitions, etc. By this way can they study more theories and promote it with the news guidance and cultural promotion.

Finally, it is necessary to guarantee the inner national material and charm in the creation of Art songs. The actual exploration of the nationalization of Chinese art songs found that the creation of Art songs gradually became symbolic and shallow. In the 1980s, the high-level excellent Art songs became less and less, especially the works with national characteristic.

We must know that "things belonging to the nation belong to the world", so contemporary composers should strive to explore the nationalized tones, harmony and textures. By this way can public feel the charm of national music while accepting foreign things.

Conclusion:

This paper may have some limitations on the study of the historical process of sinicization of art songs and there is still much room for improvement. Further efforts are needed to study the historical process of sinicization of art songs, to summarize the characteristics of sinicization of art songs and to provide some theoretical guidance for the further development of Chinese art songs.

References:

- [1] Yue Li. Historical Track of Art Songs From the Perspective of Vocal Music Culture [J]. Popular Literature and Art, 2014,02 :149-150.
- [2] Wang Anchao. Historical Development of Nationalization of Chinese Art Songs [J]. Journal of Zhejiang Vocational College of Art, 2014,1202 :67-74.
- [3] Lin Dan. A Brief Discussion on the Historical Status and Future of Chinese Art Songs [J]. Literature Education (middle), 2011,04 :95-96.

[4] Qian Yiping. Historical Development of Western Art Songs [J]. *Contemporary music*, 2016,06 :69-71.

[5] Zhang Bin. A Brief Discussion on the Historical Development of Early Chinese Art Songs [J]. *Voice of The Yellow River*, 2016,09 :62-63.

[6] Jiang Xiaomeng. On the Development and Creative Characteristics of Chinese Art Songs in the 1920s and 1930s [J]. *Contemporary music*, 2015,03 :52-54.

[7] Luo Dinghai. A Brief Analysis of the Music Form of Chinese Art Songs [J]. *Music Space and Time*, 2015, 14:24-25.

[8] Zhang Song. A Brief Analysis of the Development of Chinese Modern Art Songs [J]. *Intelligence*, 2013, 10:211.