

On the Multiple Values of the Humanistic Spirit of Chinese Folk Music

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Abstract

Music is a spiritual symbol of a country and a nation, and it can best reflect the cultural connotation of a nation, demonstrating the inherent humanistic spirit, ways of thinking, imagination and cultural awareness of a nation. In the long history of Chinese culture and historical heritage and national music art practice, Chinese folk music has formed the cultural spirit with “harmony” as the core. Chinese folk music cultural spirit with “harmony” as the core has profound cultural origins, distinctive artistic features, typical aesthetic value and rich social function. Today, we must adhere to the “double for” direction and “double hundred” policies, strengthen national music art, promote national music art heritage, and carry forward national music cultural spirit to achieve the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

Key words: Folk music; Cultural spirit; Inheritance and innovation

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INTRODUCTION

China is a large country with a long history, many nationalities, extensive exchanges, and in the history of civilization of thousands of years, the Chinese nation have created a large number of excellent folk music, forming a deep and rich connotation of folk music system, a typical

representative and an important part of Chinese traditional culture. These excellent works that arise from the folk are popular in the folk and show folk life and production, are the historical accumulation of the high development of social thought and art, the spiritual symbol of the country and the nation, and play an important role in national governance, social enlightenment, self-cultivation and other aspects. In the long-term historical evolution, Chinese folk music gradually formed the cultural spirit with “harmony” as the core. The cultural spirit with “harmony” as the core of Chinese folk music has profound historical and cultural origins, aesthetic features, artistic value, social function; it has become a successful governing ideas in politics, a common way to make money in the economy, a primary ethics in the relationship between people, an important aesthetic rule in art, and a highly prosperity in the process of social development. Today, the realization of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is inseparable from the prosperity of the Chinese culture, the prosperity and development of literature, and especially the cultural spirit with “harmony” as the core. The Chinese culture is the rich nourishment for the Chinese nation to grow and develop; Chinese excellent traditional culture is the outstanding advantages of the Chinese nation, and our most profound cultural soft power. Deep excavation, inheritance and development of the cultural spirit of the Chinese folk music have far-reaching significance to promote the development of folk music, the Chinese culture development and rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

1. AESTHETIC CHARACTERISTICS OF CHINESE FOLK MUSIC CULTURAL SPIRIT

“Harmony” is not only the core of the cultural spirit of folk music art, but also the basic characteristics of folk music artistic beauty. Cultural guide to music makes the achievements of Chinese folk music creation practice

naturally and subtly show the ideological connotation and spiritual qualities of “harmony, inclusiveness of Chinese folk music theory, creation, practice and aesthetic features, and the multiple performance characteristics, types of folk music with thick life breath. Colorful forms of singing and performance show distinctive aesthetic features and effects of the Chinese folk music creative practice, becoming the source of the Chinese folk music art aesthetic principles.

1.1 Inclusiveness and Aesthetic Characteristics of Chinese Folk Music Theory and Creative Practice

Inclusiveness of Chinese folk music theory and creative practice lies in two aspects. One is the unique cultural phenomenon of multi-ethnic coexistence of music creation practice. For thousands of years, all Chinese ethnic groups live in different regions, thus, there are different regions, different cultural customs, different styles and different kinds of music culture. No matter wars or dynasty changes, they not only didn't limit, abandon or kill music culture, but also promoted the mutual blending, mutual absorption and mutual nourishing of different regions, different cultural customs, different styles and different kinds of music culture, thus forming the history of pluralistic coexistence of Chinese national music theory creative practice. Achievements of the folk music theory creative practice that reflect the national cultural spirit not only get the identity of all Chinese ethnic groups, but also win the respect from the world. In Tang dynasty, the coexistence policy of three religions of Taoism culture, Buddhism and Confucianism, the opening of the Silk Road, and the incoming of outland music culture to China made a beautiful music culture. A variety of exotic and musical instruments were introduced to China, such as Qiuci music, Tianzhu music, Xiliang music and Gao Chang music, etc. took the fusion of local traditional “elegant music”, “ancient music”, showing an unprecedented situation with a blend of innovation. For example, Tang Xuanzong wrote dance song *Chinese Classical Dun Huang Dance*, which is said that it was created by learning from Indian *Brahman*; the western dance songs, *Huxuan Dance*, *Jizhi Danc*” were originated from folk dance *Huteng Dance* and so on in Tashkent regional in central Asia. The Han folk music, ethnic minority music, outland music blend mutually, which has formed the artistic effect, and we can see it from the delicate description of poets in the Tang dynasty, like Du Fu's *View Aunt Sun Disciples Sword*, Bai Juyi's *Huxuan Woman*, *Pipaxing*, Li Bai's *Listen to Monk Playing the Instrument*, *Spring*, *Youjianquan* and so on. Therefore, the music dance and instrumental playing in the prosperous Tang Dynasty have formed its exquisite performing skill and very common form of performance. It is this inclusiveness contributed to produce energy of various kinds of art in the Tang dynasty period, becoming the

soul of its beauty, so the system is called voice of Tang dynasty. The liberal ideas environment has created the magnificent meteorological of multiple music culture, forming the unique culture of the prosperous period of Tang Dynasty in the history of the Chinese nation. The other is that music creative practice of inclusiveness forms the unique aesthetic characteristics of folk music. The aesthetic characteristics of the folk music are the essence of the spirit of the Chinese traditional culture for thousands of years. The most representative and systematic of Chinese folk music theory discussed from the national music art ontology is the famous player in late Ming dynasty and in early Qing dynasty Xu Shangying (Hong, Shuqingshan), in whose works *His-Shan's Epithets on Ch'in Music*, the aesthetic rule of the Chinese folk music “harmony” as the core is very penetrating. He summarized the aesthetic characteristics and skills performance of his lute as “harmonious, static, clean, far, old, weak, ease, leisure, elegant, beautiful, bright, clean, smooth, round, harvesting, grant, fine, slip, healthy, light, heavy, late, speedy” 24 cases, in which “harmony” is the core of the 24 cases, throughout every case. In his theory, “harmony” is divided into several levels. First, “the most important element for the instrument is harmony that is the beginning, the first is to adjust tone, strings, follow characteristics, debate for referring, check for listening, which is taking harmony to feel, and to response”, “scattered harmony is the most important, fixed harmony is secondary, scatter harmony does not follow the tone, the right finger controls string, with main and secondary, strong and weak, mutual complement, which is harmony”. That is to say, for instrument performance, the first thing is to determine aesthetic consciousness of harmony in intonation and notes way, and with the performers' art technology and skills, “harmony” performance effect is achieved in aesthetic perception, and is high degree of professional proficiency of mutual blending of art and technology. This artistic conception of “harmony”, like “mountain stream” (instrument music), “House of Flying Daggers” (lute music), the profound artistic imagination and artistic inspiration expressed by the music, clever music and people's state of mind are integrated to make the person's inner spiritual elements fully sublimate, along with the musical instrument, to achieve the unprecedented fulfillment, so as to make the person to produce an unprecedented emotional experience and spiritual satisfaction, which is praised for its “lasting impression”. These music products formed after one thousand years' spreading with highly artistic appealing reflect the cultural spirit, cultural connotation and local conditions and customs of the Chinese nation inheritance from generation to generation, and is internal cohesion of the human blood of the Chinese nation, with high aesthetic value and appreciation value, as well as indispensable to the lasting spiritual sustenance of the Chinese nation.

1.2 Pluralism and Different Performance Characteristics of “Harmony But Difference” in Chinese Folk Music Theory and Creative Practice

In the development process of China's long history of thousand years, each ethnic music formed its unique national characteristics and national features of different styles and different performance characteristics. With its unique charm and existence, in the collision of blood and fire, spirit and flesh, strength and weakness.

In the theory of traditional Chinese folk music, “introduction, elucidation of the theme, transition to another viewpoint and summing up” in the folk tone is the result of the understanding and application of natural rule and natural law. “Introduction, elucidation of the theme, transition to another viewpoint and summing up” comes from Fan Deji's *Poetry Style*: “There are four methods for making poetry: introduction shall be straight, elucidation of the theme shall be clear, transition to another viewpoint shall have change, summing up shall be deep”. “Introduction, elucidation of the theme, transition to another viewpoint and summing up” also becomes one of the basic principles of Chinese folk melody structure. Introduction, means display, the initial presentation of the theme music or music motive; elucidation of the theme, means consolidation, through repetition or change to strengthen music theme or music motive; transition to another viewpoint, is namely development, fully developing music theme, with great instability; summing up, means the end, reproducing music theme to end the entire music. Also, there is another kind of description: introduction is smoothness, elucidation of the theme is the development, transition to another viewpoint is climax, and summing up is end. Our ancestors have “harmony” as the core of the essence of Chinese traditional culture deeply used in the study of folk music theory and used traditional humanistic thought to illustrate the music development and change rule in a detailed and vivid, concise and visual manner, which has unique humanities connotation and the glamour of the Chinese nation culture.

The production, application, enriching and perfection of national mode is the product to best reflect the cultural traits and connotation of the spiritual “harmony”. The most widely used national mode within the most distinctive national feature is the Chinese national five-tone mode, and it is the basis of the composition of all other national modes. The Chinese national five-tone mode is the melody that several notes lined up according to the perfect fifth relation, and made up of five notes: Do Re Mi Sol La. Its basic characteristic is that Do Re Mi Sol La, the five notes (i.e., 1, 2, 3, 5, 6) all can be a tonic mode to form five different modes: Do mode, Re mode, Mi mode, Sol mode, La mode. People also call the five notes in music's pronunciation as correct pronunciation, which form the backbone of the music. The interval relationship of the Chinese national five-tone mode takes major second, minor third as the main, and perfect fourth and

perfect fifth as the auxiliary, occasionally uses big jump in the music, so that music can achieve the dynamic state on the basis of the smooth implementation. The purpose of smooth is to keep music smooth, and the purpose of the beating is to make music change rich and athletic. Based on the Chinese national five-tone mode, six-tone mode, seven-tone mode, etc. were derived, and the application of national mode highlights the ingenuity and creativity of the Chinese nation, and makes the Chinese folk music creative practice activities become more rich and colorful.

Music performance characteristics of “harmony but difference”. There are 56 nationalities of the Chinese nation and colorful ethnic music, which presents the music of different styles with rich ethnic color in the same music mode, but because of the differences in natural geography, life custom, dialects, etc., and the differences in mode structure, trend of the melody, interval, emotional expression, it forms distinctive music characteristics. The nationalities in the north are living in nomadism, whose objective geographical living environment is bad. In the long course of practice, people form bold, energetic, uninhibited personality. When singing, whether it is a kind of Shanxi local melody or Chinese local opera performed with the accompaniment of wooden clappers, they are mostly high, long, hot, bold and unrestrained. Southern ethnic groups live around mountains and lakes with agriculture as the main livelihood, so their living is relatively stable. For a long time, they develop fine and gentle personalities. No matter whether it is a folk song or ditty, most of them are tactful, circuitous, lingering, and soft. For example, *Yang Guan Farewell* is a classic poem song, which is composed based on another instrument song written according to the tang dynasty poet Wang Wei's *Sending Yuan'er to Anxi*. The sentence pattern of “harmonious head” and “harmonious end”, music structure, Gong Diao tone system transfer and rhythm writing have a strong national style, and the poetic lyrics perfectly expresses the poet's infinite care for the travelling friend. The whole song has three paragraphs, with one tune in a repeated pattern and is sung three times, therefore it called “three fold”. Although using seven-sound Shang mode, the Qing Jiao 4 and Bian Gong 7 occurs rarely (Qing Jiao 4 and Bian Gong 7 occur in some scores, but some scores have Qing Jiao 4). The vocal music teaching library's *Yang Guan Farewell* published by People's music publishing house in 2007 just has only Qing Jiao 4. Qing Jiao 4 appears in the sentence “Come, drink one more cup of wine”, there is no Qing Jiao 4 in the first fold, but it appears in the Permian and Triassic; the clever application of Qing Jiao 4 brings the subtle change on interval, showing the poet's stronger feeling of drinking for departure with friend. *Yang Guan Farewell* is a touching ancient song, and also the rare high-quality Chinese folk music work, which is widely sung by people for over one thousand years and has a strong artistic vitality. The music score of *Yang Guan Farewell* has been

lost in the Song dynasty, and the earliest score can be seen from *Music Score of Zhejiang Sound Interpretation* by Gong Jigu in the year of Ming Hongzhi (1491). This song has more than 30 tablature versions, a total of six types. Now, the current score was originated from *Invention Tablature* (1530) in the Ming dynasty, and after the adaptation, it was recorded into the *Instrument Introduction* composed by Zhang He (1876) in Qing Dynasty. In 1950s, the contemporary composer Wang Zhenya adapted mixed sounds based on the performance score of the modern instrument master Xia Yifeng (1882-1963). In addition to the song, there are many kinds of instrumental music playing, such as the ancient music instrument, piano, yangqin, guzheng qu, chi, taoxun and so on, although they experienced through vicissitudes of life transformation, with style diversity, the basic tunes and simple charm of “Yang Guan Farewell” always have not changed, becoming one of the treasure of Chinese traditional folk music.

2. ARTISTIC VALUE OF CHINESE FOLK MUSIC CULTURAL SPIRIT

Chinese folk music art creation process is a dynamic system; in the parent system, there are generally three subsystems. The first subsystem is a writer - life - work, known as creation for the first time; the second subsystem is works - performer, known as creation for the second time; the third subsystem is work- performer - appreciator, known as creation for the third time. In the whole parent system and subsystems, there are two core factors. One is the philosophical idea of “harmony but difference, similarity doesn’t sustain” (Zhou Shibo), “harmony from different sounds” (Liu Xie), which is the core culture thought of parent system and subsystems, the soul of this system, and the laws of beauty that the Chinese folk music art must abide by. The other is that the three subsystems have their own cores, but are distinct, associated with each other, supplement each other, forming Chinese folk music harmonious integrity with “harmony” as the core of the cultural spirit.

2.1 Creation of “Harmony” and Music for the First Time

“Harmony” in the creation for the first time is reflected in three aspects. First, the writer with extraordinary artistic thinking ability, unique aesthetic vision gets into the life, through “traveling a thousand miles”, “reading a thousand books”, “miscellaneous take all sorts of people”, “accumulation”, “stored treasure” to obtain a number of different or similar materials of life; second, on this basis, with the musicians art mind-set and creation framework, the artistic conception is conducted to breed the art image beyond themselves and others; third, musicians use music elements like sound, rhythm, melody, harmony, to make art image in mind materialized as music works

according to their own talent. The three links in the music art creation for the first time are the product of “harmony but difference”, and the three are linked together, with “harmony as the core, forming the first creation with unified elements more than differences.

The work type is harmonious with but different from the writer’s personality. It is because of this “harmony” that Chinese folk music with different nationalities, different style and creative personalities and different music art categories appears in bloom, with national music, musicians and singers of different genres and different styles, such as Guo Lanying with high, beautiful sound, Wang Kun with simple, vivid, lively sound, Ma Wang Tao with sonorous dense and energetic sound; Xian Xinghai with energetic enthusiasm, He Lüding with delicate simplicity; there are Chinese opera MeiPai that is luxuriant, the energetic Cheng Pai with euphemism; there are the Sichuan opera that is light, beautiful, charming, and Peking Opera that is gorgeous; there is lively and vigorous deep feeling of Uyghur music, loud and moving Tibetan music; there is the story of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai with Beijing and Sichuan opera music, and Chen Gang’s violin concerto *Butterfly Lovers* with the combination of Chinese and western music.

2.2 Creation of “Harmony” and Music for the Second Time

In the second creation “harmony” involves in many aspects, which I prepare to illustrate from two aspects: First, the homogeneous, simultaneous, isomorphic creation. In the preparation stage, “harmony” is reflected by the performer’s experience of the writer’s feeling to grasp the principles, which requires the synchronization with the writer’s works, with accurate understanding to better experience the integration with the works and conform to the objective stipulation. Second, homogeneous creation with different sounds and forms. After performers are familiar with works, they want to have personality, superior performance, according to their own understanding and comprehension to the works, to give full play to their own conditions and artistic skills, with more distinctively and vividly revealing the original work’s style and artistic conception so as to achieve the artistic effect of “harmony but difference”. For the song Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, Han Hong and Peng Liyuan have different styles in singing. Visibly, only when we insist “harmony but difference” throughout the second creation, we can sing songs with the unique characters of Chinese folk vocal music art.

2.3 Creation of “Harmony” and Music for the Third Time

For the third creation, it mainly concerns the “harmony but difference” of writers’ works, performers and appreciators. Here we talk about only two aspects.

Firstly, the nature of music appreciation is the reinvention of writers and performers by appreciators. In

the process of appreciating music, appreciators, according to their own life experience, emotional experience, special situation, and cultural accomplishment, imagine and associate the content of the music works and performers. Then they process, supplement, and change artistic language of the works and performers including acoustics, melody, rhythm and so on to create an artistic image or conception in their own minds. For example, the poet in the Tang Dynasty, in *Listening to the Performance of Monk Ying*, Han Yu imagined the lingering song as the image of a pair of young man and woman in love in intimacy and chatting in whispers, namely “children exchanges in whispers”, and imagined loud and high tones as grand action to fight in the war, imagined the elegant tone as “cloudy catkin has no root, heaven and earth are broad with wind”, and imagined the high and clear tone as “among hundred birds, suddenly seeing a lonely phoenix.” Visibly, when Han Yu appreciated the music, he constantly kept his own experiences, feelings, knowledge combined with the sound, melody, rhythm and imagination to create unceasingly, and made the music image and music conception into image to achieve equally satisfactory results and high harmony.

Secondly, another reflection of “harmony but difference” in the third creation is subjective and objective commonality. Because a main body will combine his own culture knowledge, feelings, experiences to recreate when listening to music, he will have appreciation differences due to different times, different nationalities, and different personalities. The so-called “when one thousand readers read Hamlet, there are one thousand Hamlets”. Similarly, one thousand people appreciate *The Moon Over a Fountain*, there are one thousand artistic conceptions of *The Moon Over a Fountain*. Regardless of nationality, country and personality, a people always can't imagine *The Moon over a Fountain* as *Roar, the Yellow River*. This is ruled by the objectivity of the work, and not be created freely. This objective stipulation and subjective difference is the reflection of “harmony but difference” of music art in the third creation.

3. SOCIAL FUNCTION OF CHINESE FOLK MUSIC CULTURAL SPIRIT

The characteristic “harmony” of Chinese folk music which is combined with the social functions of governing the nation and regulating the family, transforming social traditions, self-cultivation and moral education, reinforces its core position in the Chinese folk music, and highlights the role of Chinese folk music in the entire China ancient superstructure.

3.1 Reflection of Folk Music Cultural Spirit “Harmony” Element in Governing the State

In China's long history, the ancient Chinese musicians, politicians, thinkers have made many discussions on

harmony. Kuang Shi said, “Music spread morality far away with the wind of mountains and rivers”, “morality to spread with seasons” (*National Language· Jin Language*). He thought that music is interlinked with politics; music is associated with national politics and social traditions. Music created according to the stipulation of “ritual” would be a moral enlightenment, and make the people live and work in peace and contentment. According to *Zuo Zhuan, Twenty-Nine Years of Gong Xiang*, Qin music critics Ji Zha made a lot of comments when appreciating Zhou music; after listening to *Zheng*, he said that it was so good but not harmonious, and considered that people suffered a lot in life and the nation would perish. When he heard the *Song*, he said “straight not proud, curved but not yielding, close but not imposed, far but not taken, twisted but not bad, repeated but no boring, sorrowful but not harmful, enjoy but not waste, use but not lack, broad but not scattered, implement but not waste, get but not greedy, place but not low, run but not flow; five tones are harmonious, eight winds are steady, prosperous but orderly. They are the similarities of moralities.” This kind of music reflects the harmony between the rulers and the people, people's livelihood and social harmony. (In today's words, “power is used for the people, emotion is produced for the people, and interest is made for the people”).

3.2 Reflection of Folk Music Cultural Spirit “Harmony” Element in Transforming Social Traditions

Chinese educator, statesman, thinker, Confucius who is the founder of Confucianism, under the guidance of the doctrine of the mean and the charity, took “harmony” as the aesthetic standard to advocate the music aesthetics of “enjoyment but not obscenity “ and “grief but not harm”, “thinking without evil”, “being perfect”, held “music shall follow *Shao* and *Wu* to show *Zheng* sound”, thought “transforming social traditions, music is the best; governing people, ritual is the best” (*Xiao Jing· Guangyaodao*), and required music to have social functions of “xing, guan, quan, yuan”. Through “viewing” customs, political gains and losses, he advocated to promote social harmony, criticize social adverse phenomena and expresses emotions to achieve society harmony. *Yue Ji, Yue Benpian*, “Every musician is also the person to stimulate public feeling, so harmonious music represents the harmonious politics; chaos of music shows the complaints and weak politics. A music for a perishing nation shows the hardship of people. Music is connected with politics”. This sentence firstly shows that music comes from life, and is the reflection of social life; secondly, music is connected with politics, which vividly reflects the relation of the politics and folk, folk custom, mood, and even society as a whole. *Lüshi Chunqiu Shiyin*: “every music is connected with politics and transforms social traditions.” It shows the great effect of music on

politics, transforming social traditions, and enlightening all of the people. *Book of Rites Record of Music* says, “when music is harmonious, the rite is smooth, when people see another others’ internal harmony and external smoothness, they will also be harmonious”. I can be seen that music and rite have become the core of the cultural spirit of the Chinese nation.

3.3 Reflection of Folk Music Cultural Spirit “Harmony” Element in Self-Cultivation

In the process of transmission, folk music takes “harmony” as the core of the cultural spirit and is integrated with people’s minds, unconsciously affecting individual’s mind. In the Period of Wei , Jin and Southern and Northern Dynasties, in the “music theory”, Ruan Jie took *Harmony* as nature of music, emphasizing the enlightenment of music, and requiring music to be suitable to heaven and earth and become the nature of all things. Music is the essence of all things, and is harmonious with people’s minds.

Ancient musicians, thinkers and politicians attached great importance to “harmony” as the core spirit of the folk music culture, and had a lot of discussion on the ideological relation of this kind of music art ideology with politics, morality, and education and other ideological relations, described the great dynamic role of the music in the whole social economic foundation and superstructure, and discussed the relation between Chinese folk music and the nature, earth, people, mind, and politics so as to promote a harmonious society as a whole.

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