

Understanding and Thinking of Ancient-Chinese-style Music in Popular Songs*

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Abstract—Ancient-Chinese-style music in popular songs is a music style that comes into being with the development of network and as required for catering for the appreciation demand of the younger generation born after 1990s and 2000s in China. This kind of music is of distinct characteristics of Chinese nation and the times. The lyrics of such music are full of ancient charms, creating an attractive feeling of transcending time and space. The nostalgic words mixed with classical Chinese and vernacular Chinese makes people intoxicated with it. The melody mode having characteristics of Chinese nation breaks through the traditional free and easy-matching orchestration. All the said features reflect the uniqueness of ancient-Chinese-style music. In popular music circles, ancient-Chinese-style music is like a graceful and elegant girl who has attracted many people's pursuit and attention within the just few years after its emergence. The trace of ancient-Chinese-style music can be seen in the popular media from online games to popular movies and TV plays and from original works competitions to entertainment shows from time to time. In this regard, this paper analyzes the status quo and practical problems of ancient-Chinese-style music from perspectives of the characteristics of its lyrics and songs, the development route from network to reality and the gradually emerged trend of Asian culture.

Keywords—*ancient-Chinese-style music; network and reality; consciousness of creating competitive products; respect for copyright*

I. INTRODUCTION

Ancient-Chinese-style music was emerged with the development of network communication in the 21st century. Creators of such music are small music groups. Their initial intention of composing and putting lyrics to music and singing is not for fame and fortune, but for the love and touching in heart. The earliest work of the like is to put lyrics to the background music of online games such as Chinese Paladin themed games, forming a combination of ancient style and popular elements and creating a Chinese aesthetic feeling. Due to the attention from Internet and media,

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ancient-Chinese-style music is gradually developed from online to offline and is loved by more and more listeners.

Ancient-Chinese-style music is a branch of Chinese-style works. But as everyone agrees, it is not the same as the Chinese style prevailed in 1990s. For ancient Chinese style, the academic circle has not yet given an authoritative definition. According to the academic views of scholars from all circles, the analysis of a large number of ancient music works and the interpretation for it on Baidu Entry, it can be summarized as follows: ancient-Chinese-style music's lyrics are classic and elegant, like poems and songs. Its tone mode is beautiful, pays attention to melody and is almost formed by national musical instruments and electronic synthesizers so that there is not the metal feeling of rock music and the heavy feeling of classical music. According to the mainstream classification in 2013, ancient-Chinese-style music can be classified as a new century music or pop music.

II. MORPHOLOGICAL FEATURES OF THE LYRICS AND SONGS OF ANCIENT-CHINESE-STYLE MUSIC

The theme and type of ancient-Chinese-style music are mainly nostalgic. Most of the lyrics have classical allusions or story lines. This is mainly reflected in two aspects such as narration part and speaking part. Narration part is the background of story described in the lyric, while speaking part is a more explicit expression of the story plot. The melody of ancient-Chinese-style music is a combination of a series of notes that reflect the theme of the music. Sometimes foreign music melody is quoted, such as those reflected in the "Han Yi Diao", "Qing Lian Xue" and so on.

A. Lyrics

Ancient-Chinese-style music is mainly represented by the lyrics of ancient-Chinese-style songs. Such lyrics are mostly classical Chinese, history allusions and ancient Chinese poems and pay attention to rhyme while creating the work. Sometimes, the lyrics of ancient-Chinese-style songs are directly Chinese poems or biographies of classics and history; sometimes, it may be a recreation on the basis of national classical allusions or a story creation taking imaginary story, transcending story and history themed story as the narration part.

1) *Directly adopting ancient Chinese poems:* A few years ago, there had already been many works directly quoting ancient poems as ancient-Chinese-style songs, such as the earliest theme song of "The Romance of the Three Kingdoms", "Gun Gun Chang Jiang Dong Shi Shui", Teresa Teng's "Wish we Last Forever" (which was covered by singer Wang Fei later) and Luo Wen's "Man Jiang Hong" and so on. All those songs are directly arranged for ancient poetry. This kind of creation only needs to consider the meaning expression in words. Because of the difference from the communication and production methods of current ancient-Chinese-style music, such works are regarded as Chinese-style works.

2) *Originally creating lyrics based on a story:* A story is reflected in the lyrics of ancient-Chinese-style music, such as "Qing Jin Tian Xia" written by finale and melodized and composed by He Tu. In this work, it narrates that the red rendering on the painting of blood dyed rivers and mountains

is inferior to the cinnabar point within your eyebrows. Whether the land under heaven is ruined or not, it is just a bustling scene even blood stains peach blossoms, I just want to see you again in tears. ...the wind smashed through the heavens and the earth. When we are old, I will govern the world. This song mainly tells a story about Bai Yan (founding emperor of Zhou Dynasty), Emperor Jing of the former dynasty and his last lover Cinnabar.

3) *Symbols in lyrics of ancient-Chinese-style music:* In the lyrics of such music, there are never modern words such as network, mobile phone, coffee, dear, miss you and so on. Otherwise, it may not be considered as ancient Chinese style. In such lyrics, some words in the vernacular Chinese can be replaced by some words with the characteristics of ancient Chinese style, called the symbolic narration. For example, beauty can be called Yiren, and good times can be called Shaoguang (glorious youth). The following "Table I" gives some words commonly used in ancient-Chinese-style lyrics:

TABLE I. LIST OF ANCIENT-CHINESE-STYLE COMMON CHARACTER

Common classification	Single word	Double words	Ended by a	Ended by an/ang
Example	乱(luan)	三世(san shi)	朱砂(zhu sha)	巫山(wu shan)
	殇(shang)	倾尽(qing jin)	繁华(fan hua)	霄汉(xiao han)
	寒(han)	流转(liu zhuan)	天下(tian xia)	兰夜(lan ye)
	暖(nuan)	袖手(xiu shou)	作罢(zuo ba)	断肠(duan chang)
	醉(zui)	红尘(hong chen)	桃花(tao hua)	微凉(wei liang)
	离(li)	凭栏(ping lan)	落花(luo hua)	未央(wei yang)
	红(hong)	相思(xiang si)	韶华(shao hua)	仓皇(cang huang)
	怕(pa)	青瓦(qing wa)	天涯(tian ya)	离殇(li shang)
	香(xiang)	袈裟(jia sha)	烟霞(yan xia)	焚香(fen xiang)
	亦(yi)	红颜(hong yan)	无暇(wu xia)	凄凉(qi liang)
	柔(rou)	青骢(qing cong)	孤侠(gu xia)	参商(shen shang)
	断(duan)	松萝(song luo)	华发(hua fa)	清商(qing shang)
	葬(zang)	天河(tian he)	造化(zao hua)	雕花笼(diao hua long)
	...	金樽(jin zun)	还家(huan jia)	棠梨煎雪(tang li jian xue)
		锦字(jin zi)	鞍马(an ma)	寒梅煮雪(han mei zhu xue)
	

The lyrics of ancient-Chinese-style music are symbolic and are closely relevant to the growth space of their audience so that it is not hard to be understood by those who haven't got in touch with electronic music, film & TV music and game music and are not familiar with classical novels, martial arts culture and animation culture.

B. Tune

1) *National tune:* The tunes of most ancient-Chinese-style music are created by using the national five-tone mode or by adding Qing Jiao (fa), Bian Zhi (#fa), Bian Gong (si) or Run (^bsi) on the basis of the pentatonic mode to form six-tone mode. Rare of them are created by using seven-tone mode. Living in this ancient land of China, what native people have experienced since young age is the strong

national characteristics. Therefore, when listening to the most familiar tone mode in ancient-Chinese-style music, is heard, native people may truly feel the cordial feeling and the sense of belonging.

2) *Melody and rhythm form:* The melody has not too large fluctuations and are divided into stationary type, descending type, rising type and mixed type [1].

The rhythm is often characterized by repetition in rhythm and structural arrangement, because the lyrics are rhythmed and symmetric. Taking He Tu's "Ru Hua" (written by finale and composed by He Tu) as an example (see "Fig. 1"), the rhythm often changes at the climax, forming a contrast of chorus. There may be various forms of large leaps in syncopations, dots and melodies according to different emotions (see "Fig. 2").

Fig. 1. He Tu's "Ru Hua". (first part)

Fig. 2. He Tu's "Ru Hua". (second part)

3) Instruments for ancient-Chinese-style music:

Instruments for ancient-Chinese-style music adopt national musical instruments full of charm. In China, there are many types and styles of musical instruments. Ancient-Chinese-style songs often use a large number of traditional musical instruments, such as Erhu (a two-stringed bowed instrument with a lower register than jinghu), Chinese zither (a 21-or 25-stringed plucked instrument), bass drum, bamboo flute, pipa (a plucked string instrument with a fretted fingerboard), tonso (a vertical bamboo flute), panpipe, lusheng (a reed-pipe wind instrument), dulcimer, liuqin (a plucked stringed musical instrument), guqin (a seven-stringed plucked instrument in some ways similar to the zither), temple blocks, matouqin (horse head string instrument), frame drum, bo, gong, banhu fiddle (a bowed two stringed instrument with a thin wooden soundboard), gaohu, Gehu and suona horn. Playing those instruments can reflect a strong Chinese flavor.

The material of such music comes from some elements of Chinese image, such as the sound of High Mountain and Flowing Water, the tone of opera and the speaking part like drama. Influenced by Western pop music, the orchestration of such musical instruments occasionally mixes with Western instruments, adopts electronic synthesizers and MIDI and other production techniques to produce accompaniment effect. Many ancient-Chinese-style works are very difficult to be completed only depending on live performance, mostly relying on recording, post-processing and soft sound sources by electronic equipment.

III. ANCIENT-CHINESE-STYLE MUSIC'S DEVELOPMENT TREND FROM NETWORK TO REALITY

"Ancient-Chinese-style music" is a music form developed from network culture to real world. Ancient-Chinese-style music has been a heterogeneous and diverse cultural product since its emergence. Listeners can find the styles of RAP (Rap), R&B (Rhythm and Blues), and electronic music from the rhythm and texture of such music, read the rules and forms of classical poetic composition from the lyrics, hear moving stories from the speaking part and also hear the key points provided by dialect and opera tune from the melody and tones. Under the mixed styles, such music seems having a sense of strangeness at the initial listening, but it is not in chaos. Right because of the fresh feeling and appreciative story, ancient-Chinese-style music can satisfy the appreciation of many young people in the network. The ancient-Chinese-style music producers and fans spontaneously form a circle of love in such music. They may share it to good friends while loving it so that such music has always been spreading online.

A. Network Origin

Ancient-Chinese-style music that attracted people's attention the earliest was the famous online game "Chinese Paladin 4" issued in 2007. Its theme song and background music are inspired by Chinese classical literature. Music is skillfully integrated into the game plot and scene, so that players can not only feel the graceful music but also haunt in

mind the touching plot in the game. Consequently, such game style attracted many players. With the rapid development of the online games such as "Xuanyuan Sword", "Chinese Paladin 3" and "Fantasy Zhu Xian" after 2008, ancient-Chinese-style soundtrack in Chinese Paladin themed games quickly gained the favor of players and online game companies.

In 2007, the first ancient-Chinese-style original music "Mo Ming Qi Miao" registered via Internet and launched Tencent Weibo. This was initiated by online musicians EDIQ and Diuzi and gathered with a group of talents specialized in writing, composing, singing, playing, sound mixing, MV production and art design and other aspects via the Internet. Most of the members' professions and works are irrelevant to art. It is the love of music that brings them together and leads them to continue creating works over constant perception and attempt. The association claims itself to be "Mo Village". Its style of music works is diverse and predominated by ancient-Chinese style.

In addition to Mo Village, there are also many ancient-Chinese-style music associations registered on the Internet such as Ping Sha Luo Yan, Luan Feng Ming, Qian Ge Wei Yang Bond, Liu Shang Qu Shui, Hua Kui Lou and Miao Yu Qing Ge. As mentioned in the song "Our Mo Ming Qi Miao", "Inviting you to breathe the wind of Tang and Song Dynasties" and "Drunk and sleeping in the fantastic melody". The two lyrics appropriately demonstrate the musical style, namely the ubiquitous ancient-Chinese-style element.

B. Team Advertising and Media Promotion

In December 2008, the first ancient-Chinese-style music album "Qian Shan Meng" was officially published and issued by China Record Shanghai Company and Mo Ming Qi Miao. In February 2010, Guangzhou Daily interviewed Mo Ming Qi Miao association and issued the article titled "Backing to Tang Dynasty through My Ears (Xiang Hui Da Tang De Er Duo)". In 2011, website of ancient-Chinese-style circle was registered and established. On October 5, 2013, a fanciful music concert themed "Jinling Qinhuaiye" ancient-Chinese-style culture festival activity was held in Nanjing Great Hall of the People. On December 8, 2013, the "Time Forum" of Tsinghua University ushered in the ancient music performers who appeared in Nanjing two months ago. In 2014, "The Ten Years of Ancient-Chinese-style Music" themed performance conducted a nationwide tour. In 2015, Mi Man Media representing Mo Ming Qi Miao association was established. In October 2015, the collection of ancient-Chinese-style music "Feng Ya Ji" initiated by Xiyin Culture Media opened 5sing crowd funding. Cultures such as "ancient Chinese style" and "cos" were even developed from network two-dimensional feature to three-dimensional feature.

Ancient-Chinese-style music has been adopted in the hit TV series "The Legend of Zhen Huan", "Nirvana in Fire", "The Mystic Nine", "The Princess Weiyang", "San Sheng San Shi Shi Li Tao Hua" and "Story of Yanxi Palace" and so on. While looking at the plot, audience may be even attracted by the ancient-Chinese-style feeling haunted in mind and

reflected in the theme song of ancient Chinese style. Ancient-Chinese-style music was greatly highlighted after the successive shows of the ancient-Chinese-style music "Juan Zhu Lian" shown on the Spring Festival Gala on CCTV 1 in 2014 and "Shu Xiu" shown on the Gala in 2015.

C. Number of Works of Ancient-Chinese-style Music

When searching ancient-Chinese-style lyrics and songs on network, what often pop up are links about "a hundred ancient-Chinese-style lyrics" and "a hundred selected ancient-Chinese-style songs" and so on. When searching that keyword on Baidu Music, there are often more than 3,600 songs of the like. Up to the end of 2017, according to incomplete statistics (statistical materials are collected from network, team official website, Baidu entries, etc.), the number of works of original ancient-Chinese-style music teams are as shown in the following "Table II":

TABLE II. STATISTICS OF THE NUMBER OF ORIGINAL WORKS (UP TO 2017)

Mo Ming Qi Miao 200	Xiao Xu Music 186	Luan Feng Ming 124	Qian Shui Ning Lan 105
Ping Sha Luo Yan 92	Cang Hai Yue Ming 90	Han Tang Yi Ge 45	Shi Wu Ye 45
Xia Mo Xiao Yin 33	Hua Kui Lou 38	F.Be.I 35	Hu Shuo 33
Feng Huang You 27	Liu Yin Jiu Zhang 24	Liu Shang Qu Shui 24	San Sheng 23

D. Subculture Trends of Ancient-Chinese-style Music

Subculture was originated in the study of sociology. When a certain group in society formed a lifestyle different from the dominant cultural characteristics and having cultural elements distinct from that of other groups, the culture of the group is called "subculture". The emergence and spread of ancient-Chinese-style music appropriately reveals the characteristics of this subculture. [2]

Zhao Yan, a literary work creator, believes that "loving ancient-Chinese-style music or Hanfu (national costume of people in Han Dynasty in China) has become a label for two-dimension fans to make themselves stand alone". Ancient Chinese style fans and ancient-Chinese-style music creators are using their own unique language and costumes in the circle, spontaneously forming teams online to conduct creation, communication and activities. More and more ancient-Chinese-style music teams have received invitations for making soundtracks for film, game and radio play. This indicates that many young people's aesthetics for ancient-Chinese-style music have become a necessary thing and also indicates peoples' appreciation and recognition on such music in pop music circles.

IV. THINKING ABOUT THE REALISTIC PROBLEMS OF ANCIENT-CHINESE-STYLE MUSIC

A. *A Sense of Creating Competitive Products Needs to Be Kept in Mind in Order to Promote Ancient-Chinese-style Music from Self-entertainment Mode to Entertaining Mode*

At the origin of such songs, it is mainly spread on internet publishing platform and the purpose of its production is not for commercial promotion but for the sake of pleasure/interests. From determining the theme of a song in planning stage to completing the production of the song in later stage, each member usually works free of charge and the audience can download such music fully free of charge. This pure cultural creation and spreading atmosphere is precisely because the lovers of such music have incorporated their interests into the cultural creation. However, such works have different art levels, because such works are spontaneously created by singer just for interests and there is low threshold for singers.

Excellent popular songs should be those simple and unaffected in words, but the artistic atmosphere is still very rich. However, with the spread and development of ancient-Chinese-style music, there are more and more spontaneous musicians on the Internet. Some of the works are completely piled words and some works are roughly produced, lacking connotation. Zhou Xianbao and Xiong Chuyue have carried out deeper analysis on ancient-Chinese-style music from the perspective of culture and art. They believed that such music lies in the grassroots cultural background and pluralistic aesthetic pursuit, but it is necessary to pay attention to the uneven quality levels of works, blind worship of idols and lack of relevant market norms [3].

Ancient-Chinese-style music has no longer been just for self entertainment of small amount of people. Many of such works have entered the real life and vision of the public, having certain commercial feature and being sought after by many people. So, it becomes in duty bound to bear necessary social responsibilities and it is necessary for music production teams and creators to have a sense of creating competitive products and consolidate their cultural deposits to better inherit the classic culture by virtue of ancient-Chinese-style music.

B. *Enhancing the Sense of Protecting Own Copyright While Respecting for Other's Copyright*

Some music creators make ancient music completely fully in order to satisfy their hobbies and express their feelings in Weibo, so that their works fail to be registered copyrighted. At this point, it is needed to improve their sense of protecting their own copyrights. Meanwhile, with respect to copyrights, it is also needed to respect for other's works while covering other's works.

There are many ancient songs that are covers of Cantonese or Japanese songs. When the cover writers cited some famous songs as the accompaniment, some of them didn't indicate the source of the song and the name of the composer in their works. For example, "Zui Xian Ge

(Drunken fairy song)" quoted the Japanese Rin orchestra's song "Sakura, Sakura" in the Shakuhachi and Shamisen. The singing part in the song of "Fu Sheng Ban Xie" is sourced from the Japanese pop singer Nakajima Mika's work "Ying Hua Fen Fei Shi" and the lyrics are refilled by the popular singer of the ancient circle Audio Monster (Yin Pin Guai Wu). However, in the public performance, the original singer recorded on the screen was Audio Monster and the information of the original composer or the like is not listed. The "Grass (Cao Mu)" and "Empty (Kong Kong Ru Ye)" popular on TikTok were also the covers of works of others and are also announced offline by the platform for reason of copyright. There were many situations like that some ancient-Chinese-style songs cited famous songs but did not mark the source of songs and the names of original composers. This is misleading and may cause many people regarding that this song is originally created by the cover writer. This is a bad phenomenon.

C. *Ancient-Chinese-style Music Cannot Take the Place of Chinese-style Music*

The concept of "Chinese-style music" was proposed by Mi Man Media in May 2016 when it announced to begin cooperation with Tencent's game "Tian Ya Ming Yue Dao (Moonlight Blade)". The reason why Mi Man can complete multiple rounds of financing and continue spending large amount of money is that it is telling a more and more popular story to the capital market by using the word of Chinese style. However, it should be emphasized that ancient-Chinese-style music is not the same as Chinese-style music. The two concepts cannot be confused.

Chinese-style music is a kind of songs that includes ancient-Chinese-style songs and is created on the basis of Chinese traditional culture and literature. It has great historical and cultural value and a strong sense of the times. True Chinese-style music not only includes ancient-Chinese-style songs, but also includes Chinese-style songs, local operas, music played by folk instruments, folk songs, traditional tune of songs, poetry, music, dance as well as such Chinese music culture and art classics as adopting a lot of foreign cultures to Chinese use such as "The Butterfly Lovers" and "The Yellow River Chorus".

Chinese popular music has experienced nearly a century of twists and turns. The turning point began from 1983. Popular music experienced the rough confusion period of "Rock on the New Long March", experienced Teresa Teng, Wang Liping, Huang Zhan and Qiong Yao's works which are still sung by contemporary people and are elaborative in classical rhyme and melody of music and also experienced various attempts on Chinese style by modern popular music creators represented by Fang Wenshan and Zhou Jielun. Ancient music is also a Chinese "new century" music style gradually formed over many times of impacts between traditional and modern styles. The emergence and status quo of ancient-Chinese-style music also provides a development direction for traditional music. The combination of classical, national and modern styles makes those associations available to produce more works for test and may form a

typical style or even a sect and take a place in a place in the field of contemporary Chinese music.

V. CONCLUSION

China's pop music has experienced nearly a century of twists and turns. Since 1983, pop music has experienced the confusion of Rock and Roll on the New Long March Road. It has experienced the elaboration of Ci-style film and TV songs in Tang and Song dynasties, classical lyrics and melody by Deng Lijun, Wang Liping, Huang Zhan and Qiongyao, which are still sung by contemporaries. Contemporary pop musicians represented by Fang Wenshan, Zhou Jielun and so on have made various attempts in Chinese style. Ancient-Chinese-style music is also a Chinese style of "new century" music which has been formed after countless attempts to blend traditional and modern music. However, the long-term development of ancient-Chinese-style music also needs to have a sense of quality. In the network promotion of ancient-Chinese-style music equaling to national-style music, it also needs to be prudent.

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