

A Discussion on the Evolution of Tune Jixianbin and Corresponding Aesthetic Characters

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Abstract

Cultural “conscious” affects innovational development of art style and form imperceptibly. It is a typical example of the close link between Chinese music tunes and literature. It expresses profound connotation of traditional Chinese music and self-renewal of the inherent potential. In the process of development, its folk property, spreading channels and a variety of elements lead to constantly evolved origin of *Jixianbin*. All the music features in tune, style and even the name have changed. According to history and current reality, it is able to know spirits such as “Qin, Qi, Ge” of *Jixianbin*. Due to the specific requirements of different time and space, there are different aesthetic characteristics.

Key words: Traditional music; Tune; *Jixianbin*

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INTRODUCTION

Jixianbin is one of Chinese traditional tunes. Feng Guangyu, a famous Chinese music scholar, once defined it as “tune that contains similar melody in detail but diverse in general” in A Study of the Characters in the Perspective

of Music Communication (Vol.1) due to “newly filled words are different in both property and content, majorly by pronunciation. According to tune melody, words and sentence are filled into tune to fit its original melody.” (Feng, 2007) The tune that belongs to literati music, due to pronunciation-based filling, derives a variety of variants future propagation as long as it does not completely deviate from the original melody. In this paper, we discuss formats of its derivation and corresponding aesthetic characteristics from the origin of *Jixianbin*, in order to further explore value of tune-music on culture and aesthetic level

1. ORIGIN OF TRADITION MUSIC TUNE JIXIANBIN

Traditional music tune, *Jixianbin*, is also known as *Jiexianbin*¹. It comes from the music tune written by Wang Shifu, a Zaju writer in Yuan Dynasty and consists of 11 songs. According to Feng Guangyu’s research, in Qianlong 11, Qin Dynasty (1746), its opern is collected in red-written and house-published Comprehensive notation for southern and northern Ci-poetry. It suggests that *Jixianbin* is created before that as a tune. In fact, Wei liangfu, a musician in Ming Dynasty, mentioned key points in studying *Jixianbin*: “When it is the first time to learn *Jixianbin*, one should start with sound, then lyrics, then melody. Don’t mix tunes, or style will be confused. If learn *Jixianbin*, only sing *Jixianbin*...after long period of practice, it will be fluent.” Thus three steps are summarized to learn it, as “firstly ‘make the sound’; secondly ‘look

¹ Music tune name. Both the north and the south music have it. It belongs to “Shang”. For the one from the north, its sentence grammar and the music tune are different and is used in the divertimento. The one from the south use it if as a primer, then it is the same as the music tune; if as a song, then it is different from the music tune.

at words”; thirdly ‘understand its melody.’” (Feng, 2008) In house notation contains 12 music tunes based on *Jixianbin* in volume 56, 57 and 60, which compose half of the total sheets. There are five music tunes that start with “Jixian”. They are [Jixiantinghuamei], [Jixianzuiyunzi], [Jixianxianghuanglong], [Jixianlang], [Jixianshuangtinyin]. Though the seven tunes rest are not named by “Jixian”, for example use [Yingtixu], [Huameixu], [Jixianbin], [Xianghuanglong],

[Erlangshen], and [Zuigongzi], the first parts of those tunes come from alternation of second half part of music and elements. Thus those tune melody and styles in two parts are closely related. In these tunes, it is difficult to determine which of those five tunes is the origin of *Jixianbin* and which are alternation. Currently, people prefer to regard the first *Jixianbin* as the origin in comprehensive notation for southern and northern Ci-poetr, as shown in Opern 1.

集 贤 宾
(集一作接, 与本调正曲不同)

毛文锡 词
刘崇德译谱

散板

香 鞞 饌 檐 五 花 驄。 值 春 景 初 融，
流 珠 噴 沫 驟 蹙， 汗 血 流 紅。
少 年 公 子 能 乘 馭， 金 鑪 玉 管 瓊 璫。
為 惜 珊 瑚 鞭 不 下， 驕 生 百 步 千 踪。
信 穿 花， 從 拂 柳， 向 九 陌 追 風。

Opern 1
Part of the First [Jixianbin] in *Comprehensive Notation for Southern and Northern Ci-Poetry* (Liu, 1998, p.3255).

Though *Jixianbin* is recorded in literatures in Min and Qin dynasties, it is not well utilized in current social communication, art and life. Currently available tune of *Jixianbin* is *Qiangtounashang*, traditional Kunju, and *Chunjiang*, Fujian music. In folk music, *Jixianbin* is not common. It only leaves a few traces in wind music in center Jin area and guchui music in southwestern Lu area. All those seem to suggest that *Jixianbin* gradually lose the character as an original tune, as well as its musical character. However *Jixianbin* is continued as a grammar and melody format. In addition, it is combined with other music and tunes during propagation. Especially in battle between Jingju and Kunqu in Qin Dynasty, it got close to those art formats due to its own music style. As a result, consciousness of culture affects art style and innovational

development of art format. *Jixianbin* is a typical example of closely linked Chinese music tune and literature, and their recombination. It displayed profound connotation of Chinese traditional music and the inherent potential of self-renewal.

Of course, the “combination” and “consciousness” are also reflected music tune that has the same name. The *Jixianbin* tune in *Journey to west*, which is collected in *Comprehensive notation for southern and northern Ci-poetry* and the one in *Journey to West·Son Claiming*, which is recorded in *Chinese Kunqu Dictionary* (as shown in Opern 2), have similar melodies and grammar, even though they are in different art formats, which suggests the character of “similar but not the same” in Chinese traditional tunes.

《九宫大成》
[集贤宾]

《西天取经》

(凭趁着这)碧澄澄, 大江东去得紧,

南方昆剧
[集贤宾]

《西游记·认子》

凭趁着这碧澄澄, 大江东去得紧,

Opern 2 Tune Jixianbin Excerpt of *Journey to the West: Son Claiming* in Chinese Kunqu (Feng, 2008)

The full name of *Journey to the West* is *Tang Sanzang's Journey to the West*, is the Yuan Dynasty dramatist Wu Changling's Zaju script, which mainly describes the story of monk Tang Sanzang's journey to the west for scriptures. *Journey to the West: Son Claiming* is the Zaju script by the late Yuan and early Ming Dynasty dramatist Yang Na, which reflect the content of the folklore of the monk's story. The plots and stories are different, but lyric and melody in them are very similar. The reason is due to the phenomenon of a mutual borrowing and absorbing of the music due to the same theme of the story produced. There has been a change in the music tune and convergence of the style during the transmission of the music performance. In many traditional music tunes, due to the different media as well as the impact of adaptation and recreation, coupled with different aesthetic taste and value orientation of the audience at different time periods, the original songs gradually lose its original form and fused into other forms of art. The reality of the situation is that in the course of the development of the music tunes, because the same song used for marriage is often used for funeral as well, making the title of a lot of music tunes become a formality, and basically lose its original meaning. This can be seen as an explanation of those two songs with the same tunes of *Jixianbin* and similar melodies but with different names.

Through the comparison of Opern 1 and 2, it is easy to see that their melodic bones and movements are basically the same. In another word, these music tunes are derived from the accident *Jixianbin*. So, how did it evolve?

2. EVOLUTION OF JIXIANBIN

Under the normal circumstance, the traditional vocal music tunes would have a prototype or original style. During the development, influenced by many factors, the original style constantly evolving. Especially in the evolution of music tunes from a form of vocal music to a form of instrumental music, the music features, style, and even the name can change. In order to clarify this problem, I only analyze the evolution of *Jixianbin* from two aspects: its folk attribute and propagation channels.

2.1 Folk Attribute and Its Evolution of *Jixianbin* Music Tune

“Improvisation” and “flexibility” are the two typical properties of traditional music, especially of folk music, and the “tune” *Jixianbin* is no exception. Folk musicians have plenty performance or singing experiences. When they recreate within a framework, they will do it based on their own habits or experience, showing a degree of innovation and personalized features. In the aspect of music tune inheritance and interpretation, it shows a certain degree of flexibility and impromptness. During the process of inheritance, *Jixianbin* also experienced a similar interpretation. After being recreated by different artists, a variety of different forms have been derived from its original style. These variants reflect the characteristics of either the folk music or traditional music: full of personality improvisation, immediate and impromptu, and flexible. If we can produce a spectrum table, we may be able to see the detailed track of the evolution of *Jixianbin* much clearly and also more characteristics of improvisation and flexible performance. Certainly, vocal music spread orally in the folk area is bound to bring a lot of different ‘variants’, some even have nothing to do with its original form, of music tunes such as “*Jixianbin*”. This is where scholars studying the traditional music tunes need to carefully screen for.

2.2 Evolution Reflected by the Propagation Methods and Channels of *Jixianbin*

The recreation of folk musicians has influenced the dynamic evolution of *Jixianbin* both through time and space: Horizontally—it evolved with the direction of space; vertically—it evolved according to the time; with time and space together—it evolved from a vocal style to an instrumental style. These three forms of changes met each other and become a “three-dimensional” art form that changes according to the experience and personal aesthetic of the interpreter. In fact, at different times, from the point of view of the propagation methods and channels of *Jixianbin*, it includes both the evolution differences from time and a blend of space; that is, Zaju from the north, Guchui music from the southwest, and Kunju from

the south all have the same development context. They fully embody similar characteristics of the same time and space of music tunes with the same origins. However, because of the different aesthetic values and orientations

of the composers, the music tunes show corresponding diversity characteristics during the process of evolution from the vocal style to an instrumental style. As shown in Opern 3.

Opern 3
Tune Jixianbin Excerpt of *Comprehensive Notation for Southern and Northern Ci-Poetry* (Ma, 2012)

The evolution of *Jixianbin* is also reflected by its propagation channels. Ancient opera artists used to perform around the country, the folk troupe tour objectively promoted the spread of the “origin” opera tune and the variations of its “child”. In order to more effectively attract the public’s attention and to become more close to audience’s aesthetic and habits, a variety of folk arts often consciously absorb and integrate into other art styles and formats during the performance process, and often spread the folk art from A to B while learning or absorbing the characteristics of some tunes. In additions, they integrate with the local language and local music for further development, including transplanting suitable songs for performances as well as phenomenon of transferring the vocal characteristics of the song to instrumental music creations. Undoubtedly, these adaptations would promote the spread and innovation of the music tune including *Jixianbin* in a much wider range.

On top of that, due to folk musicians are either solitary artists or collective artists and crafters, the exchange between them would lead to changes in the shape and style of the music tune. As mentioned above, during the process of propagation, *Jixianbin* gradually absorbs the different musical cultural nutrients and perform recreation purposely, which formed all kinds of music tunes with similar names but are actually different from each others. From the beginning opera song form and through constant recreations, the final form of *Jixianbin* has become an instrumental music which has been widely circulated. Therefore, I believe that the cultural development of the “conscious” consciousness makes *Jixianbin* choose the most suitable form of its carrier for its survival during the

process of inheritance, which is the most important reason why it can still exist and have a better development.

3. AESTHETIC CHARACTERISTICS OF *JIXIANBIN* – COMBINATION OF “QING, QI, AND GE”

As part of the song structure, the aesthetic characteristics of *Jixianbin* are worth our careful considerations. Like other traditional tracks, *Jixianbin* is also a carrier of some kind of aesthetic, value and artistic view. In other words, music embodies the “artistic spirit” of man. This has already been described as early as the classic work of Confucianism, the “Music Mind”. It said, “all music starts within people’s minds. Their emotions first fill their minds, and then are expressed through sounds. When sounds are expressed in order, it becomes music’ or ‘musicians are happy”, and so on. It is all to show the relationship between music and emotion. Although the music of Confucianism finally settled in the “ritual music”, the fundamental purpose is to seek harmony between politics and the kingdom, but also to seek unity and harmony between music and rations, in order to express and reflect the inner world of the mind.

The original lyric and music tune² determines its ability to have realistic and objective “real scene” for the

² The lyric tune and the music tune original are the same. Liu, X. A. (1978) once said, “if there is no song, then words is a song; if there is a song, then it can be enlightened to words. If the song is not rational, then the lyric is not good either.” See *Art* (pp.123-132). Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House.

hidden, spiritual “virtual environment” function; that is, it can turn a specific “image” into an abstract “symbol”, which lets the inner world of the mind to form a vivid environment. Its artistic spirit of “Qing, Qi, and Ge” have unusual aesthetic characteristics because of the specific requirements of different time and space. Among them, “Qing” corresponds to the aestheticism of the audience of *Jixianbin*, “Qi” points to its artistic vitality, and “Ge” refers to the artists’ “personality”. The high style of *Jixianbin* maps onto deep meaning and certainly echoes with Confucian music and ritual thoughts. However, the latter version of *Jixianbin* becomes more and more realistic, and there is a sense of “freehand” spirit in its form of expression, which can be found in many variations.

3.1 “Qing” Expressed by *Jixianbin* – Unity of “Truth: And “Ration” of the Audience

In general, “Qing” of the work can be interpreted from two different aspects—truth and ration. “Qing” of *Jixianbin* is consistent with the “truth” and ‘ration’ of the audience, and it is often easier for the public to accept music tunes with rations and songs with “true emotions” are more likely to affect the audience. In other words, the “ration” of music, which embodies its logical thinking, and the music structure, the inner feelings and the concept of ‘truth’ and together with “Qi” are the organic combination of the whole. When carefully tasting the lyric and the song structure of *Jixianbin*, we find that it breaks through the limit of time and space and uses an objective way to describe things. It reflects the inner world and the spirit of oneself well, which forms its own unique charm and style. This is exactly its reflection of “reason”. Secondly, the variety of variants and flexibilities and diversities of the form of the song structure of *Jixianbin* during the process of inheritance make it more acceptable to the common public. In addition to its ability to reflect the simplicity and reality of the folk art, its inner ethereal also connects to the soul of the public (through the combination of the vocal music in literary content and melody). In our view, *Jixianbin*’s melody structure and its evolving form is an excellent example of the combination of elegance and vulgarity. The fusion of its emotions, rations and truths is the common artistic spirit of the nation. With Mr. Xu Fuguan’s words, “this is the positive enlightenment without a trace...is for people to use their own strength to complete their own personalities and achieve social (custom) harmony” (Xu, 2007, p.19).

3.2 “Qi” Expressed by *Jixianbin*: Folk Heritage and Improved, Fresh Vitality

The concept that “Qi” is very important in Chinese traditional art, which may be formed after the chapter of Mencius and Kung-sun Ch’au, originally pointing to the “physiological vitality”. But Cao Pi brought the idea that “paper is based on Qi” in *Code*, the creators’ objectives,

thoughts, emotions and their imagination of art would be transferred from the creators to their work. In this way, in the case when the heir and the creator of the folk music tune are the same person, under the influence of the mainstream view of the Chinese literary aesthetics, “Qi” in *Jixianbin* is vivid and fresh. Song artists who are both the heirs and the creators of the music tunes grasped the balance between creative and classic (show in music sheet 1 and 3) during the inheritance and re-creation. This makes *Jixianbin* and other traditional folk art can have the same strain. Accompanied by inspiration during impromptu performance, the songs are full of respects of the “ancestor”. Although the completion of a music tune song is based on the end of the audiences’ acceptance of it, in a strict sense, the audiences cannot be regarded as the leader of folk art. This point can be proven by the fact that the name of *Jixianbin* had never been modified since its creation, not to mention its link structure has not changed much either. In this sense, the vitality of *Jixianbin* is determined by its own word/song “gene”, and its evolving process of accepting and developing, and ultimately relying on the time carrier eventually lead to the formation of vertical inheritance and development of the situation.

3.3 “Ge” expressed by *Jixianbin*: The Style of the Heirs and Creators

Needless to say, the style of work is a direct reflection of the “personality”. In Qing Dynasty, Deqian Shen’s *Style Theory* advocated the broad and beautiful aesthetic atmosphere, but also showed the ancient clear and distinct aesthetic style and the liberated class’ pursue for ideal and dignity. More commendable is that in the choice of subject matter, he insisted on the concern of the community (Wang, 2007), which connected the style of art closely with real life. *Jixianbin* is an excellent example of maintaining its own style while connecting with real life. On one hand, during its inheritance process, some of its own form of components, such as the gongche, banyan and music mode, has certain stability and irreplaceability, which constitutes the “cultural genes” of *Jixianbin* and other traditional music tune and also achieves their vigorous or elegant aesthetic characters, directly mapping of the poet or the artist’s aesthetic personality; on the other hand, we also believe that as a special format of traditional Chinese music tune, *Jixianbin* itself has a potential factor that is interconvertible with the real life factor. Although this factor is mainly reflected in the various types of music tune, it is said that in the case of the basic tone of the tune song, the language and form of the traditional version of the song change with time. However, in the “self-discipline”, under the influence of Chinese art aesthetics, *Jixianbin* always shows the same “personalities” of the inherited retreaters (who were at least not vulgar). Otherwise, during the process of diachronic differentiation of ideas and continuous conversion of performing styles,

Jixianbin may have long been buried in the numerous tracks and been forgotten.

CONCLUSION

The Chinese traditional tune *Jixianbin* is the product of historical and cultural development and evolution. Its value is expected to be explored by more people. Today, with the coexistence of diversification and personalization, the art spirit of folk tune music is still worthy of our value and should be flourished. The tune music absorbs and mutually integrates between each other, constantly derive and evolve into a wide range of songs with the same tune name or different tune name variation, and gradually form a complete set of music tune system. This is the beneficial nutrients that we should learn from it, and the cultural charm of traditional art is also the ideal light that today's music culture pursues.

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