

The Contemporary Echoes of “Technique Advancing into the Tao”: The Aesthetic Education Path of Guzheng Performance under the Perspective of Chinese Musical Aesthetics

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Abstract: *This paper aims to explore the practical path of the idea of "Technique Advancing into the Tao" in contemporary Guzheng aesthetic education from the theoretical perspective of Chinese music aesthetics. By analyzing the philosophical connotation of Chuang-Tzu's "Dismember an ox as skillfully as a butcher" and the unity of "Tao" and "Qi", this paper reveals the dialectical relationship between "technique" and "Tao", combined with the technical tendency of "emphasizing skills over art" existing in the current Guzheng performance and teaching practice, regaining the ontological value of "music, the expression of joy", following the practical path of "harmony", continuing to "Technique Advancing into the Tao" in the practice of aesthetic education in contemporary Guzheng performance, and sending out a deep echo of classical Chinese aesthetic thought.*

Keywords: “Technique Advancing into the Tao”; Music Aesthetics; Guzheng Performance; Aesthetic Education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Chuang-Tzu revealed to the world the philosophical idea of "Technique Advancing into the Tao" through the story of "Dismember an ox as skillfully as a butcher" in "The Lord of Health", and its core contains the practical wisdom of the unity of subject and object, which is a typical example of the "instrument" under the form to reach the "Tao" in the metaphysical. As a traditional musical instrument of the Chinese nation, the Guzheng is prospering and developing in its art, and the learning group is also expanding. However, in this context, the performance and teaching practice of the Guzheng generally show a significant utilitarian and technical tendency, often emphasizing the difficulty of the repertoire and the speed of the performance, and completing the task of using technology as an indicator. The alienation of "heart" and "hand" makes the "technique" and "Tao" separate but not united, the inner feelings and life experience of the Guzheng learner as the subject of aesthetics are suspended, and the embodiment of the deep aesthetic education functions such as the beauty of artistic conception and the cultivation of temperament carried by Guzheng art is incomplete. From the connection between the aesthetic ideas contained in Chuang-Tzu's fable "Dismember an ox as skillfully as a butcher" and music, and the relationship between music technology and aesthetic expression, a practical path of Guzheng aesthetic education is realized.

2. THE UNITY OF "TAO" AND "QI" IN THE CONCEPT OF TECHNIQUE ADVANCING TO THE TAO

Chinese classical aesthetic thought profoundly influences the core of Chinese music, making it more concerned with the creation of a deep artistic conception and the expression of connotation than Western music. Butcher's carving of an ox is inspiring and suggestive in terms of the debate between Tao and technique, the meaning of health preservation, political philosophy, and aesthetic thought.

Scholars from different fields interpret Chuang-Tzu's saying, "The ruler's preference is the Tao, which is closely related to technique," in various ways. "Tao" can be the truth and morality, the spiritual realm level reached by artistic creation, and the laws of the operation of all things. In "Classic of Changes", "The metaphysical is called the way, and the metaphysical is called the instrument." "Tao" refers to the laws of heaven and earth and yin and yang, and in the objective world, the laws are intangible, that is, "metaphysical", and "Qi" refers to tangible things and hexagram paintings that are imaged by objects, that is, "metaphysics". In this concept, Tao and Qi are a pair of opposing categories. In fact, people, musical instruments, and technology can all be regarded as audible, visible, and touchable "Qi", also called "instruments". "Tao" is all-encompassing, invisible, intangible, silent and invisible,

but when it is seen and heard clearly, it is transformed into "instrument"; On the contrary, when the "skill" reaches a certain height, a certain artistic spirit is derived, and the "instrument" produced by the "skill" can be transformed into "Tao". The mutual transformation between them is the process of body-mind transformation, and it is also the process of unity between Tao and instrument.

The process described in Chuang-Tzu's "Butcher's carving of an ox" progresses through three stages: the heart as the servant of the body, the body as the servant of the heart, and the heart achieving freedom through mastery of technique. The third stage, where skill becomes an extension of Tao, answers why skill can transcend into Tao and what that transcendence entails. The process of music creation (playing, singing, composing) is quite consistent with it.

When we immerse ourselves in music with a pure heart and without utilitarian distractions, the techniques used will be free from mechanics and deliberateness, and will naturally blend perfectly with the fundamental laws of this matter. At this time, although you do not deliberately pursue success, you can achieve the most perfect and natural results. Skill is the foundation, and the ideal is the beacon. Skills provide material conditions and psychological space for the spiritual realm we pursue, and the lofty goals of the Tao will guide us to achieve higher technical skills. Technological progress in the Tao includes the transformation from empirical knowledge to practical wisdom, the self-cultivation of virtue, and the transformation of the way of existence. Therefore, it can be said that skill is the premise of Tao, and Tao is the root of skill. Although Tao and technology exist independently, skills can be advanced into Tao. From the perspective of performance, the skill can be summarized as "sound and meaning" and "unity of heart and hand", which is philosophically an aspect of the unity of "Tao" and "instrument", which provides a valuable theoretical reference for the aesthetic system of Chinese music performance.

3. THOUGHTS ON "TECHNIQUE" AND "TAO" IN GUZHENG ART

As the "Record of Music" says: "To the music to heal the heart", Chinese music philosophy attaches great importance to the subjective value of music, and regards it as an important way for individuals to cultivate themselves and achieve their ideal state. Moreover, classical Chinese philosophy is good at establishing connections between seemingly different things, pursuing a harmony of wholeness and relevance. In music, this is reflected in the ultimate ideal of "the unity of nature and man". The inside and outside of music, the mind and object, the subject and object are not separated, but an organic whole that senses and resonates with each other. Playing a piece of music is mobilizing the rhythm of the player's own life to respond, reproduce, and even create the rhythm of heaven and earth.

In the framework of Western contemporary music philosophy, the fundamental value of music, as a unique "aesthetic object", lies in its intrinsic and perceptible "aesthetic quality". These aesthetic qualities are the fundamental attributes of music as an art, and they are objectively contained in the structure of musical works, which are presented through musical elements such as timbre, rhythm, melody, harmony, musical form, dynamics, textures, and their interactions. When the subject interacts deeply with music as an aesthetic object, the pure, engaged, and internal perception and emotional response produced is the "aesthetic experience" that people pursue.

Chinese and Western musical thought jointly pursue a deeper artistic experience that goes beyond mere sensory stimulation and performance technology. However, Western aesthetics is more inclined to objectify the "aesthetic object", define and perceive beauty by analyzing its internal formal structure, and the achievement of its experience depends on a highly conscious "aesthetic subject" who maintains a certain observation distance from the object. The Chinese aesthetic tradition represented by "Technique Advancing to the Tao" advocates a practical wisdom of "unity of things and me". It does not examine music in the binary opposition of subject and object, but pursues the fusion of performers, instruments, music, and even the spirit of heaven and earth. Here, the highest "aesthetic experience" is not only an object that is "perceived", but a "realm of existence" that bursts out and is personally integrated into the subject in the process of practice after a high degree of proficiency.

Since the continuous development of Guzheng performance techniques and the emergence of numerous excellent Guzheng works, there has been a prevailing concept of "skill supremacy," pursuing the mastery of technically challenging pieces in the shortest possible time. Quantifiable external indicators are used simultaneously, such as whether the playing speed meets the standard, whether the technical difficulties are correct, and whether the notes and rhythms are accurate. The inherent charm, phrasing, and emotional expression of the music are eroded in the mechanical repetition of muscle memory and speed endurance.

Guzheng music is deeply rooted in the fertile soil of traditional Chinese culture, and each classic repertoire carries a specific historical background, literary imagery, and emotional philosophy, but the lack of cultural context generated by "emphasizing skills over art" has often overlooked the deep connotations that give the soul of music to it. "Decontextualization" makes music just an auditory symbol. If music cannot establish a connection with its own culture, emotions, and life experience, its performance will inevitably lack expressiveness and appeal. They may be able to perfectly copy the notes, but they cannot make meaningful musical expressions, because they do not really understand what they are saying, and stay in the imitation of shallow "skills" and cannot enter the deep realm of "Tao". We often say that "technology serves music", which does not deny technology, and the consensus of positioning the role of technology also reveals the practical starting point and intermediate hub of technology in the Tao - technology is not the ultimate purpose of music, but the only path and carrier to the spiritual connotation of music, and the conscious choice to express intentions. Furthermore, this conscious sense of "service" is the psychological premise of the state of "mind condensation and body release". When the performer's full energy is focused on how to use technology to portray the artistic conception and convey the charm, his attention successfully shifts from the control of the technique to the expression of the heart. Worries about misplaying and technical imbalance dissipated, and the heart was cleared. In this state of "humility", the movements of the fingers are no longer deliberately commanded to be executed, but become the natural expression of inner music and life experience, and finally achieve the "unity of heart and hand", that is, the unity of "technique" and "Tao" at the practical level.

Therefore, if the performer wants to realize the freedom from the cage of "technique" to the "Tao", he is required not only to use his hands, but also to use his ears, heart, and brain to listen, understand, and feel the cultural code and philosophy of life behind music. When technology is profoundly and sincerely used to "tell" the connotation of music, it transcends things, carries meaning, rhyme, and spirit, completes the sublimation from "technique" to "art", and finally "enters the Tao". This is the charm of Chinese zheng music and even traditional Chinese music and art that can reach people's hearts and touch the soul, in addition to dazzling skills.

4. RETURN TO THE AESTHETIC EDUCATION OF GUZHENG MUSIC "INTO THE TAO"

In the context of the continuous development of contemporary Guzheng music art, returning to "Technique Advancing into the Tao" does not mean conservative, but returning to the source of Chinese music aesthetics, drawing nourishment from traditional wisdom to cope with contemporary difficulties, regaining the ontological value of "music, the expression of joy", and realizing the aesthetic education shift from "training" to "nourishment". The beginning of "Record of Music" is that "All sounds take their rise in the heart of the hearer", which profoundly reveals that music is the natural externalization of inner emotions. The current performance and teaching of Guzheng music often focus on the norms and order of "standing in the rites" - the precision of technology, but it is easy to ignore the ultimate goal of "becoming in music" - the pleasure of the soul and the sublimation of personality. Therefore, returning to the aesthetic education of "entering the Tao" first requires our concept to shift from external technical discipline to the awakening and nourishment of internal life experience. In practice, a piece of music should not be regarded as a collection of technical difficulties, but as a complete emotional world and life narrative. Outline the aesthetic advancement path from physical sounds to artistic organization and then to spiritual elevation.

Returning means practicing the cultivation process of "strings and fingers, fingers and sounds, and sounds and meanings" to achieve a unified aesthetic experience of subject and object. The concept of "harmony" proposed in the Ming Dynasty guqin aesthetic work "Xishan Qin Kuang" accurately summarizes the practical logic of "Technique Advancing into the Tao", and this theory is also applicable to Guzheng music. "Strings and fingers" is the technical foundation, requiring the player's fingers and strings to achieve a high degree of coordination and eliminate technical barriers. "Finger and sound harmony" is an artistic expression, which requires finger technology to serve the musical intention, and to do what the heart thinks, and the sound is what it can do. "Sound and meaning" is the highest state, which requires the musical expression to be integrated with the inner feelings of the performer and the far-reaching artistic conception of the music.

By projecting the philosophical speculation of technique and Tao onto the performance practice of Guzheng, we can clearly see the realistic path of "technique in Tao". At the beginning of the performance, attention is trapped in hand shape, basic fingering, pitch and rhythm accuracy, etc., which is the foundation stage of "serving the mind for the body". With the refinement of skills, the performer can control his hands with his heart, skillfully handle

difficult modern creative repertoire such as fast finger sequences and complex rhythms, and enter the technical stage of "serving the body with the heart". In this phase, Guzheng art is just a tool to show technical ability. " We can say 'yes' to the necessary use of technical objects; we can also say 'no' because we reject its arbitrary demands on us and its oppression, disruption, and desolation of the very nature of our lives. Heidegger's philosophical view reminds us that technology is used as a tool for practical life, and if it is dominated by its anti-object, it will be enslaved by it, trapped in it, and feel depressed and empty in loss. However, when the performance is sublimated to the third stage of "mind condensation and body release", the performer no longer worries about the burden of technology, and the "charm" and "artistic conception" of the music are condensed, and the inner emotions and the rhythm of life naturally flow out from the performance technique. While mastering "how to play", you can have a deeper understanding of "why you play like this", so as to gradually internalize and improve aesthetic perception and judgment. For example, the butcher "knows that the official knows to stop and the god wants to go". At this time, the specific "skills" are integrated into the overall "rhyme", the audible "sound" points to the "artistic conception" outside the strings, and the "musical instruments" reach the infinite "Taoist realm". In the end, the hallmark of a successful performance is no longer the technical presentation of zero mistakes, but whether it can lead the performer and the audience into a spiritual world that transcends form constructed by "sound", "rhyme" and "meaning" through exquisite "technique", and realizes the leap from "technique" to "art" and then to "Tao".

5. CONCLUSION

The return to "Technique Advancing into the Tao" in Guzheng aesthetic education represents a return to the root of Chinese music aesthetics, reshaping the goal of aesthetic education with "music, the expression of joy", and recasting the practical path with the combination of "strings, fingers, sounds, and meanings". In this way, the development of Guzheng art can not be trapped in technology, so that learners can not only temper their skills between strings and pillars, but also settle their hearts, see themselves, and finally realize the sublimation of personality and the transcendence of life. The echo of this classical Chinese music philosophy in contemporary Guzheng art is the embodiment of the continuous vitality of Guzheng art and the profound humanistic value that contributes to art education.

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