

# Research on the Creative Characteristics and Artistic Value of the Song "Jasmine Flower"

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**Abstract:** *The purpose of this study is to explore the artistic value and social significance of folk songs, taking "Jasmine Flower" as a case study. This study holds that folk songs are not only the crystallization of the wisdom and artistic ability of the working people, but also the true portrayal of their inner feelings, containing their yearning and expectation for a better future. By analyzing the creative characteristics of "Jasmine Flower" in two different fields of folk music and professional music, this paper reveals its unique artistic charm. Further, this paper discusses the artistic value of "Jasmine Flower" from four dimensions: music creation, cultural dissemination, folk custom research and music education, aiming to reveal its important role in social and cultural development.*

**Keywords:** *folk song, "Jasmine Flower", creative characteristics, artistic value*

## 1. Introduction

"Jasmine Flower" is a well-known Chinese folk song. According to existing records, the melody of "Jasmine Flower" originated from the folk tune "Xiao Hui Ji" during the Qing Dynasty, while the lyrics can be traced back to the opera text "Zhui Bai Qiu" during the Qianlong period. As for the style of the melody, it has a rich Jiangnan flavor. With the development of social economy and cultural exchange between regions, "Jasmine Flower" has been spread to different areas. Contemporary musicologist Feng Guangyu believes that this kind of different variants generated during the transmission process based on a common source is called "homogeneous folk songs". As a representative homogeneous folk song, "Jasmine Flower" has not only continued to be transmitted and transformed among the folk, but also been frequently used as material for music creation in the professional field, realizing the creative transformation and innovative development of folk songs. This article will elaborate on the creative characteristics and the artistic value contained in "Jasmine Flower" to achieve a deeper understanding of the song.

## 2. Creative Characteristics of "Jasmine Flower"

### 2.1. "Jasmine Flower" in the Perspective of Folk Music Creation

Folk songs are the crystallization of the wisdom of the working people in their production, life, and artistic endeavors. They express the heartfelt emotions of the laboring people and contain their longing for and anticipation of the beauty of the world. When examining various versions of "Jasmine Flower" (Jasmine Flower) from different regions, we can see that they either praise life's delights using symbolic metaphors or narrate their perspectives on reality with a humorous tone. Most of these songs convey people's inner feelings through simple melodies and everyday language.

In the Jiangsu folk song version of "Jasmine Flower", the melody is gentle, meandering, and subtly profound. It resembles a secluded garden path filled with fragrance or a tranquil and winding stream. Through its progressive and winding progression, it creates a picturesque water village landscape. In the Hebei folk song version of "Jasmine Flower", elements of the local drum tunes are incorporated. The combination of the first eight notes and the following sixteen-note pattern, along with the use of dotted notes and large cut notes, together with the integration of progressive and leaping melodies, exudes a slightly passionate and yet fresh and pleasant quality. Particularly notable is the addition of minor second color notes, which adds a humorous and lively natural charm.

In the Shaanxi folk song version of "Jasmine Flower", the use of elements from the Qin Opera

showcases a style characterized by desolation, grandeur, and the vigor of heroic figures. In terms of the tonal structure, the song employs the Qin Opera flower-tone scale, with the melody mainly constructed around the core notes La, Mi, and Re. It is precisely the use of these three notes that gives the melody a blending quality of the Yu diao mode and the Shang diao mode. Furthermore, the composition of this song also borrows the gradual variation structure of the Qin Opera's banqiang body, employing a layout that alternates between middle tempo, slow tempo, and fast tempo. This structure allows for the presentation, variation, and development of the main theme, showcasing characteristics reminiscent of the structure of traditional opera singing.[1]

From the creative characteristics of the lyrics, it is mainly manifested in the following two aspects. The first is the use of analogy, so that the jasmine has a symbolic significance. Jasmine is a kind of natural plant with white color and light aroma. It can not only symbolize people's pure heart, but also can be used as a metaphor for pure love. This symbolic meaning is common in "Jasmine Flower" all over the world. Especially in the traditional creation horizon of folk songs in China, which focuses on the use of starting techniques, the praise of "Jasmine Flower" as the beginning of the lyrics is helpful to the expression of real life situations. Taking Liaoning folk song "Jasmine Flower" as an example, the song is a combined folk song, which is divided into two sections as a whole. The first section is the "Jasmine Flower" variant, and the second section is the use of the "December Style" racket. The first section is sung in a complimentary tone, and this lyric is repeated twice. This lyric creation technique can not only enhance the intensity of praise, but also lay a solid foundation for the subsequent development of music. The second is the use of narrative and lyrical techniques. The equal emphasis on narrative and lyricism is one of the most prominent artistic features of Chinese folk songs. It is manifested as lyricism in narration and narration in lyricism. This situation can be said to exist in "Jasmine Flower" all over China. Taking Jiangsu folk song "Jasmine Flower" as an example, the song is a segmented song structure composed of three lyrics. Each section begins with the same lyric, and then enters their respective narrative situations. For example, the narrative situation of the first paragraph of the lyrics is "I have the heart to wear a flower, and the person who looks at the flower will scold me". From the perspective of narrative, there are characters, movements, scenes, and even certain psychological actions in the lyrics, which achieves the unity of narrative and lyricism.

## ***2.2. "Jasmine Flower" in the Perspective of Professional Music Creation***

Since the 20th century, with the development of professional music education, composition, and performance in China, not only has Western compositional techniques been introduced, but also folk music inheritance and innovation have been highly valued. Looking at the composition of professional music in China over the past few decades, works based on the folk song "Jasmine Flower" can be found in various genres, including solo songs, choral songs, ethnic instrumental solos, ethnic instrumental ensembles, piano pieces, violin pieces, string quartets, etc. Among them, the most prominent feature in the use of materials is the incorporation of elements such as the melody of the folk song "Jasmine Flower", pentatonic scales as the basis for tonality, and vocal ornamentation techniques such as glissando and vibrato commonly found in folk singing. This inheritance retains the distinctive Chinese style of folk songs.[2]

"Orchid", composed in the early 1980s, is a lyrical song with lyrics by Zhang Hongshu and music by Zang Dongsheng. Although the title is "Orchid", the composer chose the melody of the Jiangsu folk song "Jasmine Flower". Based on the mi-re-mi-so and la-so-do-la motifs, the composer rejuvenates the original folk melody through techniques such as using the rhythmic patterns of traditional Chinese opera, variations in embellishments, and reorganization of melodic phrases.

"Jasmine Fragrance", composed by He Zhanhao in 1991, is a guzheng solo piece full of rich Jiangnan-style flavor. Based on the melody of "Jasmine Flower", this piece fully utilizes the pentatonic scale characteristic of folk songs, employing techniques such as gradually changing rhythmic structures (overall layout), contrapuntal development (theme presentation), and harmonic support (theme defense) to portray the picturesque scenery of Jiangnan and express strong humanistic sentiments. The performance combines guzheng techniques such as pressing, rubbing, vibrato, and glissando, presenting a richly vocal-like effect and achieving a fusion of folk singing and guzheng playing techniques.

"Jasmine Fantasy", composed by pianist and composer Chu Wanghua in 2003, is a medium-sized piano solo piece. Although written for piano, the composer exhibits distinct Chinese characteristics both in material selection and compositional techniques. Incorporating the pentatonic scale characteristic of the Jiangsu folk song "Jasmine Flower", the piece features melodic lines in the

right-hand part and harmonic structures predominantly using seconds, fourths, and fifths in the left hand, fully demonstrating the stylistic characteristics of the pentatonic scale. Additionally, the composer breaks down, presents, rhythmically varies, and tonally varies the material in a dramatic layout, expressing both the sentiment and mood of "harmony" while sketching a traditional life scene filled with cultural connotations.

From the above descriptions of works based on "Jasmine Flower", it can be seen that in contemporary professional music composition, the folk song "Jasmine Flower" has become a widely used material by composers, with efforts made to reflect Chinese stylistic characteristics in both compositional techniques and thematic presentations.

### **3. Artistic Value of "Jasmine Flower"**

#### ***3.1. Musical Creative Value***

"Jasmine Flower", as a folk song passed down in history, has been able to spread and develop into a diverse range of regional styles across China, indicating its widespread popularity among the working people and representing the aesthetic desires of ordinary people. This solidifies the mass foundation of "Jasmine Flower" in folk culture, providing a strong basis for its utilization in musical compositions. As Yang Sitong stated in "The Folk Song 'Jasmine Flower' and the Modernization of Chinese Literature and Art", the robust vitality of "Jasmine Flower" primarily stems from its folk cultural genes. In current artistic creation, its widespread application is fundamentally a matter of cultural and aesthetic identity. From the current situation of works based on "Jasmine Flower", it has been applied in various genres, demonstrating its significant musical creative value. This underscores the importance for contemporary music creators to focus on the creative transformation and innovative development of folk songs with a high degree of cultural confidence and self-strengthening will.[3]

On December 23, 2021, the original musical "The Sound of Jasmine", jointly launched by the Jiangsu Provincial Federation of Literary and Art Circles and the Nanjing University of the Arts, vividly portrayed the background and development of the folk song "Jasmine Flower" by integrating character roles and emotional experiences. This approach of presenting the background and development of the folk song "Jasmine Flower" through stage performance and dramatic representation is unprecedented in the history of Chinese music and even cultural history. The emergence of this musical signifies the transformation of creation and innovation in contemporary music composition based on the folk song "Jasmine Flower".

#### ***3.2. Cultural Communication Value***

As an important part of traditional Chinese music culture, folk songs play a crucial role in social and cultural exchanges as well as cultural communication. They serve as an effective medium for the world to understand Chinese traditional culture and showcase the charm of Chinese music. The melody of the folk song "Jasmine Flower" is well-known worldwide, thanks to the Italian composer Puccini's creation of the opera "Turandot" with an oriental style. The melody of "Jasmine Flower" can be heard in the overture, arias, recitatives, and choruses of this opera. With the performance of the opera worldwide, "Jasmine Flower" has also been widely disseminated. As the musicologist Qian Renkang said, "Jasmine Flower" is the first Chinese folk song to spread overseas.

The "Four Chinese Fantasy Pieces for Solo Violin", composed by a contemporary renowned composer in 1999, is a commissioned work. It incorporates four different styles of Chinese music as materials: "Jasmine Flower", "Erquan Ying Yue" (Moon Reflected on Erquan), "Sunset Xaio Gu" (Sunset Drum and Fife), and "Drama · Reminiscence", involving elements of folk songs, erhu, pipa, and Peking Opera. Among them, the "Jasmine Flower Fantasy" uses the melody of the Jiangsu folk song "Jasmine Flower". This work premiered in San Francisco by the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra and was later performed in regions such as Chicago, Michigan, Minnesota, Texas, and Indiana. It can be said that it allows American audiences to experience the charm of Chinese music from the East. From this, it can be seen that "Jasmine Flower" has become a "business card" and "messenger" for China's cultural exchanges with foreign countries.[4]

#### ***3.3. Value of Folklore Research***

From the perspective of folklore studies, folk songs initially manifest as a form of linguistic

expression, belonging to the realm of folk music literature. Especially in the lyrics of folk songs, there lies the value of showcasing regional dialects, reflecting regional production and daily life, and expressing regional cultural sentiments. Therefore, regarding the research on folk songs, musical studies only constitute a portion, while using folk songs as the subject of study can encompass various disciplines. In the perspective of intangible cultural heritage, conducting folklore research on folk songs from aspects such as regional background and cultural background helps in summarizing and synthesizing the characteristics of regional culture, thereby enhancing people's cultural identity and confidence.

Take "Jasmine Flower" as an example. Although in current research materials, it is widely believed that the "Jasmine Flower" from Jiangsu serves as the prototype for "Jasmine Flower" versions across various regions, the versions of "Jasmine Flower" circulated in different regions exhibit distinct local characteristics. This distinctiveness is not only reflected in the differences in melody but also in the manner and content of the lyrics. Aspects like the tonal pronunciation of lyrics and the semantic nuances of dialects in the lyrics carry rich regional features. Therefore, through the study of "Jasmine Flower" in different regions, one can better understand the local cultural history, production methods, and customs of life.

### 3.4. Value of Music Education

In traditional Chinese music, folk songs play a fundamental role and have a profound influence on various forms of folk arts such as opera, instrumental music, storytelling, and dance. They serve as representative symbols of traditional music. In contemporary music education, using excellent folk songs as teaching materials is not only one of the most effective ways of dynamic inheritance but also promotes the development of music education by fully utilizing the formal characteristics and singing techniques of folk songs.

Firstly, from the perspective of formal characteristics, "Jasmine Flower" from different regions varies in terms of musical structure, melodic form, rhythm, and mode. By appreciating "Jasmine Flower" from different regions in music teaching, students' perception, experience, and understanding can be enhanced through music appreciation, thereby improving students' aesthetic literacy.

Secondly, from the perspective of vocal teaching, due to the different technical applications and performance styles of "Jasmine Flower" from different regions, integrating them into vocal teaching by summarizing techniques and comparing performance styles can help promote the development of ethnic vocal arts and the cultivation of singing talents.

## 4. Conclusion

Xu Fenghua, Yuan Wei, and Yan Lingnan argued in their article "The Value Manifestation of Folk Songs in Forging the Consciousness of the Chinese Nation" that folk songs have the important significance of "carrying the roots of the nation, promoting the sound of the nation, and shaping the soul of the nation". "Jasmine Flower", as an outstanding and classic Chinese folk song, is highly valued in both folk and professional music composition fields. Its diverse characteristics in composition are also prominently reflected. Analyzing its compositional features not only helps us understand the development characteristics of "Jasmine Flower" in different fields but also provides many ideas for our future music composition.

From the perspective of the artistic value of "Jasmine Flower", further exploratory research is needed on a broader scope and higher spatial level. Only by doing so can we draw attention to Chinese folk songs and even the excellent traditional music culture of China, thereby preserving the roots of the nation, promoting the sound of the nation, and showcasing the spirit of the nation.

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