

Borrowing and Local Practice: How "Assimilation" Leads to Innovation in Modern Pipa Performance

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Abstract: Pipa performance constitutes a symbolic system of "dots and lines" through the techniques of "finger rotation", "pushing and pulling" and so on. The traditional performance of the pipa is based on the "unity of man and the pipa", which realises the transmission of emotions to the outside world. However, the technological innovation in the creation of modern pipa music has led to the separation of traditional emotion and technology, and the degradation of the player's ability to "make up for the sound with rhyme" has further aggravated the technical deviation from the "technique-artistic-doctrine". The technical deviation of "technique-art-dao" is further aggravated by the degradation of the performers' ability to "make up for the sound with rhyme". At the same time, the traditional Chinese teaching model of "teaching by heart and mouth" reconstructs the symbiotic relationship between "technology, symbols and emotions" through imitation of physical experience, thus realising the "visualisation of life forms" for pipa music. It provides practical guidance for pipa music to realise the "intuitive presentation of life forms". This paper takes Susan Langer's "assimilation theory" as the philosophical framework to discuss the practical dilemma between the symbolic and emotional assimilation in modern pipa performance and the theoretical orientation of assimilation theory in pipa teaching.

Keywords: Susan Langer; "Assimilation Principle"; Secondary Composition; Pipa Performance; Music Education.

1. Introduction

Pipa music, as an important element of traditional Chinese music, integrates the diverse cultural genes of the Silk Road to form a unique musical art system. Based on the physical structure of "four strings and twelve pins", pipa music is constructed with the aesthetics of "dots and lines" through the techniques of finger rotation, pushing, pulling, sweeping and whisking. Susan Langer's "Principle of Assimilation", as a philosophical theory rooted in artistic symbols, is centred on explaining how art can realise the transformation and sharing of human emotions through symbols, while the traditional Chinese teaching method of "teaching by heart and mouth" is intended to be an example of "teaching by heart and mouth". The traditional teaching method of Chinese "oral teaching by heart" aims at solving the problem of transforming internal emotional symbols into external symbols in an embodied way. This theory is better suited to the problem of fragmentation between musical symbols and actual performance in the modern pipa music creation and performance, and provides theoretical support for the modern pipa teaching and stage interpretation practice in China.

2. Susan Lange's Theoretical Orientation of Musical Assimilation

2.1. The Theoretical Core of the "Principle of Assimilation"

2.1.1. The Essential Attribute of Art as "Emotional Symbol".

Susan Lange breaks through the dichotomy between traditional imitation theory and expression theory, and proposes that art is "the symbolic creation of human emotion". She believes that art is not a direct expression of individual emotions, but an abstraction and formalisation of the essence of emotions. The pipa, with its unique playing techniques, such as chanting, rubbing, and smoothing, is able to produce

musical effects that contain meaning and connotations beyond the notes themselves. In other words, these techniques can be used to create a symbolic element in the artist's creation that has a "form of life" through such elements as tone and rhythm. This "symbolic" evolution allows individual experience to be sublimated into an "emotional concept" that can be universally perceived by the outside audience, laying a theoretical foundation for the assimilation of emotion and performance technique.

2.1.2. The Logic of Isomorphism of "Life Form".

In the final interpretation of a musical work, there is a characteristic of "heterogeneous isomorphism" between artistic symbols and human emotions. Susan Langer points out that musical form must be isomorphic with the internal logic of emotion (e.g. from tension to resolution) in order to realise the assimilation effect. In modern pipa works, the common musical structure of "scattered plate-slow-medium-fast-scattered plate" has the same characteristics as the human emotion of "brewing-exploding-calming". The changes of melodic strength and human emotion are in line with the process of "brewing-explosion-calming", which forms the same-frequency resonance between the music score, the performer and the listener, so that the listener can complete the emotional projection of the music unconsciously. This isomorphism transcends the superficial differences between artistic symbols (musical scores and performance techniques, etc.), and reflects the internal logic between musical elements at the emotional level.

2.1.3. Dynamic Mechanism of Perceptual Assimilation

In her "Principle of Assimilation", Susan Langer emphasises the active constructive nature of artistic reception. She inherited the philosophical viewpoint of "the world of art is an imaginary world" from Cahill, indicating that art symbols (works of art) are not unidirectional transmission of information, but are forms of expression that are independent of the real world. Taking the pipa's wheel-finger technique as an example, the performer controls the speed and strength of

the fingertips to create a melodic character of "from point to line", building an "illusion of time". The listener, on the other hand, organises the fragmented notes into an inner flow of emotions through the sense of hearing. In this process, the boundary between subject and object is gradually diluted, and the subjective experience of the individual is incorporated into a universal external form. This assimilation is both cognitive and physical, and it can be said that the final stage presentation of the pipa song encompasses an "embodied" assimilation mechanism.

2.2. The Embodiment of "Assimilation" in Pipa Music

As a product of the musical and cultural fusion of the Silk Road, the pipa, whether in terms of form, playing technique or aesthetic expression, is a manifestation of the local retention and creative transformation of traditional Chinese culture into foreign culture from the Western regions.

2.2.1. The Evolution of Playing Techniques

Ancient China in the instrumental performance can be traced back to the Zhou Dynasty, the "Rites of the Zhou" recorded that musicians need to be "in charge of the six rhythms of the six same", the requirements of the performance in accordance with the norms of the meter, with emphasis on the embodiment of the beauty of a "neutral" and pay attention to the rhythmic precision and emotional restraint. After the opening of the Silk Road in the Western Han Dynasty, the Qu Xiang Pipa, as an exotic instrument imported from the Western Regions, initially focused on rhythmic plucking, with its four-stringed and four-posted structure and the way of holding the instrument horizontally, adapting to the distinctive rhythmic characteristics of hu music and the function of dance accompaniment. However, when the instrument entered the Chinese culture, it encountered a strong demand for linear melody and mood expression in local music. The Chinese musical tradition of "silk is better than bamboo and bamboo is better than meat" forced pipa players to break through the shackles of simple plucking techniques. In the period of the Wei, Jin and North-South Dynasties, through the maturity of the left hand's technique of "pushing, pulling, chanting and kneading" and other differential tone control, the player was able to simulate the gentle ups and downs of the human voice in the pipa's limited number of pins and columns; the right hand's rotating finger wheel constituted a kind of "illusion of time" with its dense sound points, which allowed the player to move in the flow of the technique. In the flow of technique, the performer transforms individual sorrows and joys into shared rhythms of life; push and pull tones create "uncertain tendencies" through pitch shifts, sublimating the performer's individual emotions into the external tensions between the notes of a piece of music. This change in playing technique makes the pipa a material carrier of sound, and completes the qualitative transformation of sound from pure physical vibration to the expression of musical mood and meaning.

2.2.2. Assimilation of Aesthetic Function

At the aesthetic level, the assimilation of pipa music is reflected in the "Chinese translation" of sound symbols. Taking the pipa piece "Ambush from Ten Sides" as an example, the piece names each section with its unique playing technique and the story content expressed in it as follows: 12 sections: camping, blowing and beating, pointing out the generals, lining up the formation, walking in line, ambush, a

small battle at Jiming Mountain, a big battle at Jiu Li Mountain, the defeat of the king of the Xiang Dynasty, cutting one's own throat in the Wujiang River, the generals' struggle for success, and returning to the camp in triumph. From the analysis of playing techniques, "wheel fingers" and "sweeping strings" simulate the thundering of war drums, which expresses the solemn and murderous atmosphere of the army assembly and formation, and the tones are urgent and tense, which sets the tone of the whole piece; "strings" simulate the battlefield between the weapons. The "twisted strings" simulate the impact between weapons on the battlefield; the "parallel strings" show the neighing of horses. When the song reaches its climax, the use of full wheel, strings, clapper board and other fierce techniques to express the waves of sound, depicting the magnificent scene of the battle between thousands of troops and horses. As the symbols of the music score and fingering as the medium of expressing musical emotions, the music is sublimated from the technical display to the musical reconstruction of the historical picture, and the reconstruction of this musical language is essentially a deep fusion of cultural memory and auditory perception, which makes the listener complete the unconscious identification of historical aesthetics in the assimilation of the aesthetics of the music.

3. The Balance between form and Emotion in Second Creation

3.1. Music Subjectivity and Performance Dominance in Second Creation

In the second creation of music, there always exists a certain philosophical discursiveness between the subjectivity of music and the dominance of performance. Eduard Hanslick, in his "theory of formal autonomy", puts forward that "music is a formal structure", emphasising the "beauty of self-regulation" in the form of musical movement, and requiring the performer to follow the objective laws of pitch organisation, rhythmic pattern, etc. Schopenhauer, on the other hand, put forward a critical insight into his view that "music is a structure of emotion", and he argued that "music is a structure of emotion". Schopenhauer, on the other hand, put forward a critical insight into his view that "music is an emotional structure", and he regarded music as a direct reflection of the nature of the will, which is a kind of emotional expression based on the idea but beyond the idea. Together, the two construct two dimensions of musical secondary creation: musical subjectivity and performance dominance.

Musical subjectivity requires both formal self-discipline and emotional experience, and performance dominance is the practical carrier to reconcile these two dimensions. Take the classic pipa piece "Ambush on Ten Sides" as an example, in the whole piece, the performance dominance of the performer becomes the core of the piece. When performing the piece, the artist should, on the one hand, strictly follow the formal structure of the piece to ensure the structural purity of the music ontology; on the other hand, he or she needs to express the tension and relaxation of the strength and the speed of the speed through the appropriate technical regulation, so as to incorporate the sadness and intensity of the war into the notes, and to make the form become the symbolic carrier of the emotional narrative. This philosophical contemplation of subjectivity and dominance shows its different artistic characteristics in the contemporary interpretation of the piece

"Ambush on Ten Sides". Liu Dehai's version strictly adheres to the formula of the "string twisting" technique, in which the sound of clashing weapons acquires a tragic emotional weight through the control of the right hand's explosive force; while Lin Shicheng's version shows another dimension: in the "ambush" section, the amplitude of the left hand's vibrato follows the narrative of the ambush. In the "Ambush" section, the amplitude of the left hand vibrato gradually expands as the narrative progresses. This treatment is in line with Gadamer's statement that the performer is neither a slave to form nor an indulger of emotion, but rather uses physical memory as a medium to resonate the narrative of the score with contemporary views of human nature in a symbiosis between the real and the imaginary in the fingering.

3.2. Mutual Relationship between Musical Form and Emotional Expression in Secondary Composition

Based on the perspective of assimilation theory, Susan Langer clearly puts forward in *Emotion and Form* that once music is combined with lyrics and drama, the final result is that music assimilates or even annexes the text of lyrics and drama, turning it into a completely musical work. Once a musical work loses its emotional form in the process of presentation, it will become a meaningless symbolic form. His "theory of assimilation" reveals the essential characteristic of musical art: music abstracts emotion into a perceptible symbolic system through formal structures. Lange points out that music does not directly imitate emotion, but constructs dynamic patterns that are isomorphic to emotional life through the logical movement of pitch, rhythm, and weave. This "heterogeneous and isomorphic" transformation mechanism is especially significant in the second creation - the performer needs to follow the self-regulating laws of musical form, but also needs to inject emotional energy into the formal framework through technical means, so as to realise the depth of interplay between form and emotion.

In modern pipa concerts, however, there is often a barrier to emotional isomorphism between the performer and the listener. For example, in Chen Yin's 2008 solo pipa piece *Dance of the Mountain*, the large-scale rapid sweeping and clapping of its sections is meant to express the joyous scene of the A Thing people during the moon dance, but for the non-professional listener, it is not possible. However, for the non-specialist audience, the lack of knowledge of the new techniques and styles made it impossible to relate them to their own emotional experiences. At the same time, the overlapping of rhythmic patterns and technical fingerings between the layers adds to the burden of appreciation and understanding, making it difficult for the listener to capture the emotional pulse of the music and to empathise with the work.

In the field of music aesthetics, the issue of emotion has always occupied a central theoretical position, but there has long existed an epistemological level of disagreement between the ontological attributes and value pointing between its musical ontological form and human emotion. Edward Hanslick, in his book *On the Beauty of Music - A Revision of Musical Aesthetics*, offers a critical view of this, arguing that although there is indeed a close correlation between acoustic art and the experience of human emotion, attributing the essential root of the aesthetic value of music to such a correlation constitutes a misinterpretation of the principle of artistic self-regulation. This theoretical position reveals the

dual dimensions of music's emotional attributes - one is the subjective experience generated by the receiving subject in aesthetic activities, with the contingent characteristics of individualisation and contextualisation; the other is the objective emotional qualities embedded in music's formal structure, embodied in the self-contained aesthetic value carried by elements such as pitch organisation and rhythmic patterns. Hanslick's theoretical construction. Hanslick's theoretical construction is clearly inclined to the latter, emphasising that the essence of musical art lies in the purely formal beauty contained in its "musical movement form", rather than in the direct mapping or reproduction of the subject's emotions.

For example, in the second composition of the pipa piece "Ambush from Ten Sides", the musical form and emotional expression are deeply intertwined in the various passages. The technique of the piece is a symbolic carrier of the emotion of war, such as the "sweeping whisk" and the "wheel finger". The performer injects emotion through technical processing, such as Liu Dehai's emphasis on strengthening the finishing strength in his performance, and Lin Shicheng's precise control of the fingering details in each passage. Form serves emotion, and emotion activates form. Not only retaining the formal genes of the original war depictions, but also incorporating contemporary emotional interpretation to achieve a deep integration of the two. Therefore, when the artist creates a second composition, in order to realise the rapport between the musical form and the performer's personal emotion, it is essentially a self-innovation of the performer in the practice of playing. By interpreting history and culture, relying on the medium of modern technology and combining his own subjective experience, the performer achieves a balance between form and emotion in the tension between "constraint" and "freedom". This not only confirms the aesthetic value of Lange's assimilation theory, but also provides methodological inspiration for music interpretation in the era of globalisation.

4. The Realistic Dilemma of Modern Pipa Music Creation and Presentation

4.1. Technological Innovation and Emotional Disconnection

In the context of contemporary music creation, modern pipa music creation is undergoing a profound technological innovation, which is taking place in multiple dimensions, such as compositional techniques, performance techniques, and the use of sound effects. In terms of compositional techniques, complexity has become a significant trend. Taking the modern pipa concerto "Cloudy Thoughts, Flower Thoughts" by composer Wang Danhong as a typical example, this work breaks through the constraints of the traditional pentatonic scale system, innovatively uses cutting-edge techniques such as multi-tonal superposition and micro-differential tones, and meticulously designs modern rhythmic patterns. The polytonal superposition allows the musical elements of different tonalities to intertwine and collide in the same space and time, creating a rich and unique harmonic effect; the introduction of micro-differential tones further expands the space for subtle changes in pitch, adding aesthetic colours and sensual tension to the music.

However, this technical innovation has directly led to the

weakening of traditional aesthetic techniques such as "chanting, kneading, nickering, and noting", so that more and more professional performers are deviating from their focus when playing this work. As Zhang Hongyan, a professor at the Central Conservatory of Music, points out, "When the speed of the rotating fingers is increased from 60 beats per minute to 180 beats per minute, the aesthetic qualities of the granularity of the timbre are being replaced by technical athleticism." In the dominance of modern technical rationality and the interpretation of works, artistic sensibility has been gradually marginalised, and has become more of a "classroom" tendency. Performers take the emotional expression of the piece itself as a technological accessory, which further leads to a break in the aesthetic tradition of the "unity of zither and human being". When technical rationality overrides artistic sensibility, the mechanism of conveying music's emotion is at risk of being deconstructed. Therefore, in training modern works, players need to strengthen the aesthetics of traditional techniques. For example, before playing the fast finger-rotation passage of "Cloudy Thoughts - Flower Thoughts", one can compare the moon ripples created by the finger-rotation passage of "High Moon" to understand the differences in the expression of granular timbre in different contexts, and use the "three-touch method" proposed by Professor Zhang Hongyan: a dynamic adjustment system of string angle, string depth, and string speed, to help the player to In the high-speed technical passages, the sound quality of the tone is preserved to avoid producing mechanised sound effects.

4.2. The Dilemma of the Performer's Secondary Composition

In discussing the nature of music performance, Susan Langer puts forward the idea of "how a mature musician should have a correct grasp of music": "Music is able to express the form of life experience through the speciality of its own dynamic structure, which is extremely difficult to convey in words. Emotion, life, movement, and mood make up the meaning of music." She divides this theoretical "grasp" into two levels, the first being the external, sensory grasp of the work. In the process of music transmission and presentation, the score, as a symbolic medium, carries the composer's creative intent and musical message. The performer's first task is to transform these abstract symbols into actual audible sound, which is a process from abstraction to embodiment. At this level, the performer needs to have solid playing skills, master the principles of instrumental sound and playing methods, and play accurately according to the notes, rhythms, strengths and other markings on the score, so that the musical work is transformed from silent symbols into sound art that can be appreciated, and which directly affects the listener's auditory senses.

The second level is the inner, spiritual grasp of the work. This is a more in-depth and complex process, which requires the performer not only to stay on the surface of the notes, but also to dig deeper into the spiritual connotation behind the work. As Yu Runyang explains in his book *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Modern Western Music*, this material transformation of the spirit begins with the "concept of form". Performers need to understand the overall structure of the work, the harmony, the melody and other elements of the form of the internal logical relationship, to grasp the formal beauty of the work. On this basis, the performer should combine these formal elements with the spiritual content of the work,

such as emotion and thought, through his own artistic perception and imagination, and finally realise the "complete presentation of imagined sensory experience". In other words, the performer has to construct a vivid and lively musical world in his mind and convey it to the audience through his performance, so that the audience can feel the deep-seated charm and emotional power of the work.

However, in the actual performance process, performers often face the dilemma of balancing between these two levels. Some performers pay too much attention to the display of external skills, neglecting the deep excavation of the spiritual connotation of the work; while some performers can understand the inner spirit of the work, but when they transform it into actual performance, it is difficult to present it through perfect skills, and all of these factors affect the quality and effect of the second creation of the musical work.

4.3. Barriers to the Audience's Affective Isomorphism

Based on the above problems of technical innovation and emotional disconnection in pipa music creation and interpretation, modern pipa music often incorporates a large number of innovative techniques and diversified styles when using the "assimilation theory" for creation. For example, modern western compositional techniques are borrowed, and complex means such as multi-tonal superposition and micro-differentiation are used, or elements of jazz and rock styles are fused. Although these innovations have enriched the expressive power of the music, they have raised the threshold of understanding for listeners accustomed to traditional pipa music. For example, the pipa solo piece *Dance of the Mountain*, composed by Chen Yin in 2008, with its large-scale rapid sweeping and clapping, was intended to express the joyous scene of the "moon jumping" of the people of A Thing, but for non-professionals who lacked a foundation of knowledge of the new techniques and styles, they were unable to relate it to their own emotional experience. At the same time, the excessive stacking of rhythmic patterns and technical fingerings between the layers adds a burden to their appreciation and understanding, making it difficult for listeners to capture the emotional pulse of the music and to empathise with the work.

In addition, according to Susan Langer's "assimilation theory", performers need to assimilate multiple elements into their performance in order to convey specific emotions. However, most performers and listeners have different aesthetic perceptions. Performers pay more attention to technical innovation and depth of artistic expression in the presentation of their works, and pursue personalised musical interpretation, while listeners have different aesthetic levels and preferences, some of whom may prefer simple, easy-to-understand, and emotionally straightforward music. This difference makes the works created and performed by the performers through the assimilation theory unable to accurately hit the emotional points of the listeners, thus making it difficult to realise the emotional isomorphism.

5. The Applicability of Assimilation Theory in Pipa Teaching

In the ancient Chinese traditional society, the core paradigm of traditional Chinese music teaching is "oral transmission by heart", the essence of which is to transmit knowledge through physical experience and cultural

perception. In the context of agrarian civilisation, this mode of teaching is based on the teacher-apprentice system, and relies on the path of "observing-imitating-understanding", which transforms abstract skills into performance techniques that can be perceived and used. At the same time, the teaching paradigm of oral transmission builds a trinity of "skill-art-doctrine" in pipa teaching and performance, and its localised teaching practice can be realised in the following two aspects:

5.1. Imitation and Reproduction of Physical Experience

Through the visual demonstration of body language, the teacher transforms abstract techniques into perceptible "movement diagrams". For example, when teaching the finger-wheeling technique of the piece "The Moon is High", the teacher uses the movement of the right arm to "draw a circle" with the rise and fall of the breath, and explains the timbre of the technique when touching the strings in the middle of the performance, so that the students internalise the image of the "moon's shadow flowing" in the course of imitation, and imagine that they are in the music. The students internalise the imagery of "moon shadow" and imagine that they are in the mood of the piece. This mode of teaching abandons the indirect translation of musical notation, but directly through the imitation and reproduction of body movements, realising a synchronous transformation mode from fingertips to hearing and then to imagination, the advantages of which are more and more prominent in teaching practice. Under the guidance of this kind of intuitive teaching, students' mastery of techniques is more rapid and profound. When they repeatedly imitate the teacher's body movements, their bodies gradually form a muscle memory of specific techniques. This muscle memory is intertwined with the imagination of the musical context, so that when students actually play, they no longer just execute the movements mechanically, but interpret them with emotion and understanding.

In addition, this mode of synchronised transformation helps to develop the individual student's perception and creativity of music. When students are able to skilfully blend their body movements with the musical context, they are no longer confined to a set way of playing. With an understanding of the compositional context of the piece and the established meaning, students may be able to innovate in the use of techniques, expressing a new understanding of the piece with unique rhythmic variations or by changing the angle of the fingernails touching the strings to handle the timbre. At the same time, this teaching mode promotes two-way interaction and communication between teachers and students. Teachers are able to give timely feedback and guidance based on students' imitation, and at the same time, they can also put forward new thoughts on the performance of the piece based on students' second-hand creations.

5.2. Infiltration and Permeation of Aesthetic Paradigm

Teachers and pupils gradually form an "aesthetic community" in the long-term oral transmission-imitation teaching system, so that the micro technical details carry macro-cultural judgements. This "aesthetic community" is like a cultural field with strong cohesion, playing the function of continuous immersion and deep penetration of aesthetic paradigm. In daily teaching practice, the master, by virtue of his superb demonstration performance, transfers to the pupil

an organic fusion of performance skills and aesthetic norms. In the process of imitating the master's performance, the pupil does not only copy the movements mechanically, but also deeply explores and internalises the aesthetic concepts behind the master's performance.

In pipa playing, the master's subtle control of the strength and speed of the "wheel fingers", which on the surface seems to belong to the realm of microscopic technical details, in fact carries the macro-consideration of the expression of musical emotion, as well as the pursuit of the core element of "rhythm" in the aesthetics of traditional music. The pupil is a master in the art of music. Through repeated imitation and practice, the pupil gradually learns and understands the deep cultural connotations behind these micro-techniques, and skilfully integrates them into his own playing style. With repeated practice over time, this effect continues to deepen. Not only does the pupil become closer to the master's level of technique, but he or she also reaches a high level of aesthetics in tune with the master. They began to apply common aesthetic standards to objectively and accurately judge the quality of their performances, and showed remarkable similarities in their understanding and interpretation of musical works.

In addition, this aesthetic paradigm continues to be passed on from generation to generation, and in the mode of "master's succession", traditional music culture continues to achieve self-enrichment and development, which strongly guarantees the consistency and stability of music culture in the process of historical evolution.

6. Conclusion

Susan Langer's "assimilation theory" provides profound philosophical insights into the creation and teaching of modern pipa music, but also exposes the structural contradictions of the traditional art in its contemporary transformation. Pipa music relies on the symbolic system and collective cultural memory to convey emotions, and its traditional technique, through the granularity of timbre and the processing of vocal chords, confirms the theoretical core of Lange's "isomorphism of life forms". However, the over-expansion of technological rationality in modern composition has led to a break between musical symbols and the listener's perceptual experience in the process of translation. There is an urgent need to strengthen the traditional Chinese teaching model of "teaching by heart and mouth" to resolve the contradiction between the two.

The survival of contemporary pipa music is essentially a fusion between classical music aesthetics and modernity. Only by adhering to the principle of "emotional and formal isomorphism" in innovation, and by making technological innovation a cultural memory, can we safeguard the "locality" and "vitality" of pipa music in the fusion of Chinese and Western music. "The Pipa Music

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