

# Music Analysis and Playing Techniques of Zheng Piece *Deep Night*

Qiaochu Yuan<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> School of Music, Shandong College of Arts

Correspondence: Qiaochu Yuan, School of Music, Shandong College of Arts.

doi: 10.56397/AS.2022.08.01

## Abstract

Many excellent art forms have been nurtured on the fertile soil of traditional Chinese music culture. Among them, Kunqu Opera, Peking Opera and Guzheng “grew” together on this fertile soil. The zheng piece *Deep Night* adapted by the famous Guzheng player Wang Zhongshan is the result of the fusion and symbiosis of these three art forms. Making this analysis is out of that to find commonalities from individuality, summarize and look forward to the perfect integration and interpretation of Chinese opera music elements and contemporary Zheng music art, so as to better inherit and carry forward Chinese traditional music culture.

**Keywords:** Peking Opera, *deep night*, creative features, performance skills

## 1. Music Ontology Analysis

### 1.1 Introduction to the Composer

Mention the musical instrument Guzheng, and people’s impressions are often of melodious and graceful female images. However, in the professional field of contemporary Guzheng, one of the leading figures of Guzheng art, Wang Zhongshan, is a gentle and humorous man. Wang Zhongshan, a famous contemporary Guzheng player in my country, is currently a professor and doctoral tutor at the China Conservatory of Music. Wang Zhongshan was born in Nanyang, Henan, the hometown of folk art in my country. The art of Zheng music has influenced him since childhood. After graduating from Nanyang Opera School in 1986, Wang Zhongshan began to study with Mr. Zhao Manqin. During the process of learning with Mr. Zhao, he gradually checked and filled the gaps in basic techniques and sensation. Since then, Wang Zhongshan, by virtue of his fate, talent and diligence, has gone farther and farther on the road of Guzheng, and has occupied a place in the Zheng class.

### 1.2 Creation Background

The Guzheng song *Deep Night* was transplanted and adapted by Mr. Wang Zhongshan through Jinghu’s work *Deep Night*. *Deep Night* was originally the name of the tune, and the pianist Mei Yutian took it from the tune of the Qupai in the famous Kunqu opera “Si Fan Down the Mountain”, and then negotiated with Mr. Tan Xinpei, a famous Peking Opera performing artist, and finally named it *Deep Night*. The lyrics of the original song are: “It’s deep at night, I lie down alone, when I get up, I sit alone, who is lonely like me, what’s the reason for such a haircut? I hate only the fate of lying and the Buddha...” (Wang Caiyun, 2011). It tells the story of a little nun, Sifan, who sits alone under the ancient Buddha with a green lamp, cuts her hair to become a nun, and finally goes down the mountain to pursue happiness. Later, Mei Lanfang turned this piece into the background music of *Yu Ji Dancing Sword in Farewell My Concubine*. The scene is right in front of you, and the background of *Deep Night* makes the picture more exciting and relaxed. The *Deep Night* played by Jinghu has been widely circulated for a long time and has become a classic and famous piece. Contemporary Guzheng performer Wang Zhongshan adapted it into a Guzheng piece based on the Jinghu version.

The Guzheng piece *Deep Night* still retains the performance form of Jinghu and percussion music. The crisp and bright timbre of the Guzheng is matched with the thick and full drum, which echoes each other. This form of

performance, firstly, can better increase the graininess of the music, which is very similar to the martial arts in Peking Opera, and it can be changed freely. Secondly, it can fill in the gaps in the interlude of the music, making the music more coherent and refreshing. At the same time, Guzheng's unique and distinctive press glide perfectly integrates the unique rhythm of Jinghu. Different from the performance of the Jinghu version, the timbre of the Guzheng is bright and light, while the timbre of the huqin is more sad and heavy. The Guzheng version of *Deep Night* can not only express the emotion of this sad song, but also show a trace of it in this sadness. The tenacity and upward strength make the vivid scenes of swords, lights, swords and shadows more exciting.

## 2. Analysis of Music Form and Characteristics of Works

### 2.1 The Form of Music

In terms of mode, the Jinghu version of *Deep Night* adopts the key of F, which is suitable for high-pitched musical instruments such as Jinghu, with a sense of passion. From *Fighting Tigers Up the Mountain*, Mr. Wang Zhongshan has always had a soft spot for Beijing-flavored works. He adds the sound of big drums to this piece of music. In the cooperation with the drum music, it reflects the profound feeling of the music, and has a strong appreciation for the Beijing melody and Beijing style. The flavor is very well grasped.

In terms of structure, the whole piece consists of 144 bars, divided into introduction, adagio, allegro and presto.

#### 2.1.1 Introduction

The introduction part of this piece is relatively short, with a total of 6 bars. The heavy drum sound is directly entered from the introduction. From the first bar to the fourth bar, the playing strength of the bass drum is from weak to weak to the weakest, and the speed is gradually increased from slow to slowest the faster. The dense drum sound creates a solemn and harsh feeling, and with the thick and full tone of the big drum, it heralds the emergence of the theme of adagio, which is the main melody. In the introduction, the right-hand finger shaking is combined with the left-hand tapping, pressing, kneading and other performance skills.

#### 2.1.2 Adagio

The Adagio part has a total of 58 bars (7-64 bars), which can be divided into 5 small phrases according to Yuyin, Shangyin and Kuoyin. Bars 7-15 are the first phrase, and the melody starts from a weak start, but the following fourth jump makes the music suddenly full of passion, forming an obvious contrast between the strength and weakness of the previous one, and it also indicates that the following bars are continuous. The emergence of unstable motives promotes the further development of music. The unstable motivational material ends on the feather tone, followed by a large piece of melodic development, which ends with the shang tone in bar 28. Immediately after entering a transitional phrase, bars 29-31, the melody goes progressively downward, the intensity gradually increases from weak to strong, and the melody is about to reach its climax. From bars 32 to 43, the phrases basically stay on the chirping sound. The rhythm and melody of this part are gradually relieved, and there are relatively few rapid rhythm patterns, and the music has a little more firmness. From bars 44 to 64, compared with that of before, the melody of this part is richer, the mode is constantly changing, and the music is very rhythmic. The appearance of the 62-bar arpeggio has solved the unstable motivation. The slow onset of bars 62-62 paved the way for the arrival of the Allegro below. The Peking Opera in the adagio part has a very strong charm. The linear characteristics of the string melody and a large number of pressing and sliding techniques demonstrate the tone and rhythm of Peking Opera.

#### 2.1.3 Allegro

The Allegro section is (65-123) bars. The Allegro part is also divided into two sections, 65-98 is the Allegro of the first part, and 98-123 is the Allegro of the second part. In bars 65-72, the drum music is matched with the ring finger, and the syncopated rhythm makes the music appear imposing at this time, and the accent of the left-hand triad adds a sense of tension to the music. From bar 73, the drums stop and a large Guzheng solo begins. The fast fingering sequence and the creation method of the analog sound promote the music layer by layer and increase the excitement of the music. Drums begin from 92 bars, and the rhythm of sixteenth notes pushes the musical atmosphere forward. The 99 bars are constantly repeated, and the intense and tangled music thoughts develop vertically at this time, until the main melody of the 119 bars continues to develop downward. The Allegro part uses a lot of fast fingering sequences, which makes the music melody more fluent and has a sense of coherence.

#### 2.1.4 Presto

The presto is 123-144 bars, and the strumming at the end echoes the beginning, which greatly increases the momentum of the music. The whole song is relatively firm as a whole, with fierce war scenes and tragic endings.

### 2.2 Features of the Work

The Zheng piece *Deep Night* is a very representative piece of music. The biggest feature of this piece is the use

of Beijing rhyme and Beijing accent in the piece.

At present, many modern creative Zheng songs integrate western harmony, polyphony and other techniques in their creation techniques, and the blindly westernized creative concept has led to the loss of the original appearance of zheng songs. Based on the present works, Guzheng is a kind of national music that carries thousands of years of Chinese traditional culture. Therefore, the musical ideas expressed by it should have national cultural connotations and China's own aesthetic characteristics. The song *Deep Night* not only has a new type of performance skills, but also takes into account the strong national charm, and the melody is full of Peking Opera characteristics. It is mainly reflected in the following aspects: First, "rhyme" is the soul of Peking Opera and opera music. In this piece, the charm of Peking Opera is still preserved, which is realized by pressing and sliding with the left hand and other Guzheng techniques. The slide of the left hand runs through the whole piece. During the performance, the pitch of the slide of the slide is very important. It should be pressed in place accurately. Otherwise, it will change the charm of the piece. Second, *Deep Night* embodies the Peking Opera-style "tight pull and slow singing". What is "tight pull and slow singing"? Peking Opera is a "slow" art. In the performance, a turn around, a glance back and a singing sentence are all slower than our normal speed. Peking Opera actors are required to have a very precise grasp of every singing voice and lyrics. This pursuit of "considering every word and every sentence" has created the "tight pull and slow singing" approach (Wang Qin, 2018). In the adagio part of *Deep Night*, different rhythm types such as dotted rhythm are used, and the performance techniques are also very rich, such as glissando, scratching, rotation and so on. The complex rhythm and techniques create a sense of relaxation and relaxation in the zheng music, which happens to reflect the opera characteristics of "speaking too late, then fast" in the art of Peking Opera. Third, in the art of Peking Opera, the accompaniment instruments are very important for setting off the atmosphere. The accompaniment music of Peking Opera is mainly divided into two categories: percussion music and orchestral music. The function of percussion music is to exaggerate the atmosphere of the martial arts scene. where. In the zheng piece *Deep Night*, the "figure" of percussion is still preserved, and the bass drum is used as an accompaniment instrument. The orchestral accompaniment in Peking Opera is mainly used in the "text field", and its main function is to sing. Jinghu is one of the most important accompaniment instruments in the orchestral accompaniment. The most prominent feature of Jinghu is its portamento, which is similar to Guzheng. In the music, the performance of glissando is very rich, adding a lot of Peking Opera charm to the zheng music.

### 3. *Deep Night* Performance Skills and Performance Experience

#### 3.1 *Playing Skills*

##### 3.1.1 Wheel Finger

The Guzheng's wheel finger technique is to play the strings from the outside to the inside from the first four or three fingers in turn, requiring the player to play with a clean tone and even and delicate intensity, so as to form a musical effect of dots forming lines. In *The Darkness of the Night*, the ring fingers appear continuously from the beginning of the adagio, and the performance is a little difficult. Most of them are sixteenth notes, and there are many continuous long lines of the ring fingers, which adds to the original monotonous melody. Somewhat vivid colors.

##### 3.1.2 Three-Finger Shake

Three-finger shaking is a difficult technique in Guzheng. It is often used to shake the strings with the big finger, the index finger and the middle finger at the same time. Later, different combinations of the third finger, the index finger and the ring finger were gradually developed. Commonly used is a three-finger shake that combines the big, index, and middle fingers. The three-finger shake is formed on the basis of the single-finger shake, so the one-finger shake must be played firmly in order to better apply the three-finger shake. In *Deep Night*, the part of the three-finger shake mainly appears after 29 bars, and each bar develops downward with the same motivation to form a descriptive music scene, reflecting Xiao Sa, the night wind in the background of the story.

##### 3.1.3 Bounce

The finger-shaking technique not only derived the three-finger shaking, but also the playing technique of strumming. It is to play other strings with the middle finger of the right hand at the same time as the big finger of the right hand, thus forming the sound of different parts and different lines. Effect. Mr. Wang Zhongshan used his shaking fingers to maintain the long-line melody characteristics of the sound in Jinghu, and at the same time highlighted the middle finger stress, which not only retains the style but also innovates the characteristics of the Guzheng. With the two-finger shaking, the hook is added, which tests a person's wrist strength and tolerance. The strumming effect includes two aspects: one is to divide the phrase into several segments; the other is to make the sound effect rich and full, so that the single tone in the intended expression is not monotonous. During training, it is necessary to ensure the independence of each finger playing. In this link, three points need to be done: 1. The rhythm is clear; 2. The tone is beautiful; 3. The strength is balanced. During the performance, it is

necessary to maintain the stability and coherence of the right remote finger, and at the same time, the appearance of the middle finger “playing” should also be clear in tone, making the music melody more lively.

### 3.2 Performance Practice and Perception

In modern Guzheng works, there are more and more zheng music works with opera style, such as *Xiao Wu, Tonight, Drunken Jing Lan*, etc. Have a vertical and in-depth understanding of Chinese traditional music culture and opera culture. The author believes that whether it is the art of Peking Opera or other types of opera, the combination with the creation of zheng music can open up a unique aesthetic path for Guzheng learners and listeners. First, the colorful playing skills of the Guzheng and its wide and varied timbre effects can imitate the charm of opera very flexibly. Secondly, Guzheng performance and opera performance are two different art forms. The huge stage effect of opera performance and the “single-play” scene of the Guzheng instrument give the audience different aesthetic impacts. Finally, integrating opera elements into zheng music performance requires the performer to have some understanding of the opera and the content of the work. Through the second creation of the performer, the concept of emotion and beauty to be expressed in the work is conveyed to the audience, so as to achieve emotional and spiritual sublimation.

With my country’s vigorous advocacy of national cultural confidence and the construction of a culturally powerful country, the emphasis on China’s excellent national traditional culture has increased day by day, and more and more young people have begun to pay attention to traditional music art. The perfect combination of zheng and opera can serve multiple purposes with one fell swoop. Zhengqu with opera elements not only conforms to the general direction of the development of the current era, but also opens up a new path for carrying forward the quintessence of China. At the same time, it can better carry out cultural innovation and enhance national cultural self-confidence. The fusion of two traditional Chinese cultures, Guzheng and opera, builds a bridge, and the two musical elements communicate with each other, thereby better promoting the common development and prosperity of both.

### 4. Conclusion

Through the analysis of the creative background of the zheng piece *Deep Night*, the analysis of the music ontology and the characteristics of the work, we can better understand the connotation and meaning of the piece itself. With the influence of Western modern music trends such as “Western music spreading eastward”, my country’s music creation as a whole is moving closer to learning from the West, and the idea of learning from the West is a “double-edged sword”. On the one hand, it has indeed promoted the great development of my country’s music culture, but on the other hand, blindly learning from the West has not only led to the loss of my country’s own traditional culture, but also led to the disapproval of its own culture. More and more young people love Western music culture, but they don’t know anything about their own music. On the one hand, this piece of music continues the musical essence and characteristics of the Jinghu version of *Deep Night* in terms of musical tunes and passages. It expresses the charm of Peking Opera and the story of Peking Opera, and inherits the excellent spiritual culture of the nation. The creative idea of combining folk music and modern composition techniques is the mainstream direction of today’s music creation. The organic integration of Peking Opera opera art and contemporary Zheng music has created a unique inheritance model.

In more than ten years of guzheng(Chinese Zither) learning and perception, the author gradually understands that “inheritance is for better development”. On the road of learning Zheng music, the author will always maintain the belief of not forgetting the original intention, love the culture of the nation, and better carry forward and inherit the spirit of national culture and the art of Zheng music.

### References

- Wang Ting.. (2019). *Analysis of the evolution characteristics of Qu Pai “Deep Night” in the genre of instrumental music*. Shanghai Conservatory of Music.
- He Yiwen. (2019). *The performance of Peking Opera’s “running the tune” technique in the famous Guzheng songs*. Jiangxi Normal University.
- Wei Wan. (2018). *Talking about the application of Beijing accent and Beijing rhyme in contemporary composition of Zheng music*. China Conservatory of Music.
- Chao Xia. (2011). Analysis of the performance of the adapted Guzheng piece “Deep Night”. *Ethnic Music*, (01), 96-97.
- Huang Yue. (2019). *Research on the creation of contemporary Guzheng solo works (1979-2019)*. Jiangxi Normal University
- Wang Caiyun. (2011). Peking Opera Song Pai The Evolution of “Deep Night”. *Journal of Chinese Opera Academy*, 32(1).

Wang Qin. (2018). *On the application and performance of musical elements in Peking Opera of Zheng pieces "Deep Night" and "Tonight"*. Shanghai Conservatory of Music.

**Copyrights**

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).