

## The globalization of music culture in the development path of Chinese music culture

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### Abstract

"Globalization" is an inevitable trend in the course of human history, and music, as a cultural phenomenon, has also undergone globalization. After centuries of filtering, Western music exists in today's music cultural practices in a diverse form, becoming a treasure trove for contemporary music development. Western music not only brings us beautiful and melodious tunes but also influences the development of music in terms of compositional techniques and performance skills. The development of world cultures does not evolve along a single path but rather undergoes a multi-centered and multi-faceted evolution through creative invention, borrowing, and assimilation. The existing form of Western music was not created by a single ethnicity but rather emerged as a result of globalization, with multiple ethnic music cultures interacting and exchanging under specific historical conditions. In contemporary China, Western music has spread widely throughout society in various multicultural forms. Today, Western music has become a globalized music and a mainstream music culture worldwide. The exchange, diffusion, transfer, mutual acceptance, complementarity, and fusion of Chinese and Western cultures are an unstoppable historical mainstream in the development of human civilizations. In a certain sense, the emergence of modern Chinese music is partially a product of this exchange, diffusion, and mutual fusion, known as cultural hybridity. Currently, there is a close connection between Western music and modern Chinese music, with many renowned Chinese musicians having studied in Western countries. They bring back advanced Western music theories to China and, in turn, introduce Chinese music with distinct ethnic characteristics to the West. Modern Chinese music has also become a part of world music. Of course, Western music has also become the mainstream of Chinese artistic music, and the Chinese people embrace and appreciate Western music.

**Keywords:** Western music culture, Chinese modern music, national culture

## INTRODUCTION

### Statement of the issue

The "West" in Western music is not a geographical concept, but a cultural one. Culturally, it represents the mode of existence and artistic practice of Western music. Thanks to the individualist elements in Western music, composers strive to pursue their individuality during the creative process, infusing their thoughts and feelings into the music. This brings new creativity to Western music, including the introduction of new compositional materials and techniques. These new materials and techniques are not entirely derived from Western society, as some nationalistic composers incorporated folk music elements from their own

cultures into Western music. This allowed the development of Western music to become more holistic, enabling it to be universally accepted by different ethnic groups through emphasizing individual expression. The core reason why Western music could become a globalized musical culture is its universality. As Chinese, having understood the rational thinking in the ontology of Western music, as well as the universal spirit embodied in it, how should we properly deal with the development of Western music in contemporary China? How to position the relationship between Western music and modern Chinese music?

## Research Analysis

Human beings are the creators of culture and the masters of culture. Therefore, culture should exist for humans instead of humans existing for culture. Humans create culture in order to improve their existence and move towards a better state of life. This is the purpose and driving force of culture. Therefore, humans need to keep moving forward and break through the shackles of existing culture in order to create new culture that adapts to the current natural and social environment. Clinging to the characteristics of existing culture will lead to the alienation of culture that was originally created by humans. The exchange, diffusion, transfer, mutual acceptance, complementation, and integration of cultures is an irresistible historical mainstream in the development process of human civilization. In this sense, it can be said that the emergence of modern Chinese music was the product of such exchange, diffusion, and integration, a phenomenon of cultural hybridity.

Although Western music has become a globalized art and is widely accepted around the contemporary world, globalized Western music cannot replace the existence and development of ethnic music worldwide. It does not mean that the forms of ethnic music cannot serve academic and aesthetic values for the ethnic groups themselves and others around the world. The musical genres of different regions and ethnic groups in the world all have irreplaceable status and extremely high artistic value.

Today, the music of ethnic groups around the world presents a brilliant and competitive landscape. However, they are often closely and directly connected with their social lives, or bear particular imprints in performance practices, musical functions, aesthetics, etc., which restricts their spread globally. (陈自明, 2007 : 5)

However, many ethnic groups in the world have appreciation ability for music that is comparable to or even more advanced than that of the West. Many ethnic groups have their own unique musical cultures with extremely high artistic values, such as the grand songs of the Dong people in China, which consists of ensemble with multiple instruments and vocal parts.

One of the main purposes of China's study and learning of Western music is to develop its own music business. This is based on the need to develop China's unique cultural system and cultural tradition, and the exploration of Western culture became a new cultural perspective based on the characteristics of the times in modern China. Therefore, the ontological study and development of modern Chinese music cannot be separated from Western music and Western culture. Historically, it is also based on China's traditional culture combined with the attributes of contemporary Chinese musical culture. Its theoretical connotation plays a pivotal role in reconciling the relationship between Western music and traditional Chinese music, and in regulating China's research process of Western music so that it functions consistently with the research perspective constituted under the traditional cultural system and the contemporary Chinese cultural context.

Therefore, Chinese Western music culture needs to explore an academic research trend that conforms to the development of the times from the individualized characteristics of musical works and composition, while fully reflecting the Chinese characteristics of logical thinking and research perspectives. It also emphasizes Chinese subject consciousness, observes, studies and integrates Western music from China's unique perspective, raises our own questions, and explores our own ability for theoretical innovation from it.

## Purpose of the Article

This article summarizes and analyzes the connections and influences between Western music and current Chinese music, through the study of the history of modern Chinese music, under the historical context of Chinese and foreign music.

## Presenting Key Materials.

As we know, music, as an important part of the cultural family, is closely connected with the cultural environment in which it is situated. The introduction of Western music into the Chinese cultural circle also has profound social origins. When the material civilization of the West far surpassed that of China, the Chinese had to learn from the West in terms of systems and concepts. As an important part of culture, music was also inevitably influenced by this macro environment.

Compared with other ethnic musical cultures, Western music culture, with a high degree of rational spirit involvement, pays more attention to the constitution of music ontology, emphasizing mathematical proportional relationships in pitch, rhythm, and tempo. In Western music, pitch is fixed, rhythm is quantified, and tempo is clear, which forms a very complete system of composition, including a series of technical theoretical systems such as harmony, form, polyphony, orchestration, etc. In Weber's work "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism," he mentioned: "Many rational innovations of the West in music: such as rational harmony (including harmony and counterpoint); the constitution of tones based on triads and major thirds; our interpretation of enharmonic and chromatic tones in terms of harmony and rational form since the Renaissance; the symphony orchestra centered on the string quartet and the organization of wind ensembles; our notation system (which makes the composition, performance, and preservation of modern musical works possible); basso continuo; our symphonies, sonatas, and operas (although program music, tone poems, and variations on whole tones and semitones once existed extensively as forms of musical expression)." (Max Weber, 2010: 9)

The development of these disciplines is not only very helpful for people to understand Western music, but also provides guidance for those who want to learn and compose such music. It helps people analyze music and create brand-new musical works using these techniques and means. This is where Western musical culture differs from other ethnic musical cultures.

Starting from China's Tang Dynasty, Western musical culture began to enter China and gradually spread. Whether it was the extensive introduction of Christian music, the establishment, and

development of Western brass bands and military bands in China after the Self-Strengthening Movement, the development of military songs, or the emergence of school songs in modern schools (the most important avenue of influence), all had extremely important significance for modern Chinese music. Genres such as symphonies and concertos have been created and appreciated by musicians and people in most countries around the world. Performance venues like opera houses and concert halls can be found in almost every corner of the world. Performance means like pianos and orchestras have become popularized. The Westernized management and education models of educational institutions and research institutes like music academies and research institutes. Composition techniques like harmony and form, as well as standardized notation systems...the list goes on. And these achievements have very little or even no ethnic attributes or national concept

In professional music institutions in China, most of the repertoire for performance, vocals, and music education are from the Western classical tradition. In fundamental theory courses like harmony, polyphony, form, solfège, etc., classical music is the main focus, like using Bach's works to analyze polyphonic techniques, and using works by composers like Beethoven, Brahms, and Grieg to analyze form. Western classical works are also extensively used for training musical literacy in harmony and solfège. The core content of music appreciation courses is also Western classical masterpieces. For musicology research, thesis topics on Western music history are also concentrated on Western classical works. Notably, although the technical theoretical system of Western music ontology is ethnically neutral, it does not prevent composers from reflecting ethnic and regional characteristics in their compositions. For example, in the work "Morning in Miaoling" by contemporary Chinese composer Chen Gang, he used violin techniques like slides and trills to imitate the sounds of birds in nature, portraying a beautiful Miao morning scene with sounds of birds, nature, and the lively dancing of Miao families. He combined Chinese folk music materials with Western compositional techniques, incorporating Western traditional violin techniques into the ethnic Chinese musical language.

Western music is independent in its ontological existence and development, not constrained by other cultures. This is a clear difference between Western musical art and many other forms of music. For example, many traditional regional Chinese operas share the common trait of being constrained by local dialects. Take Qinqiang, one of the oldest regional opera forms in China's Shaanxi province, which is loved by people in northwest China but hard for the world to understand, because the ontological existence and development of such music is not independent but limited by local culture. The development of modern Chinese music did not directly inherit from ancient Chinese music but went through a historical transformation. Although much of modern Chinese music appears Chinese in theme, melodic material, and is composed by Chinese composers, ontologically it takes the form of Western music. Currently, almost all music historians and scholars believe that modern Chinese music did not simply continue the development of ancient Chinese music, but blazed new paths on

that basis, meaning Chinese music underwent a historical transformation from ancient to modern times. Modern Chinese music belongs to "Chinese music" created by the Chinese people, while also belonging to "Western music" composed by Chinese people through learning and applying Western compositional techniques. For example, Chinese composer Xian Xinghai created the rousing "Yellow River Cantata" by learning from and drawing on the Western musical form of cantata. Chinese composer Huang Zi created the famous work "Song of Endless Sorrow" by combining Chinese traditional poetry with the Western musical form of recitative he learned.

When Western music entered the Chinese music scene on a large scale in the early 20th century, the ancient Chinese musical history represented by Pre-Qin dance and music, grand song and dance, and opera was abruptly severed, causing a rupture in traditional Chinese music. This resulted in musical genres beginning to develop diversely. In the years that followed, Chinese music in practice, music disciplines, and creative thinking basically echoed with commonalities of Western traditional compositional writing. The major reform faced by 20th century Western music was the comprehensive collapse of the tonal functional system which was then replaced by individual tones as the realm, causing isolation between Western modern and traditional music. This process in Western music was almost directly reflected in the course of music composition in China. "After the ending of inherent Chinese cultural traditions, rather than a full restoration and continuation, the trajectory and rupture of non-inherent cultural traditions (Western traditional and contemporary music) was condensed reproduced in the historical process of Chinese modern music." (朱玫玫, 2018: 5)

To be precise, since the emergence of school songs, Chinese composers, singers, and performers have gradually made comprehensive contributions on the world music stage. Some works have won awards in international competitions, some were premiered abroad. It has become normal for foreign performers, singers, or orchestras to perform works by Chinese composers in concerts. Many Chinese music experts teach in music institutions in Europe and America and serve as judges in various music competitions worldwide. These signs indicate that the significance of "Chinese learning Western musical culture" is not just an outlet for developing Chinese musical culture, but also embodies the historical development trend of Western music continuously absorbing the participation of musicians from extensive regions, constantly absorbing the musical traditions of ethnic groups worldwide, and creating more novel musical works.

Professor Zheng Su once pointed out in an article: "To a large extent, China has created 'Western music' independent of the West over the past hundred years or so." Some other scholars have proposed similar views, believing that all the music composed using Western techniques since the 20th century cannot be called "Chinese," but can only be considered "Chinese style." Therefore, taking contemporary Chinese music culture as part of Chinese music is incomplete. The creative mainstream of modern Chinese music has been the result of learning from and drawing on Western music in many aspects such as techniques, genres, and forms. For

example, Chen Gang and He Zhanhao learned from and drew on the Western musical form of concerto to create the classic violin concerto "Butterfly Lovers"; even China's national anthem, "March of the Volunteers" composed by Nie Er, was completed by learning from and drawing on Western musical creation. Feng Yuxiang of the Northwest Army, who was a Christian and had contact with and learned Western compositional techniques early on, personally wrote quite a number of military songs, attaching great importance to military training through singing. These songs had some positive influence on China's later military construction, such as "Mountain Marching Song", "Great China's Aspiration Song", "Ten Commandments for Soldiers", etc. These songs created with Western compositional techniques while embodying Chinese characteristics also became popular in various fields.

There is also a very important spiritual commonality between Chinese and Western music cultures, which is "love." The theme of "love" is not limited to the literary field. In Western religious music, many works spread God's love for the world, while also expressing the composers' love for God, such as Bach's Mass in B minor. In the late Qing dynasty when China was in a crisis of survival, Chinese musicians learned Western music theory and created Chinese songs using Western melodic patterns to express their patriotic spirit of saving the nation. Examples are Zeng Zhimou's "Drilling Soldiers" and Li Shutong's "Ode to the Motherland."

The spread of Western music in China spans from Palestrina, Bach, and Beethoven, to Debussy, Bartók, and Stravinsky; from solo to chorus; from solo to symphony; from opera and ballet to film and TV music; from elegant music in concert halls and conservatories to popular music circulating in stadiums, outdoor stages, shops, and music halls. These musical forms created by Western musicians are now utilized, learned from, adapted, and transformed by Chinese musicians, organically combined with Chinese traditional musical materials, to express Chinese social life and people's thoughts and feelings. Examples are Liu Tianhua's erhu works "Birdsong in the Empty Mountain" and "Peaceful Night," Peng Xiuwen's arranged ensemble piece "Flowing Water Exercise," Li Huanzhi's "Zheng Concerto," Wu Zuqiang, Liu Dehai and Wang Yanqiao's pipa concerto "Little Sisters on the Grassland." While basically retaining the traditional musical forms, they partially adopted expressive techniques from Western music to arrange and adapt the ethnic music forms. Chinese composer Qu Xihan adapted the Mongolian folk song "Pastorale" from a monophonic melody into a polyphonic choral piece, and required it to be performed in the prevailing *bel canto* style. Some Chinese composers arranged traditional Chinese music to be performed by Western instruments. Examples include Wang Jianzhong's piano solo "Hundred Birds Paying Homage to the Phoenix" (adapted from a *suona* piece of the same name), Li Yinghai's piano solo "Sounds of Flute and Drum at Sunset" (adapted from a pipa piece of the same name), He Zhanhao and Chen Gang's violin concerto "Butterfly Lovers" (based on Yue opera music), etc.

In summary, the expressive forms of new Chinese music are all results of integration between Chinese and Western cultures. The extent of integration of the two cultures varies in strength,

obviousness, or subtlety; the channels of integration vary in width, directness, or indirectness. But together they reveal the diverse and colorful landscape of 20th century Chinese new music. In short, composers and performing artists engaging in professional music activities must be cultivated in both Chinese and Western musical cultures. Therefore, although the performance forms of new musical works vary greatly, their spiritual essence (mainly manifested in aspects like subject matter, content, musical language, structure, artistic style, and emotional experience) is invariably closely tied with Chinese traditional culture (or social life) in countless ways.

## Conclusion

Chinese culture is an agricultural culture, with basic components of a natural economy, autocratic system, and values and ideological system centered around ethics and moral teachings. Western culture is an industrial culture, with basic components of a market economy, democratic system, and values and ideological system centered around human rights. The former takes the collective as the center, summarized as collectivism and autocracy. The latter takes the individual as the center, summarized as individualism and liberalism.

For Chinese people, Western music was something completely novel and different from native culture. Western music appealed to the masses' emotions at the time through its uniform rhythms and collective performance forms like choirs. And when new things are accepted by people, they naturally produce value in their existence. This was also an inevitable result of the Chinese people's active choice of Western musical culture. Practice has proven that the history of learning Western music and cultural exchange between Chinese and Western music since the modern era in China is something no force can stop. The cultural fruits produced by the combination of Chinese ethnic culture and Western music culture have been comprehensively adopted. This fully demonstrates that learning from and drawing on Western music was a historical inevitability for the development of modern Chinese ethnic music culture, and many technical elements in Western music remain indispensable important factors in the creation of Chinese ethnic music art.

Today, the folk music of various ethnic groups in China has widely participated in globalization and gained popularity among people worldwide. And Chinese ethnic folk music still has irreplaceable unique aesthetic value. The interpretation of any art has a "thousand Hamlets in a thousand people's eyes" individualized characteristic in different eras and regions. (王索尼, 2014:9)

The difference between Chinese and Western cultures is not an ethnic but a temporal one. Western music in China has also formed interpretive characteristics of "contemporary" and "Chinese" in terms of time and space, influenced by the times and accompanied by Changes in Chinese aesthetic interests and different interpretive approaches to music stemming from Chinese cultural traditions compared to Western models. And such individualized interpretation of Western music from a contemporary Chinese perspective may rise to a universalized interpretation with recognition and acceptance by most music appreciators (including

the West). A history of modern Chinese music is both a history of Chinese musicians using Western musical culture to create modern Chinese music culture, as well as a history of Chinese musicians participating in creating Western musical culture with Chinese cultural genes. This is not contradictory to globalized Western music, which can also find new creative inspiration through the unique artistic styles of music across ethnic groups worldwide.

Based on the actual contemporary Chinese music scene, the proportion of Western music in China's cultural and artistic sphere has skyrocketed. This actual situation has led Chinese scholars to an overall and comprehensive new understanding of Western music, including the cultural positioning of Western music in China. If we can recognize the actual circumstances of contemporary Chinese music, it is not hard to see that research on Western music theory needs to adapt to this practical activity, and the resulting music theory should be applied to social music activities. If it deviates from this principle of unifying theory with practice, the music theory will be unable to apply to actual music life, losing the only platform to test the theoretical value. If academic research aims to pursue theory-guiding practice better, then practice should be used to implement and test theory. (杨燕迪, 1990:3)

The task currently faced by Chinese culture is transitioning from pre-modern to modern culture, while the West completed this transition before China. So China should learn from the West. But we should learn things in Western culture that have universal significance for modernization. Hence, the main components related to modernization are what we need to absorb. Similarly, the parts of Chinese culture conflicting with modernization must be changed, while the non-conflicting parts should be drawn upon for reference.

Modern China is still at the stage of learning Western musical culture. Western musical culture remains an introduced rather than native concept for China. Under the push of global historical trends, the pursuit of sonic purity and directness of expression are valued more and more by academic composers. Current Chinese composition shows an increasingly pronounced tendency of composers shifting focus during the creative process, with more and more Chinese composers significantly increasing the proportion of humanistic sentiments and so-called sinicization techniques they want to express in the impressionistic form of their works. This is embodied in many contemporary Chinese composers' works. (王真, 2007:11)

Current research on Western music in China still needs greater academic resources to study the many issues surrounding this field. More music scholars and experts need to enter this field to bring Western music research into a better academic environment, making Western music culture research more valuable both theoretically and practically. Under the influence of the development trend of Chinese musical culture itself and the trend of cultural integration in a diversified world, Chinese music academia must explore new concepts and new thinking for Western music research that keeps pace with the times while conforming to China's national conditions and traditions.

In summary, the globalization of Western music is reflected in many areas of China, and the achievements of contemporary Chinese music entering the world are also results of learning from the West. The inclusion of Chinese ethnic music culture is conducive to promoting a diversified world cultural landscape. This trend of convergence and integration of Chinese and Western music has already become part of the new tradition of modern Chinese music, and together with the continuation of the "native culture" of traditional music, jointly forms a new form to carry expressions of today's Chinese music.

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