

Research on the Cross-cultural Dissemination of Chinese National Musical Instruments

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ABSTRACT

This thesis, against the backdrop of globalization and the digital age, delves deeply into the cross-cultural dissemination practices, internal mechanisms, practical predicaments and optimization paths of Chinese ethnic Musical Instruments. The thesis first sorts out the cultural connotation, aesthetic characteristics of Chinese ethnic Musical Instruments and their dissemination context in the long course of history, establishing the theoretical basis for the research. The core part adopts a method that combines multi-case analysis with theoretical interpretation. It systematically dissects the diverse models of cross-cultural dissemination of contemporary ethnic Musical Instruments from three dimensions: "subject and channel", "content and form", and "audience and effect", including stage performances, educational inheritance, media convergence, industrial innovation, and community interaction. Research indicates that current communication is confronted with multiple challenges such as cultural discount, misinterpretation of symbols, fragmented communication systems, shortage of professional talents, and intensified cultural infiltration in the digital age. The deep-seated contradiction stems from the tension between "cultural essentialism" and "instrumentalism", the difficult balance between traditional protection and contemporary innovation, as well as the dialogue predicament between "self" and "other" in cross-cultural interpretation. Ultimately, the paper proposes to construct a new communication paradigm that is "three-dimensional, interactive and symbiotic": in terms of concept, it advocates the "intercultural" perspective to promote creative transformation and innovative development; In terms of strategy, we will deepen content construction, build a three-dimensional communication matrix, expand the depth of educational cooperation, stimulate the vitality of industrial innovation, and encourage community-based immersive cultural dialogue. This study shows that the cross-cultural dissemination of Chinese ethnic Musical Instruments is not only a one-way transmission of artistic information, but also a deep dialogue and meaningful co-construction among civilizations through music on the basis of equality and respect. It has significant theoretical and practical significance for promoting cultural diversity and enhancing the influence of Chinese culture.

KEYWORDS

Chinese National Musical Instruments; Cross-cultural communication; Cultural discount; Intercultural nature; Creative transformation; Communication strategy

1 Introduction

The wave of globalization and the rapid development of digital technology have profoundly reshaped the picture of world cultural exchange. Cultural soft power is increasingly becoming an important symbol of a country's comprehensive national strength. As one of the most dynamic and resonant carriers among them, the cross-cultural dissemination of music plays an irreplaceable role. Chinese ethnic Musical Instruments, embodying the philosophical thoughts, aesthetic tastes and emotional expressions of the Chinese nation over thousands of years, are treasures and living legacies of China's fine traditional culture ^[1]. From the pipa and konghou on the ancient Silk Road to the three strings and flutes across the sea in modern times, its cross-cultural journey has a long history. In the context of China 's increasingly approaching the center of the world stage, promoting the effective cross-cultural communication of national instrumental music is not only related to the maintenance of cultural diversity and the prosperity of art itself, but also a strategic need to enhance international understanding ^[2]. However, the phenomena such as "high music but few people" and "symbolic barriers" encountered in communication practice have exposed deep-seated theoretical and practical problems that urgently need systematic research.

The core question that this study aims to answer is: In the context of contemporary globalization and media, how can Chinese ethnic Musical Instruments be effectively disseminated across cultures? What are the internal mechanisms of its dissemination, the practical predicaments it faces and the breakthrough paths? Specific goals include: (1) Sorting out the cultural core and historical dissemination context of Chinese ethnic Musical Instruments; (2) Analyze the diverse practical models and their effects of contemporary cross-cultural communication; (3) Reveal the main obstacles and deep-seated contradictions faced in the communication process; (4) Propose systematic and forward-looking strategies and paradigm concepts for communication optimization.

2 The Cultural Connotation and Historical Transmission Context of Chinese National Musical Instruments

Chinese ethnic Musical Instruments are by no means merely acoustic art, but rather a "cultural complex" that carries the accumulation of thousands of years of Chinese civilization. Its unique timbre, scale, playing techniques and expression

methods are all closely linked to Chinese philosophical thoughts, cosmology, outlook on life and aesthetic ideals, forming a self-consistent and profound aesthetic system. The making of Chinese Musical Instruments, the setting of musical scales and the pursuit of performance all embody the philosophical thought of "harmony between man and nature". The ancients believed that music was a bridge connecting heaven, earth and human beings. The "Record of Music" states: "Music is the harmony of heaven and earth." This concept is first reflected in the extreme refinement of the materials used in Musical Instruments^[3]. The selection of materials for the guqin emphasizes "paulownia on the surface and catalpa at the bottom". Paulownia wood belongs to Yang and symbolizes heaven. The catalpa tree belongs to Yin and symbolizes the earth, taking the meaning of the harmony of Yin and Yang in heaven and earth. The process of making violins itself is a kind of understanding and pursuit of the way of nature. The bamboo flute is made from natural bamboo, and its growth rhythm is regarded as a manifestation of natural breathing. The xun is made by firing clay, and its vast and rich tone is regarded as the "sound of the earth". Secondly, in terms of rhythm, although traditional Chinese law (such as the three-point profit and loss method) is a kind of mathematical calculation, its ultimate pursuit is to coincide with the natural solar term and the order of the universe. Zhu Zaiyu invented the "twelve equal temperament" in the Ming Dynasty. Although it is a great mathematical achievement, its ideological source is still to solve the problem of "Xuan Gong Zhuan Tiao" to simulate the natural circulation perfectly^[4].

Unlike the "three-dimensional thinking" of Western music, which is based on the vertical harmonic progression, the core of Chinese traditional Musical Instruments is the "linear thinking". It emphasizes the horizontal flow, undulation and charm of the melodic lines of a single part, just like the line art in Chinese calligraphy and painting, pursuing "vivid vitality and charm". A simple melody, through techniques such as "embellishment", "variation", and "embellishment", becomes intricate and full of profound meaning. The ultimate embodiment of this linear aesthetic is guqin music. The "handcrafted notes" of the guqin create a subtle and continuous "cavity" effect on the melodic line. The notes seem to be disconnected but not completely, with a lingering breath, forming an internal tension that can only be felt. The principle of "the interplay of reality and illusion" is an important rule in Chinese art, which is particularly exquisite in traditional Chinese Musical Instruments. "Shi" refers to audible musical sounds, while "xu" refers to silent blank Spaces, pauses in breath, and the aftertaste of timbre. In the performance of the guqin, a large number of "overtones" are cold and ethereal, in contrast to the solid and deep "pressed tones". The carefully designed pauses between musical phrases are not blanks but rather the continuation of emotions and implications. As the saying goes, "Silence speaks louder than words at this moment." The "glissando" of the zither creates a hazy charm between the changes in pitch. The "wheel fingers" of the pipa are as dense as a sudden downpour, while the subsequent pauses are like the blue sky after the rain, alternating between reality and illusion, jointly creating a rich auditory imagination space. The peak of this aesthetic pursuit lies in the creation of "artistic conception". Chinese instrumental music does not primarily aim to satisfy sensory stimulation or logical narrative, but rather to guide the listener into an aesthetic realm where the scene and emotion blend and the self and the object are forgotten through sound^[5].

The cross-cultural dissemination history of Chinese ethnic Musical Instruments is a magnificent cultural exchange history that unfolds along with trade, politics, and population migration. Its dissemination has shown distinct characteristics at different historical stages: During the ancient Silk Road period, the physical instruments, performance techniques, music pieces and musical systems were systematically exported through land and sea channels, exerting a foundational influence on East Asia, Southeast Asia and Central Asia. Take the pipa as an example. After its predecessor was introduced to the Central Plains from the Western Regions, it evolved into a mature pear-shaped curved neck pipa in the Tang Dynasty, becoming the core of court music. Later, it was sent back to the Western Regions in reverse and influenced Persia and the Arab region, serving as an important reference for the Udel family. Instruments such as konghou and biili have also undergone a similar process of 'introduction-transformation-retransmission'. The Maritime Silk Road has brought Chinese musical instruments into Southeast Asia, and its remains have been seen in court music in Thailand and Cambodia.

The highly systematic court music of the Tang Dynasty profoundly influenced the Korean Peninsula and Japan through the envoys to Tang and other means. After being localized, instruments such as the shakuhachi, pipa and guzheng formed the main framework of traditional music in Japan and South Korea. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the dissemination shifted towards the "observation of the other" carried out by missionaries and the "cultural preservation" of overseas Chinese communities. The records of missionaries first systematically introduced Chinese music to Europe, influencing the thinking of Enlightenment thinkers. Meanwhile, immigrants from South China maintained their cultural identity in the form of music societies overseas, thus forming "cultural enclaves". Since the 20th century, communication has undergone a transformation from self-reform under the background of "the spread of Western learning to the East" to active external output. Liu Tianhua and others reformed Musical Instruments and creations, promoting the modernization of traditional Chinese music. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, professional troupes performed abroad through national diplomatic channels. Since the reform and opening up, communication has entered a stage of diversification and globalization. Composers like Tan Dun have explored new expressions of traditional Chinese music in

an international context. Professional educational institutions have cultivated enthusiasts through overseas teaching. Digital media has given rise to new flexible communication models such as "Zidi Qin Society", jointly building a three-dimensional and dynamic contemporary communication picture.

3 Analysis of Multi-dimensional Practice Models of Contemporary Cross-Cultural Communication

Entering the 21st century, the cross-cultural dissemination of Chinese ethnic Musical Instruments has formed a dynamic ecosystem with the joint participation of the state, the market, society and individuals, and has built a three-dimensional dissemination network covering the world. Official forces demonstrate cultural orthodoxy and shape the national image through cultural diplomacy projects. Market entities promote the popularization of folk music with commercial logic and expand the mass market. Educational institutions cultivate overseas enthusiasts and professional talents through systematic teaching, with a focus on long-term cultural immersion. Digital platforms have given rise to community-based flexible communication, attracting young audiences around the world with visual and interactive content. Various entities, relying on the synergy of different channels, have woven a multi-level and wide-coverage communication picture.

Contemporary communication demonstrates a high degree of openness and experimentation in both content and form. Communicators update classic interpretations through "modern translation", promote the integration of Chinese and Western cultures, cross-border styles and multimedia innovation, and reduce cultural discounts in narrative packaging. The communication effect presents a complex spectrum: at the cognitive level, it is necessary to guide the audience from the novelty of sound color to cultural understanding. On the emotional level, it is necessary not only to evoke resonance but also to correct stereotypes by demonstrating the modernity of traditional Chinese music. At the behavioral level, pursue the transformation of cultural identity from single consumption to continuous attention. At present, the effect evaluation has limitations such as emphasizing traffic over depth and short-term over long-term. In the future, it is necessary to build a more comprehensive evaluation system, introduce qualitative research methods, establish a long-term tracking mechanism, and develop "cultural influence" indicators covering multiple dimensions such as academia, education, and creativity, so as to be compatible with wide dissemination and in-depth dialogue, and jointly illuminate the path for national Musical Instruments to reach the world.

4 Main Challenges and Deep-seated Contradictions in Cross-Cultural Communication

The cross-cultural dissemination of Chinese ethnic Musical Instruments is confronted with multiple practical predicaments. Firstly, profound cultural discounts and aesthetic barriers are widespread: Western audiences accustomed to functional harmonic systems often find the aesthetic characteristics of Chinese music, which are centered on single-line melodies, loose structures and timbres, "monotonous". Secondly, in the process of dissemination, it is prone to symbol misinterpretation. Folk music is often simplified into decorative symbols of "Oriental sentiment", and its rich contemporary nature is obscured by the stereotype of "ancient and mysterious". Thirdly, the current communication system is fragmented, with insufficient coordination among official, commercial and non-governmental forces. There is a lack of top-level design and resource integration, making it difficult to form a sustained synergy. Fourth, there is a severe shortage of compound talents who are proficient in the essence of traditional Chinese music and well-versed in international communication and modern media technology. Finally, while the digital age offers vast channels, it also makes traditional Chinese music vulnerable to being overwhelmed by the flood of information and facing strong pressure from global popular culture.

Beneath these superficial predicaments lies a more profound internal contradiction. The first and foremost issue is the tension between "cultural essentialism" and "instrumentalism": How should one strike a balance between upholding traditional authenticity and adapting to the aesthetic standards of others in order to capture the market? This further leads to the paradox between traditional preservation and contemporary innovation - will innovation betray tradition, and how can the soul of culture be safeguarded in the process of change? At the same time, the power game in cross-cultural interpretation cannot be ignored: Does the right to interpretation belong to the self-expression of the communicator or the selective interpretation of the receiver? How can one avoid losing oneself in a conversation? Furthermore, the conflict between artistic value and market value has been constantly emerging in practice, and the predicament of being "well-received but not commercially successful" or "commercially successful but not well-received" occurs from time to time. The root cause of these contradictions lies in the fact that cross-cultural communication is essentially a complex process of collision, negotiation and reconstruction of different cultural meaning systems.

5 Suggestions for Paradigm Shift and Strategy Optimization

Based on the above analysis, the cross-cultural dissemination of Chinese ethnic Musical Instruments needs to achieve a paradigm transformation from "one-way output" to "two-way dialogue", and from "cultural display" to "co-construction of meaning". Abandon the "center-periphery" mindset and establish the concept of "intercultural", that is, on the basis of

acknowledging differences and equal respect, seek the convergence point of dialogue and understanding. The goal of dissemination is not to replace or conquer, but to enrich the common spiritual garden of mankind. Under this guidance, we will firmly promote "creative transformation and innovative development".

To effectively promote the cross-cultural dissemination of Chinese ethnic Musical Instruments, it is urgently necessary to establish a systematic strategic system and implementation path. At the content level, a hierarchical dissemination strategy should be implemented. By systematically translating and producing high-quality guided tour materials in multiple languages, the cultural narratives behind Musical Instruments, music pieces and musicians should be deeply explored. At the same time, for different audiences such as professional groups, students and the general public, gradient content products ranging from academic research to popular experience should be provided. At the channel level, it is necessary to integrate online and offline resources, combine offline concerts and workshops with online streaming media albums, documentaries and interactive content, and actively establish long-term strategic partnerships with internationally renowned art festivals, theaters, museums and media platforms to build a three-dimensional communication matrix. In terms of talent cultivation, it is necessary not only to deepen overseas educational cooperation and offer courses on music culture and aesthetic theory in addition to technical teaching, but also to strengthen the cultivation of local compound talents, establish cross-cultural communication-related majors in art colleges, and cultivate future "cultural envoys". In terms of industrial innovation, efforts should be made to actively develop high-quality cultural and creative products and digital collectibles centered on musical instrument elements and music IPs, and expand the application of traditional Chinese music in diverse scenarios such as film and television, games, advertising, healing, and public art. At the community interaction level, it is encouraged to carry out face-to-face and life-oriented cultural dialogue practices such as "folk music workshops" and "street flash MOBS" among overseas Chinese and local communities. Finally, it is necessary to establish a diversified effect evaluation system covering both quantitative and qualitative methods, going beyond surface data such as box office receipts and click-through rates. Through questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and long-term follow-up research, the deep-level influences such as cultural cognition, attitude change, and emotional connection should be evaluated, thereby forming a closed loop of "strategy - implementation - evaluation - optimization", and dynamically enhancing the communication effectiveness.

6 Conclusion

The cross-cultural dissemination of Chinese ethnic Musical Instruments is a systematic project that carries the mission of mutual learning among civilizations. At present, communication has entered an active stage featuring diverse subjects, innovative forms and integrated channels. Although remarkable achievements have been made, it still faces challenges such as cultural discount, symbol misinterpretation and fragmented communication systems. The root cause lies in the deep-seated contradictions in the negotiation of cross-cultural meanings. The key to future communication lies in achieving a paradigm transformation from single thinking to "intercultural" dialogue and from one-way display to co-construction of meaning. This requires strengthening top-level design and resource integration in terms of strategy, and deepening content construction, expanding communication channels, cultivating compound talents and stimulating industrial innovation in practice. True success lies not only in how many international stages one steps onto, but also in whether one can inspire emotional resonance and intellectual dialogue across cultures with its unique aesthetics, enabling this living tradition to truly integrate into and enrich the diverse spectrum of global music culture. Although this path of dissemination requires persistent efforts, its ultimate goal will surely add brilliant colors to the picture of human civilization.

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