

# The Construction of Aesthetic Orientation and the Implementation of Cultural Security: An Interpretation of the Value of the Symphonic Suite "Nie Er and the National Anthem"

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## ABSTRACT

In December 2023, the symphonic suite "Nie Er and the National Anthem" completed its world premiere at the Yunnan Provincial Grand Theatre Concert Hall. The work takes Nie Er's life trajectory and historical background as clues, unfolds the creative process of the "March of the Volunteers", rooted in local folk music elements in Yunnan, and deeply connects Nie Er's personal destiny with the modern struggle history of the Chinese nation. This article is based on the inherent logic of aesthetic orientation and cultural security, analyzing how works construct the aesthetic of national spirit through distinct formal beauty and transcendent emotional experiences; Furthermore, it is argued how this internalized national, political, and contemporary aesthetic experience can effectively strengthen national identity, consolidate mainstream ideological consensus, and achieve deep construction of cultural security. Research has shown that aesthetic orientation is the psychological pathway and emotional carrier for achieving cultural security, and the two have a close interactive and constructive relationship. This work provides a vivid practical model for the construction of cultural security and the creation of red literature and art in China's new era.

**Keywords:** *Symphonic suite "Nie Er and the National Anthem", Aesthetic orientation, Cultural security*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

“The cultural fortune is closely linked to the national fortune, and the cultural vein is connected to the national vein.” On December 15, 2023, the Kunming Nie Er Symphony Orchestra and Kunming Spring City Theater jointly commissioned the world premiere of the symphonic suite "Nie Er and the National Anthem" composed by Yunnan Bai ethnic female composer Li Changshan in the Yunnan Provincial Grand Theater Concert Hall, perfectly interpreting the inherent relationship

between the aesthetic orientation of literary works and cultural security. The work "Nie Er and the National Anthem" takes Nie Er's life as the context, and through music, showcases his deep affection for the motherland and his persistent pursuit of the music industry. What is commendable is that "Nie Er and the National Anthem" borrowed Western music forms, absorbed elements of Yunnan folk music, carried and promoted the theme of patriotism, and integrated every audience present with the tragic history of the Chinese nation. It has undergone a baptism of Chinese spiritual culture

and patriotism, and has also made contributions to China's cultural security cause.

After the performance, there was a long burst of enthusiastic applause from the audience. People are not only impressed by the exquisite artistic expression of this work, but also moved by its profound cultural connotations and strong sense of the times. "Nie Er and the National Anthem" is not only a musical feast, but also a touching experience for the soul. With its unique artistic form, it enables a dialogue between history and reality, and blends tradition and modernity.

The successful premiere of this work not only adds a significant touch to the cultural and artistic fields of Kunming and even Yunnan, but also sets an example for literary and artistic workers across the country. It proves that in the context of the new era, literary and artistic creation should not only inherit and carry forward excellent traditional culture, but also have the courage to innovate and integrate diverse cultural elements, in order to enrich and develop socialist literature and art.

The creation and performance of "Nie Er and the National Anthem" is a conscious maintenance of national cultural security by literary and artistic workers, as well as a vivid interpretation of cultural confidence. It not only enhances the public's level of cultural and artistic appreciation, but also inspires people's pride in national history and culture. In the future, this work will continue to tour across the country, allowing more people to feel the power of music and its important role in inheriting culture and promoting the main theme.

## 2. COMPOSITION OF THE WORK

The symphonic suite "Nie Er and the National Anthem" consists of an overture, the first movement "Born in Kunming", the second movement "Mother's Cradle", and the third movement "Strong Sounds of the Era". The composer uses simple musical vocabulary and concise composition techniques to create the strongest sound in China, "March of the Volunteers", from three dimensions: Nie Er's birth year and major events in the city, Nie Er's mother who influenced his life, and patriotic enthusiasm. The composition is full of dramatic tension.

### 2.1 Prelude

The prelude is concise and exquisite. Huang Yi, the artistic director and young conductor of the Nie

Er Symphony Orchestra, calmly and powerfully extends his arms. The first horn like solemn theme plays, and we hear the familiar theme of the "March of the Volunteers". In that moment, everyone's enthusiasm is like a spark ignited, quickly burning and illuminating everything around them. It is not just a piece of music, but also a mark of an era and a reflection of the soul of a nation. The dual themes of "National Anthem" and "Remembrance" are highly integrated. In the slow flow of music, the string part plays the first theme developed based on the motivation of the "March of the Volunteers" in a warm and affectionate way. It develops in the theme motivation of string performance and transitions into a deep and soothing "longing" and "memory" through woodwind music. Through the meticulous processing of polyphonic techniques, this piece of music showcases the interweaving of various emotions in Nie Er's image, which together constitute his spiritual style that transcends time and space. In this music, people can feel Nie Er's natural talent and youthful passion, as well as his firm ideals, beliefs, and relentless spiritual pursuit. These elements interweave with each other, forming Nie Er's unique musical style and personal charm. The melody, full of strong emotions, seems to be telling an indescribable longing. Every note is like Nie Er carrying history, his wisdom, emotions, and perseverance are cleverly woven into every beat and melody. This is a deep memory of the past, an endless admiration and longing for this outstanding musician of the people. Because of this, his image can transcend the boundaries of time and space, forever engraved in people's hearts.

### 2.2 First Movement: Born in Kunming

Four months before Nie Er's birth, on October 10, 1911, the Xinhai Revolution began in Wuchang. This historic moment marks the end of China's feudal dynasty and the dawn of democratic republic. However, in just 20 days, the Qing army quickly captured Hanchuan and approached Wuchang, making the situation of the Xinhai Revolution precarious. At this critical moment in history, on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month, in Kunming, located on the southwestern border of China, the "Double Ninth" Uprising led by Cai E and Tang Jiyao broke out, providing strong support for the revolution in Wuchang and successfully overthrowing the Qing Dynasty's rule in Yunnan, injecting new vitality into the course of history.

At the beginning of the movement, a low melody slowly unfolds, just like the darkness and

oppression of that era's background. The mournful tone played by string instruments is deep and heavy, echoing like the suffering and voices of the people under feudal rule. This melody is like a whisper of history, telling the hardships and difficulties of that era. Then, the viola played a passionate six tone, as if the battle horn had been sounded, and the soldiers gathered in the military academy. The atmosphere of tension and solemnity filled the air. The rhythm of this piece of music is fast and powerful, like a heartbeat accelerating, indicating the upcoming intense battle.

Due to the leakage of rumors, the uprising was launched three hours in advance, and the soldiers fought bravely. After fierce battles, they finally achieved victory step by step. This part of the music is full of tension and urgency, like the smoke of gunpowder on the battlefield, intertwined with the cries of soldiers and the clash of swords and knives. The music theme has gradually shifted from the initial gloomy "darkness" to intense "struggle", symbolizing the indomitable fighting spirit and fighting spirit of the people. Here, people can capture the vague and fragmented themes of the national anthem, as if they contain a potential power waiting to be unleashed.

The following expansion section is lengthy, with both moderation and tension in emotional expression, gradually transitioning from soothing to passionate, step by step, and ultimately reaching climax. This part of the music is like a scroll, slowly unfolding and depicting vivid historical scenes one by one. From the assembly of soldiers, to the outbreak of battles, to the final victory, every detail is delicately portrayed by music. This movement exhibits a strong symphonic quality, deeply reflecting the indomitable spirit of the nation and the spirit of resistance and battle. Music is like a witness to history, recording the vicissitudes of that era and conveying the hopes and dreams of the people of that time.

### **2.3 Second Movement: Mother's Cradle**

Nie Er's mother Peng Jikuan, a woman of Dai ethnicity, not only gave Nie Er life, but also depicted the true meaning of life for him with her selfless maternal love and profound wisdom. Peng Jikuan, with her kind and resilient character, provided endless warmth and care for the young Nie Er. At the same time, she also integrated wonderful music into his growth. During Nie Er's infancy, Peng Jikuan used her pleasant singing as a lullaby to help him fall asleep peacefully. These

folk music melodies not only exposed Nie Er to rich and colorful musical elements in his childhood, but also laid a solid foundation for his future music creation.

In this movement, the composer cleverly employs the interactive dialogue form of solo cello with strings, woodwinds, and solo violin, vividly depicting a deep and inseparable picture of mother son emotions. The main theme features a warm and bright melody, showcasing the warmth and radiance of maternal love; The sub theme incorporates the unique charm of Dai music, blending musical elements together to create a vivid and warm picture of mother son life. Through the power of music, this movement deeply expresses the depth and vastness of maternal love.

At the end, the ensemble of cello and violin is like a deep conversation between a mother and son, expressing the warmth of maternal love and Nie Er's gratitude towards his mother in a vivid and unrestrained manner. The work adopts a three-stage structure, with a strong ethnic flavor permeating the music. Based on the genetic variation and evolution of Dai tones, it vividly depicts the image of the mother. It can be said that Nie Er embarked on a journey of music, using notes as powerful tools to convey the voices of the people and the cry of the times. The initial "seeds" of his musical enlightenment undoubtedly originated from the lullabies hummed by his mother for him, as well as those local folk songs full of maternal love and ethnic customs.

The local folk music and Dongjing music in Yunnan are the music "textbooks" that Nie Er has been exposed to since childhood. This movement gradually unfolds its second part through the orderly replacement of instrumental groups and the precise transformation of timbre and rhythm. In this process, the theme emotion of "maternal love" has been further refined and sublimated, presenting a moving dynamic beauty, injecting more warmth and emotional depth into the overall movement. The double lead of cello and violin is like a tacit communication between mother and son, with beautiful and moving melodies and simple and warm emotions, bringing profound artistic enjoyment to the audience.

Peng Jikuan is not only a great mother, but also a woman with profound ethnic music literacy. She ingeniously integrated the music traditions of the Dai ethnic group and local music elements from Yunnan into Nie Er's music education, which sparked his strong interest in music from a young

age. Nie Er's musical talent and love for music are largely influenced and guided by his mother. Peng Jikuan's music education method is not just about simple teaching, but more about allowing Nie Er to feel the charm and power of music invisibly through the bits and pieces of life.

During Nie Er's growth, his mother Peng Jikuan's musical enlightenment had a profound impact on him. She not only taught Nie Er to appreciate and understand music, but more importantly, she taught Nie Er how to feel music with heart and how to closely connect music with life. Nie Er's musical journey gradually shone brightly under the careful cultivation of his mother and the nourishment of ethnic music. Peng Jikuan's maternal love is not only reflected in her care for Nie Er's daily life, but also in her cultivation of Nie Er's musical talent and respect for music art. Through her mother's words and deeds, Nie Er not only learned how to express emotions through music, but also how to use music to touch people's hearts and convey deeper social meanings.

#### **2.4 Third Movement: Strong Sound of the Era**

The "March of the Volunteers" is hailed as a clarion call for the liberation of the Chinese nation. Its lyrics are concise yet profound, accurately depicting the hardships and struggles experienced by the modern Chinese people. This song conveys the firm belief and oath of the Chinese nation in times of crisis through passionate music. The May Fourth Movement, as an important event promoting the widespread dissemination of new culture in Kunming, played a crucial role in awakening people's national consciousness. At that time, Nie Er was studying in Kunming and was deeply influenced by the cultural changes brought about by the May Fourth Movement, which led to profound changes in his ideological consciousness and music creation style. His creation of the "March of the Volunteers" and many other folk music works vividly reflect the spiritual connotation of the May Fourth Movement, brimming with youthful vitality and positive energy. Nie Er, with a deep patriotic sentiment as the cornerstone, carefully crafted every note and ultimately forged the horn of this era - the "March of the Volunteers". The music of this movement is based on the motivation of the "March of the Volunteers", and develops two theme music that echo the first theme that appears for the first time in the preface. Through the form of music, it showcases the indomitable and courageous national

spirit of the Chinese people in the face of numerous difficulties. At the same time, the movement also expresses a lofty praise for the great motherland and a deep affection for the motherland. As the music deepens, all emotions converge and eventually reach a climax, forming a strong artistic appeal. At the critical stage of the performance, the band wholeheartedly performed the classic piece "March of the Volunteers". With the clarion call, the Chinese people, under the wise leadership of the CPC, work together to forge ahead! The theme and motivation of the "March of the Volunteers" runs through the entire piece, and two musical themes are derived from it, echoing the first theme that appears for the first time in the prologue. The composer, with a unique spirit of innovation and exquisite skills, cleverly employed various complex and concise techniques to meticulously adapt the main melody of the national anthem. From a "spark of fire" gradually spreading to a "prairie fire", the energy of music gradually gathers from "one after another", forming a "surging torrent" trend. Its intensity continues to accumulate and increase, like the surging of molten lava in an active volcano, scorching hot and overwhelming. With the continuous accumulation of power, it finally erupts like a volcano, unstoppable and showcasing the infinite charm of music. At that moment, Huang Yi turned around and gestured to the audience. The audience had already been infected by the music, overflowing with passion and unable to suppress their inner excitement like ignited flames. They stood up one after another, their eyes sparkling with excitement. They followed the conductor's rhythm, resonated harmoniously with the music, and sang together: "Get up! People who don't want to be slaves!". The last note fell, and the audience burst into thunderous applause. Everyone stood up, and the applause and cheers intertwined into a scene. This new work undoubtedly aroused strong emotional resonance among the people of Nie Er's hometown. They paid the highest respect to Nie Er and all the composers, conductors, and performers involved in the creation in the simplest and most direct way possible.

### **3. AESTHETIC ORIENTATION AND CULTURAL SECURITY REVIEW OF "NIE ER AND THE NATIONAL ANTHEM"**

"Nie Er and the National Anthem" have achieved success in both aesthetic orientation and cultural security dimensions: in terms of aesthetic orientation, it balances the transcendent experience

of formal beauty and emotion; In terms of cultural security, it has distinct national, political, and contemporary characteristics. "Nie Er and the National Anthem" not only achieved success in aesthetic orientation and cultural security, but also deeply reflected the integration of art and history. In terms of artistic expression, it cleverly combines Nie Er's personal fate with the historical process of China, and through the narrative technique of music, allows the audience to feel the weight of history and the pulse of the times in the melody. This work not only praises individual heroism in terms of emotional expression, but also promotes the spirit of collectivism, allowing listeners to deeply appreciate the power of national spirit while enjoying music.

In terms of cultural security, the creation and performance of "Nie Er and the National Anthem" not only consolidates national cultural confidence, but also promotes the inheritance and development of national culture. It conveys the voice of China to the world through the universal language of music, showcasing the unique charm and contemporary style of Chinese culture. The popularity and popularization of this work also reflect China's improvement in cultural soft power and its increasing influence in global cultural exchanges.

In addition, "Nie Er and the National Anthem" has also made positive explorations in artistic innovation. It not only inherits the essence of traditional Chinese music, but also absorbs the creative techniques of Western symphonies, making the work maintain national characteristics while also having an international artistic perspective. This fusion and innovation not only enrich the forms of expression in Chinese music, but also contribute to the diversity and development of world music culture.

In short, "Nie Er and the National Anthem" has become a milestone in the history of Chinese music with its unique artistic charm and profound cultural connotations. It not only provides people with the enjoyment of beauty, but also inspires people's reflection on national history and longing for the future, becoming a cultural bridge connecting the past and the future.

### ***3.1 Interpretation of Aesthetic Orientation***

Artistic aesthetics is a purely sensory activity, which is completely different from rational cognitive activities centered on concepts. This kind of sensory activity first reaches the formal beauty

of art, which is the non-conceptual unity of reason and sensibility. From the overture to the fourth movement, "Nie Er and the National Anthem" embodies the perfect combination of melody, vocals, and instrumental music, which is pleasing to the ear. However, a higher level of artistic aesthetics inevitably requires transcending formal beauty and reaching directly into the survival experience of a nation or even humanity, achieving the unity of sensibility and truth. "The richness of human emotions, that is, the ears that feel music, the eyes that feel the beauty of form, in short, those feelings that can feel human happiness and confirm that they are the essential power of human nature... are only produced due to the existence of corresponding objects, due to the existence of a humanized natural world."<sup>1</sup> Marx pointed out here that the experience of survival (that is, the feeling of confirming oneself as the essential power of human nature) is the basis for distinguishing formal beauty. According to Heidegger's existentialist view of truth, truth always exists at the level of sensibility. "Truth is the unobstructed state of being that exists. Truth is the truth of existence." Truth is the understanding of transcendent existence. "The existence of a work is to establish a world. What is this world?... The world is never an object that stands in front of us and allows us to examine it carefully. As long as birth and death, blessings and punishments constantly bring us into existence, the world will always be non-objectified, and we humans will always belong to it."<sup>2</sup> Therefore, artistic aesthetics must have transcendence. Only by bringing the audience into a living world and achieving the unity of truth and sensibility can we truly create excellent works of art. Starting from the overture of "Nie Er and the National Anthem", the audience immediately isolates themselves from the world and enters the unprecedented changes of the Chinese nation in the last century. They empathize with the tragic fate and suffering of their predecessors imposed by history. The first movement allows the audience to witness the darkness before dawn and the resistance of the people against the corrupt ruling class. Such resistance is like a spark that is bound to ignite a prairie fire. The second movement immerses the audience into the musical world of Nie Er and his mother, filled with the joy of family, experiencing Nie Er's musical talent and his mother's endless

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1. Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844"[M]. People's Publishing House, 1979 edition, p.79.

2. Heidegger, Holzwege [M]. Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 1997 edition, p28.

love for her son, as well as the subtle influence in the field of music. Finally, in the third movement, the work reaches its climax, and the audience's body and mind return to the extreme environment of the 1930s, surrounded by foreign powers, invaded by foreign enemies, and the unbearable suffering of the people. Eventually, the Chinese nation erupts into its final roar in the deepest suffering, resisting warlords internally and rejecting strong enemies externally. Nie Er's "March of the Volunteers" has emerged, echoing the fate and needs of the times, using music as a sword to split open the historical fate of the Chinese nation's self-improvement and heroic struggle. At this point, "Nie Er and the National Anthem" clarifies the historical fate and survival experience of the Chinese nation in the last century, which was bullied, gradually awakened, and began to resist to unity. At the same time, it integrates Nie Er's personal musical growth with the fate of the country and the nation, triggering the deepest emotional resonance in the hearts of the audience. It connects every audience with the history and destiny of the Chinese nation, and washes away the aesthetic images of beauty and nobility rooted in the national survival emotion. In the world constructed by music, individuals are integrated with the country and the nation, naturally inspiring the patriotic spirit of every audience.

### **3.2 Understanding of Cultural Security**

#### **3.2.1 Interpretation of Cultural Security**

Today, major countries in the world attach great importance to cultural security strategies. The United States, Russia, Germany, France, Japan and other countries are striving to maintain and emphasize the independence and uniqueness of their own national cultures, while vigorously supporting the development of cultural undertakings through laws, regulations and industrial policies, and making every effort to expand the influence of their own cultures in the world. Culture is closely related to national security because it has distinct national, political, and contemporary characteristics. The national character of culture refers to the concentrated embodiment of a nation's historical destiny, survival experience, and inner spirit, as well as the important connection between individuals and the nation as a whole, involving the identification and recognition of individuals and the nation as a whole. The political nature of culture refers to its strong ideological characteristics, which are related to the

survival of a country's political system.<sup>3</sup> The contemporaneity of culture refers to the embodiment of a country or nation's "current" mission in the era, and the inevitable fate of culture is to learn from the past and embrace the new. Therefore, the cultural field is naturally related to national security.

Cultural security does not mean exclusive treatment. Globalization has connected the world, and cultural exchange and learning are both historical trends and objective facts. The excellent cultural forms of others can be borrowed by China, and the cultural content that carries truth, goodness, and beauty can also be absorbed by China. The development history of Chinese national culture is a history of inclusiveness, inheritance and development. It is precisely because of the openness and inclusiveness of Chinese culture that it has a rock-solid world influence, and there is an inherent dialectical relationship between the two.

#### **3.2.2 The Intrinsic Relationship Between Cultural Security and Aesthetic Orientation**

Cultural security requires artistic works to reflect distinct national, political, and contemporary characteristics. The aesthetic value of artistic works lies in presenting the survival history and emotional experience of a nation. "The acceptance of any work always occurs within the historical context of national life. It is this context that constitutes the premise for the work to be experienced, understood, and judged... The aesthetic experience of the recipient is never a priori construction beyond history, but is always dominated by the historical process of the cultural world of the nation in which they live."<sup>4</sup> In the experience of national survival, identity, ideology, and "current" needs become the protagonists, perfectly echoing the national, political, and temporal characteristics of culture. Therefore, the cultural security of a country requires a correct aesthetic orientation, which in turn relies on the guidance of cultural security.

### **3.3 Cultural Security Value of "Nie Er and the National Anthem"**

Music is the most mysterious existence in art and is highly respected. "If we can generally regard

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3. China Institute of Modern International Relations: Culture and National Security, 2021 edition, p11.

4. Wang Defeng, Lecture on Art. Fudan University 2023 edition, p172.

activities in the field of beauty as a liberation of the soul, and a process of breaking free from all oppression and limitations, because art can alleviate the most tragic fate through the images provided for observation, making it an object of appreciation, then music is the one that pushes this freedom to the highest peak.”<sup>5</sup> As a musical work, “Nie Er and the National Anthem” does not need to use external images like painting, sculpture, calligraphy, literature and other art forms to express its inner emotions, but instead uses intangible music to reach the heavens and understand the fate and resilience of the Chinese nation. From the overture to the third movement, the entire work forms a complete narrative structure, echoing from beginning to end. In terms of form, the work revolves around Nie Er's creation of the "March of the Volunteers", but in reality, it sings about the tumultuous historical fate and indomitable spirit of the Chinese nation. Its distinct national character immerses every viewer into the whole of the Chinese nation, evoking grief and indignation for the national humiliation of that time, tears for the suffering compatriots of that time, and uplifting for the heroic struggle of our predecessors. At this moment, the individual and the whole, the present and history, sensibility and truth are perfectly integrated, and a strong sense of identity and belonging arises spontaneously. In addition, “Nie Er and the National Anthem” also has strong political significance. When the work unblocks the individual audience and national history and survival experience, it naturally guides each audience to review the national anthem of the People's Republic of China and the history and emotion of the CPC leading the Chinese people of all ethnic groups to the new China. At this time, the CPC is no longer an abstract concept, but has established close emotional ties with each audience; Adhering to the leadership of the Party is no longer an empty slogan, but a touching and recognized emotion in the hearts of every audience member. Finally, “Nie Er and the National Anthem” also has outstanding contemporaneity. This work takes the most representative symphony in Western music as its form of expression, while writing the purest, most touching, and main melody of Chinese stories, accurately interpreting the fate and characteristics of cultural advancement. This combination of Chinese and Western music creation experience is a typical case of cultural integration. The national, political, and contemporary characteristics of "Nie Er and the National Anthem" are perfectly

integrated with the aesthetic experience of the work. The aesthetic value and cultural security value of the work go hand in hand, echoing each other. While allowing each audience to achieve a transcendent aesthetic experience, each audience also consciously completes a baptism of national spirit and identity. Cultural confidence is rooted in every audience on site through such artistic means.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The symphonic suite "Nie Er and the National Anthem" injects Chinese soul into the form of Western music, using Nie Er's life trajectory and historical background as clues, showcasing the creative process of the "March of the Volunteers" and promoting the spirit of the Chinese nation and the theme of patriotism. “Nie Er and the National Anthem” have achieved success in both aesthetic orientation and cultural security dimensions: in terms of aesthetic orientation, it balances the transcendent experience of formal beauty and emotion; In terms of cultural security, it has distinct national, political, and contemporary characteristics. The national, political, and contemporary characteristics of "Nie Er and the National Anthem" are perfectly integrated with the aesthetic experience of the work. The aesthetic value and cultural security value of the work echo each other, and the transcendent aesthetic experience and the baptism of national spirit care for each other. Cultural confidence and cultural security benefit each other, making great contributions to China's cultural security cause.

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