

The Sustainable Development of Ancient Chinese Music in Contemporary Music

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Abstract: The present study investigates the integration of Chinese ancient music into current musical compositions and its influence on the development of musical genres. This study explores the many methodologies and strategies used in the sampling and remixing of Chinese ancient music, while also analyzing the perceptions and responses of listeners toward the amalgamation of traditional and contemporary musical components. Moreover, this research examines the obstacles and potential for conserving and rejuvenating Chinese old music by incorporating it into modern music. It also investigates the cultural importance of Chinese ancient music within the framework of worldwide music creation and consumption. The study employs a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, including the analysis of pertinent policies, scrutiny of film and television productions, exploration of specialized programs, and inquiry into the viewpoints and approaches of experts in the field of traditional Chinese music instruction. This study seeks to investigate the research topics to provide insights into the dynamics and influence of Chinese ancient music in contemporary music. Additionally, it wants to underscore the significance of safeguarding and advancing the preservation of ancient music in China.

Keywords: Chinese ancient music, contemporary music, movie

1. Introduction

The development of ancient Chinese music was influenced by philosophical and spiritual beliefs such as Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. These philosophies emphasized the importance of harmony, balance, and the integration of nature and human existence. Traditional Chinese musical instruments such as the guqin, pipa, and erhu were not only tools of artistic expression but also symbolic representations of cultural and spiritual values” [1]. In ancient China, music was not only an art form but a means to achieve harmony within oneself and the world [2].

As the ancient philologist Confucius remarked in the previous sentence, the accordance of ideas about ancient Chinese music was kept both in the extension in vertical and horizontal. “Music is the universal language of mankind,” said Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, proved by the examples in musical sampling and remix. One well-known example of Chinese ancient music being sampled and remixed is the track “Schizophrenia” by the Chinese musician and composer Wan Yeung. Released in 2012, the song incorporates elements of the traditional Chinese opera song “Mad Scene from ‘Peony Pavilion’” by Tang Xianzu. Wan Yeung blended the unique vocal style and melodic motifs of the traditional piece with modern electronic beats and production techniques, creating a refreshing

fusion of ancient and contemporary sounds. Another example of using ancient Chinese music in contemporary music tracks is “The Creator” by DJ Shadow. Released in 2006, the song incorporates a sample from a traditional Chinese music piece called “Horse Racing” from the album “China: Folksongs and Music” by David Lewiston. DJ Shadow skillfully blends the ancient Chinese melody with modern electronic beats, creating a captivating and unique fusion of styles. However, even though the crucial of preserving the ancient Chinese musical culture was convinced, the discussion around the topic of how to attach more importance to this issue automatically and persistently is still impoverished [3, 4].

Therefore, my research aims to clarify the current state of sustainable development and the impact of Chinese ancient music on contemporary music. Based on this, several research questions are proposed:

How has the incorporation of Chinese ancient music influenced the evolution of contemporary music genres?

What are the various techniques and approaches used in sampling and remixing Chinese ancient music?

How do listeners perceive and respond to the fusion of Chinese ancient music with modern musical elements?

What are the challenges and opportunities in preserving and revitalizing Chinese ancient music through its integration into contemporary music?

How does the cultural significance of Chinese ancient music resonate in the context of global music production and consumption?

By addressing these research questions, this article aims to shed light on the dynamics and impact of Chinese ancient music in the realm of modern music, accordingly stressing the significance of protecting the music field in ancient China. The research utilizes a combination of methods and data sources to achieve its objectives. It predominantly focuses on the analysis of cases related to the sustainable development and influence of Chinese ancient music in contemporary music [5]. Data sources for this research include Analyzing word frequency patterns in relevant policies to identify the language context regarding the inclusion of Chinese ancient music elements in other music industries. Moreover, investigates the utilization of Chinese ancient music in the context of film and television productions to understand its impact on the contemporary entertainment industry. Third, Examine whether there has been an increase in specialized programs related to Chinese ancient music within these institutions, highlighting the potential significance and demand for such education [6-8]. Finally, the perspectives and practices of professionals involved in traditional Chinese music education to gain insights into the challenges and opportunities they face will be explored. The research methodology involves a detailed analysis of these various cases to gather evidence and draw conclusions about the sustainable development and impact of Chinese ancient music on contemporary music.

2. Specify the traditions and features of Chinese ancient music

In ancient China, traditional music was composed of a wide variety of instruments and musical forms that reflected the rich cultural heritage of the country. Traditional Chinese music utilizes a multitude of instruments, each with its unique timbre and characteristics [9].

Ancient Chinese music is enriched by the presence of several iconic instruments, such as the guqin and the pipa. Guqin derived from about 3000 years ago, being famous for the ability to convey deep emotions and philosophical thoughts. A branch of it evaluated into the instrument we now called ‘Zheng’, which has been served as the typical palace music for the enjoyment in both auditory and visually. The arpeggios has not been the most unique technique for Zheng, and had been used in western string music as well. However, when playing the guzheng, press Mi for fa and press La for

Xi. When playing, the string is played first and then pressed. With the right hand, the string is played, and the left hand is on the left side of the zheng code. Use the index finger, middle finger, ring finger, and three fingers to press the string, raising the string tone to the desired height. This particular mechanism enabled Zheng to have relatively flexible tone when playing different melodies. If performers hardly pressed on the string and pushed it directly to the height according to the experiences, the tone can appear to be stiff or tense. With the gradually pushing of the strings and applying the force, the tone tend to be more gentle, lovely or innocent. This skill is changeable as the desirable effect changed.

In the realm of guqin music, another significant aspect is the skill known as “Huayin.” Huayin involves various sliding techniques, including up-glide, down-glide, round-glide, and vibratos. These techniques allow for a transformative effect, altering the sound in unique ways specific to the zheng (guqin). Mastery of Huayin is essential for studying different musical genres and discerning their origins and local influences. Each school of guqin music possesses its own repertoire and distinctive Huayin techniques, particularly demonstrated through bending elaborations and special approaches to creating fa (4) and ti (7) notes.

In this context, it is important to understand that fa (4) and ti (7) have different meanings compared to their counterparts. The reason fa and ti can be produced in various ways is because traditional schools use pentatonic scales consisting of do (1), re (2), mi (3), so (5), and la (6). The tuned scale does not include fa or ti, so musicians have to bend the strings of mi (3) and la (6) to achieve the higher pitches of fa and ti. It’s essential to note that fa and ti in this context do not have the same meaning as in Western equal temperament, but instead represent significant notes that can encompass multiple pitches through bending, glides, and vibratos.

Understanding the meaning of this technique, according to Blacking’s main point, entails recognizing that music change refers to the change of the musical system as a whole, rather than changes within the system. In the case of huayin, the diverse utilization of huayin across different schools highlights its flexible nature, where teaching and playing methods encourage an innovative music tradition. However, such innovation is primarily applied to traditional repertoires, as variations occur within stylistic changes and the context of yi yun bu sheng, emphasizing the depth of huayin nuances and individual interpretation. On the other hand, modern compositions disrupt traditional monophonic music structures and conventions, creating a diverse and unrestricted tradition. Professional composers, both Chinese and Western, have started incorporating huayin as a distinctive feature of the zheng and an ornamental characteristic in their compositions. They break away from traditional pentatonic tuning and experiment with unconventional rhythms and techniques. Furthermore, the zheng is not only performed as a solo or ensemble folk Chinese instrument but also appears alongside Western instruments, accompanied by Western orchestras and ensembles. Along with these changes, the concept of individuality has transformed. While the stylistic use of huayin was traditionally the main criterion for valuing a musician’s artistic expression, contemporary zheng performances consider factors such as virtuosity, market value, and audience appeal.

When discussing musical forms, one of the most notable is the yuefu, which refers to ancient Chinese folk songs. These songs typically depict everyday life scenes and express a range of emotions from joy to melancholy. Another significant form is the quyi, which encompasses various narrative singing styles, including storytelling and comedic performances.

Aside from these, there were also classical instrumental compositions, such as the guqin pieces created by renowned musicians during different dynasties. These compositions embodied the essence of Chinese philosophy and aesthetics, often incorporating themes from nature and expressing a sense of tranquility and harmony.

Overall, traditional Chinese music was characterized by its profound cultural and artistic significance, with a diverse range of instruments and musical forms that beautifully captured the spirit of ancient China.

A large-scale Han Yuefu institution emerged in the Han dynasty in the music field, which created good conditions for mutual promotion of music among various nationalities and music recording and dissemination, thus producing a wide variety of musical forms. The musical aesthetic thought in this period is the inheritance and development of Confucianism in the music field. The process of music aesthetics, emphasizes the function of practicality and enlightenment, establishes a music implementation process of “move people with emotions”, and provides a materialistic explanation for the basic musical aesthetic issue that music can express people’s emotions, and it lays the foundation for the idea of “music” and “political communication”. As music can affect people’s emotions and different kinds of music will make people feel differently, and then they will have appropriate ideas and behaviors. Therefore, music has the function of enlightenment and has a decisive influence on social morality. As Hou Jin stated, music “can make people kind, have a deep impression on people, and it is easy to change the customs”. (Jing Zhang, 2018)

3. The appliance of ancient music factor in the contemporary music industry

In contemporary music, there has been a significant incorporation of Chinese classical music elements, which have had a profound impact on the artistic style and creative concepts of modern compositions. Artists have drawn inspiration from ancient Chinese music and applied it creatively in their works.

One example of the utilization of Chinese ancient music elements in contemporary music can be found in the works of composer Tan Dun. Tan Dun is known for his compositions that blend Chinese and Western musical traditions. His compositions, such as “Ghost Opera” and the soundtrack for the film “Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon,” incorporate traditional Chinese instruments, vocal techniques, and melodic structures. By infusing these elements into his music, Tan Dun creates a unique artistic fusion that connects the past with the present, representing a bridge between traditional and modern Chinese musical styles. Tan Dun said in an interview that he was very much influenced by Taoism growing up and he is still grappling with the essence of Taoism. One of the crucial beliefs in Taoism is called Wan Wu Jie You Ling, which means: everything is a spirit [11]. Taoists believe everything in nature is a spirit and all spirits are equal. Spirits can travel through time and space to commune with each other and they should be worshiped to keep nature in a yin-yang balance. Figure 1-2 shows the Chinese character for Taoism that is written with a yin-yang circle in it. This belief makes Taoists worship more things through rituals than the other religions in China and this is also the origin of the reverence for gods, ghosts, and ancestors in the Xiang-Chu culture. (Lin Tian, 2014)

This integration of ancient Chinese music elements into contemporary music has contributed to a diverse range of artistic expressions and expanded the possibilities of creative exploration. It has allowed artists to connect with China’s rich cultural heritage while exploring new sonic territories. The fusion of Chinese classical music with contemporary genres has also facilitated cross-cultural dialogue and appreciation, introducing global audiences to the beauty and complexity of Chinese musical traditions. Furthermore, the use of Chinese ancient music elements in contemporary compositions has provided artists with a rich source of inspiration and a foundation for innovative sonic experimentation. By combining traditional instruments, scales, and melodic motifs with modern electronic sounds or unconventional approaches to composition, artists have been able to push the boundaries of musical expression and create unique artistic statements. In conclusion, the incorporation of Chinese ancient music elements in contemporary music has had a transformative effect on the artistic style and creative philosophy of modern compositions. It has allowed artists to bridge the gap between past and present, cultivate cross-cultural connections, and explore new avenues of creative expression. The influence of ancient Chinese music in contemporary works

continues to shape the landscape of music, showcasing the enduring legacy and adaptability of Chinese musical traditions.

4. Challenges and Opportunities for Sustainable Development

Now, after delving into the current state of Chinese folk music, we should explore the factors that pose a threat to its existence. In embracing and cherishing Chinese folk music, we ensure the preservation of this invaluable cultural treasure for future generations. By delving into its intricacies, attending performances, and supporting local musicians, we become stewards of this unique art form. Chinese folk music is not just a sonic journey; it is a portal into the heart and soul of Chinese culture. Let us continue to celebrate, appreciate, and honor this timeless tradition, ensuring that its melodies continue to echo through the ages.

Chinese folk music, with its profound cultural significance and centuries-old traditions, faces numerous challenges in the modern era. The impact of modernization and globalization, changing demographics and urbanization, lack of awareness and education, and the influence of commercialization and the modern music industry all contribute to the potential decline of this cherished musical heritage.

The modernization and globalization of China have posed challenges to the preservation of Chinese folk music. Western music styles have gained popularity, diverting the younger generation's attention from traditional folk music. Rapid urbanization and shifting demographics have contributed to the decline of folk music as rural communities, the custodians of traditions, dwindle. Limited awareness and education about folk music hinder its appreciation and understanding. The commercialization and profit-driven nature of the modern music industry neglects the promotion and authenticity of folk music. Despite these challenges, efforts such as government support, cultural projects, grassroots movements, and digital platforms are being made to safeguard and revitalize Chinese folk music.

On the other hand, efforts to preserve Chinese folk music have gained momentum as various stakeholders recognize the importance of safeguarding this invaluable cultural heritage. Government initiatives and policies, cultural organizations and preservation projects, community engagement and grassroots movements, as well as technological advancements and digital platforms, all play crucial roles in ensuring the longevity and revitalization of Chinese folk music.

The Chinese government has implemented initiatives and policies to protect and promote Chinese folk music, including providing funding, establishing cultural preservation programs, and creating dedicated institutions for research and dissemination. Cultural organizations and preservation projects play a crucial role in documenting, showcasing, and bridging the gap between traditional and contemporary folk music. Community engagement and grassroots movements involve people coming together to preserve and revitalize folk music traditions through festivals, workshops, and performances. Technological advancements and digital platforms have made Chinese folk music more accessible and allowed for global engagement and collaboration. The collective efforts of the government, cultural organizations, grassroots movements, and technology contribute to the preservation and international recognition of Chinese folk music. Active participation and support from individuals, communities, and music enthusiasts are essential in ensuring the continued vitality of this cultural treasure for future generations.

5. Suggestions and Prospects

Proposal to promote the continuous development of Chinese ancient music in contemporary music, drawing inspiration from milestone achievements like “Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon” and “The Silk Road Camel Bell”:

Fusion of Traditional and Contemporary Elements: Encourage composers and musicians to explore the integration of Chinese ancient musical instruments and techniques with modern genres, just like the successful fusion of traditional Chinese music in the film “Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon.”

Cultural Exchange and Collaborations: Promote collaborations between Chinese ancient music experts and contemporary musicians from different cultural backgrounds, mirroring the spirit of cultural exchange along the Silk Road, exemplified by the musical project “The Silk Road Camel Bell.”

Education and Preservation: Establish platforms and institutions to educate aspiring musicians about Chinese ancient music, emphasizing its significance and fostering a deep appreciation for its unique attributes. This approach aligns with the preservation efforts seen in the achievements of “Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon” and “The Silk Road Camel Bell.”

By incorporating these milestone successes into our strategies for the continuous development of Chinese ancient music, we can ensure its relevance and longevity in contemporary music.

Chinese ancient music holds a rich and diverse legacy that has captivated audiences for centuries. In recent years, milestone achievements have showcased its potential for continued growth and evolution. Glissando, as a traditional musical technique, is widely used in film music. Smooth notes provide various expressions of emotions and effects by forming a smooth transition between pitches. The Silk Road Camel Bell can serve as an example to illustrate the application of sliding tones in movies.

6. Conclusions

The use of Silk Road camel bells in films is often employed to portray an ambiance characterized by arid landscapes, desolation, and an air of mystery. The use of sliding tones imparts camel ringtones with a distinctive texture and dynamic quality. The incorporation of sliding notes within the musical composition of a film may evoke a sensory experience for the spectator, eliciting sensations akin to the movement of desert sand and the deliberate, rhythmic advancement of camel caravans. This integration serves to enhance the overall visual and aural impact of the scene. As an example, the film ‘Lawrence of Arabia’ has a musical score composed by the esteemed Maurice Jarre, wherein the Silk Road Camel Bell is used. The video incorporates the auditory element of camel bells sliding, which enhances the depiction of the grandeur of the desert landscape and the investigation undertaken by Lawrence. The musical style used in this context effectively encapsulates Lawrence’s intrepid nature and resolute commitment to confronting the inhospitable surroundings using the persistent modulation of slide notes. Furthermore, the film “Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon” effectively showcased the worldwide allure and commercial viability of music influenced by old Chinese traditions. The musical composition for the film, which was created by Tan Dun, garnered significant praise from critics and ultimately earned the prestigious Academy Award for Best Original Score. This achievement underscores the importance of Chinese classical music in expanding its reach to a broader audience and garnering global acclaim.

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