

# The Synchronized Relationship between Film Music Course Teaching and the Recognition of National Identity

A Case Study in Anshan Normal University

Di Liu

Foreign Languages Studies  
Anshan Normal University  
Anshan, Liaoning, China

**Abstract**—To date studies that refer to music in film tend to be too generalized to offer a firm theoretical paradigm for analysis of how music functions in cinema. In addition to this, studies on the relationship between film music course teaching in University as the recognition and cultivation of national identity are distinctly lacking. This paper takes one of the elective modules film music course teaching in Anshan Normal University as a case study, the main focus is to explore and trace the synchronized relationship between film music teaching and the cultivation of students' national identity.

**Keywords**—music in cinema; recognition; cultivation; national identity

## I. INTRODUCTION

It is noticeable that during the last two decades, with the opening up of China's market to the world that the movie industry is also catching up with this trend. New movies emerged from the domestic markets in China but also, won back international fame for Chinese filmmakers in International Film Festivals. As a result, China's movies have come to play an increasingly important role in promoting multiculturalism in the international movie industry and in developing its own distinctive style outside of the Hollywood dominated film industry. This is somewhat similar to the development of film in countries such as France, Germany, and so on.

When we watch films we hear lots of music at the same time. It is not simply referring to theme or episode songs in films, but to how music is heard in the background in almost every film. Although it is a central component of cinema, the way it works has not received sustained critical attention, and hence, the role of music in film is little understood. This might explain why much of the time we hardly notice sound and this is, perhaps, why writers and scholars have paid it little attention. However, film music not only displays a rich breadth and diversity, but it also encompasses some of the most interesting and affecting music produced in the twentieth century. This study will focus on exploring the recognition and cultivation of the students' national identity

in terms of the film music teaching in Anshan Normal University, but to do this it will, where applicable, draw on and the use of music in cinema in order to explore and combine the relationship between film music teaching and the recognition of national identity in particular. With politics, the economy and culture as its background and influence, how does the development of film music keep its nationality? This is the central question that this paper aims to address.

As part of this inquiry, this paper also attempts to reveal the importance of music in film production, celebrate its richness and reveal its specific characteristics, nationality and identity as a whole. Concurrent with this, will be an exploration of the tensions and accommodations to be found in film music between transnationalism, global imperatives and national characteristics in cinema.

There are two main themes running throughout this paper. Firstly, this paper is centred on exploring the use of music in cinema. Secondly, it will adopt a historical-cultural studies perspective in order to offer a better understanding to university students of both what film music is, and also how the relationship between music and image has developed in the contemporary cinema. This paper also attempts to offer a full appreciation of how the contemporary use of cinema music implicates identities and nationality.

## II. QUESTIONS OF RESEARCH

As one of the elective modules in Anshan Normal University, the course of film music is considered a general open module to all students in the university. Based on my PhD research in cinema language and music and sound image, and according to the strategy of the development during the thirteenth five-year plan in Liaoning Province (Anshan city, for example), this course aims to cultivate students with humanity and creativity through the whole session of teaching. And therefore, the teaching contents include the function of music in cinema, the relationship between music and image, as well as the students' recognition of nationality and identity, and so forth.

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Reviewing the academic approaches to music in cinema, with the two disciplines failing to collaborate, it became apparent to me that this study needs to take an interdisciplinary approach. Despite the popularity of cinema and the fact that a large amount of film music is heard by a mass audience, academic writing in the field of film music has been somewhat neglected over the years. The main reason for this is that in western countries such as the UK and America, or in China itself, film music brings together two separated areas, each with their own specialist language and terminology (film studies and musicology). Those who have written on film music tend to be either from a film studies background with no specialist knowledge of music studies or from a musicology background with no specialist understanding of film studies.

In addition, only a small number of books about film music have been published in the last decade, such as Claudia Gorbman's *Unheard Melodies* (1987), Kathryn Kalinak's *Setting the Score* (1992), Caryl Flinn's *Strains of Utopia* (1992) and Royal S. Brown's *Overtones and Undertones* (1994), to name some of the most important. However, these books while they individually explore film music from different perspectives, do not mention the development of film music or the music-image relationship in a national context. Hanns Eisler and Theodor Adorno's *Composing for the Films* was first published in 1947. On the surface, it seems to be a practical guide for making film music, yet upon closer inspection it offers much in the way of a theorisation of film music. While this text is still relevant there are lacunae in its approach when it comes to applying it to the development of film music worldwide. *Unheard Melodies* by Claudia Gorbman is perhaps the most enduring analysis of film music, focusing on classical Hollywood film music and music in European art cinema. It provides a distinct introduction to the theoretical ideas tied to music in the cinema yet, given its subject area (American cinema and European art) suffers from a Eurocentric bias (Gorbman, 1987).

Caryl Flinn's *Strains of Utopia* comprises a heavily theoretical analysis of music in classical cinema, attending to its psychological function as a discourse. *Setting the Score* illustrates Hollywood film music in a more historical manner, adopting the processes of production as well as the aesthetic structures that have defined film music (Flinn, 1992). *Overtones and Undertones* bring together a selection of writings, which approach film music from varying points of view (Brown, 1994). Each of the books has case studies about specific films. While these books are exemplary, they generally lack a solid historical perspective that this paper supplies on the relationship and the development of cinema and music, and these studies lack the breadth possible in discussion of the film music, nationality and ideology.

Some scholars undertaking research on Chinese cinema discuss Chinese cinema in alternative ways. For example, Dai Jinhua, the critic and scholar in Beijing Film Academy, P. R. China, serves as an important critical voice that merits consideration because she has published a number of books describing contemporary films from a particular historical moment in China. Dai shows her expressions of gender,

sexuality, Confucianism, and socialism in cinema and mass culture through her analysis of the Fifth Generation (Dai, 1999).

Furthermore, as few people have explored the image and music relation in cinema, the direction of recognition and understanding the nationally identity in terms of the development of film music is still not clear. Studies at present have not addressed the relationship between film music teaching and university students' national identity as a Chinese expression, and studies that refer to music in film tend to be too generalized to offer a firm theoretical paradigm for analysis of how music functions in film. One of the concerns of this study will be to explore both how different image-music relations develop in contemporary cinema, while, at the same time, they manage to retain musicality and nationality that can only be explained in a specific national context. In other words, it would be argued, and it is the line taken in this paper, that to explore these developments we have to consider the influence of different culture and music in cinema in different periods. Therefore, as part of my enquiry, combining both of my research interest and the university course teaching, as well as how to cultivate university students' recognition of national identity in terms of film and music, attention will be placed on the cultural and historical development of Chinese film and music in contemporary China, and the reasons for the growing popularity and diversity in film production.

### III. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH APPROACH

The module of film music course supposes to offer the university students two lectures (around 90 minutes) per week, sixteen weeks per semester, it opens up to the students among twelve schools in Anshan Normal University such as the Foreign Languages Studies, the School of Humanities, the School of Fine Arts, the School of Music Education, and so forth. As a result, the big challenge is that the students who come from different background with different level of aesthetic appreciation towards cinema. Therefore, during the whole session of sixteen weeks lectures, I have adopted various methodologies and teaching instruments, they mainly focus on my research interest on music and cinema and a number of detailed case studies to apply a historical and cultural review of music in cinema worldwide.

My intensive study and teaching of the use of music in contemporary cinema has benefited me greatly, providing valuable insight and a deeper knowledge and appreciation of its steady progress and development over the years. During the course of investigating this topic, I came across a problem; this was defining an appropriate methodology for my lectures. I needed to find a methodology that could guide the students to the general understanding which combines the approaches necessary for both cinema and music, and this was the biggest challenge for me at the beginning of my lectures. Therefore, the first couple of my lectures are based in my PhD research of review of literature. During this period I concentrate on collecting and guiding students the appropriate background literature, paying particular attention to theory and aesthetics of film, film music and cinema.

In order to better understand how and what kind of music is used in cinema, another important aspect of my teaching project is to focus on some specific films as my case studies because these demonstrate a strong relationship in the process of tracing the development of music-image relationship, additionally, the certain film cases fulfill the information on how to cultivate students to recognize the national identity through appropriate cinema language and sound or music image.

#### IV. CONTRIBUTION AND RESEARCH FINDING

This module of film music is taught from a historical cultural studies perspective, and takes into account my own personal interest in Chinese film music. Therefore, during my lectures, I do not use any specialist terms associated with the study of music and the intention is for what follows to be accessible to university students of film, music, media studies and those studying film music, as well as individuals with a general interest in contemporary film music. I argue that to fully understand cinema as a cultural practice, we have to consider the relationship between music and film as national negotiations with tradition and innovation. This is an area that has, as yet, not been fully recognized and it is the aim of this course of study to fill in some of the missing gaps in film theory, global cinema studies, music studies, and in musicology, and also to open up the achievement and pleasures of film music to a wider audience, and encourages university students to pursue this interest further.

In order to offer a better understanding of the use of music in contemporary cinema, taking Chinese cinema as an example, my suggestion is that the relationship between music and image forms continuity in contemporary Chinese cinema. However, what is lacking in these generalised accounts of film music is a solid historical perspective. This is particularly true in terms of addressing the areas of nationality, identity and ideology. In order to counter this deficiency, the course teaching is considered the development of Chinese film music within a historical frame, paying particular attention to cultural factors. By reviewing the historical development of the use of music in Chinese cinema, during my course teaching, I have demonstrated and have examined to students how and why music is situated in cinema in different periods, and I have also considered issues of musicology of Chinese cinema as a whole. I have argued that Chinese music retains its “Chineseness” in terms of musicology and national identity during the development of Chinese cinema since the 1930s.

I have applied theory from film studies and musicology but also signposted the lacunae of both for my subject area. On their own neither film theory nor musicology can fully answer the question of the relationship between image and sound. Although reviewing the development of the Chinese image and music relationship under the influence of Chinese cultural policies in different periods has offered us the general understanding of the function of film music and the relationship between music and image, it is also necessary to offer some concrete examples in order to chart both this influence and how Chinese cinema developed. Therefore, I have offered a number of case studies in my course teaching,

in order to address the above issues in more detail and to support my argument. These film cases fill in gaps by tracing the use of music in Chinese cinema, which have not been touched on before.

For example, between 1949 and 1966, film songs still played the most important role in the movies; they encouraged Chinese people to work hard for the socialist ideal life. However, rather than just composing or choosing simple music for relevant movies, during this period, the theme music became mature, and therefore some good music themes played the role of the narrative function with the appropriate image together (Yin & Ling, 2002). The relationship between music and image was getting richer and more colourful, the synchronized relationship between music and image which was popular in the 1930's Chinese cinema was developed; as for the parallel relationship between music and image which was adopted in the 1930's Chinese cinema, it was used continually, resulting in it becoming a popular Chinese film music technique during the period from 1956 to 1964 (Wang, 1995). In addition to this, in order to convey music nationality and demonstrate the ethnic Xinjiang minority life, in the film *Visitors from the Ice Mountain*, rather than using Chinese instruments in traditional Chinese folk idioms, an interesting variant is adopted. Composer Lei Zhenbang chose traditional Chinese instruments to be used in a Western symphony in order to transfer different messages, and to enhance the musicality and the nationality of the film in general.

After the Cultural Revolution, mainland China started its reform with the Open-door Policy announcement in 1978. The reform was first initiated in the economic field and later introduced to the cultural field. By tracing the history of Chinese music in film it becomes apparent that Chinese cinema developed from the singular political mode of ideology and a traditional mode of screen drama to the pluralistic mode of sound and image. Furthermore, with advancements in marketing mechanisms in the late 1980s, Chinese cinema began to absorb elements from the cultural industries (global mass media).

For this very reason, it is important to trace the development of the relationship between music and image in Zhang Yimou's early cinema from 1987 to 1991 because by doing so we can see how the use of traditional Chinese music has continued from its initial stage in the 1920s through to the Fifth Generation cinema, and more particularly contemporary Chinese film. Because of this, the use of music in Chinese cinema belongs as much with disciplines such as ethnography as it does with literature, women's studies, sociology, and media studies (Chow, 1995). The theme of female subjectivity and the awakening of female self-consciousness have undoubtedly won Zhang Yimou widely-acclaimed fame as being part of a feminist van-guard in contemporary filmmaking.

My focus in this lecture has centered on how Zhang Yimou has achieved his goal of producing a feminist manifesto and how the multi-relationship between music and image has been developed in his trilogy. I offer the case study of *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991), one of his earliest

films, to explore the genesis of feminist content within his films. In this film, the heroines' struggles mirror the turbulent social milieu of China in the early twentieth century. By focusing on periods of traumatic change in Chinese history, Zhang exploits the social backdrop to dramatize how this sets off "unruly" changes in both women's traditional roles and opens up spaces for women to challenge (even when they are unsuccessful) their gendered positionality within Chinese culture. As such, his films offer a critique of Chinese femininity. Visually and aurally, by the use of contrasting colours, enchanting sound effects and uncomplicated camera angles Zhang Yimou creates an atmosphere of love, passion and romance in contrast to the frustration and despair that women express in their traditional roles, without losing the audience in the process.

Sound plays a significant and important role, allowing the expression of sexuality, and to some extent augmenting the visual referents of this film (Yang, 2003). In addition, the composer Zhao Jiping uses sound to create images for the viewers without having to provide a visual image on screen. Zhao Jiping's music combines with Zhang Yimou's unique cinematography; this forms a special cinema language to represent women's defiance. In *Raise the Red Lantern*, Zhao Jiping uses the highly effective device of the chorus constantly repeating the phrase *Li-Ge Long* (a song style in the traditional Chinese opera) to express symbolically the history of Chinese culture's utter contempt for women. This musical device is borrowed from Beijing Opera. The threatening character of the music, as Zhao Shimin claims, is "a threat perceptible on a subliminal level- it serves to underscore the somber events in the lives led by the Master and his four concubines" (Zhao, 2003: 222).

In short, through the demonstration of multi-relationship between music and image such as synchronization, parallelism and counterpoint, students can conclude that *Raise the Red Lantern* tells the third stage of defiance, the ideological struggle against the Confucian system, although this struggle is incomplete and hopelessly crushed.

To sum up, combining with the sound effect and dialogue in cinema, the course of film music teaching, was, and is playing the active role in cultivating university students' recognition of national identity. In addition to this, it is hard to ignore a history of collaborative venture of the film industries during the different periods of cinematic development. Because of this, students are able to be based on traditional national culture, absorb the elite from the ethnomusicology, assimilate different composing technologies from Western countries, express national inornate patriotism, describe people's daily life, and provide a popular entertainment site.

## V. CONCLUSION

This paper has traced the relationship between the use of music in cinema course teaching, and the cultivation and the recognition of national identity towards the students in Anshan Normal University. Through my discussion of the case studies of Chinese filmmakers' works, it is obvious to see that Chinese cinema has moved from the platform of

political propaganda to that of autonomous popular culture since the 1930s (Yin & Ling, 2002). The development of film techniques and music score, as well as the multi-cooperation between the film crew pushes Chinese cinema into a flourishing age with notable diversification in styles. Under these influences, the relationship between film and music has also advanced into multi-development from synchronization and parallelism to counterpoint. As the national art, the use of music symbolizes the Chineseness of contemporary Chinese cinema. In short, the Daoist thought "Silent is the Roaring Sound, Formless is the Image Grand" structures the theme in the relationship between music and image in post-Cultural Revolution Chinese cinema.

As Shelley rightly wrote in one of his poems, "If winter comes, can spring be far behind?" This paper has negotiated both Chinese film studies and Chinese music studies. It is the first specific study of the cooperation between music and image course teaching and the cultivation of national identity towards university students in China (Anshan Normal University, for example). In terms of understanding research for this study, lack of sources directly related to this subject area was notable. I hope that this paper will in some small way engender further research in this area and encourage interest in both the history of and study of contemporary expressions of the dynamic synchronized relationship between music and image and the national identity in cinema.

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