

A Comparison of Music Aesthetics Thoughts Between Record of Music and Plato's Republic

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Abstract: By comparing the Music thoughts contained in two classical music books, *Record of Music* (yue ji 樂記) and *Plato's Republic*, this paper analyzes the similarities and differences in their cognition of "the origin, essence, and function of music" due to their different social backgrounds and cultures. Both *Record of Music* and *Plato's Republic* were born in the era of the alternation of the old and the new in the slave society. However, the slave society in the Spring and Autumn Period of China and the slave society in the democratic era of ancient Greece have different specific historical characteristics, and their different characteristics in economic development are bound to be reflected in ideology and culture. Thus, different cultures have developed different music.

Keywords: *Plato's Republic*, *Record of Music*, Aesthetics of music, Musical thoughts

1. Introduction

Since ancient times, music has been a key field of aesthetic discussion and has an important position in the history of aesthetics. The terminology "Music" (yue 樂) in ancient China refers to the integrated art of music, poetry, and dance, which is very similar to ancient Greece. In ancient Greece, the word "music" refers to the "art of the Muse", which means the combination of rhythmic and rhythmic music, poetry, and dance under the protection of the goddess of literature and art.

Record of Music is the representative work of the Confucian music education thought in the Spring and Autumn Periods of China and the Warring States Period. It is also the first systematic and complete music monograph in China. It contains rich musical aesthetics and educational thoughts and has a long history of influence on later Chinese literary and artistic works. In *Record of Music*, it is mentioned that the production of music is not an overnight process, but a process of developing from the natural "sound" (sheng 聲) to the aesthetic "sound", and further adding dance movements to form "music" (yue 樂). There are three social functions of the *Record of Music*, namely, regulating emotions for human individuals, expressing social conditions for the society, and maintaining political rule for the ruling class of the country [1].

Plato's Republic of Ancient Greece was almost the same time as the *Record of Music*. Although it was the first work on educational theory in the West, it used a lot of ink to focus on the art education thought represented by music, which profoundly influenced the development of Western literature and art. A comparison of the Eastern idea of music aesthetics in *Record of Music* with the Western idea of music aesthetics in *Plato's Republic* reveals that there are many similarities between the two

ideas, and each has its own characteristics. For example, *Plato's Republic* does not believe that music is produced by emotion, but that it comes entirely from nature and is an imitation of the world. In terms of social function, it is almost consistent with the views mentioned in *Record of Music*, and they all admit that music has an extremely strong educational effect on individuals and society [2]. This article will combine the summary and analysis of two Music monographs by Eastern and Western scholars and compare and discuss the similarities and differences of music aesthetic thinking in *Record of Music* and *Plato's Republic*.

2. The Contrast Between the Occurrence and the Essence of Music

Is the essence of music a manifestation of the human mind or a copy of the objective world? Since ancient times, Chinese and Western discussions on this issue have never been the same.

2.1. The View of the Nature of Music in *Record of Music*

It has been mentioned above that ancient Chinese regarded poetry as a part of "music" (*yue* 樂), and poetry is obviously a way for people to express and express their emotions, and the consensus of ancient Chinese sages on the nature of music literature and art can be seen. In other words, music is the revelation and expression of human thoughts and feelings, rather than the imitation of nature and social life [3]. *Record of Music* naturally inherits this thought and expresses the origin of music positively and clearly for the first time in the history of Chinese music [4].

Record of Music in the opening of the "Music" first put forward the "Object perception theory" (*wu gan shuo* 物感說), in the sound (*sheng* 聲), voice (*yin* 音), music (*yue* 樂) Angle explained why the origin of music: "Where the sound, from the human heart. Music, the sound of the birth, its original in the heart of the feeling in the matter also" (*Record of Music*). This saying points out that external things affect people's emotions all the time. After this, people, in order to make their emotions out, is formed by the human heart to express the emotion of music. This first emphasizes that music is subjective in nature and expresses people's psychology and inner emotions, reflecting the dominant aspect of Oriental aesthetics: "Poetry expresses aspiration and the music conveys emotion". Secondly, the *Record of Music* also emphasizes that "sound" is only the natural sound issued by people when they are emotionally stimulated, and this kind of sound does not have aesthetic feeling and cannot trigger other people's aesthetic activities. Until the "sound" is artificially combined, there is gradually a regular rhythm of beautiful changes, and it begins to be appreciated by people, and it becomes an aesthetic "music" [3].

In addition to the distinction of "sound, voice and music", *Record of Music* has been distinguished from the object of appreciating music:

"Those who know the sound but do not know the sound are animals; Those who know each other but do not know music, all are also. Only a gentleman (*jun zi* 君子) can know happiness." [5].

On the one hand, the distinction between human beings and animals, the gentleman and the common man (*shu ren* 庶人), has invite class oppression under the background of The Times. On the other hand, the attitude towards individual aesthetic differences reflected in this view is not unreasonable. It believes that the aesthetic ability of the aesthetic subject is the premise of whether the aesthetic function of music can be played. Only human beings can appreciate music, and the aesthetic ability of different people is different. In social life, the direction of aesthetic direction, the direction of art production and processing, and the education received by people with high social status become a natural convergence state. Therefore, music and people are mutually selected; people with a higher cultural upbringing, often the higher the aesthetic ability and aesthetic consciousness, the more able to appreciate the essential beauty of music, and understand the creator and performer concerned about the thoughts and feelings.

2.2. *Plato's Republic's Views on the Nature of Music*

In ancient Greece, the saying "art imitates nature" has been popular since ancient Greece. Democritus said that man learned to sing by imitating birds. Plato followed this view when he wrote in *Plato's Republic*: "From Homer onwards, all poets are imitators." He argued in *Plato's Republic* that the art of music should reflect life as if it were a mirror:

"Take a mirror and turn it in all directions, and you will immediately reflect the sun, the morning, the earth, yourself, other animals, utensils, plants, and everything else you have just found." [6].

So, he believes that the art of music is objective and realistic, and it is a mirror held in the hands of writers and artists. People use it to take in the appearance and images of various things in nature and society and believe that this is the essential feature of the art of music.

In addition, Plato combined "imitation theory" with his "theory of ideas", making it a part of the objective idealism art theory based on the theory of ideas. He inherited the Pythagorean view: "Number is the source of all things. The first of the principles of nature is mathematics." Similarly, everything can be explained by numbers. They saw again that the change and proportion of the tone could be calculated by numbers." This led Plato to believe that the ideological origin of sexual characteristics, the beauty produced by sound comes from their rational nature, and the pleasure produced by them is also unique to them. This pleasure refers to the sense of harmony caused by reason in the mind, and is also the inevitable desire in the spiritual field of man, explaining why man can understand the special pleasure from music, The soul resonates joyfully with the harmonic vibrations." Therefore, Plato believes that the rational spirit of music will not be born and die eternal [7].

2.3. *Compare the Understanding of the Essence of Music in Record of Music and Plato's Republic*

Both Eastern and Western music art affirm the unity of truth, goodness, and beauty, and both require the combination of musical form and thought. However, due to the different understanding of the origin of music, the emphasis on the truth, goodness, and beauty in music is different.

In *Plato's Republic*, Plato regarded music as an imitation of nature, so he believed that writers and artists should pay special attention to whether their works reflected the truth, to put "truth" in the first place. Whether nature and society are beautiful or ugly, they should be reflected truthfully, otherwise, they will distort nature, society, and life. This tradition influenced later Western artists to attach great importance to the realistic representation of historical facts, objects, and entities in their works.

Record of Music advocates "goodness is the subject of truth" and "goodness is the subject of beauty" and attaches more importance to the ethical and moral function of "goodness" of music. For the first time in Chinese history, it puts forward the opposition between "reason" and "human desire"[8]. It believes that music is not simply to maximize people's hearing feelings, and the thoughts and feelings expressed by music should be pure and innocent. It should be used to control the desire in people's minds, purify the human mind, and eliminate the evil thoughts that are inconsistent with the Confucian moral creeds of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and faith. Confucian's view of music, literature and art represented by *Record of Music* puts the role of "goodness" in literature and art in the first place, and the affirmation of ethics exceeds the pursuit of aesthetic value, otherwise, it will deviate from the essence of music. In the thousands of years of Chinese history, this theory of the essence of music and literature has had a profound influence on the investigation of the social function and artistic value of literary works.

3. The Social Function of Music

3.1. The Social Function of Music in *Record of Music*

For individuals, *Record of Music* believes that music can regulate people's emotions, make people educated, and become moderate and peaceful. *Record of Music* proposes that "Music is made by heaven (*tian*天)" and thinks that music should conform to the principles of heaven, while Confucianism thinks that the principles of heaven are "neutral and peaceful" (*zhong li ping he*中立平和).

Therefore, the music criterion of *Record of Music* is to use the principles of heaven to regulate music and take "harmony" (*he*和) as the highest standard of music aesthetics. Human music should be as harmonious as the principles of heaven. Ability to conform to heaven and earth [9]. *Record of Music* believes that emotions have an impact on music, people's different six senses will form different "sounds", and thus develop into different music, but the gentleman can in turn use music to adjust his heart. The use of gentle music to maintain his "People are born to be peaceful, this is an innate character" mentality. Therefore, only a gentleman with a harmonious heart can make music, and "music" lets the heart get rid of all kinds of temptation of external material desires, so that people's emotional desires and ethics are unified. The main purpose of the ruling class's system of rites and entertainment is to educate the people so that everyone can follow the rites, eliminate their own desires, and control emotional likes and dislikes [9].

Record of Music believes that music can reflect social and political conditions. Music is the most passionate of all arts, it can strongly act on people's emotional field, so "only music cannot be false". Since music comes from people's thoughts and feelings, and people's thoughts and feelings are influenced and stimulated by the external environment, the thoughts and feelings expressed by music are naturally directly related to the social environment and political situation of the creator at that time. Thus, it is possible to hear not only about the customs of a country in its music but also more about its politics and trends. In the process, music plays the role of political propaganda. Therefore, *Record of Music* uses this feature to achieve the purpose of optimistic politics, that is, "to judge Music to know politics and to prepare the way of governance" [5]. This is the same as Confucianism uses poetry to observe people's feelings and internal customs. Music is also used to observe people's customs in politics, observe current politics, correct gains and losses, and beautiful education. Therefore, corresponding to "Harmony between people" (*ren he*人和), "political harmony" (*zheng he*政和) is also an important factor in *Record of Music* to stipulate harmonious music, which believes that politics is smooth, people are peaceful, and the music produced can stimulate people's aesthetic pleasure. The theory put forward by *Record of Music* can be used to alert the ruling class to self-reflection and examine the local people's livelihood through "viewing poetry" and "viewing music". However, if this theory becomes the reason for the rulers to control artistic behavior and makes them devote themselves to eliminating "decadent sounds", it will limit and restrict the individual aesthetic space, resulting in the loss of more extensive and multifaceted content of art and aesthetics.

Record of Music proposed that rites and music cooperate to maintain feudal rule. The "rites and music system" (*li yue*禮樂) in Confucianism was inherited from the Rites of Zhou (*zhou li*周禮), which were used by the rulers to classify people of different classes and regulate their social behaviors. As the central idea of Confucian Music theory, *Record of Music* naturally needs to maintain the ethics and moral norms of feudal hierarchy with "rites" (*li*禮) and "music". Therefore, *Record of Music* discusses the relationship between "music" and "rites" in the Confucian "rites and music system". "Rites" order, "music" is harmony, "music" is equality; "Music" needs "rites" to be restrained, and "rites" (*li*禮) also need "music" to be reconciled. The role of "rites" lies in the regulation of heaven and earth, personnel, and ranks, while the role of "music" is the antagonistic relationship between the

hierarchy and order of "rites" and ultimately achieves the harmony of society, personnel, and the world.

"Music" becomes a method of governing people in accordance with the requirements of "rites", that is, in accordance with the norms or norms by which people live together and behave, it cultivates and enhances people's moral consciousness and spiritual realm, and adjusts people's relations with each other, as well as the relations between individuals and society and the state [10]. Among them:

"The music is the same, and the rites is different." "Music keeps people from complaining, rites keeps people from arguing" "Rites (*li yi* 禮義) make people divided between high and low, music makes peace between Kings and subjects"

In other words, "rites" is used to distinguish and constrain people of different class systems. In contrast "music" is used to coordinate and unify people of different and opposing levels in a hierarchical society and people with contradictions within the hierarchy emotionally, so that they have emotional identity and belonging, and prevent them from fighting each other. Therefore, "music" and "rites" complement each other, balance each other, and jointly maintain the social stability under the feudal rule. If only "rites" are too close to affection, the contradictions between classes will become irreconcilable. If only "music" or the use and appreciation of "music" are too vague, the boundaries between classes will become too thin and difficult to manage. Based on comparative analysis, *Record of Music* further exaggerates the role of "rites and music system through deification. *Record of Music* with "music the harmonious of heaven (*tian* 天) and earth (*di* 地); The rites is the order of heaven (*tian* 天) and earth (*di* 地)." The statement confuses the artificially prescribed order of supremacy with the objective laws of the operation of heaven and earth. Deifying the social function of "rites and music" to dominate all things in the world together with ghosts and spirits, heaven, and earth nature, and giving supreme authority to the value and meaning of "rites and music" is an overly mystical view [1].

3.2. Social function of music in *Plato's Republic*

Plato's Republic also acknowledges the educational role of music, which can have an impact on people's minds. Plato believes that if people accept the edification of beautiful music in childhood, even if they do not know what is beautiful and what is ugly, it does not matter. When people grow up, they can naturally distinguish between beauty and ugliness, good and evil, and first establish good aesthetic habits and have a noble moral character, which is further conducive to the formation of good social fashion [2]. An ideal citizen of a country should possess such virtues as wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice. According to the educational principle of "restraining and guiding young people to the right truth", Plato set up an idealized education path with steps. With the growth of age, the scope of knowledge involved in education in *Plato's Republic* has different emphases. Only music runs through the entire educational stage.

"Music has the function of making people aware of such quality images as temperance, courage, magnanimity, and magnanimity, and no matter where they are scattered, no matter how large or small they become, they can no longer be ignored. Reason mixed with music, which is the only internal guarantee of man's virtue in life, resides in the mind that possesses it." [6]

The reason why music can be used for politics is that music comes from the heart and has a strong artistic appeal. It influences society by cultivating people from ideology and spirit.

In politics, Plato also believed that music was a good tool of government but based on the idea of improving the overall capacity of the ruler. Because music has the effect of improving people's "temperance" ability, music has also become an important tool for rulers to establish public legal awareness, because a great use of music is to regulate the relationship between various levels in the state and control individual desires, that is, to cultivate the virtue of "temperance". Therefore, music

education should cultivate the ability of "obedience to the ruler" and "self-restraint". In Plato's view, people "develop the spirit of abiding by the law" through music and sports education from a young age, and "this spirit of abiding by the law will everywhere dominate the behavior of children and make them grow up healthily. When something changes in the country, they will rise up and restore the established order." [6]

3.3. Comparison of the Social Function of Music in *Record of Music* and *Plato's Republic*

Record of Music and *Plato's Republic* also believe that music should play a didactic role, which also leads them to believe that there must be strict mastery and requirements for the nature of music tunes [10].

Record of Music consists of the core ideas of Confucian music theory with two opposing concepts: "right sound" and "rape sound", "harmony music," and "sexual music". The so-called "positive music" refers to the noble and well-ordered elegant music, through which people can cultivate their character. The so-called "lewd music" is against etiquette, which is denounced by Confucianism as the voice of troubled times and the voice of subjugation, specifically referring to the music of indulging human desires and corrupting customs.

In *Plato's Republic*, Plato proposed that a law should be formulated to restrict music and poetry, stipulating which content of music and poetry should be promoted and which should be banned. Plato opposed music that depicted conspiracy, sin, hatred, and desire and believed that music fostered nobility, goodness, and grace. Plato made a summary analysis of the musical tunes of that time and proposed against the elegiac tones of lamentation and misery and the musical tones of listlessness and laziness, and retained the songs that developed the courage and temperance of man because they made people follow the good, without pride, modesty, and prudence. Eastern and Western educators have long noticed the social function of music, literature and art and have given full play to the role of music in shaping ideal personality and building a country in their political ideas.

However, *Plato's Republic* is too critical of the music itself and its audience. Music was to pass "censorship", and only music that expressed ideas of courage and moderation could be heard by citizens, and music that expressed sorrow and love would be banned. For this reason, the rhythm and melody of the music must also be high and simple, to ensure that the country can produce brave, tempering citizens. The lower classes, such as slaves, were not allowed to hear music, because slaves and other lower classes did not need to learn such high and solemn acts to gain the respect of others and social and political power. In contrast, *Record of Music* is more tolerant of other types of music and audiences.

4. Conclusion

Through comparison, it can be found that the two works also affirm the unity of truth, goodness, and beauty in music, and affirm that the aesthetic pleasure of music is a rational content that permeates society and ethics.

Record of Music pointed out that the production of "music" lies in human emotions, which is the first naive materialistic explanation of the relationship between art and reality in China since ancient times and has milestone significance in the history of ancient Chinese aesthetics. From this point of view, *Record of Music* further demonstrates the authenticity of music art and its cognitive significance; that is, the content of art must have the real basis of reality, and the image of art must reveal the author's real feelings. Therefore, *Record of Music* believes that art must be real, and the content of art needs to have profound cognitive significance. *Record of Music* also demonstrates the relationship between the content and form of art, the ideological nature, and the artistry. It believes that the unity of the diversity of language, color, tone, and movement constitutes the beauty of art, but the purpose

of art is not to satisfy the desire of the senses but to educate people to serve social ethics and politics, so the content of thought should be put first, and the form of art should be put second. Moreover, *Record of Music* is the first in Chinese history to demonstrate the characteristics of the role of art education, which compares "music" with "rites.", Etiquette is an external constraint and mandatory, but music, as an art, relies on inner emotions to move people, plays its educational role by arousing people's aesthetic happiness, and guides and controls people's thoughts and feelings.

There are equally valuable ideas in *Plato's Republic*: the content of the music determines the form of the music, the tune of the music must conform to the lyrics, and it needs to be played or sung by people in a good state of mind. The so-called good mental state refers to "the really good mental state of a person with good intelligence and good character." Only noble, intellectual, and moral people can write beautiful content and form of music. *Plato's Republic* also mentions the subtle effect of music poetry on the soul, arguing that music instills the distinction between the true, the good and the beautiful and the false, the evil and the ugly in children's childhood. "When a child receives a good education from an early age, rhythm and harmony are immersed in the depths of his soul, where they take root firmly, he will become gentle and polite. If you get a bad education, the result will be the opposite. To realize the truth of truth, goodness, and beauty.

The difference between *Record of Music* and *Plato's Republic* of China and the formation of their respective characteristics are related to the different characteristics of their social and historical conditions, ideological and cultural conditions, and even philosophical thinking modes. The "rites" produced by Chinese slavery did not exist in a Greek slave society, and the economic prosperity, democratic politics, and emphasis on the natural science of Greek slave city-states could not exist in a Chinese slave society. The different characteristics of Greek slavery and Chinese slavery in social and economic development must be reflected in ideology and culture, thus forming the characteristics of their respective ideology culture, and producing different influences on later generations. To some extent, a thorough analysis of the cultural differences caused by the two slave societies is the significance of the research direction of this paper.

This paper only deals with the comparative study of aesthetics and culture and fails to carefully study and demonstrate the influence of politics and economy on culture and aesthetics. It is hoped that further breakthroughs can be made on the topic of reform in future studies by starting from the aspects of slavery in ancient China and the economy of slave city-states in Greece.

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