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A Comparative Study of Chinese and Western Music

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Abstract: This paper aims to explore a comparative study between Chinese music and Western music. By analyzing the characteristics, history, and cultural background of the two types of music, this article believes that there are differences and complementarities between Chinese music and Western music. This article focuses on analyzing the historical origins of Chinese and Western music. Chinese music emphasizes the expression of melody and the transmission of aura, while Western music places greater emphasis on harmony and rhythm. In addition, this article points out their pitch encoding and differences in musical form: Chinese music is based on the pentatonic scale, while Western music uses the twelve-tone average. At the same time, this article analyzes the characteristics and development of the two types of music from a historical and cultural perspective, comparing their musical styles, cultural backgrounds, and musical differences. Based on a comprehensive analysis, this paper concludes that there is a significant difference between Chinese music and Western music. But these differences are not antagonistic. The two types of music have many similarities in certain aspects, which also proves that they complement each other. Finally, this paper presents prospects for future research on communication and interaction between two types of music.

Keywords: Chinese Music; Western Music; Comparative Research; Benefits; Influence.

1. Introduction

This article will discuss the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western music in terms of their development histories, music styles, and cultural backgrounds.

As a cultural phenomenon, music has always been influenced by various factors such as local traditional culture, philosophy, social background, history, and culture. Therefore, compared with Chinese and Western music cultures, it can provide us with an enlightening observation perspective to further explore the coexistence and differences of musical language and forms in two different cultural backgrounds, as well as their commonalities and differences [1]. This article will focus on the historical origins, musical styles, and cultural backgrounds of Chinese and Western music in order to better understand the similarities and characteristics of Chinese and Western music.

2. The Historical Origin of Chinese and Western Music

2.1. Chinese Music

Chinese music has a long history. Since ancient times, in many different historical periods in China, it has had its own unique musical expression. Different forms of music spread in the Tang, Song, Yuan, and Ming dynasties in Chinese history. As social customs change, folk music also takes on many different forms.

In traditional Chinese music, there are specific musical tones such as 'five tones' and 'seven tones', among which 'five tones' are the most widely used, namely the names of the five tons of 'Gong, Shang, Jiao, Zheng, and Yu'. In Chinese music, people often emphasize the desire for rhythm, which promotes the change and development of music. In Chinese music, emphasis is placed on the alternation of harmony and sound, chords, and collective coordination, reflecting the unique style of Chinese music [2].

2.2. Western Music

Western classical music originated in Europe in the Middle Ages, and its style and development characteristics are obviously different from traditional Chinese music. Western classical music is represented by the term "symphony, which refers to a musical form in an orchestra. In addition to symphonies, other musical forms such as chamber music and song are also widely used in the field of Western music. Western music generally uses two approaches, focusing on melody and harmony production. At the same time, the artistic atmosphere of music is often paid attention to and valued by people [3].

The rhythms of Western music tend to be more nuanced, and the accurate harmony and rhythmic signals are unique. In terms of instrument performance, Western music focuses on the coordination of single-line performance and instrumental parts to reflect its specific instrument culture. Therefore, Western music is also considered a highly technical form of performing art [5].

3. Chinese and Western Music Styles

3.1. Chinese Music Style

There are many styles of music in China. Due to historical differentiation and changes in the social environment, different regions and nationalities have produced different musical forms. The form of Chinese music is usually a fixed rhythm created by instruments or human voices to achieve the effect of specific music, such as opera music or light and soft guzheng music. In addition, the differences between different genres and regions are also vividly expressed in Chinese music. For example, Beijing rhyme drums and Mongolian songs have their own unique national flavors.

3.2. Western Music Style Western Music has a History of Hundreds of Years

Due to the diversity of its cultural background, music in different cultural regions has unique characteristics and forms of expression. In Western classical music, the interaction of rhythm and harmony is the most typical feature. The style characteristics of western music are usually manifested in the pursuit of musical form, harmony, and interactive relationships. Through forms, harmony, symphony, orchestra, and other means, fully demonstrate and express the emotional connotation and depth of music.

Besides, pop music is also a form of western music. Emerging in the early 20th century, this style of music is usually characterized by smooth melodies, simple chords, and emphatic rhythms, showing a clear sense of time and pop culture [6].

4. Cultural Background of Chinese and Western Music

4.1. The Cultural Background of Chinese Music

Chinese music is an important part of Chinese traditional culture. It is closely related to other aspects of traditional Chinese culture, such as poetry, dance, and painting, mostly from ancient Chinese culture and history. It inherits the traditional aesthetics and philosophy of Chinese culture and reflects the emotional characteristics and values of the Chinese people.

Traditional Chinese music is often associated with other cultures such as literature, poetry, and opera, and together with literature, it constitutes the core of traditional Chinese art. ancient poetry and music contain Chinese wisdom and humanistic spirit and express the emotion and cultural value of the Chinese nation.

4.2. Cultural Background of Western Music

Western musical culture is often closely associated with European political, cultural, religious, and artistic movements. Western classical music is influenced by various cultures, such as Greco-Roman culture and Renaissance culture. Therefore, its expression and style also contain a lot of classicism, renaissance, and romanticism. In Western music, we can see the shadow of a distant artistic power deeply rooted in the peak of Western culture.

5. Comparison of Chinese and Western Music Differences

Music, no matter which country's music is produced, is a profound art. In a broad sense, music is an extension of culture and the crystallization of its essence. Like language, music also has a strong national color. As there are differences between countries and regions, there are also huge differences, just like the differences in grammar and vocabulary between different languages. There are huge differences between Chinese and Western music, which are inseparable from the cultural differences between the two. To a certain extent, music is a product of the development of human society and an important part of human civilization. When regional differences in human culture are formed, differences in music are also created.

5.1. Differences in Instruments

First of all, the difference between Chinese and Western music is reflected in the differences in musical instruments. Western musical instruments are mainly made of metal and various standardized woods, especially musical instruments. They are almost always made of metal or metal and glued wood (or various natural hardwoods such as ebony, mahogany, etc.). Most of the pipes, numbers, and flutes have metal textures, and a small number have piano bodies. Metals can also combine different alloys according to human needs, which is very conducive to standardization and normalization [7].

On the contrary, the production of Chinese musical instruments is mainly based on natural materials. In addition to melodic bells and non-melodic percussion instruments used on special occasions such as gongs, bells, and swings, other instruments such as Xiao, flute, sheng, se, Zheng, Ruan, Ruan Sanxian, pipa, erhu, and ban are all made of natural materials such as wood, bamboo, leather, stone, etc. The use of natural materials means respect for natural attributes, and the diversity and uniqueness of nature itself mean that people cannot standardize and unify their high-quality materials. Therefore, Chinese musical instruments made of natural materials pay special attention to the unique personality of the sound. In terms of vocal music, Chinese and Western musical instruments are also very delicate, but they are quite different. In order to achieve the versatility of the sound, in addition to standardization and unification, it is necessary that the role of the material in the sound of the instrument is not allowed to involve the body in the sound. Western musical instruments, especially wind instruments, are dominated by air vibrations, supplemented by body vibrations. In this way, Western instruments remove the barriers created by the above-mentioned material differences that prevent them from obtaining a common sound. Therefore, the difference in instruments makes for a completely different style of music [8].

5.2. Aesthetic Differences

The difference between Chinese and Western music is reflected in the difference in aesthetics. As mentioned in ‘Introduction to Chinese Music Aesthetics’, "in the process of pursuing aesthetics, Chinese music art takes ‘harmony’ as its ideal, advocates nothingness, seeks the spirit of emptiness, seeks deep taste, seeks to deepen. To be precise, it is vivid charm, emphasizing intuition and understanding." This is profound in Western music, which emphasizes rationality and thought, while intrigue, meaning, and emotion, as the spiritual pillars of music, form a stark contrast. In my opinion, the history of music aesthetics today is actually a history of the integration and complementarity of Chinese music aesthetics and Western music aesthetics. Traditional Chinese music mainly expresses the harmony and beauty of the etiquette of Confucianism, the nature of Taoism, heaven, and man. Unity, the emptiness of Buddhism, savvy, Zen, etc., are relatively subjective. So, pay more attention to harmony, beauty, and depth, Kuangda. It is the natural expression of the inner world of human beings in a certain natural environment, highlighting the "fusion of ‘love’ and ‘scenery’. For example, when you listen to ‘Mei Hua San Nong’, the first thing you can feel is the scene, and then, through the structure of the song, the whole theme is repeated using the method of loop reproduction three times. The noble character of Aoxue Lingshuang is situated in the context of the development of

Western drama. Western classical music focuses on aesthetics and functionality, so it is more objective. Western classical music is profound, highlighting the opposition between the host and the guest. Most of them have a positive or tragic element that embodies the 'magnificent beauty' of the spirit of art. The attitude towards art must be completely different between the East and the West.

5.3. Differences between Music Creation and Music Concepts

Traditional Chinese music does not have a complete set of composition theories and laws and is more likely to be lost. The technical aspects of Western classical music have theories, standards, and a large number of texts and audio materials that are easily disseminated. Traditional Chinese music is dominated by lines, while Western classical music is more peaceful. Just as Chinese painting and calligraphy pay attention to line art, Western painting pays attention to the art of noodles, three-dimensionality, light, and shadow. Traditional Chinese music focuses on atmosphere and charm, while Western classical music pays more attention to rhythm and momentum. Just as Chinese painting pays attention to freehand brushwork, it seems to be an unrealistic scene, while Western painting pays attention to realistic and extended scenes [9].

In the final analysis, due to historical and cultural reasons, there are certain differences between Chinese and Western music. It is mainly manifested in Chinese music, which focuses on love, while the music of the two oceans focuses on the harmony of the music itself. The development of Chinese music is a natural transition and comes down in one continuous line. The development of Western music has a block structure and staged characteristics; Chinese music embodies simple linear weaving thinking, mainly based on lines, while Western music tends to cross-border three-dimensional weaving thinking. Chinese music language is psychologically oriented, slightly formal, changeable, and open in structure, while Western music forms are rigorous and closed in structure. Chinese music is still beautiful, pursuing a tranquil and ethereal artistic conception and focusing on emotion, while Western music focuses on the unity of reason and emotion. The quest for power is clear and realistic. Therefore, it forms a completely different style.

The huge gap between Eastern and Western music is rooted in the cultural differences between China and the West. This difference in the operation of Western music is the difference between Chinese and Western cultures. The difference is that the acquisition of Western culture focuses on external knowledge, while the enjoyment of Chinese culture focuses on one's own life. Western cultural tradition is based on knowledge, while Chinese cultural tradition is based on life. The so-called knowledge of knowledge refers to the fundamental sign that Westerners acquire knowledge as their own life, as their own life, as a measure of a person, as a person. Man is a rational animal. The two thousand years of unwavering dominance of the faith of the Western man show this, for knowledge is the flower of reason and the fruit of wisdom. As far back as ancient Greece, Westerners were known for their obsession with knowledge. In the minds of Westerners, the pursuit of knowledge is not just a means of human existence; it points directly to where their lives are, and this is what life means. In the minds of the ancient Greeks, the intellectual sciences seemed to have nothing to pursue, nothing worth pursuing, nothing that could satisfy the needs of their souls and give them meaning.

6. Conclusion

In short, Chinese and Western cultures have their own characteristics and styles. Traditional Chinese music pays attention to the integration and diversity of sounds, which embody the philosophical thought and aesthetic characteristics of Chinese culture. The characteristics of Western music are usually characterized by accurate and reasonable register structure, rigorous arrangement, and beautiful melody.

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