



Expression of Ethnicity in the Soundtrack of the Film "Kung Fu Hustle"

Zixuan Hu^{1,a*}, Shuaixu Shang^{2,b}, Jingyi Wan^{3,c}, Jiachun Hao^{4,d}, Yuzun Sun^{1,e}

¹Hebei Normal University, School of Journalism and Communication, Shijiazhuang, China

²The Catholic University of Korea, Gyeonggi-do Bucheon si, South Korea

³Hebei Media College, School of Film and Television Arts, Shijiazhuang, China

⁴Hebei University, School of Art, Baoding, China

^{a*}1720862271@qq.com, ^bS17737698537@163.com

^c2658166233@qq.com, ^d1403509622@qq.com

^e513011197@qq.com

Abstract. "Kung Fu Hustle," a Hong Kong action-comedy film directed by Stephen Chow and released in 2004, continues to be beloved by audiences. The film's use of traditional Chinese music in its soundtrack is widely regarded as a classic. This research aims to explore the expression of ethnicity in the soundtrack of the film "Kung Fu Hustle." By delving into the functions of traditional Chinese music in the film, as well as the cultural symbols and emotional conveyance embedded in this music, we seek to reveal the significance of ethnic music in this movie. This study is intended to provide valuable insights for the fields of film music composition and cultural research.

Keywords: Traditional Chinese Music, Kung Fu Hustle, Ethnicity.

1 Introduction

"Without a doubt, among various art forms today, the impact and breadth of film art are unparalleled by any other form of art." [1] As one of the significant forms of cultural and artistic expression, film is increasingly prevalent in people's lives. With ongoing social development and cultural exchanges, the influence of film continues to grow. Various elements are integrated and innovated, and among these, music is an indispensable component of film. It can bring a unique emotional, atmospheric, and rhythmic flavor to movies. In 1950, Dutch musicologist J. Kunst introduced the concept of "ethnomusicology" for the first time in his work, "Musicologica: A Study of the Nature of Ethnomusicology, Its Problems, Methods, and Representative Personalities" [2]. In the world of film music, the colorful musical forms of ethnic music have become increasingly favored and utilized by filmmakers. Ethnomusicology, which established a more rigorous theoretical framework since the publication of Miriam Merriam's "The Anthropology of Music" in 1964, takes an anthropological approach, viewing the world as a culturally shared, relatively static world within certain boundaries. [3]

© The Author(s) 2024

S. Zhu et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Education, Language and Art (ICELA 2023)*, Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 831,

https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-214-9_51

Chinese traditional music has a rich history and carries a profound cultural significance and historical emotions. Instruments like the guqin, erhu, guzheng, and dizi, with their unique tones and playing techniques, can express a wide range of emotions and imagery. This provides a vast creative space for film music composition. For example, in the film "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" the melodies of the guzheng play a crucial role in portraying the martial arts atmosphere and the emotional world of the main characters. In the film "Raise the Red Lantern," the sounds of traditional Chinese instruments immerse the audience in the historical ambiance of a specific era. In recent years, with the rise of China's film industry and its expanding international influence, Chinese traditional music has gradually found its place in film composition. Not only can you find Chinese traditional music in historical films, but also in comedy, action, and various other film genres, allowing audiences to appreciate the unique charm of Chinese traditional music. This cross-genre fusion of music enriches the depth of film music and, to some extent, enhances the audience's understanding of Chinese traditional culture. Stephen Chow's film "Kung Fu Hustle" is a prime example of this, cleverly incorporating elements of ethnic music into the movie. This paper will use this work as an example to conduct an in-depth analysis of the expression of ethnicity in the film's soundtrack.

2 Overview of Ethnic Music in the Film "Kung Fu Hustle"

"The Chinese nation possesses a rich culture and art, and traditional ethnic music is one of its core elements." [4] Ethnic music, with its unique tones, melodies, and expressive techniques, can bring a special atmosphere and emotional experience to film scenes. "In recent years, we can feel the rise of Chinese culture and the revival of ethnic music in many domestic blockbuster films directed by Chinese directors." [5] In the film "Kung Fu Hustle," the soundtrack includes both character theme songs and background music that adds tension and rhythm to action scenes. The use of ethnic music in films not only aligns with the theme of promoting traditional culture but also enhances the film by creating a musical atmosphere that complements the emotional portrayal. By combining traditional music with comedic actions and dialogues, the film generates a contrast that strengthens the comedic effect, showcasing the exquisite fusion of cultural communication and comedic effects in the movie.

The musical score in the film "Kung Fu Hustle" was personally handled by the renowned music producer and composer Huang Yinghua. His musical talent and extensive experience enable him to create profound and emotionally resonant compositions, giving the film a unique emotional and cultural depth. To achieve a nostalgic atmosphere, Huang Yinghua blends Chinese ethnic music with foreign classical music, imbuing the music with strong nostalgic emotions. For example, the piece "House of Flying Daggers" uses an intense rhythm and a fervent melody to create tension in key battle scenes, immersing the audience in the excitement of the fight. "Fishing songs in East China Sea" uses a soothing and melodious tune to evoke a tranquil and serene feeling, in stark contrast to the film's comedic scenes. This emotional contrast enriches the film's

emotional depth, providing the audience with emotional resonance amidst laughter and tension. "The Blade Of Gu Qin" employs the unique playing style of the zither with a light and graceful melody to add beauty to scenic moments, conveying a sense of tranquility and beauty. In the climax of the action scenes in "Heroes Successfully Cross Over The Daduhe River," majestic music and a stirring melody highlight the bravery and determination of the main characters, adding a heroic atmosphere to the film. Additionally, pieces like "Daring General" and "Decree Of The Sichuan General" with their distinct rhythms and rich tones contribute to the tension and vitality in critical moments and action scenes, further enhancing the musical texture. The "Dagger Society Suite," with its unique musical elements and rhythms, provides fitting musical accompaniment for a series of dramatic scenes, intensifying the emotional climaxes in the film. The intertwining of character emotions and music in the movie allows the audience to experience the story more profoundly through a dual sensory stimulation.

3 Influence of Different Ethnic Musical Instrument Playing Styles on the Emotional Expression in the Score

The film "Kung Fu Hustle" features a diverse array of ethnic musical instruments, including suona, pipa, and yangqin, each with distinct playing styles and emotional expressions. The suona, with its vigorous and melodious tones, adds tension and grandeur to the battle scenes. The pipa, with its tender and touching melodies, conveys emotions of tenderness and nostalgia. The yangqin, with its rich and forceful playing, creates an atmosphere of determination and strength. These instruments, with their unique tones and rhythms, imbue the film with profound narrative depth and emotional resonance.

3.1 Suona

As one of the essential components of traditional Chinese music, the suona plays a pivotal role in the realm of film music due to its unique timbre and remarkable expressiveness. In the film "Kung Fu Hustle," the extensive use of the suona in the soundtrack significantly contributes to enhancing the emotional tension and atmosphere. The distinct tonal characteristics of the suona allow it to vividly convey emotions such as heroism, bravery, and determination. It is often employed in intense battle scenes in the movie, where its grandiose tones and passionate playing style convey a sense of tension and heart-pounding emotional experiences to the audience. In the climactic battle scenes of the film, the use of the "Dagger Society Suite" featuring the suona combines both sorrow and passion. This emotional fusion highlights the fearlessness of the characters during martial arts combat and underscores their national spirit and heroic qualities. The audience can seemingly feel the characters' unwavering confidence and determination deep within their souls through the music. The synergy between the visuals and the music creates a more grandiose heroic atmosphere, effectively enhancing the overall atmosphere of the film. Simultaneously, the suona's timbre is effectively utilized to portray the characters' gallantry and resolve. Through its vibrant sound and bright tones, it creates an unstoppable atmosphere. A typical example of this is the music "Daring

General" used during the scene where the character "Fire Cloud Evil God" deflects bullets. The bold and resounding suona sound in "Daring General" immerses the audience in every frame of the film, magnifying the indomitable heroic spirit of the character "HuoyunXieshen." As the audience marvels at the characters' breathtaking martial skills, they also deeply feel the essence that the film wishes to convey, thanks to the guidance of the music. This clever combination of music and visuals not only accentuates the characters' remarkable martial abilities but also plays a complementary role in building the atmosphere. It heightens the tension within the film, making the overall experience more engaging. In summary, the application of the suona in the film's music enriches "Kung Fu Hustle," making its music more expressive and emotionally engaging, thereby making a significant contribution to the development of the film's plot and the shaping of character images.

3.2 Pipa

The pipa, as an ancient plucked string instrument, plays a crucial role in the film "Kung Fu Hustle," providing profound and unique musical support for various aspects of the film, such as plot development, atmosphere creation, and character portrayal, through its performance and emotional expression. Right from the beginning of the movie, the pipa music, combined closely with the scenes in "House of Flying Daggers," immerses the audience in a critical moment of the story. The pipa's increasing tempo in its performance outlines a tense and urgent atmosphere, almost serving as a prelude to the impending intense battle. The changes in rhythm and the refinement of emotional tension in this piece create a strong contrast with the previous light-hearted and humorous scenes, highlighting the dramatic shifts in the film's emotions. The pipa effectively shapes the tension and theatricality when the "villains" make their entrance. In the application of pipa music in "House of Flying Daggers," the pipa's timbre, known for its grace and tension, brings the film to its climax. The music, starting with the melodic pipa tones, conveys subtle yet heavily charged emotions, hinting at an impending crisis. As the music's rhythm quickens and the pitch rises, the characters gradually come together, revealing an imminent battle to the audience. The harmonious connection between emotions and the musical climax creates a tense and suspenseful atmosphere, effectively conveying the urgency of the impending events and giving a powerful boost to the film's plot.

Furthermore, the pipa's application in the film "Kung Fu Hustle" goes beyond mere musical accompaniment. It accurately represents emotions and atmosphere. The emotional transitions in the music align with the development of the plot on-screen, drawing the audience into the inner world of the film. This allows viewers to experience the ups and downs of the characters' emotions and the tension and climax of the plot more deeply. The skillful use of pipa music in the movie seamlessly combines music and visuals, enhancing the emotional experience and viewing effect of the film. In conclusion, the film "Kung Fu Hustle," through the adept use of pipa music, demonstrates greater artistic expression in the fusion of music and imagery.

3.3 Yangqin

The yangqin, as one of the ancient plucked string instruments, plays a pivotal role in film music composition due to its unique timbre and rich expressiveness. In the film "Kung Fu Hustle," this instrument's distinctive timbre is showcased to the fullest, infusing the movie with unique musical elements that enhance emotional tension and atmosphere. The yangqin performance of "Decree Of The Sichuan General" during the epic battle at Pig Cage Fortress presents a distinct musical expression. This musical segment combines intricate note arrangements with the intense battle sequences and rhythms, creating a captivating sensory experience that seamlessly merges sight and sound. The music changes and the yangqin performance cleverly mirror the rhythm and tension of the battle, immersing the audience deeply into the dynamic atmosphere of the film. "Decree Of The Sichuan General" enriches the emotional depth further, allowing the audience to not only feel the rhythm of the characters' actions but also gain a deeper understanding of the competition and tension between them through the melody and rhythm of the music. For instance, in the "Twelve Style Tan's Legs" scene, the vibrations of the music interweave with the protagonist's actions, achieving a visual and auditory unity that guides the audience's focus to the climax. Against the backdrop of scenes like "Hong Jia's Iron Wire Fist" and "Wu Lang's Eight Diagram Pole," the music evolves with varying tones and jumping rhythms, vividly presenting the entire battle process. This immersion into the emotional rollercoaster is guided by the music's cues. The use of this piece extends beyond emotional expression; it demonstrates director Stephen Chow's unique creative approach, closely intertwining music and action and guiding the audience to a deeper understanding of the plot through emotional cues. The interplay of music and visuals makes the scenes more vivid, emotions more intense, and adds an extra layer of depth to the film. In summary, in "Kung Fu Hustle," the yangqin performance of "Decree Of The Sichuan General" with its unique timbre and expressiveness tightly connects the tension in battle scenes with the audience's emotional experience, satisfying both emotional and sensory aspects.

4 Cultural Symbols and Emotional Conveyance in Chinese Traditional Music

4.1 Cultural Symbols in Chinese Traditional Music

Chinese traditional music, more than just a musical expression, plays a crucial role in cultural heritage and emotional communication. It incorporates various cultural meanings through its unique tones, scales, melodies, and performance styles, providing audiences with profound musical experiences. The musical score in the film "Kung Fu Hustle" exhibits distinctive musical elements and cultural significance, conveying rich cultural symbols and sentiments. Traditional Chinese music is often closely linked to Chinese culture. A poignant piece like "Fishing songs in East China Sea" conveys a longing for home and a peaceful life, reflecting the Chinese culture's deep affection for the concept of home and reverence for nature. Music used in battle scenes, such as

"Heroes Successfully Cross Over The Daduhe River" and Dagger Society Suite," reflects tension and intensity. However, at the same time, these pieces exude a strong sense of Chinese nationalism. This nationalistic sentiment is particularly pronounced when justice triumphs over evil, and victory is achieved through unity. The martial spirit that traditional Chinese music promotes finds perfect expression in these moments. Especially when the film's protagonist, after undergoing arduous training and self-discovery, overcomes obstacles and emerges victorious, the power of justice's triumph is accentuated through the charm of music. The film, with the aid of martial arts and music, weaves together traditional Chinese thought, adding depth and successful expression to the movie. Additionally, the performance techniques and styles of traditional Chinese music convey unique cultural symbols. For instance, the distinctive playing techniques and timbre of the suona infuse the film with bold and heroic emotions, highlighting the distinctive spirit and personality inherent in Chinese traditional music. On the other hand, the pipa, with its gentle and melodious playing style, conveys delicacy, romance, and refinement, enriching the emotional depth of the film. These performance techniques and styles convey cultural symbolism and emotional significance in film music, enriching the cultural dimension of the movie. In summary, the musical score in the film "Kung Fu Hustle" seamlessly integrates musical elements, cultural symbolism, and emotions. The unique tonal qualities, scales, and performance styles of traditional Chinese music, interwoven with the film's narrative, infuse the emotions and spirit of Chinese culture into the movie, adding a richer emotional depth. Through its unique presentation of film music, the audience not only enjoys the music itself but also experiences the profoundness of Chinese culture and emotional exchange, making the viewing experience of the film more enriching and profound.

4.2 Emotional Conveyance in Traditional Chinese Music

The musical score of the film "Kung Fu Hustle" employs its unique timbre, melodies, and performance styles to convey cultural symbols and, at the same time, profoundly affects the audience by eliciting emotional resonance. The clever use of traditional Chinese music in the film invokes a deep emotional connection with the audience, creating a rich emotional experience. Firstly, traditional Chinese music plays a crucial role in conveying emotions in different scenes of the film through its distinctive musical elements. Pieces like "Fishing songs in East China Sea," "Decree Of The Sichuan General," and "Daring General

" each employ their unique musical elements to accurately convey the emotions of the film's narrative. "Fishing songs in East China Sea" expresses a yearning for one's homeland and a tranquil life, using its gentle tones and lyrical melodies to evoke a resonant feeling of homesickness. "Decree Of The Sichuan General" and "Daring General" highlight the exceptional skills of the martial artists with their stirring melodies and powerful rhythms, stimulating the audience's fighting spirit. The precision and effectiveness of these musical expressions make it easier for the audience to resonate with the film's characters and storyline. Moreover, the film's musical score expertly controls the audience's emotional fluctuations through the expression of emotions. "Kung Fu

"Hustle" incorporates traditional Chinese music into various scenes and guides the audience's emotional fluctuations through changes in musical tempo, rhythm, and timbre. In tense battle scenes, fast-paced rhythms and strong percussion enhance the audience's sense of excitement, immersing them in the intensity of the battles. In romantic scenes, soft melodies and tones create a gentle and romantic atmosphere that resonates with the audience. The contrast in music between "Fishing songs in East China Sea" and "House of Flying Daggers" is used to convey the changing dynamics of the story, providing a vivid representation of emotional transformation. Furthermore, by using traditional Chinese music as a medium, the film seamlessly integrates music with the storyline, providing the audience with a rich emotional experience. The film is not only appreciated through its visuals and acoustics but also emotionally resonates with the audience. Through the careful selection and utilization of traditional Chinese music, the film effectively integrates emotions, moods, storyline, and music, creating a three-dimensional and thought-provoking audiovisual experience. It successfully conveys the unique charm of Chinese culture to both Chinese and international audiences, offering a fresh cinematic experience.

In summary, the musical score in the film "Kung Fu Hustle" enriches the film's content and viewing experience through emotional expression and emotional guidance. It presents the audience with a vivid audiovisual landscape filled with rich emotions and cultural heritage.

5 Conclusion

The film "Kung Fu Hustle" is not only a comedy but also a carrier of traditional Chinese culture. Through the clever integration of its plot, characters, settings, and music, the film successfully conveys core values such as hiding one's greatness from the world, chivalry, the triumph of good over evil, and the power of righteousness. This method of cultural transmission has provided inspiration to modern filmmaking, continually enriching the audience's experience with profound philosophical insights. It has also paved a new path for the dissemination of traditional Chinese culture in contemporary society. Additionally, the role of traditional Chinese music in the film "Kung Fu Hustle" is of paramount importance in cultural expression. It not only creates a unique atmosphere for the film but also enhances its artistic and aesthetic qualities through emotional resonance. As film music composition and cultural research continue to advance, traditional Chinese music is poised to find even greater potential applications and innovative development in future film and television productions. This will further enrich the cultural significance of films, deepen the audience's understanding of traditional values, and enhance the artistic value and influence of the medium.

References

1. Liu, Z. (2023). An Exploration of the Humanistic Value of Film Art Education in the Context of New Liberal Arts. *Shandong Art*, 2023(01), 18-25. <https://www.cnki.com.cn/Article/CJFDTotal-SDYH202301004.htm>.
2. J. Kunst. *Musicologica: A Study of the Nature of Ethnomusicology, Its Problems, Methods, and Representative Personalities*. Amsterdam, 1950.
3. "The Anthropology of Music" (Chinese Translation: Merriam). Alan Pa Meriam
4. Gong Y. Q. (2022). Research on Short Video Dissemination of New Ethnic Music. (Master's thesis) Sichuan Conservatory of Music, 2022(11). DOI: 10.27349/d.cnki.gsyyc.2022.000199.
5. Li N. (2018). Cross-Cultural Analysis of Tang Dynasty Folk Music in Film Art: A Case Study of "The Legend of the Demon Cat." *Art Review*, 2018(08), 124-127. DOI: 10.16364/j.cnki.cn11-4907/j.2018.08.019.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

