

Cultural Characteristics and Literature Value of Traditional Guqin Music

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Abstract: *Traditional Guqin music has been deeply rooted in Chinese traditional society. It associates with many aspects of people's lives, such as education, politics, aesthetic and philosophy. The cultural characteristic of Guqin music originating the core of ritual music of Confucianism, which emphasized the effect of morality, is known as Qin Morality. The most prominent expression of Qin Morality is harmony. Traditional Guqin music inherited by classical literature reflects the culture dominated by Confucianism.*

Keywords: *Qin Morality, Guqin music, Harmony*

1. Introduction

The cultural characteristics of traditional Chinese music are closely related to the traditional society that produced it, which is more likely to the Tea described by a Japanese writer, "The philosophy of tea is not only what we usually understand, but also a simple aesthetic taste. It combines ethics and religion, and expresses all our views on man and nature. It is hygiene because it emphasizes cleanliness; It is economics, because it is not extravagant; It's also moral geometry, because it defines our scale relative to the universe. Tea represents the true essence of Oriental democracy, because it makes all believers become nobles in taste."^[1]

The description in the above paragraph reflects the characteristics of tea in religion, nature, hygiene, economics, morality, Oriental culture, aesthetics and so on. The idea can also apply to traditional culture and art, such as Guqin music, calligraphy, painting and martial arts. They all come from the traditional Chinese society and have established contact with the surrounding things since their emergence.

In ancient China, the traditional music is called Yue. Yue is not only an independent musical discipline. According to *Yue Ji*, "A gentleman who opposes emotion to his will and achieves his deeds by comparing other kinds. Forbidding the lust far away from his wise. Forbidding the traitor far away from his heart. Making the breath of laziness, slow walker and evil disengaging his body. His ears, eyes, nose, heart and body are all in order to carry out his righteousness. Then, the sound, the text, the music, the movement, the feather, the pipe, the light of virtue, and the sum of the four Qi are used. Therefore, the clear and bright is like heaven, the vast is like the four seasons, circulation is like wind and rain, five colors are written but not chaotic, eight winds follows the sound law but not treacherous, hundreds of measure has a number but regular, the small and the big are combined, the clear and turbid are advocated, which are all transformed to the classics gradually. Therefore, it's better to be happy and honest, smart in ears and eyes, peaceful in blood, and change customs."^[2] The premise of Yue is to have a good state of body and mind. The sound and dance based on "obedience" and "righteousness" all have "the light of supreme virtue" and "the sum of four Qi", and the weather emitted by Yue can be in harmony with the world, the four seasons and the wind and rain, so as to achieve the state of "smart ears and eyes", "peaceful blood", "changing customs" and "peaceful world". It can be seen that the importance of Yue is related to body and mind, breath and blood, social customs, interpersonal relations, politics and humanities. In modern society, the so-called music has become an independent discipline, with its own components and elements. This different thought come from the "professionalism"^[3] of the Western cultural trend in the late Qing Dynasty. It leads to the classification and differentiation of disciplines. Traditional Chinese music and modern music are also influenced by this trend of thought. They have a serious tendency of differentiation, which is also an important reason for the crisis of traditional Chinese culture in modern society and the re-exploration of the cultural characteristics and literature value of traditional Chinese music.

The formation of Chinese traditional Guqin music culture has also gone through a long development process in the Chinese society. The music entity of traditional Guqin music is rarely preserved, so the vast majority of its cultural characteristics are contained in the Yue literature of the past dynasties. Only through the collation and excavation of the Yue literature can the cultural characteristics of Guqin music be further reflected.

2. Literature Review

Since modern times, there are less thesis discussing the culture of Guqin music, but more articles about Guqin persons, Guqin matter, Guqin music and so on. There are two representative articles about the cultural characteristics of Guqin music. The first is "A preliminary study of Chinese medieval culture and Shi culture" by Geng Huiqin and Liu Yiqing^[4]. This paper studies from the level of classical literature bibliography and finds that the Confucian "Morality" cultural characteristics of Guqin in the historical evolution have penetrated into other groups, making the "Morality" culture become the universal cultivation of Guqin practitioners. The second is "The care of Confucianism in the Song and Ming Dynasties for cultivating self-cultivation by Guqin - from cultivating the nature and correcting the mind to the demonstration of 'emotion' " by Fan Xiaoli^[5], which goes deep into the Confucianism in the Song and Ming Dynasties to explore the internal moral cultural characteristics of Guqin. These two articles are excellent works to explore the traditional cultural characteristics of Guqin, and both adopt the method of philology.

In this study, the cultural characteristics of Guqin are mainly summarized, hoping to further extend the thought of Confucianism morality and the important relationships between Chinese traditional literature and culture.

3. Analysis

The early Guqin literature is included in the Yue literature. As a small part of Yue, Guqin, together with other musical instruments, poetry and dance, often participates in the creation of Yue, educating people's temperament and promoting the harmonious coexistence of heaven, earth and man. Based on the literature on Guqin music, it is obvious that Guqin music activities are closely combined with the sacrificial rites in ancient times. For example, as the book of historical records *Kui* said, "Beat the ball, Bo, Fu, Guqin and Se to sing". The ancestors' ghost come, Shun's honored guests seated, ministers are humble. Pipes and drums are placed in the lower ground, Zhu and Yu are used to start and end the Yue. With Sheng and Yong, birds and animals staggering dance; Xiao Shao is played by nine times, the phoenix comes. Besides, as *Kui* said, "Yu! To strike a stone, and to lead a hundred beasts to dance."^[6]

This passage renders the music scene of Yu Shun when he offered sacrifices to his ancestors. According to the records of the historic book, Guqin and Se had existed at that time. The *ancestors' ghost come* in the article shows the identity of the sacrificial object, *Shun's honored guests seated* and *ministers are humble* exaggerate the solemn and grand sense of the appearance, and the magical effect of music is set off by *Xiao Shao played by nine times* and *the phoenix comes*. *Yili* recorded the selection of virtuous persons and the use of music on shooting occasions in the pre-Qin period. Guqin and Se were used in the hall, and the music content was selected from *Shi Jing*. In the book of *Rites of Zhou*, it is clear that the music officer of the highest rank, Da Si Yue, was in charge of Chengjun which was the university of Zhou Dynasty, and his duty was very important.

"Those who have Tao and morality should teach, and those who die should be regarded as the ancestors of music and sacrificed with Gu ancestor."^[7] The words "Morality" highlight the essence of the highest level musical officials. According to *Rites of Zhou*, the music of six generations, such as *Yunmen*, *Xianchi* and *Jiushao*, which sacrifice heaven, earth and mountains, were played with Guqin in different places, such as Yunhe, Kongsang and Longmen. On the whole, Guqin literature in the pre-Qin period outlines its early cultural identity. As a small part of Yue, it participated in the performance of music, followed the development of Yue from ancient sacrificial music to ritual music in Zhou Dynasty, and carried the "Morality" of the highest attribute of Yue in the later evolution.

In the spring and Autumn period, Confucius reorganized "Six Classics", established private schools, promoted rites, Yue, archery, horseback riding, calligraphy and mathematics, and cultivated many disciples. Coupled with the changes in the internal structure of the society, Shi stratum became more and more active, and the intellectual stratum expanded from the aristocracy to the Shi stratum, which promoted the spread of cultural ideas in the society. From the collapse of ritual music and the war in

Qin Dynasty to the period of Emperor Wu of Han Dynasty, Guqin music further consolidated the position of Confucian thought of ritual music.

According to Huan Tan's *Xin Lun*, "Among the Eight Sound, only the String is the most, and Guqin is the first instrument of the String. The Eight Sound are broad, and Qin Morality is the best."^[8] Since the establishment of the theory of "Qin Morality" in the Han Dynasty, "Qin Morality" has become a symbol of the humanistic spirit that connects the pre-Qin Dynasty with the Ming and Qing Dynasties and runs through the history of Guqin music and Guqin studies for thousands of years. It is also the biggest cultural characteristic and the most critical literature value of traditional Guqin music.

Qin Morality is the inheritance and continuation of the spirit of Yue in ancient times. In the *Book of Rites*, there is a large amount of spaces to discuss the meaning of Yue, "Great Yue is in harmony with heaven and earth, great Rites are harmony with heaven and earth. Harmony, then all the things won't lost; Moderation, then the sacrifice appear. When it is brighter, there are Rites and Yue, while it is secluded, there are ghosts and gods. In this way, there will be mutual respect and love among the four seas. Rites is that people will respect each other in different things. Yue is that people will love each other in different cultures."^[9] Owing to that, Yue imitates the rule of heaven, which will make people love each other.

As *Book of Rites* says, "When the atmosphere from the earth rise and the atmosphere from the heaven fall, Yin and Yang rub each other, heaven and earth swing each other, the thunder beat the drums, the wind and rain struggle together, the four seasons rotating, the warm is filled with sun and moon, and the hundred changes are flourishing. In this way, Yue is the harmony between heaven and earth."^[10] It indicates that Yue means the harmony created by heaven and earth. Here is another example, "Rites and Yue lie in the earth and make the heaven to be extreme, running by Yin and Yang, unblocking between ghosts and gods, beyond the high and exhausting the far. Yue exist in the beginning, and Rites appear with substances. The heaven keeps moving, and the earth keeps quiescent. A move and a stillness, also between the heaven and the earth. So the sage says, "It is called Rites and Yue."^[11] Rites and Yue are based on the spirit of heaven and earth. Yue that corresponds to the spirit of heaven and earth is great and virtuous. Therefore, the spirit corresponding to the heaven and earth could be called Yue Morality.

From the beginning of Guqin making, the idea of Yue Morality has been injected into Guqin. In the Eastern Han Dynasty, Huan Tan's *New Treatise on Qin Tao* chapter interprets Guqin making according to the law of heaven and earth, "In the past, Shennong followed Mi Xi to rule the world, observing the law from heaven, taking the law from earth, taking all the things near and far away, so he began to cut tongs into Guqin, practicing silk as strings, and connecting the virtue of gods with the harmony of heaven and earth."^[12] Whether it is Yue Morality or Qin Morality, its essence emphasizes the spirit of "harmony between heaven and earth". The "harmony between heaven and earth" includes the harmony between people, between man and nature, and the integration of all things in the world.

The word "harmony" often has an important position in Qin essays. At the beginning of Guqin argumentation, Liu Ji of the Northern Song Dynasty said, "Guqin is forbidden. Forbid evil and return to the right, so as to harmonize people's heart."^[13] In the Ming Dynasty, Xu Shangying's *Xi Shan Qin Kuang* listed the "Harmony" as the first of the 24 virtues, "Harmony is the most holy in ancient times, has a good mind of nature, and is virtuous in coordinating with gods and men. Harmony manages the temperament of the whole body and the temperament of the people in the world, it is why people invent Guqin in the world. The most important thing of Guqin is Harmony."^[14] It also summarizes three kinds of Harmony: the harmony between the finger and the string, the harmony between the finger and the sound, and the harmony between the sound and the meaning. Shen Guan's *Qin Li Guan Guan* in Qing Dynasty said, "Using five tones, making the rules by six laws, so that the size will be moderate and the sound will be harmonious."^[15] It can be seen that "harmony" is the key characteristic of Qin Morality in the opinion of ancient Chinese culture.

4. Results

In the development of Guqin music with Confucian culture as the main line, Taoism, Buddhism, Yin Yang School and other cultural nutrients are constantly absorbed into Guqin, especially the Taoism culture represented by Lao Zhuang is an important supplement to the cultural characteristics of Qin music. Nevertheless, Qin Morality which is the key feature coming from Confucianism is the fundamental axis and ultimate pursuit of Guqin music, and Taoism infiltrates into Guqin skills, Guqin theories, Guqin music interpretation and so on. The cultural characteristics of traditional Guqin music

begin from the source of Chinese culture and lasts until the Qing Dynasty. It formed a music culture that interacted with all things, customs, humanities, physical, mental and nature. Its primary cultural characteristic is Qin Morality handed down from ancient times. The classical literature is the carrier of various Guqin cultural characteristics, which can be gotten a glimpse of the score, theory, instrument, history and study of Guqin carrying the cultural characteristics of traditional Yue, and play the real role and bright value of Chinese traditional Guqin music.

5. Discussion

This paper mainly discusses the Confucianism and its core expression contained in the characteristics of Guqin culture through Chinese traditional literature, and does not clarify the characteristics of Taoism and Buddhism in Guqin culture. This is because Confucianism has always been the domination of Guqin culture. Although Taoism and Buddhism have successively participated in the historical development process and jointly constructed the cultural characteristics of Guqin with Confucianism, however, it has not changed the fundamental characteristics of Guqin. This demonstration process is also very huge, and the cited literature is also very vast. The author hopes to further explore how other cultures affect the cultural character of Guqin and what kind of role they play in the future.

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- [3] Wang Fansen proposed "professionalism" in the *Genealogy of Chinese Modern Thought and the Pedigree of Academic*, he wrote, *In the late Qing Dynasty, western scientific and technological knowledge poured in, repeating setbacks in China, a kind of professionalism has arisen, on the one hand, emphasizing the pursuit of applied knowledge and skills, and the rise of the concept of division of labor and specialization, replacing the original ideal of "Mastery" of Confucianism, or the idea that a gentleman does not have "tools".* Wang Fansen. *Genealogy of Modern Chinese Thought and the Pedigree of Academic*. Shanghai: Sanlian Bookstore. 2018. pp. 304.
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