

Uniwersytet Muzyczny Fryderyka Chopina
Wydział Wokalno-Aktorski
Katedra wokalistyki

LE SHI

SUMMARY

Praca doktorska
napisana pod kierunkiem
ad. dr hab. Eugenii Rozlach

Warszawa 2018

Summary

Classical Chinese poetry art song is a vocal music genre combining the form of Western art song with the content of classical Chinese poetry. The purpose of writing *A Study of Combination of Poetic and Musical Features in Ancient Chinese Poetry Art Songs* was to promote Chinese culture among literature and music lovers from around the world, by the means of presenting some outstanding examples of Chinese poetry and music. In the dissertation, the author discusses the integration of poetry and music in classical Chinese poetry art songs, based on the analysis of eleven songs recorded in July 2017 on the album *Tao Yao: Chinese Ancient Poetry Art Songs*.

The paper consists of five chapters. The first chapter expounds on the poetic and musical aspects of classical Chinese poetry. Poem is considered the earliest form of literature. From the moment of its birth, it has been inextricably linked with music, and both of them are time-based arts. Firstly, the language of poetry exists within a musical framework, which permeates every level of the poem. The musical nature of poetry is reflected in its prosody. Secondly, poetic language circulates in life space through artistic concepts it reveals, which ultimately brings it to the realm of “Da Yin Xi Sheng” (great music with little sound”, according to Laozi the most beautiful sound is the sound of silence, because perfection is intangible). The most notable musical characteristic of ancient Chinese poetry is that the pronunciation and tone are subject to musical constraints, which can be seen in rhyme, rhythm and metre, as well as the use of repetition and modal particles in recitation. The difference between poetic and everyday language in ancient China lay not in the language per se, but rather in intonation and tone. For example, in the earliest Chinese poem *Hou Ren Xi Yi* [*Ah, I am waiting for him!*] (239 BC), the phrase “hou ren” is taken from daily language, but adding a modal particle “xi yi” is what makes it poetry.

Across ages, Chinese poetry underwent tremendous changes in form and style, which can be exemplified by differences between realistic *Shi Jing* [*Book of Songs*] (11th-6th cent. BC), romantic *Li Sao* [*The Sorrow of Parting*] (c. 314 BC), and narrative Yuefu poem *Mo Shang Sang* [*Mulberry by the Road*] (Han dynasty). Nevertheless, the common thread in all of them is the close connection between music and poetry. For example, each of the 305 poems included in the first Chinese poetry collection, *Shi Jing*, can be sung with accompaniment. Moreover, the poems are divided into three categories: *Feng* [*Airs of the States*], *Ya* [*Court Hymns*] and *Song* [*Eulogies*], based on their musical characteristics. It can be clearly seen that classical Chinese poetry throughout centuries, including *Shi Jing*, *Chu Ci* [*Songs of Chu*] and forms such as *Lüshi*, *Jueju*, *Ci* and *Sanqu*, has always been created as a literary form suitable for singing, which is particularly eminent in Tang poetry (618-907) and Song poetry (960-1279). Therefore, it can be said that interconnection between poetry and music is an important feature of classical Chinese poetry. Poems that can be sung are called “shige” in Chinese, where “shi” stands for poem, while “ge” means song.

Poetry can be divided into three categories, based on its literary properties: descriptive poetry, narrative poetry and poetry of imagery. Descriptive poetry focuses on the depiction of people’s everyday life. Narrative poetry, in short, refers to poems with a plot, poems which tell a story. Poetry of imagery, in turn, involves using poetic language to express emotions and create literary images. Apart from that, from the perspective of musical properties, poetry can be characterized by its readability, singability and rhythmicity. A readable poem is characterized by sonorous syllables, melodious tones and the property of being easy to chant. The core of singability lies in organizing poetic language in accordance with musical principles. Finally, the beauty of rhyme reflects the essence of both poetry and music – rhythmicity.

The second chapter presents an examination of art song's compositional characteristics, striving to help the reader better understand the distinguishing compositional features of classical Chinese poetry art songs.

New Harvard Dictionary of Music gives the following definition of art song: "a song intended for performing at chamber music concerts. Traditionally composed to the words of a poem, thus the lyrics have a strong literary character. It should be differentiated from folk song and popular song. The accompaniment is written by the composer, not improvised by the performer. (*The New Harvard Dictionary of Music*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, 1986: 61.)

According to *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, art song differs from folk song in that it is a music genre composed by professional composers, and has profound artistic meaning. (*The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* [Z] .Macmillan Publishers Limited, 1980:646.)

Encyclopedia of China. Music and dance Volume explains that art song is a solo lyric song, popular in late 18th and early 19th century Europe. It is characterized by using famous poems as lyrics, focusing on the expression of human emotions, employing vivid musical language and complex composing techniques, and by important role of the accompaniment. (*Encyclopedia of China. Music and Dance Volume* [Z] Beijing: Encyclopedia of China Publishing House, 1989: 210.)

Art song was introduced to China almost one hundred years ago and Chinese composers largely adopted Western composing techniques. Nevertheless, they did not simply imitate the Western musical culture, but rather endeavored to merge it with traditional Chinese music, making some bold explorations in terms of melody, harmony, accompaniment texture and musical form. Especially starting from 1980s, both theoretical research on composing techniques and diversification in creative practice gained momentum, leading to many new developments, while at the same time traditional techniques were preserved and cultivated. In the works from this period we can observe the application of some new musical systems and methods of musical composition, such as serial music or dodecaphony, which do not really fit into traditional categories of composing techniques, thus the period is characterized by originality and syncretism in methods of musical composition.

The chapter focuses on three compositional features of classical Chinese poetry art songs. Firstly, the key idea of art songs is the perfect integration of poetic thought with emotions conveyed by music. Chinese culture has always valued the expression of artistic conception, not only in poetry, but also in painting, music, sculpture, etc. As far as the integration of poetry with music is concerned, the composer's task is to paint a vivid and graphic musical image, so as to express through music what cannot be conveyed directly through language.

Secondly, art song should make full use of the power of dramatic effect. By special use of tone, pitch, rhythm, motifs, themes and structure, the composer can create changes in mood and stark emotional contrasts, thus evoking a kind of dramatic emotional experience in the hearts of the listeners. Dramatic effect is therefore an indispensable element in writing art songs.

Finally, art songs are characterized by flexible use of musical structure. Both Western and Chinese art songs exhibit much diversity in terms of musical form. Schubert and other 19th century European composers inherited classical musical forms created and perfected by their predecessors,

such as Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. Forms popular at that time included strophic form, strophic variations, binary form and ternary form. Chinese composers, apart from employing these forms, searched for new solutions, which would enable them to blend the musical cultures of the East and the West. It can be said that Zhao Yuanren's innovations in "sinicizing" art song were the most outstanding among Chinese composers from the first half of the 20th century. According to Xiao Youmei, his art songs "opened a new era for Chinese music, making it impossible not to call him Chinese Schubert". Zhao Yuanren laid emphasis on integrating traditional Chinese aesthetics with Western composing techniques, and boldly experimented with "Chinese harmony". While writing music, he paid special attention to constructing melody in conformity with the tones of the lyrics and "adding Chinese style" to scales and singing techniques employed. Apart from that, he often incorporated in his compositions familiar traditional tunes, as in *Jiao Wo Ru He Bu Xiang Ta* [*How Can I Forget Him*].

The third chapter comprises a detailed analysis of eleven songs from the album *Tao Yao: Chinese Ancient Poetry Art Songs*, which will be briefly introduced below:

The lyrics of the first song, *Yue Chu*, come from the *Book of Songs*. It was a folk love song from the period of early Qin dynasty, describing a man looking at the bright moon and reminiscing about a woman as beautiful as the moonlight. The composer, Wang Peng (1976-) skillfully conveyed the tranquil and hazy ambience of the poem through music. It is a piece of chamber music written for soprano and four woodwind instruments (flute, oboe, clarinet and bassoon). The style of the composition combines features of traditional Chinese music with numerous modern composing techniques.

The second song, *Tao Yao*, is based on a poem from the *Book of Songs*, congratulating a young lady on getting married. It is a song of praise for the bride, whose beauty is compared to that of peach blossom. The poem was acclaimed by Yao Jiheng, a scholar from the Qing dynasty, as "the precursor of poems extolling female beauty". In his musical composition, apart from soprano, Wang Peng (1976-) employed also three instruments, characterized by completely different principles of sound production, namely violin, flute and piano. Each instrument's part is an indispensable component of the musical piece, both independent and complementary, which makes it more like a chamber music composition than a simple song with accompaniment.

The third song, *Yang Guan San Die*, is an unquestionable jewel of Chinese musical heritage. It is a masterpiece of *guqin* compositions from the Tang dynasty period, based on the poem *Farewell to an Envoy on His Mission to Anxi* by a Tang poet Wang Wei (701-761). Using the imagery of weeping willows and morning rain, the author expressed his melancholy at parting with a friend and his worry for his companion, embarking on a mission to a remote borderland. The version of *Yang Guan San Die* included in the album *Tao Yao* retained the original ternary form and conveyed the ethereal charm of *guqin* in the accompaniment texture. *Yang Guan San Die* hitherto remains one of the most widely performed ancient songs in China, which clearly shows its inexhaustible artistic vitality.

The fourth song, *Xing Hua Tian Ying*, is one of the most representative works of a famous Southern Song dynasty poet and composer, Jiang Kui (1155-1221). Jiang Kui was inspired to write this song by beautiful scenery of the Huai Chu region, which captivated him when he was passing Nanjing on a journey from Hankou by boat. The original song was written using ancient Chinese notation. The version recorded on *Tao Yao* album was arranged by a modern Chinese composer, Jin

Xiang. The composition is based on semiquavers and quavers, flowing continuously like floating clouds and flowing water. The composer managed to reflect both the ambience and prosody of the poem, achieving a perfect integration of an ancient song with modern music.

The fifth song, *Cai Sang Zi. Hen Jun Bu Si Jiang Lou Yue*, was composed to a poem by a Song Dynasty poet, Lü Benzhong (1084-1145). It expresses the pain of separation, using the simile of the moon. In the first stanza the lyrical subject complains that only the moon can accompany her in her longing, while the second stanza speaks of short reunion and long separation, which is compared to the phases of the moon. The song is characterized by true emotion, simplicity and ease. The melody, composed by Gu Danru, flows smoothly and naturally, reflecting the fresh beauty typical of Chinese folk songs.

The lyrics of the sixth song, *Feng Qiao Ye Bo*, are based on a poem by a Tang dynasty poet, Zhang Ji, which describes a quiet late autumn night in the southern water town of Suzhou. The sound of the midnight bell from the Hanshan Temple was used to render the loneliness and sorrow of the poet travelling in an alien land. The composer, Li Yinghai (1927-2007) is one of the most famous figures in Chinese music world. He managed to recreate the imagery and mood of the poem, making sure that the melody perfectly corresponded to the prosody of the lyrics. The song consists of a single period, which is constructed according to a traditional Chinese rhetorical convention (i.e. the qi-cheng-zhuan-he pattern). Such an arrangement makes the composition more vivid and realistic.

The seventh song, *Hua Fei Hua*, was composed to a well-known poem by Tang dynasty poet Bai Juyi (772-846). The poet chose to use the images of flowers, mist, dreams and clouds to convey the transience of beautiful things in life. The poem is considered a masterpiece of ancient misty poetry. Huang Zi (1904-1938) painted a tranquil, hazy image, using simple and elegant musical language. The song arouses a longing for peace and freedom, at the same time reminding us to cherish fleeting beauty.

The eighth song, *Wo Zhu Chang Jiang Tou*, was inspired by a poem by Li Zhiyi (1048-1117), a Song dynasty poet. It describes the separation of eternal lovers and the main compositional thread is the motive of the Yangtze river. The composer, Qing Zhu (1893-1959), apart from rendering the artistic concept of the original poem, endowed it with a new meaning. On the one hand, the song expresses the longing of parted lovers, but on the other, it also conveys the yearning and grief after losing a friend, who laid down his life for the country.

The ninth song, *Zao Fa Bai Di Cheng*, is based on a poem by a famous Tang dynasty poet, Li Bai (701-762). Li Bai is considered the greatest Chinese romantic poet, and has been widely praised as a poetic genius. The poem was written on Li Bai's way to exile, when suddenly he learned of the pardon decree and turned back eastwards, towards Jiangling. Therefore, the mood of the poem is optimistic and cheerful. The composer, Qin Xixuan (1922-2012), used the sensory stimulus of brisk and vigorous music to convey the mental impression rendered in the poem, in this way emphasizing Li Bai's confident and optimistic outlook on the future.

The tenth song, *Shui Diao Ge Tou. Bing Chen Zhong Qiu*, was inspired by a poem by Su Shi (1037-1101), an outstanding poet from the Song dynasty period. The poem revolves around the image of a full moon during Mid-Autumn Festival, which evokes nostalgic feelings, as it is traditional-

ly associated with family reunion. The feeling of homesickness leads the poet to reflect on joys and sorrows, partings and reunions, which are inevitably part of life. His philosophical ruminations reveal complex and ambivalent thoughts and feelings that the poet was struggling with, but at the same time also his love for life and a spirit of optimism. The composer, Liu Xueyan (1935-) chose a shortened ternary form to express the mood of the poem and emphasize the message of the last verse: “May we all be blessed with longevity though far apart, We are still able to share the beauty of the moon together”.

The eleventh song, *Sheng Sheng Man*, was composed to a poem by Li Qingzhao (1084-1155), a famous poet from the Song dynasty period. The poem gives vent to Li Qingzhao’s sorrow and despair after the loss of her father and in the face of her country’s defeat. In writing the song, Xie Zhenqiang combined traditional Chinese style with Western composing techniques, blending the past with the present, and fusing the East with the West.

The eleven songs discussed in chapter three represent classical Chinese poetry art songs from different periods. The lyrics include poems as early as the pre-Qin *Book of Songs*, as well as masterpieces from the creative peak of Tang and Song dynasties. The composers are all outstanding figures of Chinese modern music. Apart from two original songs on the album, *Yue Chu* and *Tao Yao*, the author made some modifications in the arrangement of the remaining compositions, so as to express her own interpretation of the songs.

The fourth chapter presents issues connected with the performance of Chinese art songs, focusing on the explanation of two traditional Chinese approaches: “singing driven by words” and “singing driven by meaning”.

“Singing driven by words” is a technique, in which musical composition adheres to the rules of pronunciation. The relationship between poetry and music is sought in linguistic patterns, such as tones and prosody. Music is therefore in a way subordinate to language. Chinese language is characterized by having four tones: yinping (level tone), yangping (rising tone), shang (falling-rising tone) and ru (falling tone). The music should correspond to the tones, so as to achieve perfect harmony between music and poetry. In the ancient times, art songs were written by creating lyrics to existing tunes, and since the pronunciation rules had to be adhered to, words were chosen very carefully. For example, in Liu Zongyuan’s *River Snow*, the level and oblique tones alternate in a well-arranged manner, making the poem perfect for reciting. The vocal part should therefore reflect the tone pattern in its rhythm.

Liu Zongyuan *River Snow*

Qian shan / niao fei / jue	- - / ^ ^ / -
Wan jing / ren zong / mie	^ ^ / - - / ^
Gu zhou / suo li / weng	- - / ^ ^ / -
Du diao / han jiang / xue	^ ^ / - - / ^

„Singing driven by meaning”, in turn, can be understood as another level of the relationship between poetry and music. Being semantic in nature, language can depict objective scenery and characters, having therefore certain formative and descriptive powers. In classical Chinese poetry art songs, the content and emotions of the poem are extracted and intensified through music. The method of “singing driven by meaning” has two variations: macroscopic and microscopic. The former pertains to the overall arrangement and style of the composition, which is dependent on the

content and style of the poem. The latter focuses on the objects of poetic description which can be translated into musical language, and imitates acoustic characteristics of objective elements in a symbolic way. This method is used both in China and in the West.

The topic of the fifth chapter is the current situation of ancient Chinese poetry art song. It covers issues such as innovation, protection and development of art songs, as well as new trends in Chinese vocal performance.

Just as there are one thousand different Hamlets in the eyes of one thousand people, the extremely rich expressive force of bel canto provides classical Chinese poetry art songs with endless interpretation possibilities, adding to their depth and charm. It proves that the best way to protect any musical form is through innovation. Therefore, we should not only strengthen our cultural self-awareness, earnestly reflecting on our culture's strong and weak points, and its development trends, but also care about its protection, promotion and innovation, thus enhancing its vitality. Consequently, contemporary musicians should never cease to explore new singing techniques and create new melodies. Apart from that, the foundation for development of classical Chinese poetry art songs is having a deep understanding of the classical Chinese poetry culture, which will enable us to protect the uniqueness and diversity of their content and singing style. This should be a starting point for the interpretation of classical poetry and a point of reference for performing classical Chinese poetry art songs. Because every time ancient Chinese poetry art songs are sung, it is not merely a vocal music performance, but a dynamic act of passing on cultural heritage.

There are no doubts that preserving the tradition is a very important principle, it is the basis for the development of art. One can even say that without protection and development of tradition there would be no innovation. In performing classical Chinese poetry art songs, apart from preserving the tradition, the singer should also introduce some modifications, for example blending bel canto singing techniques into techniques typical for Chinese opera or folk songs, hence adding modern international vocal art elements. In this way contemporary listeners will not only be presented with the quintessence of the classical Chinese poetry culture, but will also be able to experience the richness and multi-faceted charm of vocal music. However, in order to increase the artistic appeal of ancient Chinese poetry art songs, it is necessary to carefully integrate bel canto phonation, resonance and breathing techniques into the subtle opera and folk song singing methods, striving to achieve a seamless combination of the two. What should also be taken into consideration, is the use of a full variety of voices and diversified singing styles, so as to enrich the interpretation of Chinese art songs. It is a topic that requires further investigation both from the perspective of modern vocal pedagogy and singing theory.

Summing up, poetry and music are a dwelling place for human soul and they have been closely interrelated in the history of literature and music of many countries around the world. It is impossible to understand a foreign culture without understanding its music, because music can teach about customs and history. On the other hand it is as powerful as to influence people's thoughts, morals and feelings, to the point of changing customs and people's hearts. Cultures from around the world have all made their own unique contributions to human civilization. China has always been open to other countries' cultural achievements, at the same time promoting its own culture, which in author's opinion is the responsibility of every artist.