

Study of the Adaptation of Gospel Music

-- A Case Study in "Praise, Praise, Jesus" and "The River of Life"

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Abstract. This paper adapts two Gospel songs, "Praise, Praise Jesus" and "The River of Life," by incorporating elements of traditional Yunnan music to localize them. The paper first discusses the definition of Gospel music. Secondly, it expounds on the background and music analysis of the two songs. Thirdly, considering the people's cognition of Gospel music in Yunnan, the paper adapts "Praise, Praise Jesus" and "The River of Life" in combination with the characteristics of Yunnan traditional music. Finally, interviews are conducted with different groups to understand their comments on the adapted songs. This paper tries to increase the spread of Gospel music and improve people's cognition of Gospel music by adapting it locally.

Keywords: Gospel Music; Praise Praise Jesus; River of Life, Adapted Music.

1. Introduction

Black gospel music is a unique religious music of African Americans, which draws the essence of Southern rural culture in the United States and is formed within the urban culture of black communities [1]. Since its inception in the 1930s, black gospel music has been warmly welcomed and loved by the vast majority of African Americans for its unique charm. This music, which highlights the blackness of its performers, has become a bond between black churches and between churches and the black community, conveying God's love, giving black people the courage to live, and providing people with beautiful expectations and firm beliefs.

Gospel music is characterized by strong impromptu creation. Call and response can be formed between voice and instrument, voice part and voice part, chorus and congregation. [2] In terms of rhythm, compound rhythm, and staggered rhythm are often used, which adds a sense of power to the music and makes the music have a strong expression. In terms of musical instruments, pianos, banjos, organs, violins, guitars and brass instruments, and even other things that can hit the rhythm can be added to Gospel music, making the creation of Gospel music full of freedom. In the singing of Gospel music, singers often sing in falsetto, larynx, grunting, Shouting, etc., which gives the music a sense of span and tension [3].

Charles Alber Tindley was one of the founders of the Gospel music. He pioneered a new style of "hymns", with lyrics that combined religious and secular aspects to express personal inner feelings. [4] His songs are based on the traditional musical structure of "Call and response" singing, using a large pentatonic scale [5]. Later, with the development of Gospel music, when singing Gospel music, choirs not only retained the "Call and response" in the traditional musical form, but also added the musical form and style of folk dialects, as well as band performance, etc., and adapted and interpreted the songs, which promoted the development of the secularization of Gospel music and contributed to the spread of Gospel music. Based on the characteristics of traditional music in Yunnan, China, this paper adapts two Gospel songs, "Praise, Praise Jesus" and "The River of Life," aiming to improve the awareness and spread of Gospel music among people in Yunnan, to better promote the spread of Gospel music.

2. Background and Music Analysis of Songs

"Praise, Praise, Jesus" is a widely sung hymn among the people. As a short, folksy ballad, it is widely used in the teaching of children's poetry due to its catchy melody. The lyrics depict a joyful scene of people gathering together to praise Jesus. As shown in Fig 1, the melody of the song consists

of four phrases structured in the traditional format of introduction, development, climax, and conclusion. The first phrase progresses through modulation to the second phrase, while the first measure of the fourth phrase returns to the thematic motive of 5512. The piece employs bright major harmonies, and the overall harmonic progression is smooth and traditional.



Fig 1. Praise, Praise, Jesus

The original song of "River of Life" is written by Ms. Lv Xiaomin. It is a popular hymn among Chinese people. It is loved by people in ethnic minority areas because of its simple lyrics and tunes. The whole song is composed of four phrases, and three music sections constitute a phrase. From the development to the carrier using the method of modulation. The pitch gradually rises in the phrase to reach the climax of the piece. The melody then returns to the chord, ending in the minor major. The tone of the song is a minor color, and the overall mood of the song is a touch of introversion and sadness. As shown in Fig 2.

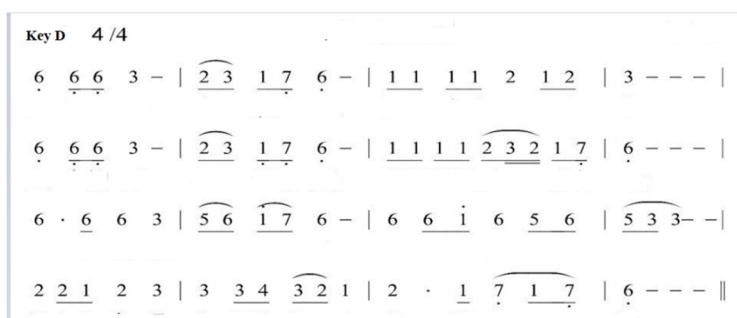


Fig 2. The River of Life

3. Song Adaptation

3.1 Adaptation of Praise, Praise, Jesus

During the mission trip of the church mission team in Yunnan. The two songs are adapted in this paper. Yunnan is located in the southwest border of China, a low-latitude inland region with mountainous plateau terrain, relatively closed communication and information transmission, relatively little foreign economic and cultural exchanges, and under the influence of ethnic culture and folk customs in this region, people in this region are less exposed to Christian Gospel information and Gospel music. Therefore, the purpose of this adaptation is to increase the popularity of the two songs and to make the local people understand Christianity through the spread of Gospel music. Therefore, this paper first understands the ethnic characteristics and people's way of life in Yunnan, and finds that the ethnic culture and music of Yunnan have been relatively primitive preservation and inheritance, and show diversified development characteristics. There are 22 ethnic groups in Yunnan. Each nation has a different historical and cultural background. The formation of Yunnan's music style is also related to their lifestyle. Yunnan is a mountainous region where people farm and work in the mountains, and Yunnan folk songs are born in the humming of people's work. This kind of folk song is similar to labor songs, with men's tones being relatively passionate and powerful, while women's tones are longer and more graceful. Yunnan people are good at singing and dancing, and music is a part of their life. Their folk dances are lively and full of rhythm. However, because the living area of

the Blang people is more isolated, their national character is shyer, and the folk songs in this part of the country are more minor in color, and the rhythm is slower. The melody development is more inclined to long lines, and more interjections like "ah ~" are added, which always contains a touch of sadness. Yunnan folk music styles are diverse, generally for the pentatonic scale, sometimes Heptachord Scales and Hexatonic Scales join. To make people in Yunnan quickly accept the two Gospel music, this paper first considers adding some elements of Yunnan folk music to draw the distance between the songs and local people and increase the intimacy.

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled "Praise, Praise, Jesus's adaptations". The score is arranged in four systems. The first system includes three vocal parts and a piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked "Moderato" with a quarter note equal to 100 (♩ = 100). The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The first two vocal parts are for female voices, and the third is for a male voice. The lyrics for the first system are "yin li yin li ye su". The piano accompaniment is in the right hand, with the left hand providing a simple harmonic support. The second system continues the vocal parts with the lyrics "wu wu wu wu wu wu wu wu wu". The piano accompaniment continues with a similar rhythmic pattern. The score is marked with "mp" (mezzo-piano) throughout.

Fig 3. Praise, Praise, Jesus's adaptations

Therefore, this paper mainly adopts the language of Dai nationality and Blang nationality as the language of song adaptation, adding the tunes of Chinese national hymns, which not only use the language familiar to the local villagers but also feel the melodic development different from that of local folk songs in the process of song learning. Meanwhile, the almost common mode also reduces people's strangeness. The song of praise and praise Jesus was added to the Dai language. Under the tone of the Dai language, it adds a lot of emotional atmospheres of singing and dancing.

Furthermore, the original song "Praise, Praise Jesus" is a neatly structured short piece in common time (4/4), with an overall joyful atmosphere. The opening eight bars begin with the first four bars introduced by A Cappella, followed by Syncopation in the last four bars, which give the entire piece

a sense of a celebration opening. The adapted chorus structure is organized in a two-part form, AB, with the first eight bars as an introduction. In terms of tonality, the introduction section presents melodic motives in C major and proceeds with modulation. The A section shifts to D major, and after a piano interlude, the B section transitions to E major for expansion and development, before returning to D major to conclude (as shown in Fig 3).

In terms of singing, after entering theme A, the main melody is repeated three times. The first time is a piano accompaniment of children singing together, the second time is a piano accompaniment of female high and female low chorus. The accompaniment body adopts the texture of the left eighth note followed by the right sixteenth note, creating a relaxed and cheerful atmosphere. As shown in Fig 4. The third melody adopts four choruses of male and female and is in the form of a Capella, which retains the texture of human voice to a great extent, aiming to create a pure unaccompanied chorus of Yunnan people in the mountains. A piano interlude then leads the melody to develop B and shifts it to E major to expand the motifs, doubling the duration of the melody (as shown in Fig 5), intended to create a more expansive feeling.



Fig 4. Texture

The image shows a musical score for a vocal harmony arrangement. It consists of four staves. The top three staves are vocal parts, and the bottom two staves are piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked as $\text{♩} = 105$. The key signature is D major (two sharps). The lyrics are: *mf* su san_ pa_ zao su san_ pa zao. The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The overall mood is described as relaxed and cheerful.

Fig 5. Melody

This paper develops the melody according to the motive to create a more glorious and sacred feeling. In the vocal harmony arrangement, a counter-melody has been added for embellishment, and the original third interval harmony has been changed to a natural octave interval between the alto mezzo-soprano and tenor voices, aiming to make the musical development more expansive. The piece concludes with a deceptive cadence returning to D major and terminates at its climax with an unaccompanied, purely vocal segment.

3.2 Adaptation of the River of Life

The original composition "The River of Life" is rich in minor-key colors, features clear harmonies, and has well-defined verses and choruses. In the process of adaptation, the original A+B structure of verses and choruses was preserved. However, in terms of vocal arrangement, the adapted version employs a solo + chorus format. The melody of the solo section is an independent melody created based on the thematic motive, while the chorus section adopts the melody of the original song. The intention behind this arrangement is to convey a sense of call and response. This response is not in a duet form but rather a feeling of one person asking and a group responding. Creating a harmonious interplay between the solo and chorus sections is also a fascinating endeavor.

In terms of orchestration, the adapted version introduces a wooden guitar and a cucurbit flute in the introduction section. The wooden guitar is a common accompaniment instrument for local people in Yunnan. The cucurbit flute is representative of traditional Yunnan ethnic musical instruments and has a very distinctive timbre. As the song progresses, it is not only accompanied by the piano but also joined by a string ensemble, adding more timbral depth to the feeling of the river of life being long and continuous.

The beginning of the verse section is initiated by a tenor, narrating the story in a deep and leisurely tone. In the second repetition of the verse, a bass voice joins in, adding depth to the song. For the first half of the third repetition of the verse, a mezzo-soprano enters, followed by a soprano in the second half. The staggered entry of each voice part enriches the layers of the chorus. Moreover, during the third and fourth repetitions of the verse, the tenor and mezzo-soprano echo each other, making the song's rhythm livelier and the listening experience more diverse.

All four voice parts enter simultaneously during the chorus, primarily with a third interval between them, which adds fullness to the song.

In terms of lyrics, "The River of Life" is sung in the language of the Blang people, an ethnic minority in Yunnan. Blang music tends to be more reserved and profound, which aligns with the atmosphere of "The River of Life". It effectively conveys the emotions of the song and emphasizes the metaphor of life as a long and flowing river.

4. Evaluation of the Adaptations

This article conducted interview research in order to better understand people's feelings after the adaptation of two songs. Four groups of individuals were selected for interviews: ordinary congregants, local Yunnan residents, music professionals, and choir singers.

For ordinary congregants, this paper explored their feelings after listening to the adapted songs. Congregants believed that the adaptations sounded good and felt fresh. They generally aligned with their expectations of Gospel music. The adapted music made people enjoy being immersed in it. Regarding the second question, congregants felt that the adaptations increased the music's appeal, bringing people feelings of joy and happiness. Compared to the original song, "The River of Life" had a more beautiful and longer melody, making people yearn for the river of life. "Praise, Praise Jesus" had a livelier and more jubilant feel, evoking a sense of universal rejoicing.

For choir singers, this paper conducted interviews from the perspective of singing, such as their feelings about the melodic lines of each voice part and any different sensations they had when singing the adapted versions. Choir singers generally found the adaptations acceptable and believed they were very well done. The melodic lines of the voice parts were strong, with the melodic phrases repeating multiple times, making them easy to remember. Compared to the original songs, they felt that the adaptations were more suitable for four-part singing. Compared to the original single-voice poetry form, the four-part adaptation expanded the scope of the work. The harmonic layers were deepened and thickened, enriching the expression of the work's content and creating a more imaginative atmosphere.

Local people in Yunnan, greatly enjoy the four-part singing style, finding the sound very three-dimensional and sophisticated. Although they may feel that singing it themselves would be somewhat

challenging, they still find it pleasing to listen to and very moving to sing. Singing in their hometown dialect feels very likable and intimate.

For music professionals, interviewed them on the following three questions: How is the musicality of the adaptations? Is the arrangement of voice parts and the use of melodies reasonable? Are there any other suggestions? Regarding musicality, professionals believed that the melodies were sufficient and hoped that more counterpoint could be used when composing chorus works to enhance the sense of line and structure among the voice parts. There were some issues with the voice part arrangement. They hoped that the pitch intervals between the voice parts could be more distinct. When creating works with strong ethnic characteristics, it is important to preserve their national identity and consult more with locals. On this basis, one's own composition techniques and musical characteristics can be added.

Overall, the four groups interviewed were relatively satisfied with the adaptations of the two songs. In terms of emotional expression, the adapted songs had more infectious emotional expression and could evoke resonance among listeners. In terms of harmony, the four-part adaptation increased the melody and rich layers of the music, better expressing the song's connotations. Although there is still room for improvement in vocal part arrangement and ethnic composition, this adaptation of the songs was a relatively successful attempt.

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