

An analysis of the humanistic spirit of ancient Chinese literati music

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Abstract: *The humanistic spirit of ancient Chinese literati music reflects their contemplation and expression of life, nature, and human emotions, showcasing profound humanistic emotions and artistic pursuits. In ancient literati music, art and philosophy were combined to convey their unique understanding and emotional experience of the world through musical works. This humanistic spirit often manifests as emotional delicacy, aesthetic pursuit, and profound thinking. Ancient literati music is not only music itself, but also a cultural symbol that reflects the style and value orientation of society at that time. Through in-depth exploration and understanding of the humanistic spirit of ancient Chinese literati music, we can better appreciate the emotional world and aesthetic pursuits of the ancients, while also feeling the cultural connotations and spiritual power contained in music, so as to inherit and carry forward these precious musical heritages and continue to bring enlightenment and inspiration to contemporary society.*

Keywords: *Literary music; Humanistic spirit; Music works; Emotional experience*

1. Introduction

The music of ancient Chinese literati is an important component of traditional Chinese culture, with a unique humanistic spirit. In ancient times, literati music was widely used to express their emotions towards life, nature, and human emotions, showcasing profound intellectual realms and artistic pursuits. Literary music is not only a form of music, but also a cultural symbol that reflects the style, values, and aesthetic pursuits of society at that time. These musical works incorporate the unique understanding of the world by literati, conveying the humanistic spirit of ancient literati through the combination of music and literature, as well as the expression of individual emotions and grand philosophy. This article aims to delve into the humanistic spirit of ancient Chinese literati music, explore its artistic characteristics and role, as well as its influence and inheritance on future music and culture. Through the study of ancient literati music, we will better understand and appreciate this unique form of music art, and at the same time, we can draw the power of humanistic spirit from it, providing inspiration and reference for the development of contemporary society^[1].

2. The characteristics of literati music

As an important component of ancient Chinese culture, literati music has unique and rich characteristics. Firstly, literary music is closely integrated with literature and art, often incorporating literary works such as poetry and prose into music creation to express emotions and thoughts. Secondly, literati music emphasizes the expression of philosophy and emotions, conveying the composer's profound understanding and emotional expression of life, nature, and human emotions through music melody, rhythm, and melody, reflecting the richness and depth of literati's inner world. In addition, literati music pursues a noble aesthetic realm, not only emphasizing harmony and beauty in melody, but also containing the concept of self-cultivation behind music, guiding people to respect nature and pursue spiritual sublimation. In summary, the characteristics of literati music lie in its fusion of literature and art, expression of philosophical emotions, and enhancement of aesthetic pursuits. It is one of the unique and charming art forms in ancient Chinese culture^[2].

3. The influence and inheritance of ancient literati music

Ancient literati music has had a profound impact on the development of Chinese music and culture.

Firstly, literati music has had a significant impact on the creation and performance of music in later generations. Many classic poems have been adapted into songs or melodies, becoming famous songs that have been passed down to this day. The unique style and expressive techniques of literati music have also been cited and developed by later musicians, enriching the artistic language and style of Chinese music. Secondly, the influence of literati music on literature and poetry cannot be ignored. Numerous literary music works have incorporated beautiful words, phrases, and artistic conception, blurring the boundary between music and literature, drawing on and blending with each other. This combination of literature and music held an important position in the history of ancient Chinese literature and had a wide influence on later literary works. In addition, the humanistic spirit of ancient literati music has also been inherited and protected in today's era. Many important musicians and music groups are committed to inheriting and promoting the artistic value and humanistic sentiment of ancient literati music. They perform traditional ancient music repertoire, explore and study historical music culture, bring the excellent traditions of literati music into the contemporary era, and pass them on to more people^[3-5].

In summary, ancient literati music has had a profound impact on Chinese music and culture through its unique forms of expression and humanistic spirit. It not only provided important inspiration for the development of music in later generations, but also played a positive role in promoting other art forms such as literature and poetry. By inheriting and protecting the music of ancient literati, we can better understand and appreciate the charm of this traditional art, while combining it with contemporary music and culture to showcase new vitality and charm.

4. The embodiment of humanistic spirit in ancient music

4.1 Extraordinary and refined: exploring the enchanting charm of the Qin

Guqin music is an important component of ancient Chinese literati music. Su Jing believed in the "Spring Grass Hall Qinpu: Eight Principles of Guqin" that "the qin, as a tool, has the vowel sounds of heaven and earth, the virtue of nurturing harmony, and the subtle essence of the Tao. Therefore, when the guqin is used, the heart surpasses the object, and the sound is natural and subtle, which is difficult to describe. At this time, there is a unique understanding of the heart and ears." Cui Zundu, a renowned qin scholar, believed that "the harmony of heaven and earth is not limited to music, and the pleasure of music is not close to the qin." Therefore, in ancient China, there was a tradition of "a scholar must play the qin, and the qin must be based on the scholar", and there was a rule that "a scholar must not be proficient in the qin and zither for no reason"^[6-8].

The shape, size, length, and thickness of the guqin create a vivid, empathetic, and attentive effect on individuals, evoking an abstract sense. Moreover, the volume, timbre, range, and rhythm of the guqin produce an auditory experience that transcends the ordinary, offering a sensory journey to the extraordinary. Ancient literati seamlessly connected with nature through the serene, vast, and distant ambiance of qin music. By immersing themselves in this environment, they were able to detach from the external world, transcend their physical selves, and enter a realm of profound spiritual elevation, achieving a state of complete absorption of mind and body. The ancient literati firmly believed that music had the power to elevate the spirit, enchant life, and guide individuals into an artistic dimension where the boundaries between reality and music blur into oblivion. This state of mind resonates with the sentiments expressed by notable figures throughout Chinese history, such as Confucius, Tao Yuanming, and Chang Jian, reflecting a profound essence of transcendence akin to Zhuangzi's philosophy. Zhuangzi advocated for a transcendental existence, symbolized by abstaining from worldly pleasures, merging with nature, and venturing into realms beyond the ordinary human experience.

4.2 Misty and subtle - like turning into rhyme, the melody captures its emotions

The powerful charm of music art lies in the fact that it can create artistic conception and atmosphere more than other art categories, and the ancient literati music is more obvious here. Whether it is lyricism music or Guqin music, it has the advantage of weaving artistic conception and creating atmosphere. Take Guqin music for example, the timbre of Guqin is neither bright nor round, it sounds very lazy and loose, with a sense of dispelling the sorrow of the world, escaping the annoyance and escaping into the void. At the same time, due to its "Yue Mountain" not directly pressing on the panel, but resonating through the vibration of the body in the chamber, the sound volume of the guqin is small and the tone is implicit, giving the listener a hazy feeling. Whether it is the turbulent flow brought by

the Qingcheng Taoist's "rolling, brushing, chuo, and annotation" to "Flowing Water", or the sadness, anger, and killing atmosphere overflowing in "Guangling San" by Ji Kang's execution in Dongshi, this hazy feeling has always existed to varying degrees in the ancient qin music that has been passed down to this day, becoming a major feature of the ancient qin. This diluted and convoluted way of expression is like an invisible paintbrush vaguely depicting a hazy picture deep in the listener's heart. Although this painting may not be loud enough to please the world, it can tactfully nourish the character of a gentleman. Looking at the melody and music, Jiang Kui (also known as Baishi Daoren), a famous writer and musician of the Song Dynasty, is the only person whose collection of lyrics with music scores has been passed down to this day. He advocates "language is precious and implicit", which is not only strongly advocated in his poetry, but also fully reflected in his musical expression. The current collection of "Baishi Taoist Songs" includes 17 lyrics and songs, including 14 self-taught songs, including "Pale Yellow Willow" and "Yangzhou Slow", almost every capital is a reflection of subtle beauty^[9].

Chinese ancient literati were known for their "cautious" and "virtuous" demeanor, emphasizing the importance of remaining unaffected by emotions such as joy, anger, sorrow, or pleasure. They believed in taking a contemplative approach, navigating around obstacles with care, observing nature with a keen eye – noticing trees and water along the shore, and perceiving flowers in the mist as if they were ethereal. The Ming Dynasty guqin master Xu Shangying once aptly noted, "If there is not enough within the string, then there is abundance outside the string." Here, the phrase "there is abundance outside the string" signifies how ancient literati were awakened by music, allowing it to resonate within them, much like poetry capturing their deepest emotions. Engaging in meditative practices amidst the morning breeze and evening clouds, they sought a transcendental experience infused with unparalleled charm. It can be argued that the subtle yet profound pursuit of Chinese literati cultivated a humanistic spirit in their music, enriching it with deeper meaning and significance.

4.3 Peace and tranquility: embracing the serene delight of Qin music

Confucianism advocates for the musical concept of "harmony between ritual and music", showcasing the aesthetic characteristics of "simplicity and harmony" everywhere; Taoism advocates the music concept of "the voice of great hope", pursuing a noble attitude of inaction, tranquility, non contentment, and questioning of the heart, as well as the spirit of the Tao. Due to the long-term constraints of Confucianism and Taoism, ancient Chinese literati music had certain requirements in both content and form. It should not be too extreme, too crazy, or too obvious, but should emphasize restraint, peace, and moderation. It should be "happy but not lewd, sad but not hurt", reflecting a mentality of not being surprised, leisurely and content, and advocating leisure and leisure^[10].

In general, when the sound of a musical instrument is faint, it often loses its richness and depth; however, the guqin presents an intriguing contrast to this norm. The softer the sound, the more profound the essence, embodying what is known as the "tranquil taste." The aesthetic beauty of "peace" and "tranquility" finds full expression in literati qin music. Through pieces such as "Xiao Xiang Shui Yun," "Scratching the Head," and "Shui Xian Cao," we can discern Xu Shangying's depiction in "Xi Shan Qin Kuang" of qualities like being discerning but not arrogant, restrained but not aloof, pure but not unsettled, and honorable but not self-serving. Bai Juyi's lyrical portrayal in "Qingye Qinxing" further elucidates this theme by evoking a sense that "the chill emanates from the wood while the tranquility echoes in one's heart," and how "the pure sound becomes primal, illuminating the clarity and weightiness of the world." Both guqin music and traditional tonal music offer literati the opportunity to immerse themselves in artistic reflections on life's indifference, powerlessness, emptiness, tranquility, and transcendence above worldly concerns and mortality.

The music of ancient Chinese literati has long been steeped in this realm of "peace and tranquility," shaping the introverted and conservative tendencies of the Chinese nation, nurturing their innate inclination towards serenity, stability, and virtue, and upholding the moral ideals and personal allure of their forebears.

4.4 Fishing, meditation, woodcutting, and leisure - unveiling the profound meaning behind a Man's decision to abstain from fishing

The fisherman and the woodcutter, as important carriers and symbolic symbols for ancient literati to express their emotions towards mountains and rivers and purify their spirits, reflect obvious "hidden" and "elegant" thoughts in the music of ancient Chinese literati. This kind of seclusion involves both

helplessness and dissatisfaction with reality and the present, as well as a desire and longing for ideals and freedom. It also includes the pursuit of continuing life and transcending the cycle of life and death. "The world understands the profound meaning, and this man's choice is not to take fish.!"

Music works with themes of fishing and woodcutting are indeed common in literati music. For example, the ancient qin piece "Drunken Fishing Sings at Night" was created by poets Pi Rixiu and Lu Guimeng in the late Tang Dynasty. Additionally, qin pieces like "Fishing Song" and "Woodcutting Song," which were created by the Zhejiang school qin master Mao Xun in the Southern Song Dynasty, as well as the anonymous qin piece "Fishing and Woodcutting Q&A" from the Ming Dynasty, and the pipa piece "Fisherman's Music," are all representative works. During that time, ancient literati lived a leisurely and carefree social life. However, they often developed a sense of pessimism and disillusionment due to their inability to achieve their aspirations or setbacks. The fisherman and woodcutter, far removed from the hustle and bustle of daily life, represented a humble yet content existence. Despite their poverty, they found solace in their simple but fulfilling lives. This way of life resonated with the aspirations and pursuits of the literati. The guqin music and classical Chinese music created in this context carry profound and serene artistic conceptions. They serve as a cure for the spiritual emptiness experienced by the literati, enabling them to detach themselves from the worries and troubles of the world. It allows them to retreat into the simplicity of their own inner sanctuary, harmonizing their lives with the changing seasons. This aspect holds significant meaning within literati music.

Literary music also uses themes of fishing and woodcutting to express leisure and leisure, such as the Tang Dynasty qin song "Fishing Song Tune", which is a representative work that expresses the mood of "leisure". The spiritual pursuit and aesthetic conception of "Yi" is an attempt to achieve harmony between heaven and humanity through blending with nature, calming down and forgetting all praise and disgrace. The fisherman and woodcutter immerse themselves in the mountains and rivers all year round, imbued with the spiritual energy of the mountains and rivers. The light and shadows of the mountains and rivers contain all the joys and sorrows, joys and sorrows, and even the countless circumstances here become real and plain, ultimately returning to tranquility and indifference.

4.5 Peaceful and lofty - self-cultivation, family harmony, governance, and world peace

Literati music represents the life style of the ancient Chinese literati, which is a symbol of perfecting self-cultivation and realizing the pursuit of life ideal. In fact, since the time of Confucius, scholars and officials have regarded Guqin and Guqin music as a kind of humanistic spirit for cultivating one's self, regulating one's family, governing the country, and leveling the world.

The Ming Dynasty Guqin master Yang Biao said in his book "Revising the Zhenzhuo Qinpu": "... When playing the guqin, one must choose a clean room and high hall, or ascend to the top of a building, or climb mountains and rocks, or swim in the water and Mekong, or observe the temple. When the two energies are high and bright, on a night of clear wind and bright moon, burn incense and sit still in the room, with the heart not racing outside, and the qi and blood being peaceful. Only when the spirit is in harmony with the way. If one does not encounter a close friend, it is better to drum their ears to the clear wind and bright moon, the strange rocks of the pine trees, and the ape and old crane at the top, for their own pleasure." Literary music emphasizes creating a cultural atmosphere and taste, inheriting a humanistic spirit, and advocating an elegant, indifferent, and peaceful life. The body language and standardized movements of playing the guqin convey the beauty of harmony between humans and nature in a specific environmental atmosphere: there is no noise, worry, and sorrow, only the sound of birds and the fragrance of flowers, flowing clouds and flowing water. The spirit of both the qin player and the listener is sublimated. After Su Shi was demoted to Huangzhou, he often used the guqin to relieve himself of the hardships in his career, in order to stay away from the turbulent political vortex. Many ancient literati, like Su Shi, have gone through their ups and downs of life with the accompaniment of ancient qin and music. For thousands of years, literati music has always been loved by ancient Chinese literati and literati. They combined the external environment with the internal state of mind, the expression of music with the pursuit of life, and the thought of music with the soul of literati. Therefore, literati music has a high and distinct cultural attribute, containing rich and profound humanistic spirit.

5. Conclusion

In summary, ancient Chinese literati music, with its unique humanistic spirit, occupies an important

position in traditional Chinese culture. It not only provides a way for writers to think and reflect, but also becomes a carrier for the general public to feel and experience a better life. This kind of music combines depth and tranquility, allowing people to transcend the contradictions and troubles of reality and pursue inner peace and wisdom. The inheritance and promotion of this humanistic spirit is of great significance for maintaining and inheriting the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation.

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