

The Application of Western and Chinese Musical Theory in Contemporary Piano Four-Hand Composition--Based on Suntharaporn Ensemble's song "Songkran Festival"

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Abstract

Integrating different genres, styles, and cultural elements in contemporary music composition to create new musical styles or forms has become a trend. The author composed a piano four-hand composition in this study, employing the theme melody from the song "Songkran Festival" by Suntharaporn Ensemble. This article aimed to: (1) compose a piano four-hand composition by combining Western and Chinese music theories in conjunction with the pop song materials from the Suntharaporn Ensemble in Thailand; and (2) analyze and describe the composition techniques of this piano four-hand composition, "Songkran Festival". This composition uses a synthesis of Chinese and Western music theories. The melody is based on Thai song melodies with enjoyable rhythmic patterns and harmony in modern music techniques, combining a Chinese flavor to make it more diverse and create a sense of participation in the famous Songkran Festival.

Keywords: Application to Western and Chinese; Contemporary piano composition; Piano four-hand composition; Songkran festival song; Suntharaporn Ensemble

Introduction

Policy, economic, and cultural exchanges have recently existed between China and Thailand since diplomatic relations in 1957. China and Thailand elevated their relationship to a strategic partnership in 2007 when they signed the Joint Action Plan for Strategic Cooperation between China and Thailand, following their 1999 signing of the Joint Declaration on the 21st Century Cooperation Plan. In 2013, China and Thailand signed the Vision Plan to develop China–Thailand relations. In 2014, they signed the Joint News Communiqué of the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand. Then, China launched the Belt and Road cooperation policy in 2013 to advance the ideas of win–win outcomes, openness and inclusivity, mutual learning, and peaceful cooperation. Additionally, the policy aims to collaboratively create a new framework for cooperation and win–win outcomes with the nations that follow it. In 2019, they signed the Joint News Statement of the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand, marking an accelerated period of comprehensive cooperation between the two countries.

With the continuous deepening of economic globalization, cultural exchanges between China and Thailand are increasing. The cultural exchange between China and Thailand has promoted mutual understanding among the people, strengthened friendships, and enriched the cultural connotations of both nations. Moreover, this form of exchange contributes to the preservation and inheritance of traditional music and propels musical innovation and the diverse development of the arts.

Music is an essential cultural carrier and medium for cultural exchange between these two countries. Music is a powerful art form that can communicate emotions and resonance across cultures and countries, even if they are different. Exploring the junction and integration of various musical styles has become a challenging and inspiring artistic endeavor in today's period of globalization and cultural integration.

This article aims to present the piano four–hand composition, “Songkran Festival,” which integrates Western compositional approaches with musical ideas such as spiral palace modulation and Chinese pentatonic harmony. The integration and creativity of Chinese music culture and Western musical theory are explored through the composition of a piano four–hand, using the song from the Suntharaporn Ensemble in Thailand as the theme melody. After reviewing pertinent material, the author discovered no instances of four–handed piano compositions that incorporate both the band's melodies and Chinese music theory.

This focuses on integrating Chinese musical theory with Western musical theory, specifically in creating contemporary piano four-hand composition. This work is based on the melodies of the "Songkran Festival" pop song by the Suntharaporn Ensemble from Thailand. The article's author and the research's composer attended a renowned Chinese conservatory from 2007 to 2016, learning composition technology theory. She has created many musical compositions in the realm of composition technology. Since commencing her teaching career in 2016, she has dedicated her research efforts to composition technology and Chinese music theory. In 2021, her composition titled "Tao Te Ching• Tao—for Soprano and Guqin" debuted in Changchun, Jilin Province, China. Her composition, "The Sound of Celebration", was also featured in a Chinese academic journal. Furthermore, she has authored articles discussing composition techniques, such as "The Application of Rotate-Gong Modulation in Contemporary Composition Techniques" and "On the Artistic Characteristics of Postmodernism". The composer aims to demonstrate the distinctive allure of Chinese music within the framework of Thai melodies, offer theoretical backing for Chinese composition, provide practical significance for the theoretical exploration of Chinese musicology, and contribute to the exchange and advancement of music cultures between the two nations.

Research Objectives

1. To compose a piano four-hand by combining Western and Chinese music theories in conjunction with the pop song materials from the Suntharaporn Ensemble in Thailand.
2. To analyze and describe the composition techniques of this piano four-hand composition "Songkran Festival".

Literature Review

In the author's investigation of the Thai band "Suntharaporn Ensemble" throughout the previous ten years, the keyword "Suntharaporn" was employed to search Google Scholar (<https://scholar.google.com>) and the Scopus database (www.scopus.com). A total of 31 publications were discovered. The time range was extended to cover 2000–2023 to compensate for the small quantity of articles. The author categorized them into three groups: reading, classification, and summarization. The first group focuses on research related to performance and singing methods. This research aims to analyze the musical identity of Thai Lukkrung singing by examining Daojai

Paijit's singing style (Sudjaritkul, 2015). The essay uses qualitative research methodologies, including literature review and field investigation, to explore the prominent vocalists of the Suntharaporn ensemble from the 1970s to the 1990s. The second category concerns the musicological exposition of the Suntharaporn ensemble and unity Strategies in Suntharaporn's Provincial and Place Songs (Junlaprom, 2008). "The purpose of the article is to investigate salient unity strategies by which the provincial anthems of the Suntharaporn band are unified within the specified concept. The third category is literature on song content, such as "Lotus: Simile Meaning in Suntharaporn's Songs (Phakkhaphanon, 2019)." The article analyzes the values conveyed by Suntharaporn's songs from the content; the strategy used by the composers to convey the meanings of the lotus similes through Suntharaporn's songs accordingly follows Thai literary writing conventions.

Western music theory encompasses various theories about harmony, form, polyphonic composition, and orchestral arrangement. The piano serves as the musical instrument utilized in this investigation; the internal structure of the work for creation is expressed through the utilization of four-hand ammunition and the Western music form structure. Hence, the literature evaluation solely enumerates the harmony and structural composition. Undergraduate music students specializing in music at professional and comprehensive universities in China must take a mandatory course in musical form. Some of the textbooks utilized by universities in the past five years (2018–2023) for investigating the structure of Western musical theory's musical form include "Analysis of Musical Form and Works (Ning, 2018)", "Basic Course of Musical Form Analysis Third Edition (Gao, 2021)", "Composition Collection of Musical Form and Works Analysis Course (Public Course 3) (Work Analysis Teaching and Research Office of Central Conservatory of Music, 2021)", and "Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education (Mckoy & Lind, 2022)", etc. The texts above highlight the significance of "multi-level thinking" while examining works in the field of tonality, specifically about "materials" and "modes, tonality, and harmony". Simultaneously, they present various types of musical structures within the traditional tonal music section of the discipline. These include sections (single-part form), single two-part form, single trilogy form, and complex trilogy form, as well as an introduction to the complex two-part form, rondo form, symphony form, sonata form, and rondo sonata form. These books conducted technical analysis on chosen exemplary compositions from various historical periods and music styles. This involved referring to written reports and guiding students to summarize the analysis of musical forms into structural diagrams.

In terms of research on pentatonic harmony, “Several Experiments on Chinese Harmony (Zhao, 1928)” was the earliest Chinese method of exploring pentatonic melodies, marking the beginning of research on pentatonic harmony in China. “On the Mode System of Five-Dimensional Harmony” (Zhao, 1964), starting from the traditional Chinese law system of pentatonic harmony, studies the mode system of Chinese ethnic music. After a long period of research and practice, as well as the reflection and recognition of Chinese harmony by musicologists such as “Han Mode Harmony in Chinese Music Theory and Practice (Fan, 2003),” all achievements related to Chinese music theory have been summarized, improved, and systematized.

The modulation of pentatonic modes in Chinese music theory differs from that in Western music theory. Standard modulation methods include “Same Gong System modulation (Li, 1981)” and “Rotate-Gong Modulation”.

The Tonggong system modulation is the most widely used modulation method in Chinese musicology (Fan, 1981). In the comparative study of mode alternation theory (Liu, 2002), it is pointed out that the tonal structure of some music pieces is relatively “fuzzy”, making it difficult to accurately divide the musical composition, phrases, and even segments, and artificially creating unnecessary “trouble” is not worth the loss. Therefore, this research will conduct a reasonable analysis based on this.

Rotate-Gong modulation is an ancient Chinese modulation technique. However, in recent years, this name and concept have only been defined in the theory of Chinese musicology. In “Chinese Traditional Music Studies (Tong, 2020)”, detailed annotations are provided, and Liu Yongfu’s “Exploration of Ancient Techniques in Rotating Gong” (2021) sorted out this concept based on ancient Chinese literature, thus establishing the name “Rotate-Gong Modulation”. However, there is still considerable controversy regarding its idea in the academic community of Chinese musicology. In the past five years (2019–2023), there have been many piano works that have used Chinese pentatonic harmony and modulation, such as “Picking Sichuan Peppercorn (Yan, 2023)” and “Qing Niao (Yang, 2023)”, but they are all solo works. There are relatively few works of four-hand composition.

However, Suntaraporn Ensemble, the most renowned pop band in Thailand, is primarily studied for its musical aspects, song connotations, and position in musicology. There is no record of this tune being adapted into a four-hand piano composition.

The findings of this research indicate that piano four-hand compositions, which primarily draw upon those above Western musical theory, are composed in a complex trilogy structure.

Chinese musical theory has established itself as a distinct field of study in professional music institutions in China. The use of pentatonic harmony and tonal approaches has been widely recognized and employed in several musical compositions in China. Nevertheless, the number of compositions for piano four-hand works is limited, and no compositions that incorporate Thai song melodies with Chinese musical theory have been discovered. This effort aims to facilitate the exchange of music cultures between the two nations, enabling Thai music academics to comprehend Chinese musical theory and allowing Chinese musical scholars to immerse themselves in the cultural significance of Thai songs and festivals.

Conceptual Framework

This research focuses on the strategies used in the current piano four-hand composition. The researchers used elements of Chinese musical theory, including pentatonic harmony and Rotate-Gong modulation, in the composition “Songkran Festival” by utilizing Western musical theory frameworks such as melody and mode. The tune of the Thai Suntharaporn ensemble was used as the basis for this piano four-hand composition. The details are as follows.

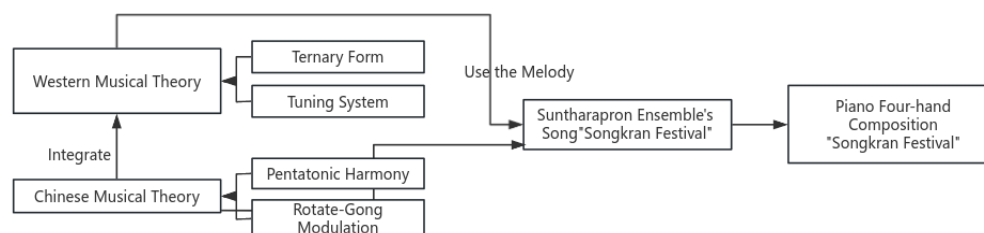


Fig.1 Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

The methodology is as follows:

Review the literatures about Western and Chinese music theories and the Suntharaporn Ensemble materials in order to plan and design composition technique;

Conduct field research on the Songgan Festival in Thailand to understand the cultural background behind the festival;

Compose a piano four-hand by combining Western and Chinese music theories in conjunction with the pop song materials from the Suntharaporn Ensemble in Thailand.

Research Results

This composition uses a synthesis of Chinese and Western music theories. The melody is based on Thai song melodies with enjoyable rhythmic patterns and harmony in modern music techniques, combining a Chinese flavor to make it more diverse and create a sense of participation in the famous Songkran Festival. The piece is shown in the QR Code below.



Songkran Festival

Fig.2 Complete notation

Discussions

1. The inspiration for the four-hand piano composition “Songkran Festival”.

In April 2023, while studying and residing in Thailand, the author had the opportunity to partake in the Songkran Festival, a celebration rich in Thai cultural traditions, alongside the local Thai populace. The composition draws inspiration from the act of adjusting the lens aperture in photography, and it intertwines with the Thai New Year celebration and the emotions of joy and longing for distant relatives.

This composition is founded upon the principles and concepts of Western music theory. The author is skilled in applying Western music theory because, as the composer, she has studied composition techniques and theory since 2006 and has worked in the composition profession for 18 years. The author of Chinese descent possesses a profound sense of national assurance. Upon arriving in Thailand for her studies, she assumed the duty of advocating for Chinese musical culture to enhance the Thai people’s comprehension of Chinese music.

Upon delving into learning about Thai music, the composer cultivated a profound fascination with traditional Thai music, perceiving it as both enigmatic and possessing a distinct temperament. Consequently, as a composer, she aspires to integrate Thai musical elements into her artistic works. Therefore, she selects the renowned Suntharaporn Ensemble as the central motif in her compositions, employs Western music theory as the structural framework, incorporates elements of Chinese music theory, and ultimately produces a piano four-hand composition.

2. The performance justification and necessity for presenting the composition as a piano four-hand combo.

The piano four-hand combination can convey communication and discourse between two vocalizations, two individuals, or two nations. The piano duet “Songkran Festival” incorporates the Suntharaporn Ensemble song's melody (Figure 3), bars explicitly 45–60. In this composition, the primo^[1] part portrays the Thai people by performing the melodic section, while the secondo^[2] part represents Chinese composers by playing pentatonic and vocal segments. This design not only enhances the melody and harmony and broadens the spectrum of sound but also embodies the cultural interchange and integration between the two countries, reflecting the profound affection and amity between the people of China and Thailand.

^[1]Primo: The first part of a piano four-hand work.

^[2]Secondo: The second part of a piano four-hand work.



Fig.3 Suntharaporn Ensemble: Songkran Festival

As a contemporary piano four-hand composition, the beginning of the work explains the special elements required for performance, such as the use of 0.81mm guitar paddles and the playing style represented by special note heads. As shown in the following figure 4:

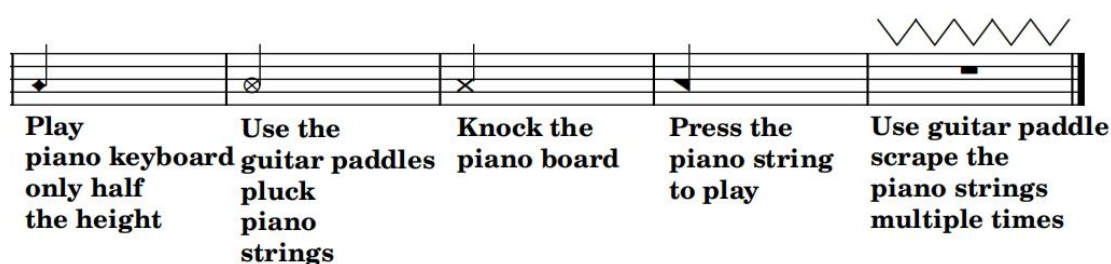


Fig.4 Performance Annotations in the Composition of “Songkran Festival”

At the outset of the composition, the secondo performer strikes the piano board and plays exceedingly delicately in collaboration with Primo. In the third bar, the Primo part comes to a complete halt, leaving only the sound of Secondo's tapping. Next, the secondo performer rises and

applies pressure to the strings with their left palm, producing the melody of the fourth to fifth parts using Primo's voice. Currently, the voice possesses a profound and otherworldly quality. Beginning with the 6th bar, Secondo forcefully strikes the piano board with both hands consecutively. At the 10th bar, the Secondo performer stands up, exerting pressure on the strings with his palms. Simultaneously, the performer of Primo stands up, exerting minimal pressure on the piano strings with his left hand while plucking them with a guitar pick held in his right hand. Starting from the 12th bar, the two performers sit together to strike the piano board. The Primo is composed of a Canon form in the Secondo section, and the rhythm performances of the two performers echo each other, gradually becoming dense. In the 19th bar, the Primo performer stands up and scrapes the strings, creating a climax in the atmosphere. Primo plays a solo at Adagio tempo, starting from the 20th measure. Following two measures of playing with his left hand, in the 22nd measure, he performs a sustained d2 note for eight beats with a moderately dynamic level while simultaneously using a paddle to play the strings above d2 with his right hand. It is crucial to mention that the force applied for ornamental note #c2 should be moderate. In the 28th bar, the secondo performer enters with a jumping melody and plays an 8-beat long note in the 31st bar. At this time, the Primo performer stands up and plucks the strings, and the two performers work together to complete the 31st to 34th bars.

The composer optimized the coordination design of the two performers in the piano four-hand, transforming it from a mere expansion of harmony and range to a dynamic combination of amusement and theatricality. This enables the artists to deliver a captivating performance rather than a mere musical interpretation.

3. The Western musical theory and the Chinese musical theory are reflected in the four-hand piano composition “Songkran Festival”.

(1) Form and Harmony Analysis

The four-hand piano composition “Songkran Festival” is a composite two-part composition, and its composition analysis is shown in Figure 5:

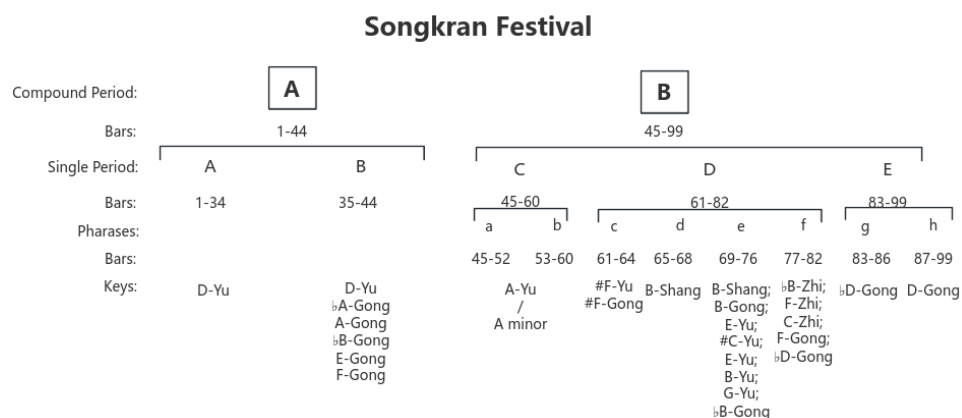


Fig.5 The form of four-hand piano composition “Songkran Festival”

The composition is inspired by adjusting the lens’s aperture in photography and composed by combining its own experience.

• Section One

Form analysis: The first section comprises sections 1–44 of the composition, whereby the melodic portion incorporates the motif derived from the Suntharaporn Ensemble’s song “Songkran Festival”. The composition includes Chinese pentatonic harmony and Western harmonic principles, along with contemporary piano performance techniques such as percussive strikes on the piano soundboard, playing on shortened piano keyboards, and utilizing a guitar pick to pluck and scrape the strings, among others. The musical composition in this section is structured into two distinct parts, delineated by specific melodic characteristics. The first portion is the theme variation section, including bars 1 to 34. The second part is the linking section, spanning bars 35 to 44.

Harmony analysis: The first section employs the D–Yu pentatonic harmony key to create a sense of harmony. The initial segment features a distinct Chinese ethnic attribute, the Yu chord, which incorporates an “Empty fifth interval”. The subsequent segment, namely the fourth section, employs a Jue chord. Additionally, the melody in the second part of the fourth section incorporates a “Bian Zhi” note. As seen in Figure 6:

Fig.6 Four-hand piano composition “Songkran Festival”, Bars: 1–7

The melody and motive in the 7th bar are borrowed from the second phrase of the Suntharaporn Ensemble song’s “Songkran Festival”. The harmony employs the III chord derived from the D minor scale, enhancing the chord's tonal quality by sharpening the VII note in the key. At the 10th bar, the IV note of the key is superimposed onto the III chord, resulting in a major second interval that imparts a distinct Chinese quality to the chord. As depicted in the subsequent figure 7:

Fig.7 Four-hand piano composition “Songkran Festival”, Bars: 7–11

In the 24th bar, the composition reverts to the Chinese pentatonic harmony. This includes the D–Yu chord, which features an empty fifth interval, and the F–Gong chord, with the addition of the “Bian–Zhi” note. Additionally, the D–Yu pentatonic chord is also present. The 27th bar of the composition employs Western musical theory’s concept of “alternating major and minor” by incorporating a dominant seventh chord. This chord selection adds warmth to the music while maintaining a melancholic tone reminiscent of the “Yu” style. As depicted in the figure 8.

The image shows a four-hand piano score for 'Songkran Festival', bars 24-27. The score is written for two grand pianos, labeled 'Pri.' (Principal) and 'Sec.' (Secondary). The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The tempo/mood is indicated as '调整光圈' (Adjust Aperture). The score includes various dynamic markings: *p* (piano), *mf* (mezzo-forte), *f* (forte), and *ppp* (pianissimo). The 'Pri.' part features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, while the 'Sec.' part provides harmonic support with chords and moving lines. Specific annotations include: 'Empty fifth interval' and 'D-Yu Chord' in bar 24; 'Bian-Zhi' note and 'F-Gong chord' in bar 25; 'D-Yu Pentatonic chord' and 'D7' in bar 26; and 'D7' in bar 27. The score concludes with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

Fig.8 Four-hand piano composition “Songkran Festival”, Bars: 24–27

The melodic inspiration in bars 37–44 of the composition is derived from the Han Chinese folk song “Little New Year Greeting”, originating in Northeast China. The mode experiences six consecutive time modulations. Bars 37–38 are in the key of $\flat A$ Gong, with the inclusion of the “Bian Zhi” note: D and the “Bian Gong” note: G in the bass of the F–Jue Chord; The 39th bar is compared to the 38th bar, with a half-tone increase in pitch. In the F–Jue Chord, the notes “Bian–Zhi” ($\sharp D$) and “Qing Jug” (D) are included, along with the note “Bian–Gong” ($\sharp G$). In the 40th bar, the turn is B–Flat–Gong, and add the “Bian Zhi” note (E), “Qing Jug” note ($\flat E$), and “Bian–Gong” note (A) in G–Yu Chord. The mode of bar 41st is E–Gong, with the addition of the “Bian Gong” note ($\sharp D$) in the $\sharp G$ –Jue chord and the use of the Neapolitan chords. The mode of bars 42–43 is F–Gong, with the addition of the “Bian Zhi” note (B), “Qing Jug” note ($\flat B$), and “Bian Gong” note (E) in A–Jue Chord. In bar 44, the DDVII chord in the key of A minor is shown, setting the stage for the subject of the second section. Six successive time modulations have led to the emergence of many sections exhibiting a strong and consistent upward shift of a semitone, progressively improving the performance. As depicted in Figure 9:

Fig.9 Four-hand piano composition "Songkran Festival", Bars: 37-44

• Section Two

The second section commences in the key of A minor and incorporates the motif from the composition "Songkran Festival" by the Suntharaporn Ensemble. The work is structured as a single trilogy consisting of three parts: A, B, and C. The period A includes an increased number of square phrases inside eight bars. The B period consists of four irregular phrases, while the C period comprises two irregular phrases.

The form analysis of this section is shown in the table below:

Table 1 The form analysis

	A				B		C	
Phrase	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h
Bars	45-52	53-60	61-64	65-68	69-76	77-82	83-86	87-99
Keys	A minor / A-Yu		#F-Yu; #F-Gong	B-Shang	B-Shang; B-Gong; E-Yu; #C-Yu; E-Yu; B-Yu; G-Yu bB-Gong	bB-Zhi; F-Zhi; C-Zhi; F-Gong; bD-Gong	bD-Gong;	D-Gong
Harmonic	Pentatonic							
Velocity	Andante		Adagio		Adagio		Rubato	

The melody in the prima portion of period A is performed using an octave interval, and the mode of this section is A minor. The secondo incorporates an octave interval in the bass and utilizes the “empty fifth interval”. The tenor section employs a pentatonic harmony consisting of Key A–Yu, which is rich in Chinese elements. As depicted in Figure 10:

The image shows a musical score for a four-hand piano composition titled "Songkran Festival", covering bars 45 to 60. The score is written for two staves, Prima (Pri.) and Secondo (Sec.), each with a treble and bass clef. The tempo is marked "Andante" and the articulation is "arco". The score includes several annotations in red: "Bian-Gong note" in the Prima staff at bar 45, "A-Yu Chord" in the Secondo staff at bar 54, "Qing-Jue note" in the Prima staff at bar 54, "Empty Fifth" in the Secondo staff at bar 54, and "Bian-Gong note" in the Prima staff at bar 59. The score also features a key signature change to F major (F:D7) at the end of bar 60.

Fig.10 Four-hand piano composition “Songkran Festival”, Bars: 45–60

Period B consists of five irregular phrases, which use Adagio’s speed starting from the #F–Yu mode. The melody comes from the Han Chinese folk song “Xiao Bai Nian” in Northeast China, and the rhythm of the Secondo section in bars 63–64 is derived from the percussion of gongs and drums by the Han Chinese in Northeast China. In the phrase *f*, the primo part modulates the shortened theme in a B–Yu tone, while the secondo part still imitates the percussion and drums of the Han Chinese in Northeast China. Secondo has used multiple modulation modulations in the phrase expansion, From key B–Shang to key B–Gong, to E–Yu, #C–Yu, E–Yu, G–Yu, and finally, end $\flat$ B–Gong. Meanwhile, the Primo part continues to use the theme of the Songkran Festival. The phrase and primo continue to shorten the theme of tonal modulation, while the secondo part accompanies an upward pentatonic accompaniment mode based on the motivation of the phrase.

There are still many modulations, from $\flat B$ -Zhi to F-Zhi to C-Zhi, and F-Gong taking on $\flat D$ -Gong to the end of the band. As shown in the following figure 11:

The musical score is divided into three systems, each with a Primary (Pri.) and Secondary (Sec.) part. The tempo is marked 'Adagio'.

- System 1 (Measures 61-65):**
 - Pri. part:** Starts with a rest, then plays a melody. A red box highlights a note in measure 65, labeled 'Bian-Gong note' with a red arrow.
 - Sec. part:** Plays a continuous rhythmic pattern. Annotations include '#F-Yu' (measure 61), 'mf' (measure 62), 'ppp' (measure 63), 'f' (measure 64), and 'p #F-Gong' (measure 65).
- System 2 (Measures 66-70):**
 - Pri. part:** Continues the melody. A red box highlights a note in measure 66, labeled 'Bian-Zhi note' with a red arrow.
 - Sec. part:** Continues the rhythmic pattern. An annotation 'Key B-Shang' is present in measure 69.
- System 3 (Measures 71-75):**
 - Pri. part:** Continues the melody. Annotations include 'f B-Gong' (measure 71), 'f B-Yu' (measure 73), and 'f' (measure 75).
 - Sec. part:** Continues the rhythmic pattern. Annotations include '#C-Yu' (measure 71), 'E-Yu' (measure 72), and 'G-Yu' (measure 74).

The image displays a musical score for a four-hand piano composition titled "Songkran Festival", covering bars 61 to 82. The score is written for two staves, labeled "Pri." (Primo) and "Sec." (Secondo). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The score is divided into two systems. The first system (bars 76-82) features the Primo part with notes labeled "B-Flat-Zhi", "F-Zhi", and "C-Zhi", and the Secondo part with notes labeled "B-Flat-Gong". The second system (bars 80-82) features the Primo part with notes labeled "F-Gong" and "Run" note, and the Secondo part with notes labeled "Run" note, "D Flat-Gong", and "Bian-Zhi" note. The score includes various musical notations such as treble and bass clefs, key signatures, time signatures, and dynamic markings like "mp".

Fig.11 Four-hand piano composition "Songkran Festival", Bars: 61-82

At the end of the passage, phrase C is a connecting sentence using Rubato's speed and free beat. It consists of two phases. The first phrase uses the descending D-Gong mode, while the Primo part freely showcases its skills. The second phase starts with the bass part of Secondo and progresses in a stepped manner from #F-Gong to D-Gong, approaching the end. As shown in the following figure 12:

The image displays a four-hand piano composition titled "Songkran Festival", spanning bars 83 to 99. The score is written for two staves, each with a treble and bass clef, labeled "Pri." (Primary) and "Sec." (Secondary). The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The score includes various musical notations and annotations:

- Bar 83:** Marked "Rubato". The "Pri." staff features a melodic line with triplets. The "Sec." staff has a bass line with triplets. Annotations include "D Flat-Gong" in red and "Bian-Zhi note" in red with an arrow pointing to a specific note.
- Bar 87:** The "Pri." staff has a melodic line with a "D-Gong" annotation in red. The "Sec." staff has a bass line with a "#F-Gong" annotation in red. Dynamics include "ff" (fortissimo) and "mp" (mezzo-piano).
- Bar 92:** The "Pri." staff has a melodic line with a "B-Gong" annotation in red. The "Sec." staff has a bass line with a "D-Gong" annotation in red. Dynamics include "p" (piano) and "mf" (mezzo-forte).
- Bar 99:** The "Pri." staff has a melodic line with a "B-Gong" annotation in red. The "Sec." staff has a bass line with a "Flat-VI" annotation in red. Dynamics include "rit." (ritardando) and "pizz." (pizzicato).

Fig.12 Four-hand piano composition "Songkran Festival", Bars: 83–99

(2) Modal chord

According to the mode concept, Western music theory's chord composition and harmony arrangement are relatively logical and functional, such as forming a chord with a third interval, the Am chord (A, C, E). In Chinese musical theory, omitting the third note of a triad and retaining a fifth interval is commonly referred to as the "empty fifth" in Chinese ethnic music. This fifth interval omits three notes, blurring the tonal color and creating an ethereal and mysterious sound with Chinese characteristics. The composition repeatedly appears in the accompaniment voice with an 8-fold polyphonic empty fifth, as shown in Figure 13.

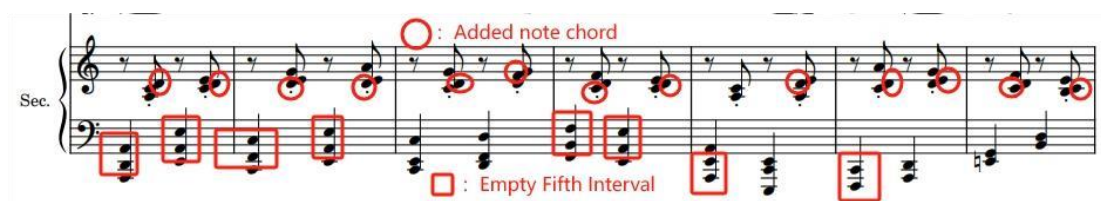


Fig.13 Four-hand piano composition “Songkran Festival”, Bars: 53–59

Another kind of Chinese pentatonic chord construction, thoroughly discussed in the preceding chapter, is likewise the predominant method employed in the composition. As an illustration, the C chord consists of the notes C, D, E, G, A, and C, following the pattern of the C chord (C, D, E, G, A, C). Alternatively, one can select the notes C, D, E, and G to construct the C chord, which introduces a D note to the C major chord according to the principles of Western music theory. Hence, the article designates it as the “pentatonic additional note chord”. The harmonies in question diverge from those found in Western musical theory, exhibiting diminished functional properties and enhanced tonal qualities. However, because this work is based on Western music theory, harmony's function, such as T–S–D, K46–D7–T, etc., remains the dominant direction of harmonic analysis. Chinese pentatonic harmony enhances the dramatic tension of composition, adds a distinct ethnic color, and makes it easier for the audience to feel the ethnic emotions and cultural essence.

(2) Non-harmonic notes and “Pian Yin”

In Western music theory, “non-harmonic notes” belong to the “tonality chords” category, which can undergo a series of functions and return to the original key after briefly leaving the mode. For example, the appearance of #F in C major indicates that the harmony is off-key in the direction of the chord, and the trend of the harmony function is DD7–D7–T (D7–G7–C). The second category belongs to auxiliary, passing, lingering, or pre-occurring sounds. In the melody, some tones appear as external tones, but the harmony function is not apparent.

The formation of the Chinese pentatonic scale is derived from the first five notes generated by the Chinese Pythagorean tuning, while the notes further generated outside of this form the modal external notes, called “Pian Yin” in China.

“Pentatonic Mode Harmony in Chinese Music Theory and Practice (Fan, 2023)” suggested that many variations and chords from Western music theory can be used in pentatonic mode harmony, given the right circumstances. In the pentatonic mode, there are additional notes such as “Bian-Zhi”, “Qing-Jue”, “Bian-Gong”, and “Run”. Bars 37–38 of the four-hand piano work

“Songkran Festival” are composed in the key of $\flat A$ -Gong, which consists of the notes ($\flat A$, $\flat B$, C, $\flat E$, and F). In the 37th bar, a note called “Bian Gong” (G) is introduced, and in the 38th bar, a note called “Bian Zhi” (D) is introduced. In the 39th bar, the focus is on A-Gong notes (A, B, $\sharp C$, E, $\sharp F$), which serve as the basis for adding “Bian Gong” notes ($\sharp G$), “Bian Zhi” notes ($\sharp D$), and “Qing Jug” notes ($\sharp D$). At this point, D and $\sharp D$ are considered two additional notes in the A-Gong mode. The 40th bar is the $\flat B$ -Gong ($\flat B$, C, D, F, G), which is the modulation progression of the previous section and also includes the “Bian-Gong” note (A), “Bian Zhi” note (E), and “Qing Jug” note ($\flat E$). The specific spectrum is shown in the following figure 14:

The figure displays a musical score for bars 37-40 of a four-hand piano composition titled "Songkran Festival". The score is written for two staves: the upper staff is for the Primo (Pri.) part and the lower staff is for the Secondo (Sec.) part. The key signature is $\flat A$ -Gong. The score includes various musical notations such as chords, notes, and dynamic markings. Red annotations highlight specific musical elements: "Bian-Zhi" notes, "F-Jue Chord", "#F-Jue-Chord", "Qing-Jue note", "Bian-Gong", and "Qing-Jue". The key signature changes from $\flat A$ -Gong to $\flat B$ -Gong in bar 40. The score is marked with dynamics like mf , f , and ff .

Fig.14 Four-hand piano composition “Songkran Festival”, Bars:37–40

(2) Modulation method

The composition employs Western modulation techniques and Chinese pentatonic “Rotate-Gong Modulation”. For example, in bars 61–62, the tonality is in the $\sharp F$ -Yu mode. In bars 63–64, the composer uses Western homotonic transfer techniques to transfer the $\sharp F$ -Yu mode to the $\sharp F$ -Gong mode. In bars 65–68, the “Bian Zhi” note (B) in $\sharp F$ -Gong is used as the following key’s “Gong” note to transfer the mode to B-Gong. Therefore, the “Gong” note in $\sharp F$ -Gong mode is shifted to the right, which is the “right rotation” of the Rotate Gong Module. In bars 69–70, use the “Run” note in B-Gong mode as the following key’s “Gong” note, that is, rotate the “Gong” note in B-Gong mode to the right to form a new mode, B-Shang (where the “Gong” note is A). In the following bars (71–72), the primo and the secondo parts were compared to the previous section and simultaneously performed Rotate-Gong modulation twice. The Primo section uses the “Zhi” note (E) in the Key B-Shang key as the following key’s “Gong” note. At this time, the “Gong” notes rotate to the left, which is called “Rotate Gong Figure” and “Rotate Left”, to the new key $\sharp C$ -Yu. At the same time, in the Secondo part, the “Shang” note in the B-Shang key is

used as the following key's Gong note. The original "Gong" note (A) shifts to the right, which is called "Rotate Gong Figure" and "Rotate Right", to the new key B-Gong. The detailed modulation diagram is shown in Figure 15.

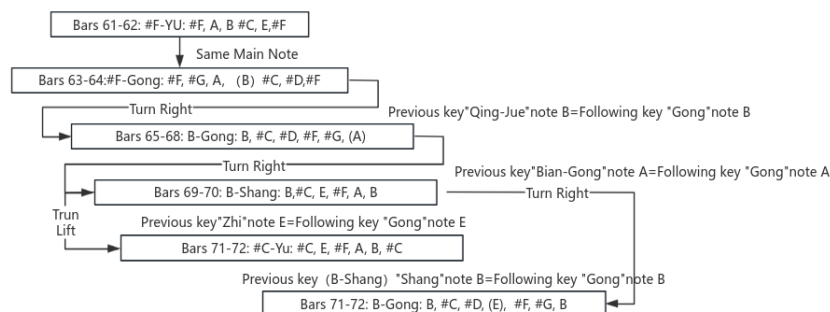


Fig.15 Four-hand piano composition "Songkran Festival", Bars: 61–72
detailed explanation of the Modulation

(2) Compositing ideas

The song's opening portrays the composer as a detached observer, witnessing the Thai people's arrangements for the festive Songkran Festival. This section vividly describes the faraway landscapes. During a performance, the artist must apply minimal effort while plucking the strings to create an ethereal sound. Additionally, they should employ techniques such as tapping, scraping, and other approaches to enhance the clarity of the blur and bring the camera closer. As an illustration, the rhythmic pattern in measures 12–19 progressively increases in complexity, while the accumulation of notes in measures 36–43 intensifies the auditory impact, establishing the groundwork for the forthcoming period characterized by joy, tranquility, and harmony.

In the second part, Primo included the main melody from the Thai Suntharaporn Ensemble's song "Songkran Festival" in the second portion of the composition. In the second section, Chinese harmonic accompaniment was added to the music. Chinese songwriters express their jubilant spirit as they celebrate the Songkran Festival alongside the Thai people in Thailand.

Knowledge from Research

In the creation of composition, Western and Chinese musical theories differ slightly in terms of harmony, chords, modes, and modulation methods. The author lists them in the following table:

Table 2 Western and Chinese musical theories contrast

	Western Musical Theory	Chinese Musical Theory
Mode	Major–minor mode	Pentatonic scale; Gong–mode, Shang–mode, Jue–mode, Zhi–mode, Yu–mode.
Harmony	Harmony of major and minor tonal systems	Pentatonic harmony
Chord	Tonal chord (Triad chord, 7th chord, etc.)	Empty Fifth, Pentatonic additional chord, etc.
Transfer method	Common–chord modulation, Enharmonic modulation, Common–tone modulation, etc.	Rotate – Gong modulation
The notes not within the mode	Tonicisation	“Pian – Yin” (Continuing to generate sounds based on Pythagorean tuning)

The use of harmony, chord progression, and tonal methods in Western musical theory has its foundation in the Major–minor mode. In Western musical theory, modes and scales are synonymous, with modes comprising scales. In Chinese musical theory, the scale and mode are two separate concepts. Based on its arrangement, the pentatonic scale encompasses five modes (Gong mode, Shang mode, Jue mode, Zhi mode, and Yu mode). Additionally, the study discusses the emergence of harmony, chord composition, and modulation techniques.

Conclusion

Incorporating Chinese musical theory in modern piano four–hand composition imbues the pieces with distinctive melodic allure and cultural legacy. Using the “Songkran Festival” as an illustration, this composition skillfully incorporates Western musical theory to employ pentatonic harmony and classic tonal expansion techniques from Chinese musical theory, such as variable chord and spiral palace modulation. This program showcases the composer’s profound

comprehension and implementation of Chinese music theory while also infusing distinctive creativity and artistic merit into the creation of piano music.

Through the integration of contemporary piano performance techniques with piano four-hand performances, the composer has developed a distinctive musical vocabulary that enables piano four-hand compositions to convey a greater sense of collaboration amongst performers rather than just creating to expand the range of performances. This has infused current Piano four-hand music with renewed energy and allure. This groundbreaking musical invention not only enhances the expressive elements of piano music but also fosters communication and integration among diverse cultural music, thereby paving the way for new prospects in the advancement of piano art.

Suggestions

Contemporary piano quartet composition can benefit from the fusion of Chinese and Western music theories and the incorporation of Thai music melodies and culture, offering composers a wealth of creative materials and inspiration. Below are a few recommendations:

1. Focus on Thai music and incorporate Thai music resources into the composition. Thai music is an extensive and abundant music system with a distinctive melodic allure derived from its historical background. Thai musical instruments epitomize the core of Thai music traditions. Their distinct sound and exceptional production technology are awe-inspiring. Their distinctive playing techniques, expertise, and modes of presentation infuse Thai music with a profound sense of emotion and authenticity. Utilizing Thai music resources enriches the musical composition and enhances the cultural significance embedded within the composition.

2. Western musical theory's knowledge structure and logic are extensive, making it a widely acknowledged framework for music academics worldwide. Hence, Chinese musical theory must incorporate Western musical theory and elucidate its principles and perspectives via the lens of Western theory of music.

3. By incorporating aspects of traditional Chinese music into our compositions, as Chinese students studying in Thailand, we must promote our cultural heritage and foster global appreciation for traditional Chinese music.

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