

Research article / Научная статья

Problems of Contemporary Development of Traditional Chinese Music: Part 1

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Abstract. In the formation and development of contemporary Chinese musical practice, the issues of external influences and national identity have become matters of significant concern at the state level. In recent years, scholars in China have increasingly noted that traditional musicology should not be restricted in its use of global methodologies and approaches within music science. Traditional music represents an essential component of Chinese culture and is characterized by its diversity and complexity. This paper focuses on the specificity of musical thinking in traditional Chinese music, the modern development of its styles and genres, and the influence of traditional Chinese music on contemporary composers. It also seeks to outline possible pathways for the future development of China's national music, drawing on an analysis of relevant historical facts and classical Chinese musical works.

Keywords: Confucius, *Records on Music*, Alexander Tcherepnin, Shen Xingguan, Xiao Youmei, lü-dü, pitch-standard system, yang-qí, yin-qí, pentatonic scale, Chinese opera, traditional Chinese music

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Introduction

Relevance of the Research Topic. In modern Chinese music history, due to a specific historical background, the issue of nationalizing musical culture has consistently been a matter of serious concern. It has become one of the central problems in analyzing the interaction between Chinese musical culture and foreign cultures. At present, the development of traditional musicology in China has entered a stage of dialogue, in which indigenous theoretical concepts coexist on equal footing with Western ones — a tendency demonstrated in this article through the works of Chinese musicologists.

Research Aim: to identify the distinctive features of musical thinking in traditional Chinese music and to examine its influence on contemporary composers, primarily Chinese ones.

The source base of this study relies on research projects conducted by modern music scholars from both Russia and China. The main analytical methods employed include historical-cultural, cultural studies, musicological, ethnomusicological, comparative-typological, and practical-analytical approaches.

Theoretical Framework

Cultural Heritage and Musical-Theoretical Traditions of China

Chinese musical culture has historically developed in accordance with the fundamental principles of key philosophical, ethical, and aesthetic norms

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established in society, shaped under the influence of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. This intellectual context underlies the entire symbolic and practical system of Chinese sonic–musical thinking and represents the cultural environment within which musicians have created for centuries.

Since ancient times, in the countries of East Asia, the phenomena of high art — including music — have traditionally formed and evolved under the significant influence of religious, philosophical, and ideological doctrines. The very description of their formation and development often sought to align these phenomena with the philosophical principles and ethical norms accepted in society.

Confucianism, with its idea of harmony and order projected onto all spheres of social life — ideology and social institutions, state structure and economy, court etiquette and family relations, science and the arts — fostered an early tendency among the Chinese, followed later by Koreans and Japanese, to structure the elements of the universe into a unified system of hierarchical interrelations.

In the field of music — which Confucius regarded as a crucial means of maintaining the harmony of the cosmos — the fundamental criteria of musical evaluation were reconsidered. As a result, the concept of “proper” music emerged, referring primarily to that which served Confucian ceremonial practices or accompanied the most refined forms of communication among noble men (*junzi*).

The sound of ceremonial orchestras during rituals in ancestral temples was expected to demonstrate a special balance of expression, as it was believed to possess magical power to influence the surrounding world. Ensuring the harmonious state of the cosmos, in turn, guaranteed human well-being.

The idea of harmony between humans and nature, on the one hand, and between individuals and society, on the other, formed the foundation of aesthetic concepts of beauty in both nature and the arts. During the Western Zhou dynasty, the ruler of Zhou created music whose structure corresponded to the form of rites and rituals.

Confucius, the great thinker and musician of the Spring and Autumn period (770 BCE — 476/403 BCE), emphasized that music must have a beginning and an end, highlighting its importance in maintaining social order. In the *Analects of Confucius* (chapter *Bayi*), there is a saying that “music begins when various instruments play in unison. As it unfolds, the instruments harmonize with one another and transition into a pure and beautiful tone” [1]. This expression reflects the aesthetic idea of musical art progressing from one state to another — for example, from calmness to culmination and back to calmness.

Confucius was deeply committed to the search for “perfect” (“proper”) music, known as the “Music of *Daxiao*”. A classical formulation of Confucius’s view of music as a means of educating people states: “A poem is born, ritual is established, and music is created”. This phrase implies that education should begin with poetry, continue with the study of rules and rituals, and be perfected through engagement with music. He believed that music plays a role in the moral cultivation of individuals and contributes to the development of their best human qualities [2].

Furthermore, Confucius held that music should serve the prosperity and strength of the state, as well as the happiness and well-being of the people, and that it could promote harmonious political governance. His advocacy for refined ceremonial music and rejection of secular music reflected the shared aspiration of the “Hundred Schools of Thought” of that era — namely, to cultivate people’s love for their families and their country.

According to the treatise *Lüshi Chunqiu*, imperfect music cannot contribute to the spiritual and physical development of a person. This statement reflects the noble character of musical aesthetics in pre-Qin China, which was grounded in the idea of “cultivating moral character, regulating the family, governing the state, and bringing peace to the world”. In the *Book of Music* (221 BCE), it is stated that the reason a ruler established rites and music was not to satisfy people’s sensory desires, but to teach them to restrain their good and bad emotions so that they could return to the correct path in life.

Confucianism influenced Chinese culture and the educational system for thousands of years. Even today, we witness the establishment of Confucius Institutes around the world. The combination of ritual and music is understood as the unity of emotion and reason. The emotion of acceptance is restrained, directed, and strengthened in such a way that it becomes a neutral emotion. As Confucius said: “Ritual, music, punishment, and governance — these are the highest means by which people’s hearts are unified and a way of governing emerges”. Music, as reflected in these words, becomes a tool for governing the people.

Confucius established the standard of Chinese musical aesthetics — one that rests on the notions of perfection and beauty. Literally, “beauty” refers to the expression of form, while “goodness” concerns the moral content that this form conveys. The perfection of beauty, therefore, lies not only in the decorative quality of external form, but also in the moral nature of its content. Confucius was a dialectical thinker in his exploration of aesthetic ideas. He emphasized the moral forces required for the progress of society.

The ancient Greek philosopher Plato also reflected on music in his work *The Republic*, arguing that in the education of the ideal citizen, priority should be given to music and physical training, for music purifies the mind and exercise strengthens the body [3]. Since the founding of the state, China has consistently used music as an educational tool within its national education system.

During the time of Confucius, a distinction existed between “proper” and “improper” sounds. Under the Wei and Jin dynasties, Ruan Ji’s treatise on music rejected the “sounds of Zheng and Wei” and upheld “the intention of former rulers to create music”. During the Sui and Tang dynasties, people remembered “ancient music” and respected “proper sound”. The ideas of the philosopher Zhu Xi regarding musical education contributed to shaping the role of music in the process of moral cultivation, a role assigned to so-called “elegant music”.

The character 樂 (yuè, music) and the character 樂 (lè, happiness) share the same written form but are pronounced differently. In many cases, however, their meanings coincide. The modern philosopher Tang Junyi wrote: “Music is something that people enjoy together. The joy of music lies in following shared emotions”. Thus, the aesthetic perception of music corresponds to perceiving life itself as beauty. The purpose of music is to strive for the daily joy of the sacred realm.

The ethical and philosophical interpretation of music is inseparable from the particular sensory pleasure it brings, as well as from the state of joy in life that music enables. The theme of goodness is also of great importance in traditional Chinese philosophy. When the happiness music brings is acknowledged, it becomes closely connected to the idea of “goodness”, emphasizing the unity of musical beauty and moral virtue — a fundamental principle governing human coexistence, reflected in Chinese ethical and moral norms.

On the one hand, the Chinese people value life in its fullness and do not consider human desires sinful. Taking pleasure in sound and color is natural to human nature. "Food, sexual desire — the greatest desires of human beings" (Book of Rites, 1861 — 1894, "Liyun"). But on the other hand, "There is no one who cannot eat, but few can appreciate flavor" (Doctrine of the Mean). Human beings cannot exist solely as biological creatures; as rational beings, they possess cultural rationality. From the Confucian perspective, people become cultured through education, and only "ritual and music" can express and reveal the degree of one's refinement and level of cultural development.

Thus, the principle known as "establishing through ritual and completing through music" became one of the most important aesthetic ideas of Confucianism and, for a thousand years, shaped traditional aesthetic norms that defined attitudes toward the art of music in China.

Ritual represents the behavioral norms of people within society. It is a general term that refers to an institutionalized system of rules and etiquette encompassing all aspects of human life — from everyday private affairs to public activities. Ritual must be coordinated with music, because music corresponds to the innate desires of human nature. "Music is the joy that is inherent in human nature. Music must be expressed through sound, movement, and silence. This is the Way of the human being... Therefore, people cannot endure existence without music" (Records on Music). Music accompanies the path of human life and human nature. Thus, on the one hand, human emotions and human nature must be regulated, and on the other hand, they must be followed and respected [4]. In this way, according to the Confucian ideal, ritual and music are combined, meaning that ritual and music harmonize the external and internal dimensions of human life.

The joy of sound and dance — pleasures of the ears and eyes — is transformed into inner emotional and intellectual joy. The word *lè* (joy) is frequently used in the Analects of Confucius to denote inner joy, with emphasis placed on its moral dimension. In the Analects, Confucius says: "There are three joys that are beneficial, and three joys that are harmful. The joy of proper ritual and music, the joy of speaking of the virtues of others, and the joy of having many virtuous friends — these are beneficial. The joy of arrogance, the joy of leisure and idleness, and the joy of feasting and revelry — these are harmful" [5]. The "realm of joy", according to Confucius, is a realm of joy imbued with moral spirit. Sensual delight, enjoyment of food and drink — this type of joy is harmful to morality, and Confucius strongly opposed it.

The essence of ritual rules and of rituals accompanied by music lies in preserving and strengthening harmony and stability within social order. On this basis, Confucianism formulates an important aesthetic principle: "music follows harmony", which has two meanings. First, harmony means that through musical education, one can cultivate inner feelings, allowing people to consciously adapt them to propriety in order to maintain social harmony and stability. Second, harmony encompasses physical, psychological, and interpersonal dimensions. Harmony between Heaven and humanity, as well as the gentleness and joyousness of music, must correspond to nature, humanity, and universal laws.

At the same time, Confucius distinguished between the goodness of musical content and the beauty of musical form — each possessing its own meaning while complementing one another.

Major Systems of Musical Temperament

In the Western understanding, music theory includes composition theory, harmony, counterpoint, and orchestration. The term “traditional Chinese music” has been widely used in Chinese musicology since the 1980s. In a number of academic works, a distinction is drawn between “traditional music”, which refers to the living musical practice transmitted from ancient times to the present, and the “musical tradition”, which refers to the theory underlying the creation of such music.

Clarifying these two concepts makes it possible to define the theory of traditional Chinese music as a systematic exposition of Chinese musical traditions and traditional Chinese modes of musical thinking, with active efforts made toward their practical application. Confucius’s original idea of comparing “beauty” and “goodness” in music illustrates that musical works may be beautiful in form, yet possess certain shortcomings or imperfections in content.

Modern Chinese musicologists are actively working to systematize the historically developed traditional theoretical systems of Chinese music. At present, they identify five theoretical systems — aesthetics, performance, musicology, notation, and structure — each of which has been given a certain academic rationale, primarily related to structural aspects.

For example, in the Introduction to the Study of the Five Theoretical Systems, it is noted that the structure of traditional Chinese music is divided into two categories: strophic structure and non-strophic structure, and it is stated that the composition of traditional Chinese music can be understood on three levels: strophic structure, melodic structure, and cadential structure.

When examining the principles of composition and the organization of the musical text itself, both short compositions and longer works — sometimes developing into full-scale suites — are used as examples.

“There are two types of suites: one is based on a melodic structure consisting of paired upper and lower phrases, which expand and contract, become denser and more elaborate, change in tempo, and so forth [6], forming what is known as a ‘plate suite’, composed of numerous upper and lower phrases. The other type of suite uses an already existing melody as the main material and organizes it in a particular way to create a ‘melodic suite’ consisting of several melodic sections”.

The term *yin* is used to denote the sound of the human voice, produced by a person. Sound is both the object of hearing and the result of hearing; therefore, that which comes from the human throat is called voice, while that which is perceived by the ear is called sound. Sound is an objective acoustic event, whereas voice is a subjective sound. The five tones of the pentatonic scale are subjective judgments rather than objective entities; hence they are referred to as sounds.

The eight timbres in the *ba-yin* classification system correspond to the eight materials used in the construction of musical instruments and serve as the basis for categorizing instruments according to these materials. In a general sense, the term “sound” is interpreted as “music that exists subjectively”, whereas “acoustic sounding” is understood as “music that exists objectively” [7].

For example, in Laozi’s expression *Da Yin Xi Sheng*, *Da Yin* is the subject and *Xi Sheng* is the predicate, meaning: “Great Sound manifests as rarefied (or subtle)

sounding". Sound, in this context, represents the subjective perception or judgment of the receiving subject after hearing the object referred to as the "great sound".

In the same way, the expression "sound without sorrow or joy" found in the famous treatise on the qin zither by the Chinese music scholar and philosopher Ji Kang refers to the subjective perception of music. It means that different people will experience different emotions of sorrow or joy when listening to the same piece of music. The refinement of ancient Chinese philosophical thought is truly remarkable.

The concept of the "Great (or Grand) Sound", which appears in several historical texts on Chinese music theory, was originally a metaphor used by Laozi in his Daoist writings, but later evolved into one of the key theories in Chinese musical aesthetics. It influenced subsequent musical compositions and served as a guiding principle, playing an important role in the development of an artistic style that emphasized the subtlety of string sound, the importance of the natural landscape surrounding the performer, as well as the tranquility and elegance of the musician's playing.

Interpreting Ji Kang's expression "sound without sorrow or joy", Shuhui argues that sound refers to an aesthetic perception experienced by the subject, rather than an objective property of the musical work itself, while "nothingness" refers to "impermanence". "No" thus means "no impermanence", whereas "sorrow" is an emotion with a concrete content. Therefore, "sound without sorrow" suggests that the listener is unable to derive a specific emotional experience or perception from the musical sound. Thus, the philosopher and musician Ji Kang not only does not deny that musical works may express emotion or mourning, but, in a certain sense, even confirms it.

In the traditional Chinese theoretical system, tones and their combinations were associated with a complex symbolism denoting various aspects of national teachings, primarily Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. In the Yijing (Book of Changes), a theoretical foundation is given for the system of 64 hexagrams. Each hexagram is a symbolic figure composed of six horizontal parallel lines, either solid or broken. The solid line represents the bright principle of yang, while the broken line represents the dark principle of yin.

In Chinese thought, the entire world was perceived as the sum of various combinations of yin and yang, and because combinations of six solid or broken lines produce exactly 64 variants, the 64 hexagrams together constitute a symbolic model of the cosmos.

Throughout their history, the Chinese developed various systems for organizing musical tones. One of the earliest such systems was the Chinese system of temperament known as lü-lü. It is believed that China's own system of temperament was developed almost simultaneously with similar developments in Europe. According to legend, it was created by the great ancient musician Ling Lun at the command of the Yellow Emperor (Huangdi).

The foundation of this system is as follows: beginning with the fundamental tone Huangzhong (literally "Yellow Bell"), the remaining eleven tones were produced by sequentially reducing or increasing the length of the Huangzhong pitch pipe by one third. These pitch pipes (lü), originally made of bamboo, were regarded as the standard for correct tuning, and it is from them that the name of the system — lü-lü ("lü measurement system") — is derived.

As a result of these acoustic manipulations, a chain of ascending pure fifths and descending pure fourths was produced (comparable to Pythagorean tuning). When

all resulting tones are arranged in ascending order of pitch, they form a chromatic scale, which functions as a transpositional framework.

The principal tone (gong) of a mode corresponded to the pitch of the lü associated with a particular month of the year. The tones of the so-called “Chinese scale” were derived from the principal tone gong according to the same principle by which the eleven lü were generated from Huangzhong. The tone gong corresponded to the number 81 (the smallest number that, when used in the above algorithm, produces a sequence of five whole numbers — 81, 108 or 48, 72, 96 or 54, 64). Further calculations required rounding adjustments. When gong corresponded to Huangzhong, the five notes of the traditional pentatonic scale were simultaneously identical to the first five lü. These five tones carry numerous symbolic associations in many areas of life and Chinese worldview [8].

Taking into account the correspondence between the five tones and the five elements (wu xing), one may draw parallels between the order of tonal generation (the cycle of fifths) and their ascending order (the pentatonic mode), on the one hand, and the cycles of mutual generation and mutual overcoming of the five elements [9], on the other. This same principle of tonal relationships can also be observed within the entire lü–lü system.

The system of twelve lü is interconnected with various aspects of life in Chinese society, especially in the sphere of natural philosophy: the twelve tones correspond to the twelve months, and possibly to the twelve-year cycle (and thus the twelve zodiac animals), as well as to the twelve signs of the zodiac.

The very idea of returning to the beginning after passing through several stages of movement has long been popular in China, particularly in Daoist philosophical treatises and in Daoist ritual practices involving physical and mental exercises. For example, in the Yang school of Taijiquan, the practitioner completes a series of movements in all possible directions and ultimately returns to the very point where the sequence began. This symbolizes the circulation of qi throughout the human body, achieving harmony of all spiritual and physical forces.

The reduction and extension of the pitch-pipe length by one third — resulting in a rise of a perfect fifth or a drop of a perfect fourth — was interpreted as the alternation of yin (the dark, feminine principle) and yang (the bright, masculine principle).

According to the Daoist conception of the universe, the primordial substance yuan-qi consisted of two types of particles: yang-qi and yin-qi. The lighter yang-qi particles rose upward, while the heavier yin-qi particles descended. During the formation of the world, the descending yin-qi formed the Earth, while the ascending yang-qi formed Heaven. Thus, the system of lü pipes symbolized the process of cosmic creation.

The very movement through the cycle of fifths carried deep symbolic meaning for Chinese theorists: the ratio of the perfect fifth — 3:2 — represented the relationship of sacred numbers. According to the Confucian treatise Liji (Record of Rites), 3 is the number of Heaven, while 2 is the number of Earth.

As a result of alternating upward and downward tone generation, the system divides into six male lü and six female lü (yang-lü and yin-lü). The six lü correspond to the six lines of a hexagram: the first male lü — Huangzhong — was associated with the initial line of the hexagram Qian, while the first female lü — Linzhong — corresponded to the initial line of the hexagram Kun [10].

The number six evokes additional associations, primarily within the Buddhist tradition. For example, the six virtues that allow one to overcome the ocean of suffering — samsara — are: self-restraint (renunciation), purity, perseverance, progress, concentrated awareness, and wisdom. A day, according to Buddhist cosmology, is divided into six periods — three daytime segments and three nighttime segments [11].

In Chan Buddhist texts, one also encounters the concepts of liu gen (six bases — sight, hearing, smell, taste, body, and mind), liu jing (six realms/limits), and liu shi (six consciousnesses) [12].

Furthermore, one may also observe in the use of the lü-lü system adherence to the Confucian principle of li (ritual): year after year, the same ceremonial music was performed on the twelve pitch steps.

However, as in the Western cycle of fifths, by moving upward in fifths (or in this case, by alternating a rise of a fifth and a descent of a fourth), the 13th pitch does not coincide with the 1st (or its octave). It exceeds it by the so-called Pythagorean comma — $531441/524288$ (23.5 cents). Chinese theorists simplified this discrepancy to the syntonic, or Didymus, comma — $81/80$ (22 cents). Thus, the circle of fifths remains open.

Consequently, might the system of twelve lü itself represent both the cyclic and the changeable nature of the cosmos? As we can see, despite its profound symbolic meaning, the lü-lü system was, in some ways, imperfect:

The system was not closed; therefore, at the start of the new year, it did not return precisely to Huangzhong, the tone that was supposed to initiate the next year.

Even within a given year, only the first eight of the twelve lü could serve as the gong (tonic) of a mode while preserving its structure precisely. All other transpositions required enharmonic adjustments, which inevitably distorted the modal structure.

All these factors encouraged continued acoustic and mathematical investigations among Chinese theorists in the field of musical temperament.

A more significant role in the history of Chinese music was played by the system of sixty lü proposed by Jing Fang. This system was adopted at the imperial court as the official one (although it was later abolished as excessively complex). Like the system of sixty-four lü, it was designed for a five-year cycle, but it followed the lü-lü tradition more precisely: it consisted of exactly five cycles of twelve lü each — no more and no fewer. Thus, to all symbolic correspondences associated with the lü-lü system, an additional “group of five” was added.

It is noteworthy that in designing the system of sixty lü, Jing Fang employed three complementary methods of calculation:

- shi — “substance”, expressed by six-digit numbers;
- lü — the length of the pitch pipes, expressed by three-digit numbers;
- chun — the length of the strings on the long zither, expressed by two-digit numbers [12].

The first historically documented attempt to create a system of equal temperament belongs to the 5th-century theorist He Zhengtian (370–447), who lowered the frequency of each tone in the lü-lü system so that the frequency of the 13th pitch was exactly twice that of Huangzhong [13].

The same problem of equalizing the intervals between tones was later studied by Luon Zhuo (543–610) and Wang Fo, but their calculations resulted only in approximate solutions.

A precise mathematical justification for equal temperament was finally formulated in the 16th century by Prince Zhu Zaiyu. He discovered the exact formula for equal-tempered tuning: constructing the ordinary chromatic scale (more precisely, ascending through twelve semitones) by sequentially dividing the number corresponding to the fundamental tone (Huangzhong) by the twelfth root of two.

However, despite the brilliance of his system, it did not find wide practical application: to this day, no musical instrument tuned according to this method has been found.

The reason for such prolonged and persistent investigation into systems of temperament may lie in the profound influence of Confucian ideology on Chinese society. The Latin word *temperatio* (“ordering”, “equalization”) is conceptually very close to what Confucianism sought to implement — in state governance, in social relationships, and in the regulation of human emotions and culture.

It was precisely the equalization and balancing of feelings within traditional behavioral norms, as well as the systematic “ordering” of the functioning of all social institutions — from the state to the family — that was likely reflected in Chinese musical theory. The Confucian tradition of ancestor veneration also played a role: nearly every new theory of temperament was formulated with explicit references to the “ancients” — the mythical rulers Yao, Shun, and Huangdi, as well as Confucius, Laozi, and others.

Laozi’s teachings, especially their natural-philosophical dimension (*Yijing*, and to some extent Zhuangzi and Liezi), promoted the idea that musical sounds could influence various natural processes — from the movement of celestial bodies to the circulation of vital energy (*qi*) in the human body. If, in the production of musical tones, the frequency of their vibration matched the frequencies of celestial bodies, the Earth, or the organs of the human body — thereby entering into resonance — one could, in principle, influence the functioning of both living and non-living nature.

One should also note the significance of music, as a non-verbal “language”, as a means of communicating with the Absolute — an idea characteristic of Chinese philosophical traditions, particularly the Chan Buddhist school. And, as is well known, for a means of communication to function as a true language, understandable to the one addressed, it must be structured in a particular way. This opened yet another pathway toward the emergence of systems of musical temperament — as a manifestation of structural order in general.

The Influence of Western Music Theoretical Principles

During the reign of Emperor Shenjong of the Ming Dynasty (1572–1620), Western musical culture began to exert a noticeable influence on Chinese music. It is important to note the impact of Christian church music on Chinese musical culture, as well as the musical education provided in church schools in China starting from the 19th century.

Missionary musicians, on the one hand, sought to study Chinese culture in order to strengthen the social effectiveness of their preaching, drawing primarily on Confucian teachings. On the other hand, they devoted themselves to translating Chinese texts in an effort to achieve the full integration of Western culture into all

classes, spheres, and groups of Chinese society. Among them, the Italian missionary Matteo Ricci stands out for his systematic efforts to introduce and disseminate Western musical instruments and Western instrumental music in China.

A tradition gradually emerged of translating the hymn texts of Christian music into Chinese. The main narrative texts include *The Poem on Nourishing the Heart*, *The Prayer for Glorifying God*, *The Poem of Praise to the Lord* by B. Henley and Fushan, as well as *The Hymn to the Lord* by Fan Tianxiang. It is worth noting that, in addition to these hymn collections written in Mandarin Chinese, there also exist collections compiled in regional dialects and performed in the languages of China's ethnic minorities. Examples include *The Divine Poem Centered in Banyan* in the Fuzhou dialect, *The Divine Poem Centered in Chao* in the Chaoshan dialect, *The Divine Poem Centered in Xia* in that dialect, as well as hymn collections still sung today by the Blang (Brown) and Lisu ethnic groups in Yunnan. These hymns continue to be performed among the Bulang and Lisu peoples in Yunnan.

What may appear to be a simple adaptation of sacred music in fact raises profound cultural questions, revealing the complex interaction between Chinese and Western musical cultures, as well as the creation of so-called Western hymn models performed in the Chinese language [14].

By the beginning of the 19th century, China had already developed and theoretically substantiated centuries-old, extraordinarily rich traditions in literature, painting, architecture, theatre [15], and applied arts, represented by a wide variety of schools, forms, and genres.

A characteristic feature of Chinese musical culture is its multi-layered nature, which is connected both to the complex social stratification of Chinese society and to its ethnic diversity. At the two extremes of this spectrum stood, on the one hand, the developed classical tradition, and on the other, the archaic forms of music belonging to isolated ethnic minorities, often geographically remote.

Although rooted in deep antiquity, Chinese musical culture by the 19th–20th centuries was, in comparison with European culture, significantly less structurally organized. Individual musical phenomena were sometimes disconnected from the general trends taking place within the country's musical culture. Added to this were limited technological resources and a significant lag in the development of mass media.

Beginning at the turn of the 18th–19th centuries, significant changes took place in Chinese musical culture, driven by the partial transformation of social culture and the influx of foreign influences. The role of urban culture increased (one of its most important components became the traditions of the national intelligentsia), and special state institutions responsible for managing cultural affairs were established.

Commercial elements gradually penetrated musical life, and new forms and genres emerged that were intended to entertain the urban public. In the early 20th century, new technological inventions — radio and phonograph recording — began to play a considerable role. Many musicians from the national intelligentsia studied Western music in European conservatories and incorporated the principles of Western musical writing into their practice.

The question of the future development of national music was largely resolved in favor of borrowing general features and specific elements of the European musical tradition. This interest in Western music can also be explained by the fact that, ever since Europeans first established a presence in China, European music had been regarded as more prestigious than traditional Chinese music or the music

of the high classical tradition. Choral singing, performances of Western European operas, and domestic music-making modeled on Western practices attracted the privileged social classes of China, who considered it their duty to cultivate what they viewed as a more progressive form of culture, thereby emphasizing their distance from the lower social strata.

Many of them sent their children to study in Europe. Consequently, progress in national art was understood primarily through the influence of Western musical achievements. Composer creativity, Western-style musical education, and training in Western music theory — including European notation — became increasingly widespread within Chinese musical culture.

In major Chinese cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, symphony orchestras and Western-style opera companies began to emerge. A tendency also developed whereby traditional forms of Chinese music came under the influence of European musical traditions. This led to the formation of so-called hybrid forms within the musical culture of major Chinese urban centers. By the 1920s–1930s one can already speak of significant competition between national and Western musical traditions. All these developments took place before the founding of the PRC (that is, prior to 1949).

The work of the Russian-born pianist and composer Alexander Tcherepnin played an important role in shaping the Chinese school of music theory. During his travels across China in the 1930s, he was deeply impressed by traditional Chinese art and developed a profound interest in Chinese music and culture. He studied with Qi Rushan, a performer of Beijing opera, and adopted the Chinese name Qi Erpin. Acting as an emissary of Chinese culture, he travelled extensively between China and foreign countries, performing, teaching, and participating in various musical and cultural events.

In May 1934, he designed and financed a campaign aimed at promoting piano music with Chinese characteristics, organized at the Shanghai Conservatory. This event significantly influenced the development of modern Chinese musical culture and the definition of the contemporary Chinese musical school. In organizing the competition, the jury he selected included Xiao Youmei, Huang Zi, and himself. According to the rules, a participant had to be Chinese and the submitted composition had to be based exclusively on Chinese themes. A conservatory student won first prize for the piece *Piccolo for a Shepherd Boy*. For the first time in history, a competition offered Chinese composers a new path for developing piano music rooted in Western music theory while simultaneously establishing an aesthetic framework and working paradigm for a modern, authentically Chinese musical school.

Thus, Chinese musicians gained access to foundational academic study of Western music and compositional techniques. This facilitated professional acquaintance with modern Western music of the twentieth century, including works by Rachmaninoff and Ravel [16]. Tcherepnin believed that Chinese musicians should follow their own path and continue their national rhythmic and melodic traditions, creating music with distinct Chinese characteristics in order to enrich world music. He introduced Chinese musicians and their works to Europe, frequently performing and publishing them. At the first “Prague Spring” International Music Festival, he presented to the world a number of Chinese musicians and compositions, including Li Xiangmin, Zhou Xiaoyan, He Luting, Lao Zhicheng, Liu Xuan, and Jiang Wen. At the same time, his soprano adaptations of Yunnan folk songs, such as *Peach Blossom Shop* and *Apricot Blossom Village* and *Spring Sleeps but Don’t Wake Up*, made a strong impression on the European music scene, marking the emergence of Chinese music and Chinese musicians onto the world stage.

In the second half of the 20th century, China faced a number of challenges whose solutions determined the future of the young republic's cultural development. These included issues of state policy and governance in the sphere of musical culture, the organization of musical institutions, ideological and national orientation in music, attitudes toward musical heritage, the role of composition, problems of mass culture, international contacts, and more. The early years after the founding of the PRC were marked by a strong cultural upsurge: new educational institutions, research institutes, museums, theatres, and music schools were opened; propaganda ensembles were created; and the All-China Association of Workers in Musical Culture was established under Lü Ji, He Luting, and Ma Sicong. Three conservatories — in Beijing, Shanghai, and Tianjin — began operation, along with four music institutes in Wuhan (Hubei), Shenyang (Liaoning), Xi'an (Shaanxi), and Chengdu (Sichuan), as well as an Institute of Folk Music Studies in Beijing and music colleges in Dongbei and Guangzhou. These initiatives were highly promising.

However, according to Mao Zedong, every area of culture had to serve political goals. The function of art was reduced to political propaganda.

In the 1950s, numerous debates arose about the future development of Chinese culture, stimulated by the proclamation of the policy "let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools of thought contend", which allowed diverse viewpoints to be expressed in various forms, except for explicitly counter-revolutionary ones. This was a period of intense discussion among poets, writers, filmmakers, artists, musicians, and theatre practitioners.

In the second half of the 20th century, the West succeeded in constructing an alternative image of contemporary Chinese music within the global cultural context. During this period, traditional Chinese music was increasingly questioned for its modern relevance. Thanks to the work of Shen Xingong, a strong cohort of musicians representing the so-called New Music emerged in China, systematically promoting a modern narrative of Chinese musical identity. Their practice was based on modern musical education, primarily grounded in Western systems. Dissatisfied with the state of national music education, many Chinese musicians undertook study tours abroad, focusing especially on music as a discipline and observing school music education in detail. As a result, Western major/minor song repertoire gradually became incorporated into the Chinese educational system.

Modern Western civilization is a powerful and influential force in global culture, and the Chinese have much to learn from it. Studying and internalizing its theoretical methods, modes of thinking, aesthetic experience, rules, and other "civilizational essences" became both a social task and a complex cultural responsibility for practitioners of the modern Chinese musical school. Among them, the creative work of Zhao Yuanren stands out. Zhao attempted to explore how Chinese musical imagery could be expressed within a multicultural context in his organ piece *Hua Liu Ban* and the *Waves of the Xiang River*. The work is based on two traditional Chinese folk melodies, *Six Versions of the Flower* and *Waves of the Xiang River*, creating an unprecedented synthesis of traditional Chinese music with the sonorities of a Western organ. Its distinctive feature is the use of vertical polyphony, whose value lies in its ability to combine Western functional harmony with the pentatonic coloration of Chinese melody.

It is known that the ruler of the Qing state left his mark on musical history with his song *Journey of the Great River to the East*. The lyrics are taken from a poem by Su Dongpo, while the melody is original. This new musical language, created by the

ruler's talent and insight, represents the first Chinese example of an art song using Western harmonies.

The achievements of Xiao Youmei are also well known. A true advocate and practitioner of Chinese musical education, he inaugurated the use of Western theoretical methods in large-scale instrumental compositions with Chinese national characteristics through his work *New Dance of the Neon Dress*. Similar contributions were made by other composers: Li Cihai, who incorporated the so-called “pipa chord” (based on the Chinese pear-shaped lute); Luo Zhongrong, who combined pentatonicism with the twelve-tone *lü* system; Wang Jianzhong, who studied the interaction of the linguistic tonal system with musical structure; and Du Mingxin, who experimented with combining Western major-minor tonality and pentatonic linear melody.

Chinese musicians eventually realized that the incorporation of foreign musical discourse ultimately depended on their own choices. Thus, the composer Qu Wanhua sought to blend major seconds layered over diminished fifth triads within pentatonic structures; Shi Wanchun employed continuous streams of parallel major ninth chords; Tan Dun's *Three Note Interlude* uses a “raspy timbre” produced by dissonant tones imitating the human voice. This body of work represents the formation of a movement in 20th-century Chinese music symbolizing the interaction between East and West.

The emergence of the Chinese musical tradition on the global stage is symbolized by *Chinese Flower Drum*, a work for violin and instrumental ensemble composed in 1911 by the American composer of Austrian origin Fritz Kreisler. When writing the piece, Kreisler had never visited China; his inspiration came solely from his fascination with Chinese music. In the 1920s, this interest deepened when he observed performances by Chinese instrumentalists in San Francisco's Chinatown during a music festival. His acceptance and study of Chinese musical styles were exceptionally valuable for that period. The West's strong economic power and elevated international status fostered a sense of superiority toward the “backward” East; thus, most publications about the San Francisco festival supported Eurocentric views and belittled Chinese art.

Unfortunately, even today, Western musicians' interest in Chinese music is sometimes limited to exotic curiosity — legendary stories about the long qin zither, descriptions of the “five tones”, the “eight timbres”, and similar topics. For China itself, however, interest in Western culture has always offered an opportunity to seek new ideas for cultural transformation — a desire tied, to some extent, to China's aspiration to integrate its musical culture into the global discourse.

Conclusion

In Chinese musical art, several major spheres of traditional music can be distinguished: instrumental performance (solo and ensemble), the chanting of poetic texts accompanied by instruments, and theatrical musical traditions.

When describing the modern Chinese orchestra of traditional instruments, it is particularly interesting to trace the evolution of the orchestral institution over an extensive historical period — from its earliest origins to its contemporary form. Chinese legends recount that the Yellow Emperor, who lived approximately between 2697–2598 BCE, used all available and officially recognized means to restore bodily and mental harmony after many years of rule, among which his orchestra of “bells and drums” held a distinguished place. Among the instruments

most common during the Shang–Yin dynasty (1600–1027 BCE) were various drums, flutes, and sounding stone slabs (stone chimes). Records indicate that the ceremonial orchestra at the beginning of the Zhou dynasty (Western Zhou, 1027–771 BCE) included two large bronze bells (bo), two smaller bronze bells (zhong), three large drums (jiangu), two small drums (li), one hand-drum (tao), two stone gongs (qing), four zithers (se), and three mouth organs (sheng and tang).

From ancient times, orchestras of various types were continuously active in China, accompanying official ceremonies and imperial entertainments. These ensembles were dominated by percussion instruments — idiophones and membranophones; later, aerophones (wind instruments) began to appear as well. During the Han dynasty (206 BCE — 220 CE), the role of aerophones and chordophones (string instruments) further increased. The establishment of trade relations with other countries introduced the Chinese to the musical cultures of foreign peoples. Under conditions of active cultural exchange, it was natural that foreign music and instruments exerted influence, which over several centuries led to changes in the composition of the orchestra.

The direct predecessor of the modern Chinese orchestra of traditional instruments is the southern ensemble Silk and Bamboo of the South (Jiangnan sizhu)—one of the brightest forms of traditional rural ensemble music. Its composition differed little from that of a divertimento orchestra and included both native and non-Chinese instruments. Bronze bells, stone chimes, and other ceremonial instruments gradually became “historical,” as they were associated with ritual performance.

Thus, entertainment-type orchestras included both national and foreign instruments. Plucked string instruments (foremost the pipa lute) dominated; bowed instruments appeared later but eventually became widely popular. Percussion instruments maintained rhythmic stability. Ensemble size varied: during the Tang dynasty, there were ensembles of hundreds or even thousands of musicians. However, due to economic decline and the crisis of the ruling dynasty, the number of musicians decreased, and ensembles grew smaller.

All traditional Chinese orchestras existing since roughly the mid-20th century can be divided into two large groups: in one group, the leading instruments are strings and winds; in the other, percussion and winds. Although the instrumentation of these groups differs in certain details, most string-wind orchestras include one transverse and one vertical flute, a mouth organ, a bowed string instrument, two or three lutes, and one or two small percussion instruments, whose players often serve as ensemble leaders. The second group, highly individual in makeup, includes oboe-type instruments, flutes, mouth organs, and numerous percussion instruments. These orchestras are further subdivided into wind–percussion ensembles and pure percussion ensembles (drums and gongs). If other instruments are used, they are considered supplementary — especially in ensembles accompanying theatrical performances. For example, Peking Opera uses two orchestras: the civil (wenchang) and the military (wuchang) ensembles. Although musicians of both sit on stage together, they do not perform simultaneously: the civil ensemble features strings and winds, while the military ensemble includes gongs and drums.

By the 19th and early 20th centuries, the influence of Western culture was strongly felt in China. The vernacular literary language baihua (based on spoken language and accessible to the masses) spread; Western literary works were translated into Chinese; the first foreign-language school was opened; and the first groups of Chinese students departed to study in Europe. The Western system of musical education — already tested in Japan — was introduced into China as well.

Young Chinese who had studied in Europe returned home attempting to transform traditional Chinese music in the style of the Western classical tradition. In 1919, a music department was established at Peking University, where classes followed the curricula of European conservatories. Gradually, European music secured a more stable position in China, even gaining its own cultural niche. The process was reinforced by the emergence of a particular stratum of Chinese intellectuals who regarded traditional Chinese culture as the main obstacle to progress and saw salvation for the nation in rejecting traditional values.

Fortunately, traditional types, genres, and styles of Chinese music were not removed entirely from the educational system. In the 1920s, a department existed at Peking University where students were instructed in pipa, qin, and erhu. In 1927, the prominent cultural figure Xiao Youmei founded the Shanghai Conservatory, which combined Western and Chinese principles of musical education. The conservatory included departments for both traditional instruments and Western piano, violin, and composition. In the Chinese arts system, the term modernization gradually became synonymous with Westernization. Students trained in Western musical style attempted to refine the styles, intonations, harmonies, polyphony, timbres, and ranges of traditional Chinese instruments.

For traditional musicians, the model of an instrumental ensemble became the large European symphony orchestra. Many Chinese lamented that in recent years Chinese classical music had been mostly solo-based, with only rare ensemble performances of up to seven musicians. Even those who described their performance as “ensemble” in fact played in unison, from memory, without using notation. The renewed interest in a new type of orchestra stemmed from the fact that small traditional ensembles no longer met the needs of a rapidly democratizing cultural life.

The period of formation of the modern Chinese orchestra of traditional instruments dates to the 1930s–1940s. All sources confirm that this orchestra evolved directly from the Jiangnan sizhu style. The first modern orchestra of traditional instruments was formed in Nanjing for broadcasting traditional music on Chinese radio (1935). In 1939, the radio station’s music department created a national orchestra of 14 musicians and a Western-style orchestra of 28 musicians. Each had its own repertoire and performed separately. One of the organizers, Gao Qiming, wrote that in 1942 the traditional orchestra included 20 musicians. Later it was renamed the Chinese Orchestra of the Central Radio Station.

As noted earlier, the orchestra was modeled on the European symphony orchestra: the yuehu or nanhu served as violas; dahu as cellos; dihu as double basses; yangqin as piano; xindi as flutes; xiao as clarinets; bangdi as piccolo; haidi as oboe; the large guan as trombone; the suona as trumpet; muqin as xylophone; dagu as timpani; xiaoguo as snare drum; dianbo as cymbals; and pengling as triangle.

Over several decades, the modern Chinese orchestra underwent notable evolution, especially in its function: from domestic entertainment to concert artistic performance. Traditional ensembles still exist in some rural and small provincial areas, but the popularity of modern Chinese orchestras continues to grow, and their number far exceeds that of local ensembles. Alongside professional orchestras, thousands of amateur orchestras have been founded throughout the country. The first state professional orchestra was established in Hong Kong by Wu Peacheng in 1977. Musicians of this orchestra adopted Western notation, while most orchestras still used traditional numeric notation. By the 1980s, many Chinese orchestras had switched to Western notation.

In the 1980s, nine amateur Chinese traditional orchestras existed within the Chinese diaspora in the United States. These included: the New York Chinese Music Ensemble (est. 1961 by Zhang Zuannanyi, 28 members); the New York Traditional Chinese Art Orchestra (1975, founder Lai Xinhai, 7 members); the Seattle Chinese Music Club Orchestra (Washington State, 1979, founder Tao Chushen, 20 members); the Los Angeles Chinese Music Club Orchestra (California, 1979, founder Bruce Lu Chunchi, 7 members); and the Orchestra of the Institute of Chinese Culture and Art in Richmond, California (founder Yu Chunmo, 27 members), among others. However, as noted by E.V. Gradova, “contacts between the main (‘mother’) trunk of the tradition and its diasporic offshoots remain rather minimal... while the main trunk of the orchestral tradition evolved and underwent significant renewal, its ‘transplanted’ branch, situated in a foreign cultural environment, became increasingly conservative regarding the preservation of traditional forms.” Thus, researchers note that in the United States one may still encounter masters performing in early 20th-century instrumental styles no longer used in China.

Today, China’s economic development is extremely dynamic. However, on the path toward the industrialization of traditional Chinese music, specialists must not only produce high-quality scholarship but also focus on transforming research results into practical application. A promising recent development in this respect is the nationwide “Lecture Hall” program, whose main goal is to disseminate China’s traditional culture and interpret it within the context of the contemporary global cultural landscape. In our opinion, in the era of digital information, it is crucial to create a platform that allows professional musicians to step onto the contemporary stage and reinterpret traditional musical forms and genres in ways relevant to modern audiences. This would significantly support both national heritage and the development of traditional Chinese music.

Traditional music also draws inspiration from other art forms, including audiovisual and dance arts. If we take modern rap music as an example, younger generations may be intrigued to learn that something similar actually emerged in China as early as the Tang dynasty (618–907). Its likely immediate predecessor was the tradition of chanting Chinese poetry “melodically”, shaped by the rich tonal–intonational structure of the Chinese language. After a period of evolution, during the Song dynasty (960–1276), this tradition adopted well-known elements of poetic ci culture, forming a relatively new type of vocal melodic line. During the Jin and Yuan dynasties, the poetic style zhugongdiao became a widely spread form of chant-declamation, typically performed solo and accompanied by percussion instruments. In the Ming dynasty, the number of performers increased. By the Qing dynasty, chant-declamation reached unprecedented development. Thus, this tradition is by no means a modern innovation but can rightfully be considered a national form deeply rooted in Chinese cultural history.

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Проблемы современного развития традиционной музыки Китая: часть 1

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Аннотация. Вопросы внешних влияний и национальной идентичности в формировании и развитии современной китайской музыкальной практики приобрели значительную актуальность на государственном уровне. В последние годы ученые в Китае все чаще отмечают, что традиционное музыковедение не следует ограничивать в плане использования мировых методов и направлений музыкальной науки. Традиционная музыка является важной частью китайской культуры и характеризуется разнообразием и сложностью. Рассматриваются особенности музыкального мышления в традиционной китайской музыке, прослеживается эволюция, а также анализируется влияние этих традиций на современных композиторов. Кроме того, на основе исторических источников и классических китайских музыкальных произведений предлагаются возможные пути будущего развития китайской национальной музыки.

Ключевые слова: Конфуций, «Записки о музыке», А. Черепнин, Шэнь Синьгуан, Сяо Юмэй, люй-дуй, ян-ци, инь-ци, пентатоника, китайская опера, традиционная музыка Китая

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