Chinese traditional motifs in contemporary European music

Motivos tradicionais chineses na música européia contemporânea

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Abstract: It is important to investigate contribution of traditional Chinese music to the modern European music. Respondents from various Chinese music departments were surveyed to examine the contribution of traditional Chinese culture to various types of contemporary European music. A list of Chinese folk music identification factors was also compiled to better understand the perception of Chinese traditional motifs in contemporary European music. The finding shows that common features of traditional Chinese motifs are domination of monophonic performance, enormous variation of percussion, "contemplative mood", pentatonic scale without semitones, and availability of stringed instruments. As the analysis showed, regardless of the country to which this or that track belongs, there are common characteristics - the singing of steady steps and the descending melody with a subsequent rise by one tone or semitone. According to the result, British modern music has more Chinese folk motifs (15 from 50 randomly chosen works), whereas German music contains only 9 from 50 works. At the same time, French music has only 1 out of 50 Chinese folk motifs. Also, all respondents were interviewed to determine common adjectives, which help to characterize Chinese folk music. The finding shows that the most popular adjectives are "mesmerizing", "intriguing", "intricate", "calm", "mysterious", "sublime" and "soothing". Obtained results contribute

to the research of Chinese traditional music perception and its contribution to European contemporary music. Furthermore, the framework used in this research is new and can be applied in subsequent works in this area of research.

Keywords: Chinese folk motifs. European music. Native music. Pentatonic scale. Rhythm. Melody and musical techniques.

Resumo: É importante investigar a contribuição da música tradicional chinesa para a música europeia moderna. Estudantes de vários departamentos de música chinesa foram entrevistados para examinar a contribuição da cultura tradicional chinesa para vários tipos de música europeia contemporânea. Uma lista de fatores de identificação da música folclórica chinesa também foi compilada para entender melhor a percepção dos motivos tradicionais chineses na música européia contemporânea. A descoberta mostra que as características comuns dos motivos tradicionais chineses são o domínio do toque monofônico, grande variação de percussão, «humor contemplativo», escala pentatônica sem semitons e disponibilidade de instrumentos de cordas. Como a análise mostrou, independentemente do país a que pertença esta ou aquela faixa, existem características comuns: o canto de passos constantes e a melodia descendente com posterior subida de um tom ou semitom. De acordo com o resultado, a música moderna britânica tem mais motivos folclóricos chineses (15 de 50 obras escolhidas aleatoriamente), enquanto a música alemã contém apenas 9 de 50 obras. Ao mesmo tempo, a música francesa tem apenas 1 em 50 motivos folclóricos chineses. Além disso, todos os entrevistados foram entrevistados para determinar adjetivos comuns que ajudam a caracterizar a música folclórica chinesa. A descoberta mostra que os adjetivos mais populares são «fascinante», «intrigante», «intrincado», «tranquilo», «misterioso», «sublime» e «relaxante». Os resultados obtidos contribuem para a investigação da percepção da música tradicional chinesa e sua contribuição para a música contemporânea europeia. Além

disso, o framework utilizado nesta pesquisa é novo e pode ser aplicado em trabalhos futuros nesta área de pesquisa.

Introduction

Investigation of contemporary music is quite interesting and is a very popular area of research. For example, in paper of CREMATA (2017), popular music was investigated. In this paper, popular music was researched in educational context with participation of pupils from middle schools, high schools and post-secondary. As the result shows, students admit that conception of pop music includes high level of democracy, autonomy, diversity and hospitality. Moreover, creating and playing popular music require creativity, collaboration and inclusivity. Work of GORBUNOVA and PLOTNIKOV (2020) also reviews a problem of education related to pop music. An investigation of education using ICT (Information and Communications Technology) tools shows that this approach has both positive and negative sides. Common negative aspects are a lack of special equipment, poor teamwork skills, stereotypes in such an area of music, etc. A number of positive aspects is less: obtaining new ICT skills and extra practical lessons for students. In work of SPRINGER (2016), results showed that teachers find learning of popular music appropriate, but only for older students. However, a lack of teacher's qualification in this area of music was noticed. Also, author notices a lack of training of playing music of this genre. According to the results, among the three types of approaches, informal training is more effective, while performance-oriented training and formal educational training show lower effectiveness. Thus, according to various obtained results, there is a huge number of different approaches in musical education and all of them have different pros and cons. In another paper of ZHU *et al*. (2018), process of pop music generation was reviewed. This work took into account such parameters as melody, rhythm and harmony. Authors of this paper used framework XiaoIce Band, which helps create a melody track for different types of instruments. As the work with real musical datasets shows, this approach could be quite helpful. In work of YU *et al*. (2017), the similar approach was used. In this work, authors developed a convolutional neural network (CNN) model, which helps to predict songs, which will be hits. Results showed

that using a sampling method of A/B sampling makes finding more accurate. Also, it is predicted that such a network could be improved with using a neural attention mechanism. Paper of SÈNAC *et al*. (2017) is also dedicated to CNN model. However, in this case, the goal is music classification by genre. Thus, there is a steady upward trend in the creation of mathematical models (especially CNN) that aid in the study of pop music.

Another popular area of investigation is rock music. In paper of NOBILE (2016), harmonic functions in rock music were reviewed. For example, it was noted that chords in this type of music almost always have no correlation with V, such as IV, ii, VII or I stages. Paper of TACHIBANA *et al*. (2019) is dedicated to another sphere of research at the junction of cognitive psychology and music. This work studied an influence of improvisation on processes in human brain. During the investigation, 20 guitarists improvised in a blues rock format while activity of their brains was recorded using functional near-infrared spectroscopy. Results of work showed high activity of left dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (DLPFC). Also, a correlation was noticed between improvisation and modulation in left DLPFC. According to investigation of HERRERO *et al*. (2020) in similar area, it was concluded that listening to rock music during the COVID-19 pandemic maintained a high level of well-being. Moreover, it helped to cope with mental illnesses. Thus, one of the most popular aspects of investigating rock music is correlation between listening to music and physical condition of a human. Also, the work of PATI and LERCH (2017) investigated guitar solos in rock music. As the analysis of musical tracks showed, rock guitar solos are best detected by taking into account all combinations of obtained features. Paper of NOBILE (2020) investigated diatonic complexes in rock music. Whereas CLEMENT (2019) gives information about four categories of tonicizations (primary diatonic, primary chromatic, secondary chromatic, secondary diatonic) in rock music.

Rap music is quite popular sphere of investigations too. For instance, paper of KRESOVICH *et al*. (2021) reviewed mental problems, which are reflected in rap music. After analysis of 125

musical compositions, it was concluded that some tracks related to high level of anxiety and depression, while other brought up the topic of suicide. Moreover, rap music contains huge number of metaphors related to mental diseases. Another work of LOPEZ-ROGINA (2015) concluded that rap music is a cause of some mental illnesses. As the qualitative analysis showed, this type of music reflects such problems as paranoia, self-hatred, violence, and suicide. Paper of JOHNSON-BAKER *et al.* (2016) is dedicated to rap music from sociological point of view. As the result showed, rap music influences sexual initiation and sexual behavior among adolescents. However, it has no influence on gender peer behavior. As common results in this area show, rap has almost always bad influence on mood and emotional health of listeners. However, it can also just reflect already existing mental condition of listeners.

As can be seen, common tendencies in investigation of music are related to social, psychological, educational and theoretical items (related to the genre of music). However, there are almost no papers in area of intercultural collaboration, especially influence of Chinese traditional folk music on contemporary European music. This fact is sufficient argumentation for conducting this research.

This work investigated a contribution of Chinese traditional music to music of different European countries (music of UK, Germany and France was reviewed). The investigation is important for better understanding of influence of Chinese culture on contemporary European music. Moreover, this paper obtained common features of Chinese folk motifs using special approach related to survey of respondents, who have knowledge in area of Chinese folk music.

Materials and methods

Selection of participants

The crucial factor of choice of respondents is high level of their knowledge in area of Chinese traditional music. For the convenience of conducting the research, participants were students from different departments connected to learning Chinese folk

music. In order to eliminate the possibility of low level of knowledge of respondents in this area, all respondents were undergraduates. This condition is sufficient for the statement that all students have a sufficiently high knowledge of Chinese folk music to participate in this study. A bachelor's degree is a confirmation of students' high knowledge. This is directly related to the high standards of education at universities where respondents studied. In this case, estimation of respondents' knowledge was not necessary as they have high level of understanding of Chinese music features.

Such factors like gender, social status and nationality were neglected as they play almost no role.

Initially, there were 287 respondents from different departments related to learning Chinese folk music (Art Center, Department of Art History, Academy of Opera, and School of Arts). In this work, all respondents were from Tsinghua, Peking and Shanghai Universities. The average age of respondents was approximately 22. However, 10 of them refused to participate for various reasons that had not been specified. Thus, total number of participants was 277.

Selection of music

The choice of music was based on the authors' subjective perception of the presence of Chinese motifs in European contemporary music. Since Chinese music tends to be smooth, this work chose only music with meditative characteristics. A list of the works chosen by respondents (in these works respondents found the presence of Chinese folk motifs) can be found in Appendix 1.

Framework of research

The research is divided into two stages.

At the first stage, respondents were surveyed to find the factors that determine Chinese folk motifs during listening contemporary Chinese music. Respondents were required to name the main

features by which they determined the presence of Chinese folk motifs in contemporary music. After it, most commonly referred to characteristics were chosen.

At the second stage, respondents identified Chinese traditional motifs in modern European music (UK, German and French). Thanks to the many pieces of music, the second stage was conducted in 3 days (1 day for each country). It should be noted that sometimes some works were identified by respondents in different ways. Due to this fact, it was decided that the presence of Chinese motifs in music was confirmed if at least 50% of the respondents noticed their presence.

After the second stage of the study, the received materials were analyzed by the following method: based on the information about the selected tracks, the musical scores of these works were analyzed to identify their common characteristics. Thus, such common characteristics as steps, repetitive melodies, and rhythm were found.

Data processing was carried out using the STATISTICA 6.1, the most common and simple data analysis and visualization program.

Ethical problems

The survey was conducted anonymously (respondents filled special form without stating their names). Participation was not encouraged or punished. All respondents were not interested in the result of the experiment. Respondents also did not know answers of each other.

Limitation of research

The common limitation of research is relatively small number of musical works. Also, factors which characterize Chinese motifs need a more detailed investigation with additional study of the literature on this topic.

Another limitation is relatively small quantity of respondents (277 persons). However, such a factor has a little influence on results and this number of participants is enough for this type of investigation.

Results

One of the most important results, obtained in this work, is characteristics of Chinese traditional music, which help identify Chinese folk motifs in contemporary European music. As the respondents' answers show, there are 5 common factors, which influence the perception and identification of Chinese motifs in modern musical works:

- domination of monophonic performance,
- enormous variation of percussion,
- "contemplative mood",
- availability of stringed instruments.

Some more detailed respondents' answers will be given below.

"As I remember from lectures, Chinese traditional music features monaural sound and variability of rhythm. Moreover, I also think that music must be smooth."

"In my opinion, Chinese folk music is like nothing else. It is no problem to identify it. I do this because of the following characteristics: pentatonic scale without semitones and domination of stringed instruments."

"The most valuable characteristics of Chinese traditional music for me are meditative mood, light and uncomplicated motif."

"I think that common feature, which helps identify Chinese folk music is dominance of stringed instruments."

"From a theoretical point of view, Chinese traditional motifs must contain pentatonic scales without semitones."

"Percussion in Chinese folk music always changes and creates special authentic sound."

Also, some respondents characterized Chinese traditional music using different adjectives. For example, "mesmerizing", "intriguing", "intricate", "calm", "mysterious", "sublime" and "soothing".

Another part of research provides information about the presence of Chinese traditional motifs in contemporary music of various countries (in this work, the music of Great Britain, Germany and France was reviewed). As the results show, Chinese folk motifs are more common for UK modern music (15 (30%) out of 50 reviewed works contain Chinese motifs). In the second place is German music (18% of reviewed works (9 out of 50) contain Chinese traditional music). In the last place is French contemporary music – only 1 out of 50 works contains Chinese traditional motifs (8%).

Further, if one carries out a quantitative analysis of the selected works by examining their musical scores, one can find some common characteristics inherent in each track. In addition to qualitative abstract characteristics (such as tempo, percussion, and "meditative mood"), one can identify a number of objective factors that unite these works.

First, it should be noted right off the bat that all of the works relating to British contemporary music are written in "simple tonalities" (usually without an altered chord or with one altered chord in the key). Thus, the vast majority of such works were written in the tonal range of C major, A minor, G major, E minor, F major, and D minor. Further, the analysis showed that the selected pieces can be divided into two groups depending on the register of performance (in the range from C to E of the first octave and in the range from B of the first octave to E of the second octave). It should be noted that practically in all these works the tonic or other stable steps are sung. Also, these musical scores are characterized by a downward melodic motion with an increase by semitone or tone at the end. Also, in this case, all the pieces are in 4/4. However, this

fact is quite predictable, as 2/4 time signature is less convenient and widespread in modern pop music, the 3/2 is typical for waltz, and other time signatures are little used in such works (as the analysis of the full range of musical scores used in this study showed).

German contemporary music is characterized by writing in more "complex" tonalities with more altered chords in the key (for example, G-sharp minor and B-sharp minor). The time signature in this case is still the same - 4/4. As can be seen, this music is also characterized by the singing of steady steps and the descent of the melody, followed by the rise by one or semitone. In addition, it is also important to note that both the British and German selected tracks are not characterized (with rare exceptions) by frequent repetition of the same note in succession (more than twice) in the same semantic phrase. German music, in addition to the features described above, is characterized by a descending or ascending melodic motion without a change of motion at the end. In addition, the rhythm in German music is somewhat more complex than in British music (in this case there is a change of durations during one semantic phrase, as well as syncopation).

However, almost none of the respondents who participated in the study noticed any Chinese folk motifs in contemporary French music. In the analysis of French contemporary music, only one piece, according to the respondents, had elements of Chinese folk music.

Thus, from a more detailed quantitative analysis of musical scores, one can conclude that for the respondents the main criteria for selecting tracks with Chinese motifs were (in addition to the previously obtained qualitative characteristics): the singing of steady steps and the descending melody with a subsequent rise in tone or semitone.

In all cases, the harmony of the piece did not play a special role for the respondents.

The names of the tracks in which, according to the respondents, there are Chinese folk motifs can be seen in "Appendix 1", and some musical scores of these works can be seen in "Appendix 2" (only

the first pages of the works are presented, because, as a rule, this amount of information is enough to make sure that the analysis is correct). Since almost no Chinese folk motifs were found in French contemporary music, the musical score of the only piece chosen by respondents is not specified.

Discussion

The work of YE (2018) studied the influence and integration of contemporary European, Australian, Canadian, and American music on contemporary Chinese piano music. In particular, this study examined the integration of contemporary foreign music into the works of such composers as Wang Lisan, Chu Wang-Hua, Alexina Louie, Chen Qigang and Chen Li. As the analysis of the works of these composers has shown, the trends of contemporary world music have some influence on Chinese piano music. The authors of this article characterized several basic facts that describe the relationship between contemporary Chinese and world piano music. First and foremost, they noted that Chinese piano music is largely "suitable" for use and integration into world music. This fact is largely consistent with the data obtained in the present article (however, it should be noted that in the case of this article the influence of Chinese folk music was investigated). Two conceptual models were also created based on the principle of adapting Western music and its deviation from familiar patterns toward Chinese piano music. The latter model is also in good agreement with the current study results, but in this case it is also necessary to take into account the differences in the analyzed music. According to research VAN DER LINDEN (2020), there is a steady trend of imitation of European classical and contemporary music among non-European musicians. In addition, with the development of electronic music, non-European pop and rock music has become commodified (mainly due to the mass media). Thus, the author of this article focuses on the introduction of European musical

features into Chinese musical culture. It should be noted that in this case only one side of the issue is considered: there is no qualitative analysis of the influence of Chinese traditional music on modern European music.

Paper of TAN and CONTI (2019) is dedicated to the impact of Chinese contemporary music on preferences in Chinese traditional music. The result shows that preferences in world modern music have influenced listener's interest in Chinese traditional music. However, popularity of contemporary versions of Chinese traditional motifs has no influence on demand for Chinese folk music. Another work of ZHENG *et al*. (2017) investigated GA-based (Genetic Algorithm based) Chinese folk compositions system. Results show that this system is flexible and has high efficiently in process of creating traditional Chinese music compositions. Paper of YANG and WELCH (2016) is dedicated to pedagogical challenges in Chinese folk music in higher education institutions. In this work, two different approaches were reviewed: Hua'er song teaching in contexts of Conservatory and Folk approaches. Conservatory approach is more systematic. However, students' productivity in learning was immediately associated with the 'authenticity' and type of learning materials. Work of QU and XIAO (2020) is related to an investigation of songwriting in contemporary Chinese folk music. According to this work, there are some changing in contemporary folk music comparing to ancient traditional Chinese music. For example, textual narratives became more difficult, performance approaches became more popular. Moreover, it was revealed that an improvement in sociological aspects significantly influenced contemporary Chinese folk music. The finding of paper of HAN and LEUNG (2015) indicates that most students have positive attitude toward learning traditional Chinese music despite the limited time of learning this music genre. At the same time, teachers' attitude directly related to existing teaching trainings, their professional responsibilities and needs of job market. In the paper of LUO (2018), a discussion was conducted about relationship between learning piano music and Chinese folk music. The paper concluded that it is important to deploy Chinese folk music in piano learning.

Conclusion

In this work, a survey was conducted for better understanding of factors which influence perception and identification of Chinese traditional motifs in modern European music. As the results show, almost all respondents defined Chinese folk motifs by such factors as domination of monophonic performance, enormous variation of percussion, "contemplative mood" and availability of stringed instruments. It is important that individually, these characteristics do not determine the presence of Chinese motifs in music. These parameters can be considered exclusively in aggregate. All respondents evaluated different European contemporary music for the presence of Chinese traditional motifs. According to finding, modern music of UK has more Chinese motifs (15 out of 50 works, which is 30%), whereas German music has less motifs – 9 (18%) out of 50 works. In French music, Chinese traditional motifs are not so popular and only 1 out of 50 works (8%) contains them. It should be noted that the percentages obtained cannot be indicative of the music as a whole. They just help to compare percentages of music with Chinese traditional motifs from different investigated countries. This fact indicates the characteristics of Chinese folk motifs in some modern European music. Besides, the qualitative analysis of musical scores showed that regardless of the belonging of the piece to one or another country, most tracks have common characteristics (rhythm, melody and musical techniques, as well as belonging to certain tonalities). For example, British and German music are characterized by the singing of steady steps and a descending melody with a further increase by a tone or semitone. The dominant time signature - 4/4 is common as well. These characteristics probably were also factors influencing the finding of Chinese folk motifs in the studied tracks (in combination with the qualitative characteristics). It is interesting that no Chinese folk motifs were found in the French contemporary music.

It is also important that the framework of this paper is quite new. It contains investigation of factors which helps to identify Chinese folk motifs in contemporary music. Moreover, these

factors were found thanks to participation of undergraduates in area of Chinese folk music learning. The approach of this research can be applied and modernized in further papers in music area. The result of this paper sheds light on perception and identification of Chinese traditional motifs in contemporary European music. Moreover, it shows in which country's culture Chinese folk music has made the greatest contribution (this work investigated only UK, German and French music).

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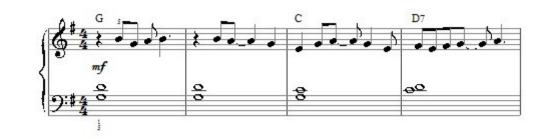
Appendix 1

British contemporary music

1. The Beatles - Here Comes The Sun

Source: www.musicaneo.com

2. The Beatles - Come Together

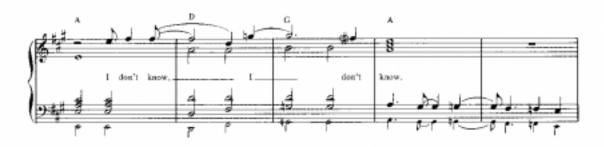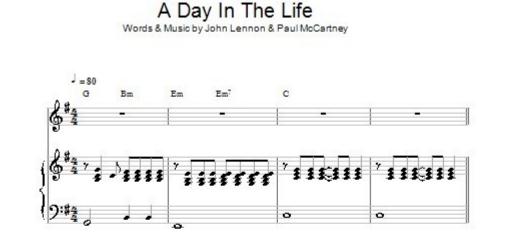*Source: www.musicaneo.com*

3. The Beatles – Something

4. The Beatles - A Day In The Life

Source: www.musicaneo.com

5. The Beatles - And I Love Her
6. Robbie Williams and Nicole Kidman - Somethin' Stupid

7. Sting - Desert Rose

Desert Rose
Words & Music by Sting

Source: www.musicaneo.com

8. Lila Drew - Crystal Ball
9. CRAWLERS - Come Over (again)

10. Ed Sheeran – Afterglow

Source: www.musicaneo.com

11. Ed Sheeran - Visiting Hours
12. Calum Scott – Biblical
13. ZAYN - "Tightrope"

14. Kate Bush - Wuthering Heights

Source: www.musicaneo.com

15. Joni Mitchell - Both Sides Now

German contemporary music
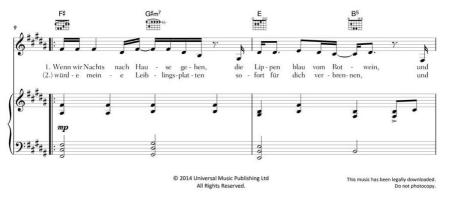
1. Mark Forster - A-N-N-A

2. Philipp Poisel - Liebe meines Lebens
3. Revolverheld - Ich lass für Dich das Licht an

Ich Lass Für Dich Das Licht An

Words by Johannes Strate and Kristoffer Huenecke
Music by Johannes Strate, Kristoffer Huenecke, Niels Groetsch and Jakob Sinn

Source: www.musicaneo.com

4. Revolverheld feat. Marta Jandová - Halt Dich an mir fest

5. F-Raz - Do You Love Me

Source: www.musicaneo.com

6. D-Yongs feat. Kyra - iCH LiEBE DiCH

7. Charlie Puth - One Call Away

Source: www.musicaneo.com

8. SDP - Ich muss immer an dich denken
9. LEA - Das Leben

French Contemporary Music

1. JORANE - J'ai demandé à la lune

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