

# The Inheritance and Innovation of Chinese Classical Music: The Path from Tradition to Modernity

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**Abstract:** *This paper delves into the inheritance and innovation of Chinese classical music, as well as its evolutionary path from tradition to modernity. The introduction section initially outlines the historical background and significance of Chinese classical music, highlighting the necessity of inheritance and innovation. Subsequently, the article elaborates on the methods of inheriting Chinese classical music, encompassing the preservation of traditional musical elements and styles, music education and master-apprentice transmission, and the fusion of folk and court music. The paper then analyzes the innovative practices in Chinese classical music, such as the integration of modern musical elements, cross-disciplinary collaborations and experimental creations, and the application of technology in musical innovation. Building on this, the article further explores the path from tradition to modernity, discussing the combination of classical music with modern aesthetics, the development of classical music from an international perspective, and strategies for the inheritance and innovation of classical music facing the future. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the importance of inheritance and innovation in the development of Chinese classical music, emphasizes the significance and value of exploring the path from tradition to modernity, and expresses anticipation and wishes for the future development of Chinese classical music. This paper aims to comprehensively and systematically present the inheritance and innovation of Chinese classical music throughout history, as well as its vitality and prospects in modern society.*

**Keywords:** Chinese classical music, Inheritance, Traditional elements, Cross-disciplinary collaboration

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Brief Overview of the Long History and Unique Charm of Chinese Classical Music

Chinese classical music boasts a history spanning thousands of years, rooted deeply in the cultural soil of China. From the primitive musical instruments crafted during the Stone Age to the sophisticated court music of imperial times, Chinese classical music has evolved into a rich and diverse art form. Its unique charm lies in its harmonious blend of melody, rhythm, and instrumentation, reflecting the philosophical ideas of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. The music is characterized by its pentatonic scale, intricate melodies, and the use of traditional instruments like the guqin, pipa, and erhu.

## **1.2 The Importance of Inheritance and Innovation in the Development of Chinese Classical Music**

The inheritance of Chinese classical music is crucial for preserving its historical and cultural value. However, mere preservation is not enough. Innovation is equally important as it allows the music to evolve and adapt to changing times. By integrating modern elements and techniques, Chinese classical music can appeal to a wider audience and remain relevant in today's world. Innovation also helps to breathe new life into traditional pieces, making them more accessible and enjoyable for modern listeners (Liu, 2024).

## **1.3 The Theme of the Article: How Chinese Classical Music Has Evolved from Tradition to Modernity**

This article aims to explore the path that Chinese classical music has taken from its traditional roots to its modern incarnations. We will delve into the historical development of the music, its theoretical framework, the instruments and techniques used, and the various styles and genres that have emerged over time (Bao, & Li, 2023). We will then examine how this rich tradition has been preserved and propagated through various means, including oral transmission, literature, education, and international exchange. Finally, we will explore the ways in which Chinese classical music has been innovated and adapted to modern tastes and technologies, and the challenges and opportunities it faces in the process.

## **2. The Traditional Foundations of Chinese Classical Music**

### **2.1 Historical Development: An Overview of Chinese Classical Music from Ancient Times to the Ming and Qing Dynasties**

The origins of Chinese classical music can be traced back to the prehistoric period, with evidence of musical instruments dating back over 7000 years. During the Zhou Dynasty, a systematic theory of music was established, including the concept of the Five Elements (Wu Xing) and the Twelve Lu. The Tang and Song dynasties saw the flourishing of court music and the development of new genres like Kun Opera. By the Ming and Qing dynasties, folk music had begun to influence classical compositions, leading to a more diverse and eclectic musical landscape.

### **2.2 Musical Theory: An Introduction to the Theoretical Framework of Chinese Classical Music**

The theoretical framework of Chinese classical music is based on a unique system of musical notation, scales, and rhythms. The pentatonic scale, consisting of five notes, is the foundation of most Chinese melodies. The concept of “Yin and Yang” and the Five Elements are also integral to the music’s structure and expression. In addition, Chinese classical music employs a variety of rhythmic patterns and tempo changes, creating a dynamic and expressive musical experience.

### **2.3 Instruments and Techniques: A Survey of Representative Instruments and Playing Techniques in Chinese Classical Music**

Chinese classical music features a wide range of instruments, each with its own unique sound and playing technique. The guqin, a seven-stringed zither, is perhaps the most iconic instrument, known for its mellow and expressive tone. Other notable instruments include the pipa (a plucked lute), the erhu (a two-stringed fiddle), and the dizi (a bamboo flute). Each instrument has its own distinct repertoire and playing style, contributing to the diversity of Chinese classical music (Long, 2023).

## 2.4 Musical Styles and Genres: An Analysis of Regional and Historical Variations in Chinese Classical Music

Chinese classical music is characterized by its regional and historical diversity. Different styles and genres have emerged over time, reflecting the cultural and social contexts of their creation. For example, Kun Opera, originated in the Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces, is known for its melodic beauty and intricate vocal techniques. In contrast, the music of the northwest region, such as the Qinqiang style, is characterized by its robust and earthy sound. These variations in style and genre enrich the tapestry of Chinese classical music (Yang, 2021).

## 3. Inheritance: The Preservation and Propagation of Chinese Classical Music

### *Oral Transmission: The Role of Traditional Methods like Master-Apprentice and Family Lineage in the Transmission of Chinese Classical Music*

Oral transmission has been a key method for preserving and propagating Chinese classical music. Master-apprentice relationships, often lasting a lifetime, ensure that the nuances of playing style, interpretation, and repertoire are passed down from one generation to the next. Family lineages, particularly in rural areas, have also played a crucial role in maintaining musical traditions. These traditional methods of transmission have helped to preserve the authenticity and integrity of Chinese classical music (Zhang, 2018).

### *Literature: The Preservation and Compilation of Ancient Musical Scores and Treatises*

Another important method of preserving Chinese classical music is through literature. Ancient musical scores, often inscribed on bamboo slips or silk, provide invaluable insights into the music of past eras. Treatises on music theory, such as the "Yue Ji" (Records of Music) by the Tang dynasty musician Li Shimin, offer a glimpse into the philosophical and aesthetic ideas that underpin Chinese classical music. These literary sources have been crucial for scholars and musicians seeking to reconstruct and perform ancient musical works (Xiang, 2016).

### *Modern Education: The Integration of Chinese Classical Music into Modern Educational Systems*

In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on integrating Chinese classical music into modern educational systems. Schools and universities now offer courses on Chinese music history, theory, and performance. This has helped to cultivate a new generation of musicians and scholars who are passionate about preserving and promoting Chinese classical music. Additionally, international exchanges and collaborations have provided opportunities for Chinese musicians to share their knowledge and skills with counterparts from other cultures.

### *International Exchange: The Spread and Influence of Chinese Classical Music on a Global Scale* (Zhao, 2020).

The globalization of Chinese classical music has been facilitated by international exchanges and collaborations. Festivals, concerts, and workshops showcasing Chinese music have been held in various countries around the world. These events not only promote the music itself but also foster cultural understanding and appreciation. Furthermore, the increasing popularity of Chinese culture in general, thanks to phenomena like the "Chinese cultural wave," has sparked interest in Chinese classical music among international audiences (Shi, 2023).

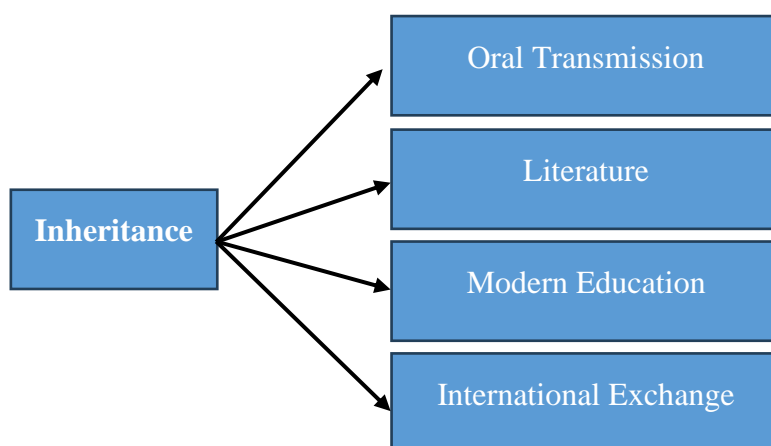


Figure 1: Inheritance: The Preservation and Propagation of Chinese Classical Music

## 4. The Fusion of Chinese Classical Music with Modern Elements

### 4.1 Technique Innovation: Integrating Modern Performance Skills and Music Theory into Classical Music

The fusion of Chinese classical music with modern elements begins with technique innovation, a process that involves the incorporation of contemporary performance skills and music theory into the traditional framework. This integration is not a simple juxtaposition but a deep-seated synthesis that respects the essence of both genres while exploring new avenues of expression. Modern performance skills, such as advanced fingering techniques on traditional instruments like the guitar, erhu, or pipa, have been refined through years of study and experimentation. These techniques allow musicians to explore a wider range of dynamics, tones, and rhythms, enriching the expressive capabilities of classical instruments. For instance, the use of rapid-fire plucking techniques or sliding notes in erhu performances can evoke emotions and textures that were previously unattainable in traditional compositions. Furthermore, the application of modern music theory to Chinese classical music has opened up new possibilities for harmonization and composition. Western theories of harmony, counterpoint, and orchestration have been adapted to complement the unique melodic and rhythmic structures of Chinese music. Composers now employ complex chord progressions and modal interchange, blending them with traditional pentatonic scales and melodic contours to create works that are both innovative and deeply rooted in Chinese musical tradition. The influence of jazz, blues, and rock music has also left its mark on Chinese classical music. Improvisation, a hallmark of these genres, has been embraced by some Chinese musicians as a means of exploring new melodic and rhythmic ideas within the confines of traditional forms. This fusion of styles has led to the creation of hybrid genres, such as "Chinese jazz" or "rock-inspired classical," that appeal to both traditionalists and modern audiences. In addition to these performance-based innovations, the use of electronic effects and amplification has transformed the sound of traditional instruments. Effects like reverberation, delay, and distortion are now commonly used to enhance the texture and color of classical performances, giving them a contemporary edge while preserving their cultural integrity.

### 4.2 Theme Expansion: Introducing Modern Themes into Classical Music Composition

Another significant aspect of the fusion of Chinese classical music with modern elements is the expansion of thematic content. Traditional Chinese music often focused on themes of nature, history, and philosophy, reflecting the cultural and spiritual values of ancient China. However, in recent years, composers have begun to explore modern topics, such as social

change, environmental protection, and personal identity, through the medium of classical music.

For example, some compositions now address the rapid urbanization and industrialization of China, capturing the frenetic pace of modern life and the environmental degradation that often accompanies it. These works may incorporate sounds from the cityscape, such as traffic noise or construction sounds, into the musical texture, creating a vivid audio portrait of contemporary China. Other compositions explore themes of identity and cultural hybridity, reflecting the experiences of Chinese people living in a globalized world. These works often blend traditional Chinese melodies and rhythms with elements of world music, creating a musical dialogue between cultures that celebrates diversity and promotes understanding. The incorporation of modern themes into classical music has not only broadened the appeal of the genre but has also allowed it to remain relevant in the face of changing social and cultural landscapes. By addressing contemporary issues and concerns, Chinese classical music is able to connect with new audiences and foster a deeper appreciation for its rich cultural heritage (Yang, 2024).

#### **4.3 Cross-Genre Collaboration: Fusing Chinese Classical Music with Other Art Forms and Modern Music Genres**

Cross-genre collaboration is another key aspect of the fusion of Chinese classical music with modern elements. This approach involves the integration of Chinese classical music with other art forms, such as dance, drama, and film, as well as with modern music genres like pop, rock, and electronic music (Deng, 2022). One of the most striking examples of cross-genre collaboration is the fusion of Chinese classical music with dance. Performances that combine traditional Chinese instruments with contemporary dance moves create a visual and auditory feast that transcends cultural boundaries. These performances often explore themes of movement, energy, and transformation, using music and dance to tell stories that resonate with audiences from all walks of life. Similarly, the integration of Chinese classical music into dramatic performances has enriched the theatrical experience. The haunting melodies and intricate rhythms of traditional instruments can enhance the emotional depth of a play or opera, creating a more immersive and evocative experience for the audience (Zheng, 2019).

#### **4.4 Technological Application: Leveraging Modern Technology for the Preservation and Innovation of Chinese Classical Music**

Finally, the fusion of Chinese classical music with modern elements is being driven by technological innovation. Advances in digital music production, virtual reality, and other cutting-edge technologies are transforming the way Chinese classical music is created, performed, and experienced. Digital music production tools, such as digital audio workstations (DAWs) and midi controllers, have made it easier for composers and musicians to experiment with new sounds and textures. These tools allow for precise control over every aspect of the musical performance, from the timbre of the instruments to the dynamics of the composition. As a result, Chinese classical music is being reimagined in new and exciting ways, with composers pushing the boundaries of traditional forms and styles. Virtual reality (VR) technology is also playing a role in the preservation and innovation of Chinese classical music. VR concerts and performances allow audiences to experience traditional music in immersive and interactive ways. By donning a VR headset, viewers can find themselves transported to a concert hall in Beijing, a temple in Shaanxi, or a riverside pavilion in Hangzhou, where they can enjoy a live performance of Chinese classical music as if they were there in person.

Moreover, VR technology is being used to create educational tools that help people learn about and appreciate Chinese classical music. Interactive VR experiences can teach users about the

history and culture of traditional instruments, the techniques used to play them, and the stories behind classic compositions. These tools are making Chinese classical music more accessible and engaging for people of all ages and backgrounds.

## **5. Challenges and Opportunities: The Predicaments and Pathways of Chinese Classical Music in the Process of Modernization**

### **5.1 Challenges Analysis: The Arduous Journey of Chinese Classical Music Amidst the Wave of Modernization**

#### **Audience Aging and Shrinking Market**

One of the most pressing challenges is the aging demographic of its audience base. Traditional concerts and performances often attract older generations who have a deeper connection to the music, either through personal nostalgia or familial transmission. Younger generations, immersed in a digital culture dominated by pop, rock, and electronic genres, may find Chinese classical music inaccessible or irrelevant, leading to a gradual decline in attendance and interest. This demographic shift results in a shrinking market for classical music performances, recordings, and educational materials, making it difficult for artists and institutions to sustain themselves financially (Li, 2020).

#### **Cultural Disconnect and Lack of Awareness**

Another significant hurdle is the cultural disconnect between classical music and the younger generation. In a fast-paced, technology-driven society, the patience and attention required to appreciate the subtle nuances and deep emotional layers of classical compositions can seem like a luxury. The lack of exposure to this genre in schools and mainstream media further exacerbates this issue, as many young people grow up without ever encountering or understanding the beauty and significance of Chinese classical music (Liu, 2019).

#### **Limited Accessibility and Outreach**

Accessibility remains a critical challenge. Unlike popular music genres that are easily accessible through streaming platforms, social media, and radio, Chinese classical music often requires more effort to discover and enjoy. Limited distribution channels, high costs of live performances, and a lack of user-friendly digital platforms tailored to classical music爱好者s contribute to its exclusivity. This makes it harder for new audiences, particularly those outside China, to engage with the music.

#### **Innovation Stagnation**

Innovation within the genre is another area of concern. While preserving tradition is paramount, a failure to innovate can lead to stagnation and irrelevance. Balancing tradition with modernity is a delicate act, and finding ways to incorporate contemporary elements while maintaining the essence of classical music is a challenge that many artists grapple with. Without fresh interpretations and creative fusion, Chinese classical music may struggle to resonate with younger audiences who seek novelty and relevance in their artistic experiences (Feng, & Wang, 2023).

### **5.2 Opportunities Exploration: Harnessing Modernity to Revitalize Chinese Classical Music**

#### **Cultural Tourism and Music Festivals**

The rise of cultural tourism offers a unique platform for showcasing Chinese classical music to international audiences. By integrating music performances into tourism packages and cultural festivals, both domestic and international tourists can be exposed to the richness of

Chinese musical heritage. Festivals such as the China International Music Festival or regional events that celebrate local musical traditions can attract visitors from around the world, fostering cultural exchange and appreciation (Zheng, 2019).

### **Digital Media and Online Platforms**

The digital revolution presents a golden opportunity for Chinese classical music to reach new audiences. Streaming platforms, social media, and online music education can democratize access to this genre. Creating dedicated channels on popular platforms like YouTube, Spotify, and Apple Music, as well as developing specialized apps for classical music, can make it easier for people to discover, listen to, and learn about Chinese classical compositions. Furthermore, leveraging AI and machine learning to recommend classical pieces based on user preferences can introduce the genre to listeners who might not have sought it out otherwise (Li, 2023).

### **Cross-Cultural Collaborations and Fusion**

Collaborations with artists from different musical backgrounds can breathe new life into Chinese classical music. By blending traditional instruments and melodies with elements of jazz, rock, or electronic music, for example, artists can create hybrid genres that appeal to a broader audience while preserving the essence of the original. Such collaborations not only expand the musical palette but also facilitate cultural understanding and respect, fostering a global appreciation for Chinese classical music (Zhong, 2023).

### **Education and Youth Engagement**

Investing in education is crucial for nurturing the next generation of Chinese classical music enthusiasts and performers. Incorporating classical music education into school curricula, offering workshops and masterclasses, and supporting youth orchestras and ensembles can inspire young people to explore and appreciate this art form. Additionally, leveraging digital tools for remote learning and virtual concerts can make classical music more accessible to students in remote or underserved areas (Liu, 2024).

### **Government Support and Policy Initiatives**

Government policies and funding play a pivotal role in promoting and preserving Chinese classical music. Establishing grants and scholarships for young musicians, supporting research and documentation of traditional music, and facilitating international exchanges can all contribute to the genre's revitalization. Furthermore, recognizing the cultural value of classical music through national awards and honors can elevate its status and encourage more people to engage with it (Li, 2023).

## **6. Conclusion**

In conclusion, the inheritance and innovation of Chinese classical music represent a profound journey from tradition to modernity, weaving together the rich historical tapestry of China with the dynamic forces of contemporary culture. This intricate dance between preservation and progression underscores the timeless appeal and adaptability of Chinese music, demonstrating its capacity to resonate across generations while embracing new expressions and forms. Furthermore, the rise of cross-cultural collaborations has facilitated the internationalization of Chinese classical music, allowing it to reach new listeners and influence global musical discourse. Festivals, concerts, and educational exchanges have become bridges, connecting Chinese musicians with artists from around the world, fostering mutual understanding and respect through the universal language of music.

In essence, the path from tradition to modernity for Chinese classical music is a testament to the power of cultural continuity and creativity. It highlights the importance of respecting and learning from the past while being open to innovation and change. As Chinese classical music continues to evolve, it not only preserves the spirit of ancient times but also reflects the aspirations and identities of the present, paving the way for a future where tradition and modernity coexist in harmonious dialogue. This ongoing process of inheritance and innovation ensures that Chinese classical music remains a vital and relevant force in the global musical firmament, enriching the cultural tapestry of humanity.

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