

Analysis of Cultural Differences Between Chinese and Western Vocal Music

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Abstract: China's vocal music culture has a long history, the cultural heritage contained in it is profound, not only from daily life and labor, but also from the inheritance and development of the nation itself. Western vocal music culture expresses a kind of art and sentiment, giving vent to emotions. From the cultural level, China's traditional vocal music culture is more researchable, but culture needs to be exchanged, in the global village, the fusion and development of Chinese and Western cultures is an unchangeable trend, this paper analyzes the cultural differences between connotation, form and singing characteristics of Chinese and Western vocal music culture, and at the same time elaborates on the aesthetic fit between Chinese and Western traditional vocal music culture.

Keywords: Chinese and Western vocal culture, Differences, Forms, Connotations, Singing characteristics, Fit, Aesthetics.

1. Introduction

The art of Chinese vocal music began to sprout around the 21st century B.C. In the course of more than 4,000 years, the art of Chinese vocal music has gone through a long course of development, and has now accumulated into a valuable artistic essence. The well-known "Book of Songs" is the earliest known form of vocal music expression. During the Eastern Zhou (770-221 BC), Chinese vocal art forms had begun to diversify. During the era of the Hundred Schools of Thought, with the intense collision of various ideas, the art of vocal music also began to see its own development. At that time, the leading class had already begun to form a strict system of ritual music, and even on the battlefield, military music was often used to boost morale. During the Qin and Han Dynasties, the art of vocal music entered a new stage, with the birth of "Yuefu Poetry", which became a milestone in the history of Chinese vocal music. In the Tang Dynasty, the society entered a peaceful era, which also gave a new opportunity for the development of vocal music, and the forms of vocal music became richer. In the Song Dynasty, Song lyrics began to appear, which became a new form of vocal art expression, and many literati used to fill in the lyrics to express their inner feelings, which produced a large number of excellent lyricists, including Liu Yong and Li Qingzhao of the Euphemism, Lu You of the Magnificence, and Su Shi, who is recognized as a Chinese literati who influenced the world. As a representative of vocal art in the Song Dynasty, Song lyrics maximized the function of vocal art to release emotions. The Yuan Dynasty saw the emergence of Yuan mixed opera and Yuan Opera, which further enriched the artistic expression of Chinese vocal music. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the traditional Chinese vocal art reached its peak with the emergence of Kun Opera and the gradual emergence of Peking Opera, which is recognized as a national treasure by later generations. With the diversified development of Chinese traditional culture, Chinese vocal music art has developed rapidly in many aspects such as expression and artistic connotation.

In contrast to Western vocal culture, in the 13th century Western vocal music was still in a relatively homogenous

period, but from the 13th century onwards, the art of vocal music rose rapidly across Europe. At that time, Rome was the largest music center in Europe, so a large number of outstanding musical artists were born in Italy. These artists enriched the form of vocal music with their talents, and also contributed to the creation of polyphonic music. After the creation of polyphony, the music appeared to be more ornate and decorative, and the musical singing and artistic attainments were greatly improved. After the Renaissance, people's thinking began to get rid of the traditional thinking, which also prompted the production of opera. Opera art has a high status in western vocal music. A large number of vocal artists continue to innovate and summarize in the process of creating opera, which has laid a good foundation for the development of western vocal music. Therefore, this paper will analyze the differences between the Chinese and Western vocal music cultures in terms of their musical aesthetics, formal expression, singing characteristics, etc., and make a summary.

2. Musical Aesthetic Differences between Chinese and Western Vocal Cultures

Chinese music culture has formed its own unique aesthetic characteristics in its long history of activities. Ancient Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism best represent the aesthetic characteristics of Chinese music culture, pursuing the harmony and unity between music and nature. This is similar to the Chinese painting and calligraphy in the pursuit of the divine mood. Therefore, traditional Chinese music is characterized by harmony, beauty and depth. On the other hand, Western classical music is characterized by seriousness and profoundness, and most of the tunes are broad and robust, with a grandiose atmosphere. Moreover, western music pays great attention to the connection between theory and practice, and many works have added the composer's life flavor, which is very realistic. For example, Beethoven's "Symphony of Fate" reflects his feelings of hardship and his strong will and indomitable spirit. Thus, on the whole, western music presents a positive or tragic color.

Traditional Chinese music is characterized by its oral and collective nature in terms of composition. That is to say, a piece of music is often not the personal act of a single composer, but the crystallization of collective wisdom. In the process of transmission from generation to generation, different singers in different regions at different times would often take a ready-made tune as a blueprint, add their own moods when singing, as well as different understandings of the song, and thus make some adaptations, so that a tune would evolve into different versions in the process of transmission, e.g., there are many different versions of the variations of the tune of "Fresh Flowers" and "the Meng Jiangnv".

Western music is usually the individual labor of a composer, and therefore has a strong individuality in the works. Western composers are often based on the compositional techniques left behind by their predecessors, using existing materials and rational creation according to the laws of music, in short, Western music is more characterized by "special songs for special purposes" and pays more attention to originality. Since Western vocal art pays more attention to imitation, the artistic realm it expresses requires the formation of unity with the senses. If the Western aspiration for freedom is the Statue of Liberty, then the music that Westerners expect is the image of the Statue of Liberty. Therefore, the aesthetic form of Western vocal music pays more attention to the three-dimensional sense. Chinese culture emphasizes on lyricism, so does the art of vocal music. Classical vocal music to the beauty of subtlety, in the style of vocal music to pay attention to the continuous flow, characterized by "neutral", "elegant" and "quiet". From the pre-Qin music and folk songs to the later Song lyrics and Yuan opera and other forms of artistic expression, there is no lack of this factor. Due to the existence of this idea, the singing style of traditional Chinese music has the characteristics of traveling accent and embellishment, which, when expressed, forms a unique oriental temperament of light elegance and spiritual charm.

3. Differences in Formal Expression between Chinese and Western Vocal Cultures

The form of music is the technique, structure, program and pattern gradually formed by musical activities after its countless repetitions, which is a sign of the high degree of development of musical art. Generally speaking, the higher the degree of development of music, the more complete and stereotyped its formal system becomes, and the more abstract it becomes, the more it is far away from the sensual impulses and intuitive forms of culture, life and living. The most original driving force of music is culture and life. Life is the root of music and even of all art. Only when the creation of art is deeply rooted in one's own life impulse and sense of life can one create works that have impact and shock to the life state of others. Culture, on the other hand, determines in what way life operates and makes physical manifestation by following what trajectory. Therefore, it can be said that life is the ultimate ontology and deepest motivation of music, while culture is a way for life to be expressed. The way music exists is essentially the tension structure of human life and the way culture operates. Therefore, for the form of music to fully display its inherent vitality, it is only possible with the impact of culture, the original force of art.

However, when music reaches a higher stage of

development and forms a more stable and complete formal system, people, especially musicians, tend to gradually shift their attention to the pure form, and no longer consider its original cultural and life connotations. Over time, the connection between form and specific culture and life is slowly forgotten, and form is left as an empty shell, a set of increasingly abstract and dry programs. Undoubtedly, the music created in this state can hardly avoid slipping into the mire of the scriptural school, and can hardly keep its vitality and deep cultural flavor. Therefore, the more highly developed the music, the more necessary it is to connect its form with the culture and life that created it in the first place, and to "restore" the music form that is extremely abstract and far away from the sensual life. In the following, the paper will analyze the deep connection between Chinese and Western music and culture in terms of the formal characteristics of their modes and weaves.

The basis of the tonal composition of the Western musical system is the tetrachord. The tetrachord consists of two whole-tone intervals and one chromatic interval, and the chromatic intervals can be at the top of the tetrachord, in the middle of the tetrachord, or at the bottom of the tetrachord, which makes it possible to have three different styles of tetrachord. From these three different four-tone rows, twelve modes can be formed, including six modes and six sub-modes, which are called "medieval modes" or "ecclesiastical modes". Later, Europe experienced the Renaissance, in the professional music creation and folk music in the Ionian modes, Lydian modes and mixed Lydian modes gradually into a group, evolved into natural major; Aeolian modes, Phrygian modes and Dorian modes also gradually into a group, evolved into a natural minor. And because of the natural major and minor interpenetration, and gradually formed a harmony major and minor, melody major and minor. But no matter what kind of major and minor keys, they all belong to the seven-tone modes; and then later, the twelve equal temperament system was developed.

Unlike Western music, the tonal composition of Chinese music is essentially characterized by pentatonicity, and the core of its composition is the triadic group. There are two types of tritone groups, the first consisting of a major second and a minor third, and the second consisting of two major seconds. The first type of tritone group is typical of this musical system because it is unique to it. This type of tritone group is subdivided into two types, the first of which is structured so that the minor third is above and the major second below, and the second is just the opposite. From these two categories, three kinds of tritone groups can be combined in different ways to form five kinds of pentatonic modes: Gong, Shang, Horn, Zheng, and Feather. Of course, Chinese music often uses seven-tone scales, such as the Yayue scale, the Qingyue scale and the Yanyue scale, but the tones other than the five tones in these scales do not have the significance of tonal composition, but are only the tonal composition tones, i.e., the basic tones of the three-tone group between the passing tones or the auxiliary tones, which are only to play the role of the "flattering" five tones; or else they are the constituent tones in the five-tone system of the other one. It is only a passing tone or auxiliary tone between the basic tones of the three-tone group, and only serves to "serve" the five tones. Therefore, in the Chinese music system, although there is also a seven-tone scale, the melody is still based on five tones, i.e., the two tritone group tones are the framework, and it is still a pentatonic modulation.

Meanwhile, the word "weave" refers to the method or pattern by which the melodies of a polyphonic piece of music are organized and matched, also known as the "voice structure". The word "texture" is an abbreviation for "textile pattern". A textile is a structure that combines vertical and horizontal (warp and weft), and this term is borrowed to illustrate the fact that music is written in a combination of vertical and horizontal, as well as vertical and horizontal synthesized relationships. Generally speaking, the emphasis on horizontal combination is the writing style of polyphonic music, while the emphasis on vertical combination is the writing style of dominant music; the former is a linear thinking which mainly focuses on horizontal stretching, while the latter is a mesh-like three-dimensional thinking which mainly focuses on vertical cooperation. The Chinese music system also shows obvious differences with Western music in this aspect.

When dealing with polyphonic relationships, the Western music system has developed a kind of major key music centered on vertical harmonic relationships, in addition to the traditional polyphonic music that focuses on horizontal thinking. The so-called tonal music is characterized by a melody, to which all the other voices are subordinated as auxiliary factors. The mechanism by which the voices are subordinated to the dominant melody is harmony. In this kind of music weave, generally speaking, only one horizontal main tune has a melodic or complete melodic significance, the other voices of the harmonic columns are only the main key to play a supporting role, or to highlight its tone, or to strengthen its rhythm, or to enrich its acoustics, or to render its emotional color, or to strengthen the image of the painting, or to strengthen the atmosphere of the piece, and so on. Therefore, in the western music system, the music of the weave thinking in the horizontal polyphony thinking, more reflective of its characteristics, and the vertical weave thinking based on the harmonic relationship.

In contrast, the Chinese music system has never been able to produce a vertical weave similar to that of Western tonal music, but has shown a strong interest in horizontal melodic thinking, focusing on the horizontal linear development of the melody in each voice part. The vast majority of Chinese music is monophonic, and its weave overlaps with the melody, and its weave is the horizontal unfolding of the melody in the monophonic part only. This is purely horizontal linear weaving. In Chinese music, if the weave is polyphonic, it is not like the Western tonal music, but similar to polyphonic music, a form of polyphonic music in which two or more melodies are combined in a specific way. The difference between polyphonic music and tonal music lies mainly in the fact that in tonal music the tone rows of the voices other than the tonal melody do not have independent melodic significance, but only act as harmonies (or chords) of the tonal melody, whereas in polyphonic music the tone rows of the voices are all complete melodies with relative independence, which are mainly combined into a whole by contrast and imitation.

4. Differences in Singing Characteristics Between Chinese and Western Vocal Cultures

The sound that comes from the vocal cords in traditional Chinese vocal music can be called the vegetal sound. To make this sound more perfect and powerful, it is necessary to make

good use of the resonance organs, that is, all the resonance organs are utilized. Therefore, the learning of this resonance method is as important as the breathing method in vocal music. We can say that only good resonance can lead to good singing performance. The core of the art of singing lies in how to express emotion, and through the connotation of the lyrics, the singer is able to convey the beauty of the words to the listener through the voice, and at the same time, the singer has already internalized the lyrics into his or her own unique kind of beauty. When a singer wants to convey a piece of work, he or she goes from the basic perception of timbre, to the perception of emotion and then the feeling of beauty before presenting it to the audience. Vocal music is different from other instrumental music because it has more linguistic elements. If vocal music loses the function of expressing language, what remains is only the drilling of sound, and it is difficult to reach the realm of conveying literary meaning. Therefore, it is very important to express words clearly when singing. "Expression" can be the most intriguing part of vocal technique because it comes from the accumulation of different emotions in each person. No one can express the same emotions as others, and even the same person performing the same piece of music at different times will express different feelings, which is what makes it so precious.

In the western vocal culture, in the training of florid skills, in order to be able to sing colorful music, often strict training of pitch, rhythm, rapid tone groups and interval changes, pay attention to the clarity of each tone to be like a pearl necklace one by one, but also strung together, the training of the vocal folds of the continuous inertia and flexibility in order to achieve the purity of the vocal skills. The Century emphasizes vocal dexterity, breath control, and the ability to use the voice freely to increase vocal expressiveness, not only for sopranos, but also for altos, tenors, baritones, and even basses. Another technique is the use of the florid technique, where the last word of the piece is interpreted with a glissando to increase the expressive power. Therefore, most of the vocal techniques of the Western School of Vocal Music are still in use today because of its natural and healthy vocal method, which guides singers to prolong the life of their singing, adds to their musical expression and beauty without artifice, guides singers to inject artistic life, and promotes the listeners to pursue the most perfect musical realm in everyone's heart.

5. Summary

In conclusion, although Chinese and Western vocal music have different development backgrounds, development cultures and development histories, they both have their own unique cultural connotations and certain commonalities. The criterion of whether the expression of vocal music culture can reach the highest level is whether the performers can show the artistic connotation of vocal music art to the fullest extent. Thus, studying the differences between the artistic connotations of Chinese and Western vocal culture is very important for mastering the emotions of vocal art, understanding the beauty of vocal art, and especially for the methods of vocal art expression. In the future, when we explore the methods and differences, we must take the satisfaction of the artistic connotation as the starting point, so that our vocal art can develop on the right path for a long time.

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