

# Aesthetic Reflection of Neutral Tone of National Mode in Accordion Music Composition

## Taking Dai People's Water-splashing Festival as an Example

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**Abstract**—In the 1960s and 1970s, more excellent works with the basis of mass social music culture were presented under the condition of concentrating on the composition of national traditional style. It is on the premise of such rich and productive composition that the author observes the relevant style of accordion music works and finds that polyphonic technique "neutral tone" is widely used in the composition of elements of national music. Therefore, the author tries to infer the expression position of "neutral tone" by analyzing the melody in the works, and further explain the use of this technique in national mode melody and how to embody the sound effect principle of national music in formal aesthetics.

**Keywords**—*accordion; neutral tone; national mode; formal aesthetics*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Accordion, as a kind of Western musical instrument, has been introduced into China, and is welcomed by the masses because of its diverse timbre and rich harmony. Since the 1970s, literature and art began to flourish, which promoted the rapid development of accordion music and produced a large number of excellent works. During this period, composers began to mine the elements of traditional Chinese music, combining accordion with Chinese national characteristics, and composed a number of original accordion works with Chinese traditional music style. Dai People's Water-splashing Festival is an accordion adaptation with national elements composed by imitating Lusheng and other musical instruments through sound and articulation feeling. The song vividly imitates the sound of Dai people's singing and dancing accompanied by Lusheng, and ingeniously reproduces the happy scene of Dai people's Water-splashing Festival through various decorative sounds and harmony with national color. The music not only retains the national melody characteristics and traditional cultural connotations of the original Dai people's festival, but also gives full play to the characteristics of accordion on the basis of national tone. It uses Western musical instruments to express the valuable neutral tone techniques in traditional music, and vividly displays the profound national spirit and cultural context. Through the analysis of the melody in the works, the author has inferred the expression position of "neutral tone", and further explained the use of this technique in national mode melody and how to

embody the sound effect principle of national music in formal aesthetics.

### II. THE HISTORICAL OPPORTUNITY OF ACCORDION MUSIC COMPOSITION

The introduction and development of accordion in China is a process of germination and development accompanied by the music life of the masses. The first reason for its popularity was that accordion, as an instrument accompanying the songs of national salvation, was played in various propaganda performances of national salvation during the period of anti-Japanese aggression. This process itself embodied that as a foreign culture and symbol, it began to blend with Chinese culture, and from the very beginning it was closely related to the real life of China. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, many local cultural troupes and other literary and artistic performers also equipped with professional accordion players. Accordion as a teaching tool had also entered the classroom of primary and secondary schools. More popular development was that millions of people felt the new era and life in the form of mass singing activities flourished throughout the country. Accordion accompaniment seemed to be a standard form of performance.

Of course, the accordion is indeed a foreign instrument. Its twelve-tone equal temperament expresses pitch performance sound and it is more suitable for the performance of Western music. Of course, it has unique charm in the performance of foreign music. The temperament of the accordion when moving a large number of fast minor second melodies is difficult for other instruments to match. However, with the need of New China's cultural undertakings, Chinese art in the 1960s and 1970s experienced a history of "foreign-to-Chinese" reform. From the perspective of cultural development, the older generation of Chinese accordionists and composers could not only be satisfied with the function of playing foreign works and accompaniment, but also needed to explore an innovative way to express music with Chinese characteristics more widely - to create diverse music of Chinese nationalization. So far, accordion art has made a breakthrough in the progress of China. However, during the Cultural Revolution period from 1966 to 1976, along with the coincidence with the literary and artistic policy of "Wulan Muqi" at that time, it objectively provided a good opportunity for the popularization of

accordion in China. However, due to the Cultural Revolution, the free composition of art was greatly restricted, and all the literary and artistic stages could only be used for "model opera" and "red play". But it did not change the significance of the instrument itself. During this period, accordion played the most important role in history, accompanying revolutionary songs and aiming at adapting revolutionary songs and model opera music, which made accordion survive in the cracks under the suppression of literary and artistic creation and performance. Indirectly, it has provided an opportunity for accordion to absorb more nutrients from Chinese traditional culture and to combine with Chinese folk music deeply.

Since the Third Plenary Session of the CPC Central Committee held in 1978, the cultural policy has been greatly adjusted. At the same time, a gratifying new era of literature and art has emerged in the Inland areas. If Chinese accordion works produced before 1978 were branded by the special social environment and cultural policies, then the reform and opening-up and ideological emancipation brought a new situation for Chinese accordion composition in the new era. It liked a sudden spring breeze overnight, and thousands of trees and pears blossomed. Artists were not satisfied with the past thinking mode of "folk song plus harmony" and "theme plus variation", and began to go beyond the framework limit of simple transplantation, and gradually explored a way of individualized composition of Chinese accordion works. During this period, a lot of high-quality works emerged, which included three types of composition: adaptation of transplanted works, focusing on popular traditional songs; re-composition of traditional Chinese music with strong local national character based on folk music; and use of modern western composing techniques for reference, both keeping the national charm and concerning works that were progressively synchronized with the world.

From a large number of creative works, the works highlighting national consciousness prominently are undoubtedly the second composition of national folk music elements. This is also the center of this article that the author wants to express — how the composer embodies and expresses this national melody element in his works, and how the dual national style charm of formality and acoustics is embodied in such composition.

### III. THE REFLECTION OF FORMAL BEAUTY OF "NEUTRAL TONE" IN THE COMPOSITION OF NATIONAL ACCORDION WORKS

On the way to the world, the composers have realized that the performance of music works must be rooted in the national and folk fertile land in order to gain more creative vitality. It is a popular saying: "works with a national character are all works of the world". Regardless of the history of China and foreign countries, there are numerous examples of composing excellent works by absorbing the essence of folk music: for example, the theme of Tchaikovsky's *Andante Cantabile* is a Russian folk song *Lonely Fania*; Zhu Jian'er composed the symphony *A Wonder of Naxi* by application of the special tone of Naxi music; Modern works such as Tan Dun's *Feng Ya Song* and Tian Feng's *Yunnan Style* are all created by absorbing nutrition from southern minority music. Although

accordion is a Western equal-temperament musical instrument, it is surprising to give an auditory feeling of "neutral tone" (three-quarter microtone) in its performance.

Neutral tone<sup>1</sup> originated from the special acoustics of minorities, and it existed since ancient times. The beauty embodied in neutral tone is also the unity of the content of the sound and the melodic form presented. From the perspective of the relationship between the aesthetic subject and object, the formal music beauty of neutral tone contains the expression and communication of intervals and other factors. From the analysis of the characteristics of the neutral tone of national music (especially southern minority music), it is helpful to observe the aesthetic tendencies of "neutral tone" in the composition of specific ethnic groups. Of course, it has also become an important feature for us to distinguish the universality of the same ethnic group. That is to say, the life experiences of different ethnic groups have different national temperament, different aesthetic and appreciation habits. People may have different perceptions on same music characteristics, so aesthetic perspectives are also different for such a non-mainstream formal technique. Anyway, what we usually see is that we tend to seek a very deep foundation of national music among the ethnic groups. The musical expression of ethnic minorities uses this special tone to express their inner feelings from generation to generation, which they think is beauty.

If the sound perception of the neutral tone is arranged according to the mode, what we hear should be the elevated fa and the lowered si in the seven-tone mode. To be exact, the difference between them is 50 cents. In fact, there is no so-called semitone relationship in this seven-tone mode, which is extremely interesting in the composition of works. This provides a great assistance for the composition of instrumental music with distinctive national and regional characteristics.

This paper takes the accordion work *Dai People's Water-splashing Festival* (Yunnan ethnic melody after the 1970s) as an example.

The introduction of *Dai People's Water-splashing Festival* uses a seven-tone mode of Qing music. The beautiful melody uses the sound effects of Lusheng, an ethnic musical instrument of Dai people, and makes every effort to render a morning scene of the Dai people living near mountains and rivers. Although it is an introduction, the metaphorical patterns in mode are rich and colorful with changed intervals and chords by using the foil effect of sound dependence. It promotes to reveal common cultural temperament and music style through interactive mode of instruments even they participate in different voices, so as to better explain the music style and connotation characteristics in the works in "Fig. 1".

<sup>1</sup> Neutral tone refers to a certain melody in minority nationalities. The distances between neutral tone and adjacent high and low temperaments are 3/4, which is between large and small intervals or pure augmented intervals. Therefore, it is called neutral tone.



Fig. 1. The music score 1.

By using this method, the composition of melody scale in music works reflects the complexity and impact in the beauty of sound form, and brings new contradictions and new contents to the whole music works from orchestration techniques and harmony layout. In style, it newly integrates the traditional system of our country with the three-quarters of the music system popular in the Arab world.

It enters to left-handed B.S. melody performance from the 42ed bar. Bass melody expands the motive of the first theme of music. That is to say, the time value of original semiquaver is extended to minim as basic length, which makes music rich with human touch and cordial feeling, and presents a grand and poetic festival scene. In this section, the melody of the left hand can evoke the echo of the right hand at any time. The thick bass of the left hand calls out the moving melody of the right hand. It is a real portrayal of Dai people's daily life and work. It reflects the moving scene of young men and girls splashing in water and playing in the village stream, and the exciting scene of dancing along with drum and sheng. In score, the composer widely used the running second up-going sound, which is very common in Western techniques. However, in the composition of national music, there is less secondary connection in most cases. But a large number of such connections are used in the sound, highlighting a similar

performance of glide in the melody. In this way, it is more necessary to use glide to reflect the essence of "neutral tone", because it is almost impossible to express pitch in seams under instrument of twelve-tone equal temperament. This equality also reflects the need for active and creative exchanges and works exchanges of performers. Through tacit "dialogue", the work could reflect the rich and varied scenes and different musical images.

In the section from 99th bar to 110th bar, Gong tone of two-line octave in G pentatonic mode begins to go down, and then rolls upward and returns to Gong tone. The melody is natural and smooth. In the 111st bar, the main chord played with decomposition chords in G Gong is like a peacock slowly harnessing its broad wings and gliding steadily to land. With the help of the Hulusi tone, by using mi as decorative tone same with the beginning of the music, and with the following tremor, the 112ed bar vividly reproduces the motions of peacock after landing who turns left and combs its feature and turns right and peck its body, and the secure manner of peacock. The music is in line with the performance of dancer, imitating peacock leaning to drink water, looking around, tapping feathers and shaking dew. In peacock dance, its expressive force is absolutely lifelike in "Fig. 2".



Fig. 2. The music score 2.

From these scores, we can feel that different nationalities and different regions have different modes. Their origins are pluralistic and their development is multi-linear, but they will encounter contradictions of various tuning systems in the process of development. With the gradual complexity of music, the change of melody transition has intensified the contradiction of unequal temperament itself and the contradiction caused by the collision of various tuning systems. Composers are trying to bridge these contradictions, and also think of using the contradictions, so they adjust the natural form of sound artificially to change the existing pitch structure of music. Therefore, whether it is the visualized sound effect or the sound effect after using these contradictions, we are constantly told that it is not advisable to blindly pursue Western technology itself. It is unwise to use grammar rules of others to create and learn our native culture in "Fig. 3".

After the 123rd bar, the music enters the second theme (B) in accessory part, and the beautiful melody becomes the 3/4 beat. In this section, the composer used the realistic music thinking of melting the past and casting the present to consolidate the first music theme. By using the development technique of b-b1-b2, it carries on about 48 bars in length, continuously pushing the melody to the high-pitched area. The music language reflects the graceful posture of countless Dai girls, and shows the desire of Dai people loving homeland and yearning for a happy life in the Water-splashing Festival.



Fig. 3. The music score 3.

The first climax of the music appeared in the subsection from 171st bar to 177th bar. In order to set off the pleasant scenery of mountains and rivers in living area of Dai people, the left hand gives full play to the characteristics of the accordion. The B.S part uses the quaver to urge the melody forward positively, giving the music a sense of impetus and direction. At the same time, in order to fully present the natural concave-convex spectacle of up-and-down and continuous mountains in Xishuangbanna, the full chord connection of the right hand suggests performers should give full play to the bellows and use all bellows of accordion (rarely used) under the condition that bellows don't lose elasticity to pull the melody up and down. A total of 21 beats in the short seven bars mobilize the hot and harmony sentiment of Dai people in the Water-splashing Festival in "Fig. 4".



Fig. 4. The music score 4.

From the 178th bar, the melody falls into the alto section. The notes are adjusted in density. The melody of strong vitality arises spontaneously with a sense of breathing and affinity. The melody is beautiful, giving people a reverie of beautify and a desire of good life. In the 194th bar, the speed slightly slows down. The 12 quavers in the two bars of right band give a continuous effect, which are interesting. It gives people a feeling of downsizing reality again and again and storing in memory as well as an eager for the Water-Splashing Festival in "Fig. 5".



Fig. 5. The music score 5.

The section from the 236th bar to the 250th bar is cadenza. It has used 120 consecutive sixteen-minute notes, and completely spread out the music theme. Then through the up-going scale in D Gong in 251st bar, it transfers to G Gong and continuously uses 61 sixteen-minute notes to re-render the music theme. After the melody from the 260th bar to the 267th bar returns to D Gong, the melody of the 268th bar goes up and down continuously by using the scale of pentatonic mode in D Gong. Then repeats the sixteenth minute notes around D Gong, E Shang and #F Jiao in six bars, reaching the peak of the music in "Fig. 6".



Fig. 6. The music score 6.

The section from 286th bar to 294th bar is the end of music. The harmony color, not bound by the pentatonic national mode, adopts the variation termination in Western Major, which presents climax design at a stroke in a steady way. Flying sixteen-minute notes like the stars of the Milky Way, or the torch of moonlight calling happiness "Fig. 7".



Fig. 7. The music score 7.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Through the analysis of the musical form characteristics of this work, we can clearly observe the use of performance skills and terminology patterns required by many national music colors in this work. In the performance of music embodying the national cultural style, accordion plays not only the logical aspect of harmony and chords, but also combines the timbre characteristics of many national instruments. At the same time, it also focuses on the change and design of "national" music material and music vocabulary. In the composition, the accordion voice part clearly presents the "national" characteristics of mode, melody, rhythm, harmony, texture and so on. Meanwhile, the formal beauty of the works also shows more enthusiastic pictorial features, which has rich connotations of "heteronomy", and also reflects the "interior" characteristic of small works. The form of the picture is more colorful and rich in the scene of the atmosphere changes. Finally, in highlighting the typical national style, the composer also highlights the use of other interval relationships in accordion music. In the composition of this work, besides above-mentioned second time relations, third time relations and the application of changed chords, it also uses a large



number of augmented second, augmented fourth, diminished fifth intervals and chord progressions to highlight national characteristics. Through these chord sequence transformations composed of non-third tones, the features and different elements of non-third tones are highlighted. The series color changes brought about by the combination and overlapping of materials also greatly enrich the harmony and tone color of "regional" and "national" nature, and make the auditory effect more in line with people's traditional psychological habits of appreciation.

In short, the national and regional characteristics are greatly mined in this work, which are well displayed in this work. The register of accordion can not only make the timbre of the whole work simulate the timbre of other instruments, but also make the performance, tone and rhythm of all kinds of instruments form a unification, which can better play the effect of register skillfully in playing and make the accordion more expressive. Especially, the use of bellows can directly affect the "national" and "regional" tone characteristics of the works in performance, as well as the timbre, timbre, volume effect and so on.

The "neutral tone" mode is a special mode, which originates from the fusion of natural material and human mind. It is also a complete comparison of humanized natural harmonic. The neutral tone mode is a "human form" which is freely changed on the basis of the unchanged nature of sound. It is a "humanized" behavior in music culture. In the performance of works, it mostly changes auditory sense of sound.

Concluding remarks: When we look back, we will examine the development of accordion music in China in all aspects. It should be admitted that in recent years, both in overall performance skills and the number of creative repertoires, there has been amazing progress. However, in addition to the joy, we cannot fail to see clearly that in these numerous works, there are still few works that can really breakthrough in creative techniques and artistic expression connotation.

In summary, we draw a conclusion about the "neutral tone" existing in the music of ethnic minorities in southern China, and it is of great research value. By studying and analyzing the rules of these characteristic sounds, we reveal their special aesthetics, which has the history and background of each ethnic group, the aesthetic sense, requirements and aesthetic consciousness of each ethnic group. It is of far-reaching significance to inherit and carry forward our national cultural tradition and to develop socialized national music by grasping, applying and developing the role of these rules in artistic practice.

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