An Analysis of China’s Popular Music Development Tendency to Its Elegance and Popularity in Modern Socio-cultural Perspective—A Case Study on Social Group Psychology and Individual Psychology

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Abstract. With the music culture increasingly penetrating into people’s life and various of musical elements and patterns emerging in endlessly, there is a great variety of music forms in cultural products markets. Facing with so many modern music pieces, people in music circle have devoted themselves into the debate of “elegance” and “popularity” in new style. Elegance and popularity are two essential elements in the art of music, which not only affect the development and trend of the musical practice but also represent the aesthetic features of the public. With the vicissitudes of time, the relations between elegance and popularity in music culture are also changing. In this case, under the impact of modern social culture, what is the development tendency to elegance and popularity in China’s popular music? In this essay, the authors will take the psychological aspect of both social group and individual into thorough consideration.

The Development Tendency to Modern Social Culture

Nowadays, with the high-speed development of economy and the flourishing of culture, people has become the leading role of the entire society. Hence, the modern social culture represents the culture of the masses, which enjoys great popularity. However, at present, the social mainstream culture, driven by commercialization, profit and entertainment, tends to develop in the direction of marketization and popularization in order to satisfy the appetite of the public and offer amusement.

What’s more, there emerges Three Vulgar Culture including vulgarity, meanness and voluptuousness on the Internet and TV programs to attract people. For example, according to the report of Modern Express in June 4th, 2016, a man deliberately hit on a passing-by old lady by stones and bricks for the purpose of being well-known. Besides, an overnight cyber celebrity named “Papi” in microblog speaks foul language in her own self-made video so as to amuse the netizens, which undoubtedly presses negative effects on cyber culture. The above-mentioned vulgar culture is very common now, which results in bad influence in modern society. Therefore, in the process of composing new contents, it is necessary to figure out the definition standard and current situation of elegance and popularity no matter what field it is. This can not only provide instructive significance for the practice of composition but also be beneficial for the development and flourishing of social culture.
The Origin and Current Status of Elegant Music and Popular Music

Elegant music, also named refined music, originates from the system of rites and music in Zhou Dynasty in Chinese ancient times, which is to strengthen the monarchy and educate the public. Elegant music is a kind of specialized music used in sacrificial ceremony. Popular music, also named popular music, originates from the folk music, which, through some process and collection, is used in the merry-making times. Popular music was named as *Yanyue* in ancient times. In the *Analects*, Confucius mentioned in the chapter of Yanghuo that “I hate to see roan killing red, I hate to see the tunes of Zheng corrupting Court music, I hate to see sharp mouths overturning kingdoms and clans.” At that time, elegant music represented the status of ruling class, but the tunes of Zheng and Wei reflected the daily life and emotions of the public. Due to the popularity of the tunes of Zheng and Wei, it was rejected by the ruling class for it menaced the status of elegant music.

With the vicissitudes of times and updates of culture, elegant music and popular music embody new implications and meanings. Nowadays, there is no distinct division of political status between elegant music and popular music. But they do have obvious distinctions. Elegant music is more likely to indicate the pursuit of spiritual level and the expression of value, while popular music is more likely to be close to the daily life and emphasize the demands of personal emotion. In the modern music circle of China, elegant music and popular music are opposite as well as unified, which will constantly promote the development of modern music culture of China.

The Tendency to Elegant Music and the Psychology of Social Group and Individual

Culture is the foundation of social development, which can offer service for the public. As a part of social culture, the music culture, which can satisfy the needs of the public and accord with the modern social values, should be advocated and developed.

The Tendency to Elegant Music and the Psychology of Social Group

In the process of the current construction of urban culture, replacing the old with the new is the inevitable tendency. Among the newly urban buildings, the music hall of citizen plays an important role. “China is the only country in the world that is still in the process of building music hall and theater.” [1] said by Fan Jingma, one of the famous tenor singer in China. As a matter of fact, such is the case. In recent years, many places in China devote to building music hall, such as the music hall of Shanghai Symphony Orchestra built in 2014, the music hall of Changsha and the opera theater of Bengbu built in 2015, the “Little Domed Stadium” of Jiangsu built in 2016.

What’s more, in order to attract more audience to music hall, many cities offer rational price of the concert, and even moderately provide the concerts which are free of charge in slack season. According to the reports of Qingdao Morning News in July 16\(^{th}\), 2009, the piano concert and the piano class of Zhao Xiaosheng and his students held in 20\(^{th}\) will be open to the public for free. According to the reports of Nanfang Daily in March 16\(^{th}\), 2016, in every March and April, Guangzhou Symphony Orchestra will offer ten concerts to the teenagers for free in Xinghai music hall. This public benefit activity has been held for ten years, which attracts nearly 15,000 audiences every year.

All these indicates that there is an increasingly tendency for the acceptance and pursuit towards elegant music. The piano concert held by Zhao Xiaosheng not only amalgamates...
classical music, romantic music and national music, but also introduces “the composition system of Taiji” engraved with Chinese characteristics and the theoretical system of “the movement of sound-sets”. It contains a great variety of elements, which may generate the feeling of boring for the non-philharmonic. Nevertheless, the piano concert attracts amounts of people including the teachers and students from many conservatory of music and many amateurs. The public benefit concert held by Guangzhou Symphony Orchestra aims to introduce classical music composition and music culture for the teenagers.

Apart from these, there are also many kinds of performance of music culture, which contribute to provide access for the public to music. Many recreational facilities provided for the public have been built, such as the Choral Singing Festival held by the Urban Cultural Houses, the music training courses held by the Urban Cultural Palaces, and the performance presented by the Urban Art Centers. Guo Ba Yin (literally means enjoyment), one of the TV program of the television channel of CCTV11, not only provides a platform of pursuing elegant music for amateurs of traditional Chinese opera, but also, in the process of inheriting the traditional Chinese opera culture, enables the public to promote the quality and cultural level of music.

The Tendency to Elegant Music and the Psychology of Individual

Under the tendency to elegant music, the psychology of society consists of the performers and the composers.

Nowadays, apart from inviting famous singer or professional groups to make performance, the music halls of citizen in many cities also enable amateurs to perform on the stage. As long as they can offer elegant performance, they can also be the top-notch in the music halls.

According to the report of Binhai Times in June 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 2016, Han Baoqing, known as a bel canto singer, is a farmer indeed. He is preparing for the public benefit performance in Tianjin. Before that, he had held his personal solo concert in the Dagang Grand Theater and the Tianjin Music Hall. According to the report in Dahe Daily in August 31\textsuperscript{th}, 2015, Xiaoping who works in hospital, insisting in singing for decades, held her first solo concert in August 29\textsuperscript{th}. This activity was hosted by the Vocal Music Institute of Henan Province and organized by the Vocal Music Committee of Musician Institute of Zhengzhou.

Meanwhile, the focus of Chinese composers has been shifted from western classical music system to Chinese traditional music. Tan Dun, a Chinese composer enjoying great popularity around the world, has deeply rooted into the ground of Chinese traditional music, which qualifies him the talents to expose the profound pith of Chinese culture through his music composition. The above-mentioned elements can be clearly seen from his earlier compositions including Feng, Ya and Song, Lisao and Jiuge, his mid-term compositions including Maps, Ghost Opera and even the controversial composition The Music Composed by Water, Stones and Papers. Tan Dun has been persisting in the research of music compositions as well as emphasizes the wide range of the approach in composing advanced music. Undoubtedly, there are mixed comments towards the music of Tan Dun. For example, “The music of Tan Dun is composed through various of approaches, which is filled with weird sounds and cannot generate the feeling of aesthetics. What’s more, Tan Dun fails to express the heartfelt thinking of the public, which makes the music become the castle in the air.

In fact, almost all music web-sites have included all of his compositions. Every album of Tan Dun has enjoyed great popularity for the high downloads and comments which are no less than the pop music. For example, Jiuge is graded at the marks of 8.8 by Douban Music
because 53.3% of netizens have granted a five-star compliment. Meanwhile, some netizens have made comments towards the composition of Tan Dun. For *Ghost Opera*, some said, “It seems to make people be personally on the scene with the feeling of thrilling and gloomy.” There are also some people said, “It is beyond my comprehension.”

There are other composers with similar composing style, such as Chen Qigang, Zhao Jiping, San Bao and so on. These composers have produced more and more subtle but effusive compositions, which enjoy wide acceptance on many music websites. Obviously, the music market of China has great potential. Also, the receptivity of Chinese audience cannot be underestimated. What Tan Dun has been insisting in is that the music represents the free dream.

However, there emerges a question. Is there any settled direction or standard for the tendency to elegant music?

The authors of this essay hold that it will satisfy the needs of the China’s national condition and the public as long as follow the steps of harmonious socialism. As a part of the Chinese culture, the composition of music should give priority to the needs of the public.

More and more compositions aim to making breakthrough and pursuing elegance. In *The Music of 24 Solar Terms*, every song, lacking of accompany and lyrics, should well present the characteristics of its corresponding solar term. Series of choral music, lacking of accompany and lyrics, had been put on the stage of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, which was performed by the Sky Chorus of the Central China Normal University. There presented *The Four Seasons of Childhood—Spring with Brisk Sparrows, Summer with Flying Insects, Autumn with Busy Ants and Winter with Frolic Puppies* composed by Wen Deqing, *The Flute and Drum Melody of The Setting Sun* adapted by Lu Pei and *The Heavenly Lake—Namtso* composed by Cao Guangping.

The random interviews after the concert, however, show that the concert was too elegant to go beyond the appreciation of the audiences. Therefore, there is still a gap between the common audiences and the elegant music composed through advanced approaches by composers.

However, some music is wrapped by the cover of so-called elegance, which aim at breaking the conventional mode and creating a new style. These kinds of music care more about being distinctive than being outstanding. For example, *The Four Seasons of Childhood* composed by Wen Deqing presents four songs in four different dialects including Shuiji dialect, Wuhan dialect, Fujian dialect and Shanghai dialect. Music like this, hard to be accepted, contains more academic value than appreciative value.

Hence, the tendency to elegant music should neither forsake the original essence of the connection between music and humanity nor ignore the heartfelt thinking of the public.

**The Tendency to Popular Music and the Psychology of Social Group and Individual**

**The Tendency to Popular Music and the Psychology of Social Group**

When it comes to the tendency to popular music, the primary task is to define the meaning of “Su” which consists of four different meanings.

Firstly, it means the custom, etiquette or convention formed in the process of social development. The convention is a specific or abstract matter shaped through the long-term practice of the public.

Secondly, it means the popular matters, such as popular name, common saying and folk song.
Thirdly, it regards the vulgar matters, such as vulgarity and vulgar things.

Fourthly, it indicates the mortal world which is contrary to the fairyland and the vulgarian[2].

Popular music refers to either the popular music mentioned in the second meaning or the vulgar music mentioned in the third meaning, which indicates the tendency to popular music. It is the civil society groups organized by the public that can best represent the tendency to popular music.

According to the report of Chongqing Daily in May 3th, 2016, this year witnesses the nineteenth anniversary of the founding of the Hainan Ladies’ Philharmonic Chorus. This chorus, including hundreds of members, has become the folk chorus with the largest scale and the longest time in China. In recent years, the Hainan Ladies’ Philharmonic Chorus, having given performances home and abroad, is reputed as “The Symbol of Hainan’s Culture”. According to the report from Fuzhou Evening Papers, a chorus, formed by over seventy music amateurs, has set foot on the stage of The Golden Concert Hall in Vienna. These people realize their dreams of singing in an international stage by dint of their perseverance regardless of lacking of professional training.

These civil society groups can well express the ardent love and pursuit towards music. Meanwhile, they can satisfy the needs of spiritual pursuit of the public and make life full of enjoyment. In this case, the tendency to popular music is of great significance.

The cover version of music is another newly-emerging popular music. Shengyan, a singer, is famous for her covering the songs of Deng Lijun. Deng Lijun used to be one of the most famous singers in China. So far, dozens of Deng Lijun’s concert were held home and abroad. Several decades ago, the songs of Deng Lijun was regarded as vulgar music. In modern times, we classify these songs into the popular music. It doesn’t mean that these songs are vulgar music. On the contrary, popular music like these can arouse consensus among the public and be beneficial for the development of music in China. Therefore, popular music can make positive effects on the development of music as long as they can be well chosen and spread.

However, it doesn’t mean that all the singers who sing the cover version have flourishing careers. Some cover versions are too vulgar to be appreciated. What’s more, some mainland pop singers cover the songs from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, and even western countries. The album named Mei Fei Se Wu, sang by Zheng Xiuwen, is a cover version of The Unique composed by Li Zhenxian from Korea. The album named Love Love Love, sang by Cai Yilin, is a cover version of Stop Stop Stop composed by Nu Virgos from Ukraine. A girl group from Taiwan named SHE has covered numerous songs of West Life from America. The above-mentioned music can be classified into the third category meaning the vulgar music.

The authors of this essay hold that as a part of popular music, pop music, characterized by its high rate of circulation, should not indiscriminately imitate others. After all, there is a fertile soil of the music culture of China, which helps to cultivate countless music elements. However, the indiscriminately imitation seems to attend to trifles and neglect the essentials.

Recently, music entertainment programs are very popular. There are over thirty music programs on many Star-TV or on the Internet. It should date back to the first season of The Voice of China which enjoys great popularity and audience ratings across the country. Then, there emerge in series of music entertainment programs like I’m a Singer, The Good Song of China and so on. All these programs have maintained the high quality, whereas there are some programs practicing fraud in order to achieve relatively high audience ratings and attract
audiences’ attention. Taking *Oh My God of Song* as an example, this program aims to entertain the audiences instead of focusing on the essence of music. Music entertainment programs like this dissimulate themselves under the cover of music to reach the purpose of amusement. The authors of this essay think that music entertainment programs should attach greater importance to the quality and essence of music than the entertaining purpose. It is introducing music with high-quality that the music entertainment programs should emphasize on.

**The Tendency to Popular Music and the Psychology of Individual**

Li Yugang is famous for the song *New Drunken Beauty*. The Band named Phoenix Legend is well-known for the song *The Most Gorgeous National Style*. The authors of this essay think that there are two reasons of their popularity. On the one hand, it is the traditional opera elements and national style that cope with the appreciation of the public. On the other hand, they well combined the traditional opera elements with the pop music elements. It is the tendency to popularization that helps to make the music win great popularity.

However, it is worthwhile to mention that not all composition derived from daily life can be well accepted. It requires a standard of measuring the degree of popularization. Nowadays, vulgar music, with vulgar lyrics and rhythms, should receive heated extolling. The vulgar music should be classified into the third category meaning the vulgar music, such as *The Poisonous Perfume*, *I Can’t Bear the Hurts*, *Wrong Wrong Wrong* and so on. The vulgar music runs in the opposite direction of the development of modern Chinese culture.

For this reason, it is necessary for the music and culture circles to set regular standard for music development. Facing with the turbulence of vulgar music, we need to develop the resolution capacity as well as supervise the source of vulgar music.

**The Practice of Music Being Linked with the Collision and Accumulation of “Elegance” and “Popularity”**

The Music Composition represents the heartfelt thinking and emotion of the composer. But, with the development of times and music culture, the qualified music composition should be equipped with profound meaning, arouse consensus among the public and advance with the times.

From the perspective of music appreciation, it is wrong to judge compositions on the standard of “Elegant music” or “Popular music”. Taking *Yellow River Cantata* and *Butterfly Lovers* as examples, music like these cannot be simply classified into “elegant music” or “popular music”. Undoubtedly, music arouse consensus among the public. In fact, these music not only embody elegant content and form but also contain easy-to-understand lyrics and rhythms. The combination of the advantages of “elegant music” and “popular music” enables music to enjoy the enduring popularity.

Therefore, in the process of music practice, “elegance” and “popularity” is the unity of opposites. “Elegance” helps to promote the spiritual level. “Popularity” helps to attract public’s attention. In a word, it is the amalgamation of “elegance” and “popularity” that contributes to develop the practice of music.
Elegance and Popularity Being in Complete Harmony and Catering for Audiences’ Appetite

The authors of essay think that the development of China’s music should attach importance to the appreciation level and the receptivity. Otherwise, the music will be too elegant to be understood by the public or too vulgar to reach the appreciative level of the public.

In the process of research, we find that music with spirit, without settled form, run through both the elegant artistic state and the common living surroundings. It is hard to completely classify a music composition into “elegance” or “popularity”. After long-time meditation, we finally figure out that the evaluation criterion towards a composition has nothing to do with elegance or popularity. Some prefer elegant music, while others prefer popular music. Therefore, only the music being widely accepted can be the proper music. It is these kinds of music that are worthy of being developed. Some vulgar music, enjoying popularity at present, will be ephemeral in the long-term development of music.

Simultaneously Developing Elegant Music and Popular Music

Culture is the concentrated reflection of the specific society and the spiritual life of the times. Culture, determined by certain economy and politics, will feed back to the development of economy and politics.[3] Meanwhile, as an inseparable part of culture, music culture has been closely linked with the development of the society and the times. In this case, what is the development tendency of mainstream music in terms of elegance and popularity in modern society?

In the process of China’s modernization, Xi Jinpin, the general secretary of China, has referred to the great visualization of The Chinese Dream. He holds that the realization of The Chinese Dream is to realize the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The realization of this goal should never separate the prosperity of the culture. Whether a country is attractive or not, the first impression of the judgment lies in the comprehensive national strength. Then, we will take the specialty of this country into consideration. The specialty here refers to the distinctive charm of the culture.

China has strengthened the comprehensive national strength as well as made great great progress in enhancing soft power. We are presenting the characteristics and dispositions of Chinese nations to the whole world. This year witnesses the successful holding of G20 in Hangzhou, China. In September 4th, the performance The Moment in Hangzhou has made great impression on the whole world. The performance, well presenting the elegance of China, has made a great success. Meanwhile, we’d better carefully consider the reason why the performance can be so successful. What potential culture element is it that contributes to its success?

Regardless of the gorgeous lights and vivid stage effects made by water, the performances, in terms of music, makes a combination of Chinese traditional culture and western culture. One part is the Chinese traditional music. The other is the western classical music. It is the combination that equips the performances with both the oriental elegance and the occidental delicacy. Too much Chinese traditional music will make the performances less international. Meanwhile, too much modern music will make foreign guests feel vapidity. If there is abundant western music, the performances will lack of Chinese characteristics. Hence, it is the amalgamation and mutual-development of different cultures that arouse consensus among the whole world.
The above-mentioned examples show that the music culture can be developed on the basis of the amalgamation and mutual-development of different cultures. At the same time, it will refresh the audiences. In developing the elegant music and popular music, the two should not be separated from each other. Otherwise, it will lead to the deficiency of music. In the performances of G20 gala, performance like *I Love My Motherland*, without being classified into elegant performance or popular performance, had won the applause of Chinese audiences.

Therefore, we should be far-sighted in terms of the development of elegant music and popular music. By dint of amalgamating the elegant elements and the vulgar elements, the outlook of music, combined with elegance and popularity, will come into being. Only by taking the attitudes of openness, tolerance and confidence can we compose the music with truth, goodness and beauty. In this way, the music will enjoy high appreciation from the audiences and then reach out to the world.

**Conclusion**

In the process of China’s music development, “elegant music” distinguishes itself for its elegance. “Popular music” popularizes itself for its cordiality. It is the combination that helps to create the composition with both profound meaning and popularity. Under the background of modern culture and society, it is a gradually mixed and unified process in terms of the development tendency to elegant music and popular music in China. There is no settled standard for elegance and popularity. We should advocate the music that has profound meaning and meets the satisfaction of the public. Only by doing this can the music be beneficial for the progress of socialist music and culture.

**Note**


[3] Selected from *Marxist Philosophy*

**References**


