

# New Development Direction of China Traditional Music: Based on the Music of Han Dynasty

Ma Xuelai<sup>1,a,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*School of Music, Philippine Women's University, Manila, Philippines*

<sup>a</sup>*2022t0845@pwu.edu.ph*

<sup>\*</sup>*Corresponding author*

**Abstract:** *The music of China has a rich historical background, as well as a rich folk cultural tradition. These resources are living cultures, attracting the interest of Chinese and foreign scholars. Development of traditional music in China is in the same strain, with the characteristics of simplicity, approachability, vividness and flexibility. With the change of the times and the development of globalization, China traditional music needs to find new development ideas. This paper takes the new development direction of China's Han Dynasty (B.C. 206-B.C. 220) music as the research theme, and expounds the four directions of traditional music: the background of the times, traditional performance forms, modern new forms and the inheritance of aesthetic ideas, and puts forward new ideas for the development of China's traditional music.*

**Keywords:** *Traditional Music of China, Music of Han Dynasty, New Direction, Inheritance of Aesthetics*

## 1. Introduction

The traditional music in China has a long history. According to the original musical instruments such as stone chimes, bone whistles and bone flutes in the Neolithic period and related historical materials, the origin, formation and development of China music have a history of more than 8,000 years. As early as ancient times and Xia and Shang dynasties (about 4000 years ago), there have been some representative large-scale music and dance. Music in China once had a far-reaching influence on the music around China. From Confucius (founder of Confucianism) to modern western music, China music has been enriched and developed in the process of absorbing foreign music elements. China is known as the country of rites and music, and China's traditional music plays an important role in personality cultivation, cultural life and sacrificial rites. The music of Han Dynasty is an extremely important part of Chinese national music. In the Han Dynasty, the Han culture in the Central Plains was the main body, which combined the strengths of various ethnic cultures, reflecting unprecedented richness and integration, and the development of music culture entered the stage of popular music from elegant music. During this period, the rulers reorganized the music system, expanded the main music institution "Yuefu", and gave full play to Yuefu's large-scale collection and arrangement of folk music. At the same time, the folk music was innovatively composed in Yuefu, so that the rulers could understand the people's feelings, enjoy themselves and consolidate their rule.

## 2. Development Background of China Traditional Music

### 2.1. Three periods of the development of traditional music

Xia and Shang Dynasties to Qin and Han Dynasties (about 21st century BC to 3rd century AD). This period is the formation stage of China traditional music, which experienced the evolution from primitive music and dance to court music and dance. In terms of melody, tone and scale form, it experienced that the original music began to pay attention to the tones of different intervals, and then initially established the pentatonic characteristics of China traditional music.<sup>[1]</sup> In the aspect of music aesthetics, with the class differentiation and class struggle becoming more and more complicated and sharp, the situation of "hundred schools of thought contending with each other" has been formed, and people's understanding of beauty and aesthetic consciousness are gradually deepening, among which three schools, Confucianism, Mohism and Taoism, are the most representative. During this period, the

most representative musical art forms are large-scale instrumental music such as bell and drum bands.

Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties to Sui and Tang Dynasties (about 4th century to 10th century). The political turmoil in the early stage of this period had a certain impact on the development of traditional music in China. In the Tang Dynasty, due to the open national policy and prosperous economy, China's traditional music made new progress in introducing musical instruments, music rules, music and music theory, and created a new generation of international music style.<sup>[2]</sup> On the one hand, it is the China of world music, including the China of foreign music and the use of foreign musical instruments. On the other hand, it is the globalization of China's music. China's music, with its brilliant achievements, has exerted great influence on many countries in the world (especially East Asian countries, such as North Korea and Japan).<sup>[3]</sup>

From the Song and Yuan Dynasties to the Ming and Qing Dynasties (about the 10th century to the 19th century). The music culture of this period has the characteristics of secularity and sociality. Secularity means that music is closely related to the ordinary civilian class. The traditional music of this period has a broader social foundation in terms of performers and audiences. In the aspect of music theory, it shows the tendency of inheriting and sorting out the previous period. The musical morphological characteristics of this period have gradually solidified and stereotyped. Its representative music art form is opera art. This art form inherits the previous generation and the next generation, and widely absorbs the new achievements of contemporary music, becoming a music treasure house that integrates ancient and modern music.

## ***2.2. The background of music development in Han Dynasty***

In the history of China, the Han Dynasty played a key role in connecting the preceding with the following, and it was an important period when the art of music and dance achieved great historical development. The Han dynasty can be divided into two stages according to the period: the Western Han Dynasty and the Eastern Han Dynasty, and is called the Han Dynasty by later scholars. In the Han Dynasty, the royal power was highly concentrated, and enfeoffment posts were set up in various regions, resulting in many rich and lively places. This political system has a high degree of centralization as a whole, and it also gives full play to the value of various official positions. This enables all localities to better manage state affairs, which is conducive to the improvement of people's material level, but also greatly enriches people's spiritual life, and people's artistic and recreational activities are more colorful.

In terms of politics and economy, the emperor at that time praised the development of agriculture, which gradually enriched the country's grain depot. The emperor himself was very frugal, and the civil and military officials were not extravagant. With the gradual recovery and improvement of social production, the social economy has developed rapidly, the living standards of the people have been materially guaranteed, and there has been a scene of stability and prosperity that has not been seen for many years. This laid a certain economic foundation for Emperor Wudi's perennial campaign. After Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty ascended the throne, he made many explorations and gradually expanded the territory of the Han Dynasty, which was called the prosperous time of Hanwu by later generations.

As far as cultural thought is concerned, the most popular thought in the early Western Han Dynasty is Huang Lao's thought, which is a theory advocated by Huangdi and Laozi. The theory of Huang Lao belongs to a part of Taoist thought, and at the same time, it absorbs the integration of Yin Yang theory, Confucianism, Legalism and Mohism, which is the inheritance and development of Taoist thought. Later, the influence of Confucian school began to sprout bit by bit. In the period of Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty, Confucianism overwhelmed hundred schools of thought and became the orthodox thought of the Han Dynasty at that time. Confucianism not only played a certain role in the harmonious development of social clubs, but also had a certain impact on talent training and artistic and cultural development.

On the aspect of music, the development of music and dance in the Han Dynasty has changed the situation that the Han Dynasty has been dominated vertically since the Qin Dynasty, and started a new situation of vertical and horizontal absorption and combined development. The art of music and dance pays more attention to artistic performance, and there are more famous music works and dancers among the people. As a collection institution of folk art, Yuefu organization began to collect and adopt widely, and its form became unprecedentedly prosperous, making music one of the main entertainment means in people's lives. The grand development of music and dance in Han Dynasty is closely related

to the establishment of Yuefu organization. Yuefu represents the central government. With the royal background, Yuefu collected, arranged, choreographed and performed various kinds of music and dances from civil and military officials, musicians and kabuki, and local folk artists. For example, literati write lyrics and compose songs, musicians who know the melody arrange music, and professional actors and acrobats perform. Undoubtedly, these music and dance activities of the royal family were an important driving force for the development of music and dance in the Han Dynasty.

### 3. Traditional Music Form of China Represented by the Music of Han Dynasty

The rulers of the Han dynasty carried out the enlightened policy of "having fun with the people" and held large-scale mass music performances regularly to show their national prestige and show their unity. These large-scale literary and artistic activities are mostly held in the square or in front of the temple, with tens of thousands of audiences, and their scale can be seen. These magnificent artistic activities also reflect the transformation of social music life in the Han Dynasty from imperial palace to mass entertainment.

In ancient China, the occurrence of rites and music was often associated with sacrifice. Among them, music also bears the function of sacrifice. Emperor Gaozu once ordered Shu Suntong (a famous minister in the Han Dynasty) to reset the system of rites and music, but due to the social nature of the Han Dynasty and various other reasons, the rites and music of the previous Zhou Dynasty could not be restored at this time. The emerging music in the Han Dynasty, drum-blowing music, was first used by the ruling class as ceremonial music to show off prestige and merit.<sup>[4]</sup> Drum-blowing bands will be used in the ceremonial activities of the royal court in Han Dynasty, such as driving, offering sacrifices, and attending the court. Etiquette music bands are mainly drum music, and mainly small bands, usually less than ten people, at least one or two people. Etiquette music in the Han Dynasty is not only the ceremonial ceremony of the court army, but also the capital that ordinary officials and rich people show off, and it is a common music social activity. Meanwhile, funeral ceremonies in the Han Dynasty also used drumming music, which was sometimes used by rulers as a reward to reward generals.

The music used in banquets is a form of music activity with the largest content and quantity in the music images of the Han Dynasty. It is also the music form that best embodies the characteristics of the coexistence and mutual blending of elegance and vulgarity in Han Dynasty music.<sup>[5]</sup> Since the establishment of Yuefu by Emperor Wudi in the Han Dynasty, song and dance have been used not only in the royal palace to entertain ministers, but also by aristocratic ministers and officials to enrich the people and entertain guests. Banquet music is especially loved by people and has become an important musical life form in Han society. In the tomb of a Han Dynasty in Shandong Province, there is a stone carving depicting the life of the Han Dynasty, including the scene of a band during a banquet. Many images of feasting, singing and dancing were found in the stone reliefs of the Han Dynasty, which was a concrete portrayal of social life at that time.

People in the Han Dynasty also liked to enjoy instrumental music and dance performances. The art before the Han Dynasty was a form of "poetry, music and dance". In the Han Dynasty, with the gradual separation of poetry from music and dance, the independence of instrumental music and song and dance appeared, resulting in a new art form. The prevalence of song and dance in Han Dynasty, not only the ruling class was immersed in the pleasure of singing and dancing, but also the princes, nobles and officials all took pleasure in it. With the prosperity of society and the integration of multi-cultures, song and dance in the Han Dynasty flourished, resulting in a variety of dance forms, such as sleeve dance and plate-drum dance. Sleeve dance is a kind of dance with dancing sleeves, and dancers use the long sleeves of dresses to create a different aesthetic feeling. Plate-drum dance is a kind of dance in which drumming is the rhythm and dancers step on the plate. This kind of "disc" is also similar to a drum. It can make a sound after being trampled, and its number is unregulated, mostly seven, so it is also called "seven-plate dance". We can generally see the colorful songs and dances of the Han Dynasty through the cultural relics of songs and dances excavated today. In addition, there were large square performances in the Han Dynasty. The performance of singing, dancing, drumming and acrobatic performances in Han portraits is called "Hundred Dramas". This kind of performance form, often in large squares, has a large audience and is a new folk cultural activity. It comprehensively shows the "Hundred Dramas" of the Han Dynasty from many angles and directions, and the scene is magnificent, which comprehensively reflects the diverse and splendid features of the music culture of the Han Dynasty.

#### 4. New Deformation and New Direction of Traditional Music Represented by Han Dynasty Music

The traditional music in China is the music with the national morphological characteristics created by China people by using their own methods and adopting their own forms. These music include not only ancient works produced and circulated in history, but also contemporary works with traditional styles. The difference between traditional music and new music lies not in the sequence of creation time, but in its expression form and style characteristics. In modern times, the new development of traditional music is to combine the aesthetic character that has lasted for thousands of years with the current fashion trend to form certain new ideas, which is the crystallization of music development.

##### 4.1. *The modern music with ancient style*

Modern music with ancient style is the embodiment of China's traditional artistic spirit in the new era. Ancient style music, that is, adding some ancient China allusions to the music as the creative background, and using modern musical expressions to sing a classical flavor. Its music style is biased towards traditional oriental performance, and some oriental musical instruments are added, so the tone of the whole song is euphemistic and looped, which has a traditional oriental aesthetic feeling.<sup>[6]</sup> China's pentatonic style is often used as the main theme in ancient Chinese music, and Chinese musical instruments are widely used in arrangement, such as guzheng, pipa and flute. Ancient style music is a combination of ancient poetry, ancient culture and ancient melody with modern new singing methods, new arrangements and new concepts. Ancient poetry is the language representative of Chinese traditional culture, with rich cultural connotation and lofty artistic conception. In ancient China, poetry, music and dance appeared together. Some new generation musicians choose to combine China's classical poems with modern musical elements to create. This makes China's classical culture inherit, and at the same time, makes their pop music works more attractive.

Nowadays, ancient style music has gradually occupied a place in online pop music. The ancient style music mainly borrowed from the singing ways and methods of pop music in the initial singing. With the continuous development and growth of itself, in order to show its characteristics, ancient music has innovated its singing methods, the most notable feature of which is the use of ancient opera singing. The purpose of this kind of singing is to show the audience that it is an ancient style song in the shortest time and become the most distinctive symbol.

##### 4.2. *The rise of Han-Tang Dance and it's music*

Han-Tang Dance is a modern China classical dance form based on the civilization and artistic temperament of Han and Tang Dynasties in China. From the 1980s to the end of the 20th century, Professor Sun Ying started frequent and arduous creative activities with his profound historical and cultural knowledge and unique artistic spirituality, and accumulated a large number of Han and Tang dance repertoires in the past twenty years. Among them, the large-scale historical dance drama "Tongque Ji" successfully reproduces the style and features of music and dance in Han Dynasty and the history of social development.

Dance drama "Tongque Ji" shows the performance content of respecting the objective existence of history, and it is also one of the most representative dance dramas, showing the music and dance characteristics of the Han Dynasty. In the play, the dance of the Han Dynasty is perfectly reproduced, no matter from props, music or costumes, all of which reflect the color of the Han Dynasty. In the dance drama, the design of movements is taken from historical ancient books, which follows the historical development process and preserves the cultural features at that time.<sup>[7]</sup> At the same time, combining the musical features of the Central Plains with those of music and dance in the western regions, Professor Sun Ying combined dance with history and showed it in an artistic way.

Music is an important part of a drama, which is not only an important factor to promote the development of the plot, but also an important means to render the atmosphere. The music of the Han-Tang Dances all followed the musical characteristics of the Han Dynasty. Although it experienced the change of dynasties, the music of Qin dynasty was still preserved in the new music system of Han dynasty, and it merged the characteristics of the times at that time to form a new form of expression. During the Han Dynasty, the music of silk and bamboo was always loved by everyone, especially the kings of past dynasties. However, due to the restriction of the ritual and music system, the music of the stone still occupies the mainstream of court music in the Han Dynasty. There has been a great progress in the history of music development in the Han Dynasty. The Han Dynasty broke the boundary between

"elegant music" and "popular music" and began to integrate them, which not only affirmed the status of folk music, but also promoted the transformation of music expression forms in the Han Dynasty. When making the music for "Tongque Ji", we should not only combine the historical situation at that time, but also the development of the plot. Only in this way can we ensure that the music can not only enhance the atmosphere of the performance, but also promote the development of the plot. When expressing the tense plot, the dance drama uses the silk and bamboo instruments that are manifold in the Han Dynasty, and it is more appropriate to use this instrument to express the tension and panic of music. And pass it on to the audience through this form. This not only brings visual impact to the audience, but also creates a tense atmosphere for the audience to feel the same way.

## 5. Aesthetic Thought and Modern Inheritance of Music in Han Dynasty

The formation of the diversified aesthetic thought of music in the Han Dynasty is related to the policy of doing nothing at the beginning of the Han Dynasty. The policy of laissez-faire has healed the wounds caused by the war, and made the music of Han Dynasty have the cultural, political and economic conditions for creation and innovation. When discussing the aesthetic thought of music in Han dynasty, we have to mention the role of music in maintaining the ruling class regime in Han dynasty, and we can't ignore Confucianism contained in music in Han dynasty. The music of the Han Dynasty not only gives people a sad feeling, but also some music works are very powerful when they are interpreted, which accords with the basic situation of the Han Dynasty. The aesthetic thought of music in the Han Dynasty is related to its cultural environment. With the expansion of territory and the integration of national cultures, more and more rich music materials have been presented, and many people with musical talents have emerged, which has led to the trinity of poetry, song and dance in the music of the Han Dynasty, which has further developed and had a far-reaching impact on the development of music in later generations.

People in the Han Dynasty generally admired ancient music, but most of them held a questioning attitude towards new music. As people in the Han Dynasty paid more attention to the aesthetic value of music, they believed that simple ancient music was the best way to express music, and they advocated correct pronunciation and opposed new music in their lives. Therefore, they think that simple ancient music can help people develop noble character and maintain the harmony and stability of society and family. They think that new music will lower people's self-moral requirements and make people develop the habit of being impetuous. So, paying attention to ancient music and neglecting new music is one of the musical thoughts in Han Dynasty. With the unremitting efforts of the people of the Han Dynasty, they finally created many musical works with profound artistic value, which created a very valuable cultural heritage for future generations.

Music in the Han Dynasty has experienced a long cultural evolution and formed the present music system in the Han Dynasty. The style of music in the Han Dynasty can be described as simple, ancient and elegant, which also reflects the social outlook of the Han Dynasty. Music has the function of expressing life and expressing emotions. In the Han Dynasty, when the economy and culture were extremely prosperous, this function of music was fully exerted. Music in Han Dynasty is the inheritance and development of Chinese traditional music, and it plays a very important role in the development of Chinese traditional music. In today's colorful life, music is becoming more and more diverse, and these music forms are the same as those of the Han Dynasty, which also reflect the present life. The content of music in the Han Dynasty reflects the living conditions of the people in the Han Dynasty. There are simple and innocent street performances and weeping poems. The development and evolution of these diverse music forms have promoted the development of music art.<sup>[8]</sup> The characteristics of Confucian music thought in Han Dynasty reflected the overall style and lifestyle of the society at that time, and constituted a simple and plain style. Therefore, the current society should also seek a simple life, so that the soul can be quiet in the infection of music. The music of the Han Dynasty provided us with a good reference and promoted the development of music art in China.

## 6. Conclusion

Music in the Han Dynasty, as an important link in the history of traditional music culture in China, is not only due to the superior natural conditions and the rapid development of social culture in the Han Dynasty, but also contains historical traditions with profound influence. By describing the music and dance in the Han Dynasty, we can find that the art of Qin and Han Dynasties is closely related, and the music history of the Han Dynasty restores a more real music and dance performance scene, showing

the beautiful dance movements and the powerful band in the Han Dynasty. The musical images, instrumental performances, sacrifices and blessings in the Han Dynasty all reflect the world view of the harmony between man and nature in the Han Dynasty, and also represent the improvement of aesthetic consciousness in the Han Dynasty, representing an aesthetic ideal and pursuit. With the new changes in music in Han Dynasty as the representative, the re-development of China traditional music is the inheritance of traditional music in the new era. In the new era, the traditional music culture is inherited and developed by combining the Internet and new media, which endows the traditional culture with the connotation and charm of the new era. This also makes more and more young people like traditional music culture. Therefore, we should have a correct understanding of the value and spirit contained in traditional music culture, build a scientific inheritance and development system of traditional music culture, improve the path of innovation and development, and improve the influence and radiation of traditional music culture.

## References

- [1] Kang Kang. *Brief introduction of China traditional music and its development* [J]. *Science and Technology Information (Academic Research)*, 2008(27):250.
- [2] Yin Maoyuan. *the present situation and development of China folk music* [J]. *times literature (second half)*, 2010(07):238.
- [3] Dong Huanling. *Music communication between China and foreign countries in cross-cultural communication* [J]. *China Music*, 2007(04):238-240+262.
- [4] Wu Jinbao. *Viewing the Transformation of Music Culture in Han Dynasty from the Portraits of Han Dynasty* [J]. *Nandu School*, 2005(04):14-15.
- [5] Wang Fuyin. *Exploring the prosperous scene of music and dance in the post-Qi Dynasty from the stone reliefs in Han Dynasty* [J]. *National Art Research*, 2011,24(06):74-80.
- [6] Zhu Hui. *On the change and development of the lyrics of the contemporary popular song "Chinese Style"* [J]. *Contemporary Music*, 2019(02):141-142.
- [7] Zhang Xilu. *The Artistic Features of "Tongque Ji"* [J]. *Yihai*, 2015(07):98-100.
- [8] Bi Guangrui. *On the Inheritance of Confucian Music Thought in Han Dynasty* [J]. *Northern Music*, 2018, 38(13):4.