



An Analysis of “Chinese Style” in Jay Chou’s Popular Songs

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Abstract

Pop music originated from American jazz at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, and then gradually developed into China. With the development of pop music in China, many music works with ‘Chinese style’ characteristics have emerged. In 2000, Jay Chou released his first solo album 'Jay', which opened the wave of ‘Chinese-style’ music. The reason why Jay Chou can become a memory of the times is not only the use of traditional Chinese music in his works but also the use of Western pop music elements in his own works. Therefore, in his works, we can hear the integration of traditional Chinese elements and Western pop music elements, which is different from his predecessors. The author mainly analyzes a large number of Jay Chou’s popular songs in the lyrics, melody, arrangement, harmony, and other aspects, so as to find out the ‘Chinese style’ elements. This paper also tries to summarize its characteristics and laws, to provide more ideas and methods for future creation.

Keywords

'Chinese style'; Jay Chou; pop songs

1. Introduction

Pop music comes from American jazz. The multicultural and improvisational techniques contained in jazz break the shackles of traditional music forms. The so-called pop music refers to instrumental music and songs that are short in structure, popular in content, lively in form, sincere in emotion, loved by the masses, widely sung or appreciated, popular for a time, or even passed down to later generations. These music and songs are rooted in the rich soil of public life. Therefore, popular music is also known as 'mass music'. However, such a definition is not particularly accurate, because such a definition, there are often some people will international song 'Oriental Red' and other works into popular music, so there are some people who popular music called commodity music, only for commercial profit the purpose of music type can called popular music. It is commercial music entertainment and all the 'industrial' phenomena associated with it. Its marketability is the main, and art is secondary (Former Soviet Union 'Music Encyclopedia Dictionary', 1990). As for the origin of popular music in China, there are two kinds of opinions at present. One is that it originated from the opening of music songs by the Qing government in 1904, and the rise of music songs in schools around the country. The other is derived from the 1930s Shanghai Li Jinhui and other composers, the creation of the then very influential songs “Ye Lai Xiang”, “Night Shanghai” and so on (Zheng, 2023). Mr. Liang Maochun also sketched out a historical clue to the development of modern pop music in China: it was produced in the late 1920s, developed in the 1930s, and further extended in the enemy-occupied areas and Kuomintang-controlled areas in the 1940s. After 1949, this line was interrupted in the mainland, but there were new developments in Hong Kong and Taiwan. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, pop music returned to the mainland (Liu, 2016). In the

development of Chinese pop music, we have to mention Jay Chou. In 2000, Jay Chou released his first album "Jay" and opened the road of "Chinese style" pop music.

2. The 'Chinese style' in Jay Chou's works

The word 'Chinese style' has been more and more reflected in all walks of life in recent years. The author mainly explores the 'Chinese style' elements in popular songs. At present, there are different interpretations of the concept of 'Chinese style' songs in China. Mo Linhu believes that Chinese style music began to rise in 2005, represented by Jay Chou and Wang Lihong, mainly in the style of rhythm and blues, emphasizing the combination of national traditional cultural elements in creative techniques, adding Chinese traditional cultural symbols to works, and can arouse the audience's psychological resonance of pop music nationalization creation trend and its music works (Mo, 2011). Another explanation is that in 2006, music producer Huang Xiaoliang proposed to use "three ancient and three new" to define Chinese popular songs: "ancient Fu, ancient culture, ancient melody, new singing, new arrangement, new concept" (Wang, 2018). Therefore, many classical poems are used in many of Jay Chou's Chinese-style works, and some traditional Chinese musical instruments are used in the arrangement. Therefore, many of Jay Chou's Chinese-style works will give the audience a sense of cultural belonging.

2.1 Lyric on the Chinese style

In Jay Chou's songs, the song that best embodies the 'Chinese style' element is Fang Wenshan's lyrics. In almost every album by Jay Chou, there are songs written by Fang Wenshan. For example, 'Niangzi' in the album 'Jay', 'Shuangjieregun' in the album 'Fansit', 'Longquan' in the album 'Eight Degrees of Space', 'Dongfengpo' in the album 'Yehuimei', 'Qilixiang' in the album 'Qilixiang', 'Faruxue' in the album 'Xiaobang' in November, 'thousands of miles away' in the album 'Still Fansit', 'Bencaogangmu', 'Juhuatai' in the album 'I'm very busy', 'Qinghua ceramics' in the album 'Magic Throne', 'Yanhuayileng' in the album 'Cross-age'. The 'Red Dust Inn' in the '12 New' album, the 'Heavenly Passer-by' in the 'Ouch, Good Oh' album, and so on. From the above albums, it is not difficult to find that Fang Wenshan occupies a very important position in Jay Chou's "Chinese style" songs. First of all, we can see that these songs written by Fang Wenshan have obvious Chinese characteristics. For example, in the song 'Dongfengpo', there is the 'a cup of sorrow', 'a pot of drifting', 'wine warm memories miss thin', 'Pipa', and so on. At the same time, 'Po' in 'Dongfengpo' is 'Qupo'. According to the records of 'Song history music score', Tang Taizong personally created 29 'Qupo' and 15 Pipa solo 'Qupo' refers to a part of speech in the Song Dynasty (Fan, 2022). In the song 'thousands of miles away', there are 'Liuli', 'Furong', and so on; in the song "Fireworks are easy to be cold," there are "annals of history," "Fututa," "a residual lamp," "deep grass and trees in the old hometown," "mottled gates", and so on; in the song 'Red Dust Inn', there are 'Xianyun Yehe', 'Jiangshan', 'Jianghu', 'Landscape Painting', and so on; in the song 'Compendium of Materia Medica', there are 'Hua Tuo', 'Chinese characters', 'Ma Qianzi', 'Cassia', and so on; in the song 'blue and white porcelain', there are 'peony', 'koi carp', 'glaze color', 'lady picture', 'azure color', and so on; the song 'Dragon Boxing' appears in the 'Yangtze River', 'East', 'Dragon'; in the song "Niangzi," there are "a pot of good wine," "two three two silver," "Saibei" and "Jiangnan"; in the song 'shadow play', there are 'singing and doing', 'Baishan filial piety first', 'shadow play'; in the song 'Double Cut Stick', there are 'martial arts', 'iron sand palm', 'Kung Fu', 'Henan Songshan', 'Taiji', and so on. The words in the lyrics of these works are all unique to our country. They not only have very distinct characteristics but also can reflect the unique artistic beauty of China. The use of these words also verifies the ancient Fu and ancient culture of music producer Huang Xiaoliang. The lyrics are mainly based on the unique classical Chinese or ancient poetry in China. At the same time, there are also some unique ancient cultures, such as 'Hua Tuo' and 'Dragon', which are the embodiment of our ancient culture.

2.2 The melody characteristics of 'Chinese wind'

2.2.1 The use of rap elements

In many of Jay Chou's works, rap elements are used, especially in his earlier works. However, because rap has its own unique style, it is also called 'Zhou's rap'. One of the most obvious features of 'Zhou's rap' is its ambiguous pronunciation. Many listeners cannot hear the lyrics clearly when listening to the songs but have a quick sense of ambiguity. Jay Chou's 'Chinese style' works are based on 'woman' as the starting point. In this work, melody creation is based on rap, and progressive melody development is the main creative technique. The beginning of the music is based on the sixteen-point note as the basic rhythm type and 'Zhou's rap' is introduced. After the rap of the four

sections, the real melody line enters (as shown in Figure 1). It is worth noting that the breathing point of the whole melody development of this work is completely different from the breathing point of the lyrics. The rhythm of the music does not develop according to the broken sentences of the lyrics. On the contrary, the rhythm of the music disrupts the breath of the lyrics. Therefore, when listening to this work, many listeners will not understand the meaning expressed by the words, but they will instantly understand when watching the lyrics alone.

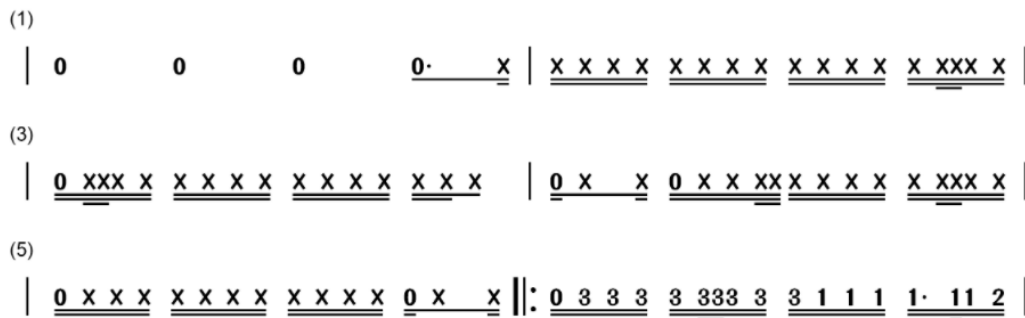


Figure 1. Rhythm of the song 'Niangzi'.

2.2.2 The use of traditional Chinese modes

In many of Jay Chou's 'Chinese style' works, the tonality of melody is an important factor in giving the works the charm of 'Chinese style'. The author analyzes that in many of Jay Chou's works, most of them use our traditional national mode. The work of 'blue and white porcelain' uses the pentatonic mode of A palace. The melody creation of the whole work adopts the arrangement of three-tone groups, and the melody begins to develop downward five tones, which makes the classical charm of the music more obvious, and also more integrated with the artistic conception of the lyrics. In the chorus part of the work, Jay Chou still adopted the downward motivation at the beginning, but this time he adopted this motivation and had a new change. He did not use the downward of the long line at the beginning but only used the downward of the three sounds. After that, the melody began to be roundabout, and with the development of the chorus, the melody began to develop upward, and the palace sound was continuously emphasized, and the grand and bright display of the palace mode was vividly displayed. At the same time, the continuous alternation of the main sound and the subordinate sound of the whole work also made the national charm of the work more prominent. Therefore, the whole work fully demonstrates the elegant and simple temperament of the Chinese people.

2.2.3 The embodiment of R&B music style

R&B attaches great importance to the role of rap in the emotional expression of songs, and the emotional expression of songs is generally reflected by the beat. For example, in Chinese R&B music works, the general beat form is four beats to form a section, and then three sections to form a paragraph, in order to form the rhythm of the lyrics (Huang, 2022).

Why Jay Chou's R&B works are not so distinctive in Western color This is because Jay Chou has integrated R&B music style into many traditional ethnic elements. In Jay Chou's works, the biggest integration with traditional elements is the integration with dramatic elements. For example, 'Niangzi', at the beginning of the rap, integrates the chanting in the Peking Opera singing. Therefore, Jay Chou's first album has begun to integrate the drama elements of our country. For example, the work 'Huo Yuanjia' is the perfect fusion of R&B and Peking Opera. It integrates the singing of Xiao Dan in Peking Opera and imitates the voice, tone, and charm of girls with male voice.

3. 'Chinese wind' arrangement and harmony

In Jay Chou's works, one of the biggest reasons for the obvious sense of Chinese style is the use of traditional Chinese musical instruments. In many of his works, Chinese traditional instruments are integrated into the arrangement, such as the use of Chinese percussion instruments gongs and erhu in "double truncheon"; the work 'Dragon Boxing' also

uses palace-style drum points and ancient chime bells.

In many of Jay Chou's works, harmony uses a lot of Chinese pentatonic harmony, such as high-folded chords. Since the 19th century, high-stacked chords have begun to develop in two directions: one is to continue to stack up three degrees on the seven chords of the genus, thus forming the high-stacked chords of the genus series that we now know—the nine chords, the eleven chords, and the thirteen chords; in another direction, except for the use of V-level, the use of high-order chords on other levels, including the use of high-order chords on heavy and subordinate genera (Zhang, 2020). For example, many nine chords and eleven chords are used in Jay Chou's work 'Blue and White Porcelain'. In Jay Chou's works, we can see a lot of the use of discordant chords, not considering whether to solve the problem, but completely as an independent status. The use of these chords is flexible and colorful, which adds rich colors to the slightly gentle melody and shows the harmony characteristics of popular music. At the same time, we found that the hanging two and the hanging four chords are also used frequently. Such chords avoid the occurrence of partial sounds, and at the same time reflect the unique color of national chords (Tai, 2020).

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