

From Copying to Reference: Recognition of Modern Creative Thinking in Tan Xiaolin's Instrumental Exercises

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Abstract: *As a composer with both Chinese and Western musical literacy in the history of modern Chinese music, Tan Xiaolin's instrumental exercises are an important carrier connecting Western modern musical techniques with the Chinese local musical context. Taking Tan Xiaolin's instrumental exercises as the research object, this paper sorts out the evolutionary context of his creation from "copying" to "reference", combines specific exercise cases such as String Trio and Woodwind Quintet, analyzes the characteristics of his copying stage of Western modern musical techniques, explores his exploration of localization of techniques and personalization of creation in the process of reference, further interprets the modern creative thinking contained in them, reveals the important significance of Tan Xiaolin's instrumental exercises for the modernization transformation of modern Chinese music, and provides historical reference and thinking enlightenment for contemporary Chinese instrumental creation.*

Keywords: Tan Xiaolin, Instrumental Exercises, Copying, Reference, Modern Creative Thinking, Western Techniques, Localization.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the first half of the 20th century, modern Chinese music was in a period of exploration of "integration of Chinese and Western music". A group of composers took the initiative to absorb Western modern musical techniques and tried to build a creative system with both national characteristics and modernity, among which Tan Xiaolin was a very representative one. Tan Xiaolin studied in the United States in his early years, studied under Paul Hindemith and other Western modern composers, and systematically learned Western modern music creation techniques. After returning to China, he devoted himself to the exploration of the integration of Chinese and Western music. His instrumental exercises are not only the study and practice of Western modern techniques, but also the excavation and application of Chinese local musical elements.

Compared with Tan Xiaolin's mature works, his instrumental exercises have more "transitional" characteristics — from the initial mechanical copying of Western modern techniques to the gradual integration of his own understanding and local elements for reference and innovation, which clearly shows the formation and development track of his modern creative thinking. At present, the academic research on Tan Xiaolin mainly focuses on the achievements of the integration of Chinese and Western elements in his mature works, but pays insufficient attention to the thinking transformation from "copying to reference" in his instrumental exercises. However, these exercises are precisely the "germination carrier" of his modern creative thinking, recording his cognitive sublimation from "learning from the West" to "integrating Chinese and Western music". Based on this, this paper takes Tan Xiaolin's instrumental exercises as the entry point, sorts out the evolution of his creation from copying to reference, explores the modern creative thinking contained in them, and provides a new perspective for interpreting the path of modernization transformation of modern Chinese music.

2. STAGE OF COPYING: LEARNING AND PRACTICE OF WESTERN MODERN MUSICAL TECHNIQUES

The copying stage of Tan Xiaolin's instrumental exercises mainly concentrated during his study in the United States. The core was the systematic study and imitation of Western modern musical techniques. The creation at this stage focused on "restoring Western techniques" and had not yet formed his own unique creative style, but laid a solid foundation for the subsequent reference and innovation. His copying objects mainly focused on Paul Hindemith's counterpoint technique, Béla Bartók's rhythm organization method, and the structural thinking of Western modern instrumental creation. Representative exercises include String Trio (exercise) and Woodwind Quintet (first draft).

In terms of technique copying, Tan Xiaolin always adhered to the principle of "accurate reproduction" and focused on learning the core techniques of Western modern music. In counterpoint technique, he copied Hindemith's linear counterpoint thinking, emphasizing the independence of voices and the balance of harmonic functionality. In the String Trio exercise, he strictly followed the creative norms of Hindemith's "counterpoint", constructed a clear voice hierarchy, where each voice not only maintained the integrity of its own melody line, but also formed a harmonious counterpoint relationship with other voices, abandoning the functional constraints of traditional harmony, and reflecting the freedom and logic of Western modern counterpoint. This kind of copying was not blind replication, but a preliminary recognition of the creative thinking behind the techniques. By reproducing Hindemith's work structure and harmonic configuration, he gradually understood the creative concept of Western modern music of "valuing logic and techniques".

In the copying of rhythm and texture techniques, Tan Xiaolin focused on learning Bartók's rhythm innovation thinking and the construction method of Western modern texture. In some instrumental exercises, he copied Bartók's irregular rhythm combination techniques, using syncopation, across-bar ties and other techniques to break the regularity of traditional rhythm and enhance the dynamics and tension of music; in texture design, he copied the multi-layered texture thinking of Western modern instrumental music, adopting a three-dimensional texture structure of "melody layer + accompaniment layer + counterpoint layer", which changed the monotonous mode of "single melody + simple accompaniment" in traditional instrumental creation, reflecting the initial absorption of Western modern texture thinking.

Essentially, the copying creation at this stage was a process of "passive acceptance" of Western modern creative thinking by Tan Xiaolin — he took the works of Western modern composers as models, and gradually mastered the creative logic of Western modern music through accurate reproduction of technical details, including core elements such as counterpoint thinking, rhythm innovation, and texture construction. At this time, his creation had not yet integrated his own understanding and local elements, but accumulated technical foundation for subsequent reference and innovation, and also made him gradually form a preliminary understanding of "modern creation": modern music is not only a simple technical innovation, but also an innovation of thinking mode, that is, breaking the inherent framework of traditional creation and pursuing the logic of techniques and the personalization of expression.

3. STAGE OF REFERENCE: TECHNIQUE INTEGRATION AND PERSONALIZED EXPRESSION OF CREATIVE THINKING

With the proficient mastery of Western modern techniques, Tan Xiaolin's instrumental exercises entered the "reference" stage. The core transformation at this stage was from "passive copying" to "active reference" — no longer limited to the accurate reproduction of techniques, but combining his own musical cognition and Chinese local musical elements to selectively absorb and transform Western modern techniques, and gradually form his own creative style. His modern creative thinking also rose from "technical cognition" to "concept integration". Representative exercises at this stage include Woodwind Quintet (revised version) and String Quartet (exercise), which clearly show the sublimation of his creative thinking.

In terms of technique reference, Tan Xiaolin broke the "complete reproduction" of the copying stage, carried out "selective absorption" of Western modern techniques, focusing on referencing elements valuable for his own creation, while abandoning expressions inconsistent with the local context. In counterpoint technique, he referenced Hindemith's linear counterpoint thinking, but no longer strictly followed the rigid norms of Western counterpoint, but integrated the melodic characteristics of traditional Chinese music, combining the logic of Western counterpoint with the lyricism of Chinese melody. In the Woodwind Quintet, the melody voice adopted the pentatonic scale material of Chinese folk music, while the counterpoint voice used Western modern counterpoint techniques, forming a unique effect of "Chinese-Western counterpoint", which not only retained the sense of hierarchy of Western modern counterpoint, but also highlighted the charm of local music.

In the reference of harmony and rhythm techniques, Tan Xiaolin also adhered to the idea of "integration of Chinese and Western". He referenced the color thinking of Western modern harmony, using rich harmonic materials such as seventh chords and ninth chords to replace the functional progression of traditional harmony and enhance the expressiveness of music; at the same time, he did not copy the Western harmony system, but combined the modal characteristics of traditional Chinese music to localize the harmony, making the harmony progression more in line with the aesthetic habits of Chinese audiences. In terms of rhythm, he referenced Bartók's rhythm innovation concept, but abandoned his overly complex irregular rhythms, and integrated the rhythmic rhythm of traditional

Chinese music, such as combining the equal rhythm in folk music with Western syncopation. In the String Quartet (exercise), through the alternation of fast and slow rhythms and the contrast of strong and weak, a rhythmic effect with both modernity and locality was created.

More importantly, in the reference stage, Tan Xiaolin had gradually formed a modern creative thinking of "techniques serving expression" — he no longer regarded Western techniques as a "creative template", but as a tool for expressing emotions and conveying local culture. In his instrumental exercises, he began to explore the core elements of traditional Chinese music, combining folk melodies, traditional modes with Western modern techniques, and realizing the unity of "technique reference" and "cultural expression". This transformation marked that Tan Xiaolin's modern creative thinking had become mature, and also reflected the rational cognition of modern Chinese composers in the process of "learning from the West" — Western modern techniques are not the "ultimate goal", but a means to realize the modern expression of local music.

4. SUBLIMATION FROM COPYING TO REFERENCE: MATURE COGNITION OF MODERN CREATIVE THINKING

The evolution of Tan Xiaolin's instrumental exercises from "copying" to "reference" is not only a transformation of creative techniques, but also a continuous maturity and sublimation of modern creative thinking. Its core is the rational cognition of the creative path of "integration of Chinese and Western music", which not only reflects respect for Western modern creative thinking, but also highlights the adherence to local musical culture, providing important enlightenment for the modernization transformation of modern Chinese music.

From the perspective of thinking, in the copying stage, Tan Xiaolin's modern creative thinking was in a "passive cognition" state — he gradually understood the creative logic of modern music through reproducing Western techniques, with the core of "learning from the West and mastering techniques"; while in the reference stage, his thinking turned to "active cognition", and he began to think about "how Western techniques can serve local creation", forming the creative concept of "integration of Chinese and Western music". This thinking transformation made him get rid of the dependence on Western techniques and realize the leap from "technique imitation" to "thinking innovation". Tan Xiaolin's creative practice proved that modern creative thinking is not "total Westernization", but on the basis of absorbing advanced Western techniques, adhering to the foundation of local culture, and realizing the organic integration of techniques and culture.

At the level of creative practice, this thinking sublimation is specifically reflected in "personalization of techniques and localization of expression". Tan Xiaolin was no longer limited to the framework of Western techniques, but modified and innovated Western techniques according to his own creative needs and local aesthetics, making Western modern techniques and traditional Chinese musical elements form a harmonious coexistence relationship. For example, in the Woodwind Quintet, he combined Western modern texture techniques with the melodic characteristics of Chinese folk music, and the texture layers not only had the three-dimensional sense of Western modern music, but also integrated the lyricism of traditional Chinese music, realizing the unity of "technical modernity" and "cultural locality".

The evolution of Tan Xiaolin's instrumental exercises from copying to reference is essentially a process of exploration and cognition of modern creative thinking by modern Chinese composers — it broke the dualistic opposition thinking of "either total Westernization or clinging to tradition", and constructed a modernization path of "learning — absorbing — innovating". This thinking cognition not only shaped Tan Xiaolin's own creative style, but also provided important reference for the subsequent modern Chinese instrumental creation: the formation of modern creative thinking is inseparable from the learning of advanced Western techniques, and more inseparable from the adherence to local culture. Only by combining technique learning with cultural expression can we realize the modernization transformation of Chinese instrumental creation.

5. CONCLUSION

The creative evolution in Tan Xiaolin's instrumental exercises clearly shows the growth track of a modern Chinese composer from "copying the West" to "reference and innovation", and also records the cognitive process of his modern creative thinking from germination to maturity. The technique learning in the copying stage enabled Tan Xiaolin to systematically master the creative techniques and logic of Western modern music, laying a solid foundation for subsequent reference and innovation; the creative practice in the reference stage reflected his

rational exploration of the path of integrating Chinese and Western music, combining Western modern creative thinking with Chinese local musical culture, and forming a creative style with both modernity and locality.

Tan Xiaolin's creative practice still has important enlightenment significance for contemporary Chinese instrumental creation: in the context of globalization, the modernization of instrumental creation is not a simple technique imitation, but to adhere to the foundation of local culture on the basis of learning advanced Western creative concepts, and realize the unity of "technique reference" and "cultural expression". With his own exercise practice, Tan Xiaolin interpreted the correct path of modernization of modern Chinese music — respecting the rationality of Western modern creative thinking, while adhering to the local cultural identity, and making Western techniques serve local creation. This rational cognition not only promoted the development of modern Chinese instrumental creation, but also provided valuable historical experience for contemporary Chinese instrumental creation.

In the future, in-depth research on Tan Xiaolin's instrumental exercises can not only enrich the research content of the history of modern Chinese music, but also provide thinking enlightenment for contemporary composers: in the process of exploring the modernization of instrumental creation, we should not only maintain an open vision, take the initiative to absorb advanced Western creative techniques and thinking, but also adhere to the foundation of local culture, realize the true connotation of "integration of Chinese and Western music", and promote the development of Chinese instrumental creation in inheritance and innovation, and in reference and development.

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