

New in Old, and Old in New — a Review of "Universal or National Music? The Chinese Contemporary Musical Thoughts in a Context of Ideology"

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ABSTRACT

Wu Weixi's book "Universal or National Music? The Chinese Contemporary Musical Thoughts in a Context of Ideology" is a discourse expression and complex cultural psychological mechanism of the beginning of the Chinese modern music system, focusing on the issues of Chinese and Western music in the context of ideology, under the theme of contemplating the music construction of the Chinese modern national imagination. This article uses dialectics to explore the unique features of the book's discourse structure from the perspectives of political history staging structure, preface style, conceptual perspective, and the use of historical materials.

Keywords: Wu Weixi, Ideology, Chinese modern and contemporary music trends, Book review.

1. INTRODUCTION

In his later years, Hu Lancheng sighed at ancient Chinese music: Song Confucians believed that true ritual music had disappeared, and music was nothing but the art of performers. During the May Fourth Movement, there was a sudden surge of joy, but it was not the nostalgia for the past that gave birth to this revival, but the national mission of hoping for a new life.¹ A country and a nation cannot be without tradition, and tradition must be inherited on the premise of cultural identity. Young scholar Wu Weixi's "Universal or National Music? The Chinese Contemporary Musical Thoughts in a Context of Ideology" is a reflection on shaping and expressing the national identity and cultural imagination of modern China. Taking the issues of Chinese and Western music as the outline, it explores the development of modern ideology and observes the musical ideas and viewpoints of famous thinkers and musicians such as Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, Wang Guangqi, Zheng Jinwen, Zhao Yuanren, Cai Yuanpei, Xiao Youmei,

Liu Tianhua, Huang Zi, and Chen Hong. It elaborates on the integration and collision of three different development paths in the early stage of China's modern music system, namely westernization, retro, and reform, as well as the underlying ideological concepts and psychological states.

The history of modern and contemporary music thought is an integral part of China's modern and contemporary music history. The history of music thought not only focuses on the development of music itself, but also includes other fields such as culture, politics, society, and music trends. It particularly pays attention to the close synchronous relationship between the emergence and rise of mainstream music thought and the political situation and struggles of the same period.² According to the chronological order, the first chapter of this book is "the shaking of traditional music concepts and the impact of western music culture: from the Westernization Movement to the Revolution of 1911". In the context of China's modern political history, facing the strong influence

1. Yang Jing, Why did the tradition of ritual and music lose in the "debate between ancient and modern times"? [N]. Shenzhen Special Zone Daily, July, 2019: 1-2.

2. Wu Weixi, Universal or National Music? The Chinese Contemporary Musical Thoughts in a Context of Ideology [M]. East China Normal University Press, 2019, p131.

of western modern civilization on China's traditional culture, Westernization scholars went overseas to investigate the western world, starting the long process of the evolution of Chinese music thought. The author examines the background of the music trend of this period from the promotion of Kang and Liang for the new music thought to the music activities of students studying in Japan and the germination of the "quintessence" music thought, aiming to discuss those representative thinkers, activists and musicians from the perspective of the history of thought, and compare their achievements with the social background and organic combination of musical thoughts. Chapter 2 "The Clash of Music Ideology between 'Universal China and 'National China': The Beiyang Period", the collapse of the Qing Dynasty and the turmoil of the Republic of China, from the Reform Movement to the May Fourth Movement, was a period of intense collision between the "national" consciousness and the traditional "universal" concept in modern Chinese music thought. The modern intellectual group influenced by the West remained the main body of this period. Intellectuals can be divided into cultural conservative, overall Westernization, and compromise schools on how to deal with the issues of tradition and Western learning. The author combines contemporary and historical perspectives to observe the impact and role of these three trends in the future from a contemporary perspective. The final chapter, "The Establishment of the Concept of 'National' Music: 1928-1939", explores the concept of "national" music in the context of the emergence of national consciousness. The 147 pages of the whole book briefly trace the development of Chinese music in the past 40 years from the Westernization Movement to the outbreak of the Anti-Japanese War. Although the chapter arrangement of "Ritual Music and National Music" follows the staging convention of political history, it presents a clear logic evolution. This process witnessed the gradual replacement of "universal China" in the Confucian civilization system by "national China" in the modern sense of the West, accompanied by the disintegration of traditional Chinese "ritual music" and the comprehensive establishment of modern "national" music concepts. In other words, the "new music" of modern China did not initially coincide with the concept of Western music culture, but was closely integrated into the magnificent national beliefs and theoretical system, presenting a unique development trajectory. This is precisely the historical reality reflected in the subtitle "The Chinese Contemporary Musical Thoughts in a

Context of Ideology" in this book. The musical trends mentioned in the title can easily lead readers down the old path of the debate between China and the West, such as Zhang Jingwei's "Modern Chinese Music Trends"³, which describes the new and old schools, retro and westernization, which will inevitably misunderstand Wu Weixi's good intentions. What the author truly cares about is how the elites of that era position tradition and choose their future development direction when the traditional Chinese context is facing a crisis under the strong impact of Western culture and the road ahead is uncertain. All of these have aroused strong interest of this paper's author in in-depth study.

2. PROFOUND THEME AND CONNOTATIONS, AND UNIQUE PERSPECTIVES AND INSIGHTS

The civilization of ritual and music is a common creation of Chinese national culture. Over thousands of years of development, the concept of ritual and music has been continuously strengthened and expanded. In the national sense, it is regulated by the ritual and music system and externalized in the form of ritual and music, becoming a cultural identity. The invasion of modern western culture forced the ritual music that had lasted for thousands of years to be in crisis. The inherent cultural standard consciousness of Chinese people for thousands of years was facing a decline. Some outstanding intellectuals began to reflect on the problems existing in Chinese music culture from the perspective of social function and ideology. The debate between China and the West is essentially a debate between ancient and modern times. In other words, the modern music trend is actually the construction process of the modern cause and the ideology that is in line with modernization. Ideology is the sum of elements such as ideas, viewpoints, concepts, thoughts, and values, which are not inherent in the human brain but exist from society. The use of "ideology" in the subtitle of this book represents a deep exploration of the complex interactive relationship between music concepts, ideas, and social, political, and cultural backgrounds in a specific historical period. Here, it is not only a conceptual system or ideological form, but more importantly, it serves as an ideological tendency and driving force for social cohesion. In the context of modern Chinese history, music trends are often closely linked to social

3. Zhang Jingwei, Modern Chinese Music Trends [J]. Music Research, 1985(4): 77.

change, political turmoil, and cultural transformation. From the perspective of ideology, this book deeply reveals the mutual influence and infiltration between music concepts and the mainstream ideology at that time. It can be said that from the perspective of music practice, in the second section of the first chapter, at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, when the country faced major political changes, music, as an important component of social culture, also underwent profound changes in its concepts and practices. The mainstream ideology at that time emphasized the ideology of saving the nation and survival, and music concepts were transformed into emphasizing that music was a necessary element for shaping the new nation. Specifically, it advocated the introduction of music forms with new social education functions from the West, aiming to promote patriotism and nationalism, and achieve the goal of reshaping the Chinese soul and reconstructing Chinese culture. At the same time, mainstream ideology has been further promoted and strengthened through music education and school songs. In this process, a relationship of mutual infiltration and influence has been formed between music concepts and mainstream ideology. Music not only reflects the political and cultural atmosphere of the society at that time, but also shapes people's ways of thinking and values to a certain extent. Mainstream ideology is also widely disseminated and accepted through music as a medium.

3. NOVEL PREFACE STYLE, AND THREE-DIMENSIONAL CONTENT PERSPECTIVE

In contemporary literary works, classical Chinese as a narrative language is indeed rare. However, a scholar studying Western music chooses to use ancient texts for narration, which must have profound meanings behind it. The use of classical Chinese may hope to avoid certain limitations and frameworks that are difficult to overcome in modern Chinese, given that modern Chinese is deeply influenced by Western academia, its categories, concepts, and methods may sometimes limit the depth and breadth of expression. The unique rhetorical charm of ancient Chinese characters enables them to express their opinions in a more subtle and innovative way, breaking through conventions and showcasing personalized forms of expression.

In the book, when the West issued a strong challenge and traditional culture was in jeopardy, how did China's excellent intellectual minds position tradition and then choose the path forward. Taking reformist Liang Qichao as an example, it is stated that "Liang believed that serious theoretical music research must transform from being a subsidiary of classical studies in ancient times to an important insight into an independent category in the modern academic system. This is also a prerequisite for the emergence of Chinese 'musicology' as an independent humanities discipline influenced by Western modern academia. At the same time, he not only realized that 'it is necessary to introduce Euromusic as teaching materials', but also emphasized the concept of the middle path that 'don't emphasize one over another', demonstrating a deep understanding of different customs."⁴ The reformists hoped to integrate the diverse musical languages within the empire through the transplantation of Western music, in order to create a new social practice that adapted to the practical needs of the nation. It can be said that it summarizes the attitude of Confucian scholars with modern "national" consciousness towards music improvement. And those reformists who were deeply influenced by Western culture, such as Fei Shi, believed that only "Western music" that adapts to the political, social, and cultural needs of modern countries can solve the problem of music improvement in China. By comprehensively negating cultural China, they can achieve the goal of self-improvement and new people. It can be said that Fei Shi's discussions did touch upon the fundamental differences between traditional concepts with pre modernity and Western ideologies with modernity in their views on music issues.⁵ The radicalism of the Westernization movement is not only due to the failure to see the essential differences in practical techniques between Chinese traditional music and Western music, but also due to the neglect of the special complexity of music discipline in terms of disciplinary modernity compared to literature and art. The author adopts a sociological perspective to demonstrate how the ideology of national identity gradually forms and develops under the promotion of national consciousness and practical interests,

4. Wu Weixi, *Universal or National Music? The Chinese Contemporary Musical Thoughts in a Context of Ideology* [M]. East China Normal University Press, 2019, p27.

5. Wu Weixi, *Universal or National Music? The Chinese Contemporary Musical Thoughts in a Context of Ideology* [M]. East China Normal University Press, 2019, p43-44.

revealing how Chinese music and culture find a balance between tradition and modernity, and between local and foreign cultures driven by national consciousness and practical interests.

It is worth mentioning that this book does not simply conceptualize concepts such as "Chinese and Western", "progress", "enlightenment", "science", "revolution", and "modernity" as either-or oppositional relationships, but rather delves into the complex interweaving of these concepts in the historical process. For example, this book provides a detailed analysis of the "populist", "academism", and Liu Tianhua's "finding rites in fields" approach to improving traditional folk music, showcasing diverse attitudes towards traditional folk music from different perspectives. This in-depth analysis of the ambiguity and complexity of history presents a richer and more three-dimensional perspective in exploring the changes in Chinese modern music.

4. THOROUGH ANALYSIS AND ARGUMENTATION, AND RICH HISTORICAL SUPPORT

The rich historical materials form the backbone of this book, while the author's theoretical analysis ability is the finishing touch.

The vitality of the study of the history of modern Chinese music thought lies in the innovation of theory, the grasp of cutting-edge theories, and the in-depth research and humanistic interpretation of historical materials and literature. This book will truthfully reveal the objective nature and original appearance of historical objects, supported by historical materials. The number of footnotes and "references" listed in this book is vast, with a total of over 11 pages and more than 150 entries. In addition to easily accessible publications, there are also some lesser-known books, such as Chen Yong's "Modern Transformation of Chinese Music History", Fei Zhengqing and Liu Guangjing's "Cambridge History of Late Qing China" (Part 1 and Part 2), Fei Zhengqing's "Cambridge History of the Republic of China" (Part 1 and Part 2), Han Guohuang's "From the West to the East - Collection of Chinese Music", Liu Jingzhi's "On New Chinese Music", etc. And it has collected references including footnotes, listing almost all relevant historical materials and literature in the article. This not only provides a solid historical basis for its own research, but also facilitates readers' learning and research in modern music history and related disciplines. In addition to the analysis in the article, the book also adds

arguments in the footnotes to dialectically examine the viewpoint that "the trend of Westernization in Chinese music under the erosion and pressure of modern Western dominant culture is an inevitable phenomenon. From the perspective of what is happening now, Westernization is an inevitability, and the development of anything has its own contingency and inevitability. The author draws two counterarguments from dialectical materialism: "Japan and South Korea, both belonging to the Confucian cultural circle in East Asia, have been able to continue their inherent musical cultural traditions despite facing the same pressure in modern times, and have been able to coexist with imported Western music (although the Westernization reform concept in Chinese modern music thought was mostly influenced by Japan during the Meiji Restoration, Japan did not fully transform traditional music with Western music. In the first half of the 20th century, when 'Asianism' was prevalent, Japanese culture showed a strong tendency towards de Westernization; South Korea, which is closer in practice to traditional Chinese music culture, immediately established the 'National Music Institute' after the end of the Japanese colonial period, becoming the main educational, research, and performance institution for traditional music such as temple music during the Joseon Dynasty. But in China, various factions hold a positive and welcoming attitude towards Western ideas and culture (whether from Europe, America, Russia, or the Soviet Union); But at the same time, it has always shown a strong anti-traditional consciousness based on the interests of the real national community."⁶ It is not difficult to see that the text mainly reflects traditional modernization, while Westernization does not equal modernization. In the process of constructing the "imagined community" of the "Chinese nation", the alternation of old and new musical ideas has largely highlighted the differences between "the universe" and "the nation", and revealed some basic characteristics of modernity. Through the logical analysis of the author's counterarguments, it has provided a "refresh" of the author's understanding of the complete Westernization of Chinese music trends. It can be seen that the author's solid critical thinking ability and rigorous logical thinking spirit are evident.

In order to comprehensively understand Chinese music thought and its inheritance and development,

6. Wu Weixi, Universal or National Music? The Chinese Contemporary Musical Thoughts in a Context of Ideology [M]. East China Normal University Press, 2019, p67.

it is necessary to trace its continuity from ancient to modern times, which helps people understand the music culture of ancient, modern, and even future China. The introduction section of this book describes the ancient Chinese music thought and the situation before modern times, "mainly from the classical Chinese period from the Spring and Autumn Period to the mid Qing Dynasty... The conceptual level of music thought system maintained astonishing stability and continuity."⁷ In order to provide readers with a comprehensive understanding of music thought and to narrate the state of music thought before modern times, the overall significance and continuity of traditional Chinese culture are highlighted. This is different from Feng Changchun's "Research on Modern Chinese Music Thought" and Yu Feng's "History of Modern Chinese Music Thought",⁸ which do not introduce ancient music thought. As General Secretary Xi Jinping mentioned in his speech at the "Symposium on Cultural Heritage and Development", it is impossible to understand ancient China, modern China, and even future China without understanding China from the perspective of its long-standing historical continuity.⁹

The speech has also emphasized the crucial role of ritual music and national music in building a harmonious coexistence of Chinese music culture with the world. In the book "Universal or National Music? The Chinese Contemporary Musical Thoughts in a Context of Ideology", whether it is the extreme views of the "Westernization school", the limited perspective of the "reformists", or the failed attempts of the "restoration school", they are all regarded as valuable experiences and profound lessons left by the pioneers of modern Chinese thought in dealing with the relationship between tradition, Western learning, and contemporary reality for future generations. Although some of these views were limited by the academic environment at the time, we can still feel the efforts made by those young music thinkers to position and develop Chinese national music in a challenging era. At the end of the article, Wu Weixi emphasized the importance of sorting out this period of history

7. Wu Weixi, *Universal or National Music? The Chinese Contemporary Musical Thoughts in a Context of Ideology* [M]. East China Normal University Press, 2019, p4.

8. Yu Feng, *History of Modern Chinese Music Thought* [M]. China Youth Publishing House, 2009.

9. "Qiushi" magazine published an important article by General Secretary Xi Jinping titled "Speech at the Symposium on Cultural Heritage and Development" on September 1, 2023.

through the voice of composer Jiang Wenye, who has a dual background in Japanese and European culture, and revealed the close relationship between music and the country. This viewpoint is profound and thought-provoking.

As soon as a country is established, musicians must be mobilized to create new music or revive old music, and formulate movements that represent the country.¹⁰ At this point, readers may have realized the profound meaning behind the title of this book, which juxtaposes "ritual music" with "national music" - this "ritual music" is not intended to return to the traditional sense of "the music of worshipping Confucius", but to build a vision of "ritual music China" that harmoniously integrates with diverse civilizations around the world.

5. THOUGHTS OF READING

The book "Universal or National Music? The Chinese Contemporary Musical Thoughts in a Context of Ideology" does have many commendable aspects, but it is not without flaws. The author of this paper will give a few examples to express my personal opinion.

The first is the omission of characters. Wu Weixi has indeed devoted a lot of ink to the in-depth interpretation of the practical aspects of Chinese quintessence music. As for the organization and sorting of this ideology, it can be seen that it is exhaustive and comprehensive. However, there are some specific and important representative figures scattered in the music of "national quintessence", such as Luo Boxie, which the author only briefly mentions on page 54 of the book. The author believes that more description should be given to Luo Boxie, one of the representative figures in the mainstream intellectual history of the Republic of China. Luo Boxie is one of the chief editors of the Chinese Music Concert (similar to the "Datong Music Concert") and a representative figure of the "Chinese source of Western music" ideology. The Chinese Music Concert has a strong interest in Chinese ancient music and is attempting to revive it. Luo Boxie proposed: "Chinese music is divided into twelve tones and summarized into five tones and eight

10. Wu Weixi, *Universal or National Music? The Chinese Contemporary Musical Thoughts in a Context of Ideology* [M]. East China Normal University Press, 2019, p131.

tones, truly surpassing the world.”¹¹ Luo firmly believed that Chinese music has outstanding achievements that surpass other forms of music, and believed that Western music actually originates from the evolution of Chinese music. This viewpoint fully demonstrates his profound love and high admiration for Chinese music. In the article "My Ideal of Music Harmony", Luo compared Chinese and Western music, revealing a music value system that praises Chinese music and relatively suppresses Western music.

The second is the textual errors. Publishers use professional software and tools in the typesetting and editing process to ensure the accuracy of the text, but human negligence and errors are unavoidable, and editors and proofreaders may fail to detect errors due to fatigue and lack of focus. There is a typo in the second line of "曾志闵 (Zeng Zhimin)" on page 35 of section three of chapter one, "The Music Activities of Students Studying in Japan and the Emergence of 'National' Music Thought". It should be "曾志恣 (Zeng Zhimin)".

6. CONCLUSION

The book "Universal or National Music? The Chinese Contemporary Musical Thoughts in a Context of Ideology", with its profound thematic connotations, unique viewpoints and insights, novel preface style, rigorous analysis and argumentation, and rich historical support, presents a deep exploration of the complex interactive relationship between modern music thought and social, political, and cultural backgrounds. From an ideological perspective, it examines the discourse expressions and complex cultural psychological mechanisms of Westernization, Retro, and Improvement, which are the beginning of China's modern music system, and helps to analyze the evolution and internal connections of music thought in various historical periods. However, no work can achieve perfection. Although the book provides a detailed exposition on the practical aspects of Chinese quintessence music, there are still some specific and important representative figures such as Luo Boxie's omissions or brief mentions. However, this does not affect the status of this book as an important work on the study of modern and contemporary music thought. This book not only provides a new perspective to examine the history of Chinese modern and contemporary music thought, but also

showcases the outstanding achievements of a scholar in cross-cultural research. Although Professor Wu Weixi's works also have some shortcomings, the flaws do not overshadow the strengths, and the weaknesses do not overshadow the weaknesses. His historical concepts, attitudes, and methods are admirable to the author.

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