

SANI FANTASIA: AN EXAMINATION ON YUNNAN YI CHARACTERISTICS IN PIANO MUSIC ADAPTATION

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Abstract: Incorporating Yunnan Yi music elements into piano compositions is a growing trend in Chinese piano music, and Yi piano adaptations serve as an important representation of Yunnan piano music's ethnic style and development. However, a lack of systematic investigation and observation means that little research has been done on the composition of Yi piano adaptations. This presents a challenge for aspiring piano students looking to interpret the Yi characteristics of these works. This study aims to provide a systematic discourse on prior research and investigate the relevance and contribution of Yi piano adaptations in reducing the existing gap. Literary research and musical analysis will be employed to analyze the *Sani Fantasia* adaptation. A literature analysis will classify relevant piano adaptation works and appreciate Yi piano music's overall growth pattern, while a systematic examination of *Sani Fantasia* will reveal how Yi's music elements are expressed and translated in the piano pieces while maintaining the original folk song's ethnic style. The researchers hope the study will deepen academics' understanding of the cultural significance and worth of Yi piano adaptations and piano compositions in the Yunnan ethnic styles.

Keywords: Yunnan, ethnic style, music analysis, Yi people, characteristic

1. INTRODUCTION

China is home to 55 ethnic minorities (Mackerras, 2016), among which the Yí people stand out with their rich history and ancient culture. They are the most populous community in Southwest China, primarily residing in Yunnan, Sichuan, Guizhou, and Guangxi. Yunnan Province alone accounts for three-fifths of the total Yí population of 4.284 million (Bai, 2002). The Yí ethnic minority has various branches, including *Sǎní*, *Nísū*, *Axì*, *Awǔ*, and *Azé*. Their geographical and cultural environments have shaped distinct living conditions and cultural systems, resulting in a music culture with unique cultural connotations (Zhou, 2007). Due to the different branches, wide distribution, and diverse natural influences, Yí music genres, appellations, forms, and classifications are complex and special (Zhang, 2006). To facilitate a comprehensive understanding, the authors classify Yí music into three categories: folk songs (*Míngē*), song-dance (*Gēwǔ*), and instrumental music (*Qiyuè*). Folk songs, as described by Zhou (2015), emerge from daily life and have been passed down orally. They encompass narrative, labor, and ritual songs. Narrative songs celebrate characters, history, and stories, while labor songs accompany physical tasks. Ritual songs are performed during ceremonies such as sacrifices and weddings. These folk songs typically employ a pentatonic scale, such as **A-C-D-E-G**, with the renowned work "*Ashīmǎ*" serving as a representative example. Song-dance holds a significant place in the Yí people's lives (Shen, 2014). Each branch has its representative song and dance music. Slow-paced dances cater to older individuals, while faster-paced dances are popular among the youth. Accompanying instruments include the bid trichord (*Dàsānxián*), small trichord (*Xiǎosānxián*), bamboo flute, and Yu-kin (*Yuèqín*). The Yí people perform these dances and play musical instruments during the Torch Festival, a traditional celebration. The final category, instrumental music, encompasses over thirty types of instruments played by the Yí people (Zhou, 2015). These instruments can be classified as wind, string, and percussion. Instrumental performances are predominantly solo, with occasional ensembles. The instruments are often played in conjunction with folk songs and song-dance performances, creating a vibrant and dynamic musical landscape.

The development of Yunnan's piano music can be traced back to the early 20th century (1900 - 1949), when pianos were imported from France and other countries through churches and missionary schools in Yunnan. Additionally, the tumultuous political situation in China prompted many musicians to seek refuge in Yunnan via Hong Kong and other regions. For instance, the renowned modern pianist Fou Ts'ong studied at Yunnan University, and Nie Er played piano music while moving from Kunming to Shanghai (Li & Si, 2003). This unique era laid the foundation for

Yunnan's piano culture, which blends the enchanting landscapes with the distinctive characteristics of Yunnan's folk songs. Moreover, due to the composers' emphasis on nationalization, Yunnan's folk songs were artistically transformed to embody both the ideological nature of the original tunes and highlight instrumental characteristics. The success and development of piano adaptations based on Yunnan's folk songs exemplify this cultural significance. Therefore, conducting research on piano works in Yunnan province holds immense importance in promoting the advancement of piano music in China.

Since the release of the film *Ashima* (*Āshīmǎ*) in the 1960s (which contains the elements of Yi-Sani music), Yi-Sani's music elements have been extensively applied into contemporary creation with various genres. An example of this would be *Sani Fantasia*. *Sani Fantasia* was composed by Yunnan native composers Liu Xiaogeng and Wan Li according to the Yi people folk song *Please Stay My Dear Guest* (*yuǎn fāng dě kè rén qǐng nǐ liú xià lái*). *Sani Fantasia* retains the characteristics of Yi folk songs. The composers not merely changed the traditional music mode of single melody and short structure in the instrumental music adaptation of national songs, but also combined Yi folk songs with piano art. In the next sections of this paper, the authors will introduce the piano piece *Sani Fantasia* by composers Liu Xiaogeng and Wan Li.

Liu Xiaogeng, born in 1955, was the first Dean of the Conservatory of Music of the Art Institute of Yunnan (Yunnan Arts University). He was enrolled into the Music Department of the Art Institute of Yunnan in 1978 and studied polyphony at the Sichuan Conservatory of Music in 1982. In 1992, he studied conducting with the American conductor George McDow, and composed songs such as *Brother with the Sun on His Back* (*bèi tài yáng dē gē gē*), *Aguo love song* (*a guǒ qīng gē*), instrumental works such as *Bamboo House Illusion* (*zhú lóu mèng huàn*), *Sani Fantasia* (*sǎ ní huàn xiǎng qǔ*), chorus works such as *One Bird Nest* (*yì wō què*) and *Return Home* (*huí jiā*). Wan Li, born in 1954, is the Vice Chairman of the Yunnan Musician Association. He lives in various ethnic minority areas in Yunnan during his childhood. *One Bird Nest* (*yì wō què*) composed by Liu Xiaogeng and Wan Li won the Five Top Project Award in China. Wan Li's vocal music works include *Da-Yanggu* (*dà yāng gǔ*) and *A Laobiao* (*a lǎo biǎo*), and his chorus works *Tread on the Clouds* (*cǎi zhē yún*) and *One Bird Nest* (*yì wō què*). In conclusion, this study analyzes *Sani Fantasia* in the Yi ethnic music style. It aims to explore the characteristics and adaptations of piano works in Yunnan Province, considering their relevance to the development of piano music in China and the cultural environment of Yunnan Province.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review discusses two distinctive topics: piano adaptation of Yunnan traditional music by mainland Chinese composers and past research studies on *Sani Fantasia*.

Piano music adapted from Chinese folk songs is a work created with the tones and melodies of the original counterparts. Therefore, performing this kind of work will be easy for the audience and performer to comprehend, and even more conducive to disseminating the original folk songs. Yunnan has an abundance of instrumental music adapted from traditional ethnic minority folk songs such as piano and flute (Wu, 2012). For example, four composers selected the folk song *Flowing Creek* (*xiǎo hé tǎng shuǐ*) for piano adaptation.

The selected representative piano work *Overture No. 2 Running Water* (*xù qǔ di èr hào - "liú shuǐ"*) is a Yunnan folk song written by Yin Yigong in 1947. The song was created in the pentatonic scale, which is **A-C-D-E-G**. It is namely Yu pentatonic mode (*yǔ diào shì*) in Chinese, also known as "Oriental Serenade". From our literature research, we found four composers who adapted this piano music and they are: Zhao Xingdao, Li Yinghai, Bao Yuankai, and Zhu Jianer. Zhao Xingdao's piano adaptation of *Flowing Creek* (*xiǎo hé tǎng shuǐ*) was adapted in 1948. The music structure is simple and short. It is written in the pentatonic mode in C major, namely Gong pentatonic mode (*gōng diào shì*) in Chinese. Next is Li Yinghai, who adapted *Flowing Creek* as a vocal accompaniment. Bao Yuankai's piano solo *Flowing Creek* was created in 1991 with rondo form structure. In addition to that, the piano solo *Overture No. 2 Running Water*, adapted by Zhu Jianer, was created in 1956, with the theme melody of *Flowing Creek* as the main creation. At the same time, it provides significant research on the creation and performance of this piano-adapted music. *Overture No. 2 Running Water*, adapted from *Flowing Creek*, was created by Zhu Jianer. The folk song *Flowing Creek* is not merely adapted on the piano, but have also been applied to other musical instruments (such as flute, accordion, pipa) and vocal works. For example, the mixed chorus *Flowing Creek* adapted by Liu Xiaogeng. Hu (2015) observed that Liu Xiaogeng expanded *Flowing Creek* through variations. He adopted the single tune's folk music into the mixed chorus. Music is inclusive and developing, and chorus, as the music category with the widest participation of the people, reflects the essential characteristics of people, times, and integration. In the Yunnan folk song *Flowing Creek* adapted for flute, Wu (2012) emphasized that the folk song adapted for flute not only retains the tonal characteristics of traditional folk songs but also facilitates the development of flute playing skills. At the same time, it is also a supplement to flute teaching content.

At present, the authors have found several academic investigations relating to *Sani Fantasia*: five (5) periodicals and three (3) theses. From the journal articles, the five authors approached *Sani Fantasia* from an analysis of music composition point of view and introduced the creative process background briefly. Firstly, Lu (2016) analyzed the influence of Sani music on Chinese piano creation from three aspects: music form, aesthetic style, and folk custom. Li (2020) in her thesis, first summarized the composer Liu Xiaogeng and the piano work *Sani Fantasia*. She then made a musical analysis of this work, and briefly described the artistic value of *Sani Fantasia*. Meanwhile, Liu (2021) in his thesis, analyzed the cultural profile of the traditional Yi ethnic Sani people, the musical analysis of four Sani style works, the historical changes and the characteristics of Sani music elements in music creation, as well as the influence of traditional Sani music elements on Chinese contemporary music. These works are important as they discuss in details the historical changes of traditional Sani music in China. They also put forward the thinking of Sani traditional music in the traditional field of China for the future. This is in distinct contrast to Zhou (2015), who used the comparative research method to elaborate on the summary of the music (folk song, dance music, and instrumental music) of the Sani and Nisu branches into Yi music. Zhou (2015) then introduced Liu Xiaogeng's piano music works in Yi style, and finally used the music analysis method to analyze three selected Liu Xiaogeng's Yi style piano works. This proved significant in providing a clearer direction for the current study.

From the thesis literature, what the authors have gathered so far was that the music elements of the Sani branch of the Yi people have relevant achievements in the research of piano music. However, the analysis of traditional music elements of Yi-Sani in contemporary music creation is in a state of scarcity, which provides a gap for the current research. The study on the utilization of traditional music elements of Yi-Sani in modern music creation is a review of the creation and inheritance of Sani music elements, as well as the shaping and development of Yunnan piano music research. Utilizing folk music elements means the composer takes the ethnic minority's folk music elements (for example, rhythm, and melody) into modern composition techniques. Therefore, the lack of systematic elaboration, is highlighted by the researchers to make the comparison.

3. METHOD AND ANALYSIS

The reworking of a musical composition, which means after the music in any genre has been arranged (transcription and/or arrangement) is called 'adaptation' (Hutcheon, 2012). The researchers observed that the previous studies used

adaptation frequently in their literature. Therefore, the researchers also employ the term adaptation in the current study. When a composer adapts, his creative techniques are based on the original work, and he makes various technical adaptations in harmony, timbre, melody line, performance technique, to fully exhibit the content of the original folk music. The creation of Chinese piano adaptation integrating ethnic music elements will inevitably promote the characteristics of music people, cultural connotation, and the development of piano music nationalization. This study selects the theme of Yunnan Yi folk music as the material (theme) to adapt the piano music *Sani Fantasia* to analyze the characteristics of Yi music. The authors will introduce two categories: utilizing melody and utilizing rhythm. The first category is to analyze the Yi folk music *Please Stay My Dear Guest* melody utilizing *Sani Fantasia*, the authors will highlight the characteristics of Yi-Sani music. The second category is to analyze the rhythm of *Sani Fantasia*, to highlight the Yi dance rhythm characteristics and imitation of Yi's traditional dances and how to adapt this piano piece.

In general, this piano piece is composed in extended sonata form in **E \flat** Major. The structure of the sonata form is divided into Exposition, Development, and Recapitulation, with Introduction and Coda that enhance the characteristics of Yunnan ethnic style. The exposition begins in **E \flat** Major and modulates to **B \flat** Major in the second theme group. The Development section consists of harmonic plays and tonal shifts in **C** major, developing materials from the earlier section. The Recapitulation reiterates the Exposition in home key. The authors do not intend to expound further on the musical structure as the focus of this paper is on the adaptation of Yi-Sani. The brief explanation on the structure of this piece is included to assist further in the analysis of this paper. The traditional elements of Yi-Sani music mainly find expression in melody and rhythm. The melody is characterized by the tonic chord (for example **C** major is **C-E-G**) creation and the irregular meter (Liu, 2021). The melody is also created by the tonic chord in Chinese namely *Gōng Jué Zhǐ*, for example in **D** major is **D (Gōng) - F \sharp (Jué) - A (Zhǐ)**, which means the development of the melody is on the tonic scale. The characteristics of the melody of Yi-Sani music mainly adopt a pentatonic mode in **C** major (**C-D-E-G-A**). The cadences of Yi-Sani music are usually **D-T/V-I**, which are the same as the cadences from the dominant to the tonic in western modes. The rhythm form is in irregular meter and is the most commonly used rhythm in Yi-Sani music, especially in the 5/4 beat. The metric pattern mostly alternates between 2/4 and 3/4. The following figures will illustrate the researchers' analyses on Yi-Sani folk songs.

3.1 Melodic Characteristics of Yi-Sani

Figure 1 shows an excerpt of the Yi folk song *Ashima* (*Āshīmǎ*) in F major. The tonic chord is **F-A-C**, which can be observed in the green mark. This is also known as chord I in F major, as the name suggests *Gōng Jué Zhǐ* in Chinese. The *acciaccatura* in bar 11 is an ornamentation and the subsequent **E^b** note is in modal quality (mixolydian) those further highlight the Yi-Sani music melody characteristics.

Figure 1. *Ashima* - Theme melody excerpt
- The staff notation was re-edited by the authors

Figure 2 shows the melody excerpt of *Please Stay My Dear Guest* (*yuǎn fāng dě kè rén qǐng nǐ liú xià lái*), which is an **E^b** major song. **E^b** major tonic/chord I is **E^b-G-B^b**, which can be observed in the green mark. In this figure, the song melody leads with **E^b-G-B^b**, the *acciaccatura* is an ornamentation and further highlights the Yi-Sani music melody characteristics.

Figure 2. *Please Stay My Dear Guest* - Theme melody excerpt
- The staff notation was re-edited by the authors

3.2 Analysis on Melodic Utilizing

Sani Fantasia highlights the characteristics of the original folk song in terms of musical melody. The melody creation of the original folk song (Figure 3, in red mark) is adopted in Figure 4 (bar 1-15, in red mark). This creative technique not only preserves the melody of the original folk song, but also enriches the color of music. The melody of *Please Stay My Dear Guests* is characterized by cheerfulness, liveliness and enthusiasm. In the lyrics of Figure 3 “路旁花儿正在开哟(lù páng de huā ér zhèng zài kāi yō), 树上果儿等人摘(shù shàng guǒ ér děng rén zhāi).....远方的客人请你留下来(yuǎn fāng de kè rén qǐng nǐ liú xià lái)” which means “picking the flowers and fresh fruits to welcome guests from a distant place”. The lyrics portray the enthusiasm and hospitality custom of the Yi-Sani people. After comparing Figures 3 and 4, we can observe the composer not only retains Yi-Sani original music melody, but also retains the *acciaccatura* notes and the tonic chord leading with **E \flat -G-B \flat** in the melody theme of Figure 4 (bar 14-28, in red mark). The emergence of *acciaccatura* notes is to better highlight the characteristics of ethnic music. The *acciaccatura* notes mainly present two characteristics of decoration by the major 2nd (Figure 4, bar 14) and minor 3rd (Figure 4, bar 15), which also highlights the melody characteristics of the original song. In Figure 4, it can be observed that the composer applies secundal (minor 2nd), (for instance: bar 14 **A \natural -B \flat** , bar 19 **C \sharp -D**) in the left hand, and the function of secundal (minor 2nd) which is to imitate the sound effect of Yi percussion. In harmony, bars 14-15 are **E \flat** chord/I, bars 16-17 are **A \flat** chord/IV, bar 18 is **E \flat** chord/I, bar 19 is **B \flat** chord/V, and bar 20 is **E \flat** chord/I. Bars 21-28 chord progression is: I - I - I - ii - I - IV - IV - I.

The image shows a musical score for the song "Please Stay My Dear Guest". It consists of three staves of music in a 2/4 time signature with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The lyrics are in Chinese. Red boxes highlight specific melodic phrases in each staff:

- Staff 1 (measures 1-6): 路旁的花儿正在开哟 树上果儿等人摘 等人摘 哎 哟 嚯 哟 嚯 哟 哩
- Staff 2 (measures 7-10): 哎 哟 哎 远 放 的 客 人 请 你 留 下 来 远 方 的
- Staff 3 (measures 11-14): 客 人 啊 请 您 留 下 来 老 圭 山 欢 迎 您 啊 嚯 哟 嚯

Figure 3. *Please Stay My Dear Guest* - Theme melody excerpt
- The staff notation was re-edited by the authors



Figure 4. *Sani Fantasia* - Theme melody excerpt - The staff notation was re-edited by the authors

3.3 Rhythmic Characteristics of Yi-Sani

Figure 5 shows the rhythm excerpt of *Axi Dance with Moon and Sani Big Trichord Dance* (*a xi tiào yuè hé sǎ ní dà sān xián wǔ*). The metric pattern mostly alternates between 3/4 and 2/4 (blue mark), in the Piccolo part first bar second beat (yellow mark) and Yu-Kin part bar 2 first beat (green mark). It can be observed that the adopted syncopation and dotted rhythm are meant to highlight the characteristics of Yi-Sani rhythm. Typically, 3/4 rhythm type is strong-weak-weak, but in Yi-Sani 3/4 rhythm the second beat is syncopated, which is against the convention.



Figure 5. *Axi Dance with Moon and Sani Big Trichord Dance* recorded by Xie Junran
The staff notation was re-edited by the authors

Next, Figure 6 shows the rhythm excerpt of *Ashima*. The metric pattern mostly alternates between 3/4 and 2/4 (blue mark), with exception of bar 13 (4/4), instead of 3/4. In conclusion, from the aforementioned figure analyses, it can be observed the melody of Yi-Sani's music is characterized by tonic chord and ornamented melody with *acciaccatura*. The characteristic of Yi-Sani music rhythm is that the second beat is a syncopated rhythm of the music beginning.

妈 妈 的 女 儿 嗯 噜 哎 女 儿 哩 阿 诗 玛 嗯 噜 哎 女 儿 哩
 天 天 长 嗯 噜 哎 长 到 哩 十 五 岁 嗯 噜 哎 山 上 的 老 青 树 噯 啰 哩 噯
 它 可 老 站 在 那 里 噯 啰 哩 噯 妈 妈 的 女 儿 啰 哩 噜 哎 啰

Figure 6. *Ashima* - Time signature

- The staff notation was re-edited by the authors

3.4 Analysis on Rhythmic Utilizing

It is observed in Figure 7 that the metric pattern is applied into 6/8 and 4/8 (blue mark), which means the composer employs Yi-Sani's traditional music rhythm characteristics in *Sani Fantasia* not only is the metric pattern utilized, it can also be observed the syncopation (yellow mark) and dotted rhythm (green mark) in Figure 7. The composer applies the metric pattern to create a sense of hierarchy that promotes the music rhythm and also showcases the composer's ingenious application of Yi dance rhythm. Syncopation is an important rhythmic element in this piece and it is a rhythm type frequently applied in traditional instruments of Yi-Sani music. The composer applies the metric pattern to create a sense of hierarchy that promotes the music rhythm and also observes the composer's ingenious application of Yi-Sani dance rhythm. The composers applied the dotted rhythms (green mark) in *Sani Fantasia* to create and increase the motivation of the music to provide a sense of continuity. Through the analysis of *Sani Fantasia*, the researchers are able to provide a more in-depth understanding of the utilization of the characteristics of ethnic music in this piece. In addition, it allows a clearer observation that the composers are imitating the ethnic music in rhythm and melody according to the characteristics of Yi-Sani music. In conclusion, the current analysis looks into the utilization and imitation

of Yi-Sani folk songs as well as the application of Yi-Sani music rhythm into *Sani Fantasia*. In the researchers' opinion, the composers not only preserved the original style and features of Yi-Sani music, but also led the music rhythm to have a more driving force and sense of drama to the music.

The image displays a musical score for piano, consisting of three systems of staves. The first system (measures 40-42) is in 2/4 time and features a complex rhythmic pattern with eighth and sixteenth notes, accented with 'v' marks. The second system (measures 43-49) transitions to 3/8 time and continues the rhythmic motif. The third system (measures 50-56) returns to 2/4 time. Colored boxes (blue, yellow, and green) highlight specific rhythmic patterns and melodic lines across the systems, illustrating the 'rhythmic imitation of the percussion section' mentioned in the caption.

Figure 7. Excerpt from *Sani Fantasia* - Rhythmic imitation of the percussion section from Yi traditional music - The staff notation was re-edited by the authors

4. CONCLUSION

This study analyzed *Sani Fantasia* which is a representative piano work with the characteristics of Yi-Sani music (traditional Yunnan ethnic music). It observes that through the utilization of Yi-Sani music elements in *Sani Fantasia*, the performers are able to provide an in-depth understanding of the work in the process of performing. In addition, it also provides a reference for potential related research in the future, be it from the fields of musicology, ethnomusicology, sociology, literary, and literature (among others), to continue to explore the embodiment of more ethnic elements in Yunnan Yi-Sani or other ethnic piano music in Yunnan ethnic music culture. This is significant in providing the academic reference for ethnic music research and Yunnan ethnic piano works in the future. Finally, the researchers hope that the dissemination of Yi-Sani traditional music in China's modern music creation can lead more people to comprehend the customs of ethnic minorities, their music cultures and the piano works with the Yunnan ethnic style.

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