

# *Aesthetic Expression and Cultural Identity of Modern Composition Theory in Cross-cultural Context*

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**Abstract:** In today's deepening globalization, cross-cultural context has become an important background for artistic creation and theoretical research. In this diversified era, the communication and integration between different cultures have become increasingly frequent, providing new sources of inspiration and broad development space for artistic creation. Music, as a common human language, its creation and expression not only carry the artist's personal emotion and aesthetic pursuit, but also profoundly reflect the uniqueness and integration of different cultures. The modern composition theory in the cross-cultural context not only involves the technical level of music creation, but also concerns the cultural connotation and aesthetic value of music works. In cross-cultural communication, composers need to face the aesthetic differences and aesthetic needs under different cultural backgrounds. How to achieve cross-cultural communication and dialogue while maintaining the uniqueness of musical works has become an important topic facing modern composition theory. This paper aims to explore the aesthetic expression and cultural identity of modern composition theory in the cross-cultural context, in order to provide a new perspective and method for music creation and theoretical research. Based on the basic theory of modern music aesthetics, this paper discusses the debate between the theory of music self-discipline and the theory of heteronomy. By analyzing the application of composition theory in different cultures, the aesthetic characteristics of modern composition theory, the music phenomenon in cross-cultural communication, the construction of cultural identity in cross-cultural communication, and specific cases, this paper reveals the unique value and significance of modern composition theory in cross-cultural context. It is found that modern composition theory presents a variety of aesthetic expressions in the cross-cultural context, which not only reflects the uniqueness of different cultures, but also reflects the integration of cross-cultural communication. At the same time, modern composition theory also has complexity and diversity in terms of cultural identity, which is influenced by both local culture and cross-cultural communication. The research results of this paper have important theoretical and practical significance for promoting cross-cultural music communication, cultural diversity and the integration of global music culture.

## 1. Introduction

The study of aesthetic expression and cultural identity of modern composition theory in the cross-cultural context is an important topic in the field of musicology. With the deepening of globalization, cross-cultural communication has become increasingly frequent, and music creation and theoretical research under different cultural backgrounds are also influencing and integrating with each other. Modern composition theory, as an important ideological system guiding music creation, shows new features of aesthetic expression and cultural identity in the cross-cultural context. This paper aims to explore the aesthetic expression and cultural identity of modern composition theory in the cross-cultural context, in order to provide valuable reference for music creation practice and foreign cultural exchanges.

## 2. Basic theory of modern music aesthetics

As an important branch of music theory, modern music aesthetics mainly studies the aesthetic characteristics, aesthetic value of music and the relationship between music and human spiritual life. It is the inheritance and development of traditional music aesthetics, but also influenced by modern philosophy, psychology, sociology and other disciplines. In modern music aesthetics, the theory of self-discipline and the theory of heteronomy are two important theoretical viewpoints.

### 2.1. Theory of self-discipline

According to the theory of self-discipline, the beauty of music comes from the music itself, regardless of the emotion and content it expresses. This view emphasizes the independence and purity of music, and holds that the beauty of music is one that is not attached to foreign content. One of the representatives of the theory of self-discipline is the Austrian music theorist Eduard Hanslick, who elaborated on this view in his book *On the Beauty of Music*. Hanslick believes that the beauty of music is a kind of formal beauty, which is reflected in the movement form of musical sounds, and has nothing to do with the expression of emotions. He maintains that music does not describe any emotions, nor does emotion serve as the object, but evokes people's aesthetic feelings through the movement form of musical sounds<sup>[1]</sup>.

### 2.2. Heteronomy

In contrast to the theory of self-discipline, heteronomy believes that the beauty of music comes from the emotion and content expressed by music. This view emphasizes the connection between music and human emotions, and believes that music is the expression of human emotions, which is restricted by some external laws of human emotions<sup>[2]</sup>. There are many representatives of heteronomy, including many musicians of the romantic period. They believe that music can express joy, sadness, hope, love and other emotions, and touch people's hearts through these emotions. Heteronomy emphasizes the emotion and expressiveness of music and holds that music is an important medium for human emotional communication.

In modern music aesthetics, the theory of self-discipline and the theory of heteronomy are not completely opposite, but complement each other. The theory of self-discipline emphasizes the independence and purity of music, while the theory of heteronomy emphasizes the connection between music and human emotions. These two viewpoints together constitute the basic theoretical framework of modern music aesthetics and provide important guidance for music creation and theoretical research.

### 3. Aesthetic expression of modern composition theory in cross-cultural context

#### 3.1. Application of modern composition theory in different cultures

The application of modern composition theory in different cultures is diverse and complex. On the one hand, modern composers often draw on and integrate musical elements and styles of different cultures in their creation, thus creating works with unique aesthetic characteristics. For example, in the creation of Chinese music, many composers have learned from western modern composition techniques while integrating traditional Chinese music elements to form modern music works with Chinese characteristics<sup>[3]</sup>. On the other hand, modern composers under different cultural backgrounds are often influenced and restricted by local culture in their creation, thus showing distinct cultural characteristics in their works. For example, the sense of rhythm and multi-part singing techniques in the composition of African music and the characteristics of melody and rhythm in the composition of Indian music reflect the influence of different cultures on modern composition theory.

#### 3.2. Aesthetic characteristics of modern composition theory

##### 3.2.1. Innovation of techniques and forms

The innovation of modern composition theory in technique and form is an important embodiment of its aesthetic characteristics. Compared with traditional composition theory, modern composition theory pays more attention to the diversity and expressiveness of music language. Through the use of modern composing techniques, such as twelve-tone technique, atonal technique, and sequential technique, composers have broken the shackles of traditional musical structures and created musical works with unique formal beauty (see Table 1).

Table 1: Comparison between modern composition techniques and traditional composition techniques

Composing technique	Modern composition technique	Traditional composition technique
Technical characteristics	Diversity and expressiveness	More fixed and conservative
Technique type	Twelve-tone technique, atonal technique, sequential technique and so on	Harmony, melody, rhythm, etc
Structural characteristics	Break the shackles of traditional structure and create unique formal beauty	Follow the traditional structure, focusing on melody and harmony

At the same time, modern composition theory also pays attention to the diversity of musical forms. Through the use of different musical forms, such as sonata form, variation form, cyclotron form, etc., and the combination and fusion of different musical forms, composers create musical works with rich levels and changes<sup>[4]</sup>. These music works not only have unique aesthetic value, but also provide more diversified musical experience for the audience.

##### 3.2.2. The transmission of emotion and artistic conception

Modern composition theory also shows its unique aesthetic characteristics in conveying emotion and artistic conception. Compared with traditional composition theory, modern composition theory pays more attention to the emotional expression and artistic conception of music works. Composers

use music language to convey their inner feelings and aesthetic pursuit, so that music works have more profound emotional connotation and artistic expression<sup>[5]</sup>.

In modern composition theory, the transmission of emotion and artistic conception is often closely related to the subject matter and theme of musical works. By deeply exploring the connotation of themes and themes, composers transform them into musical language, so that musical works have stronger expression and appeal in conveying emotions and artistic conception<sup>[6]</sup>. For example, some modern music works use different musical elements and techniques to express the thinking and perception of nature, life, society and other issues, so that the audience can enjoy the music works at the same time, but also can get more profound emotional experience and aesthetic enjoyment.

### **3.2.3. Integration of cross-cultural elements**

The integration of cross-cultural elements is another important embodiment of the aesthetic characteristics of modern composition theory. In the context of globalization, cross-cultural communication has become an important trend in the field of artistic creation. Composers began to try to integrate elements of different cultures into their music works to create music works with cross-cultural characteristics.

In modern composition theory, the integration of cross-cultural elements is not only reflected in the use of musical language, but also in the themes, themes and forms of expression of musical works<sup>[7-8]</sup>. By digging deeply into the unique elements and connotations of different cultures, composers transform them into musical language, so that musical works have stronger expression and appeal in cross-cultural communication. For example, some modern music works show the unique charm and connotation of different cultures through the use of different ethnic instruments, folk music and other elements, so that the audience can appreciate the unique charm of different cultures while enjoying the music works.

### **3.3. Music phenomenon in cross-cultural communication**

The phenomenon of music in cross-cultural communication is an important part of the aesthetic expression of modern composition theory. With the deepening of globalization, the exchange of music in different cultural backgrounds has become increasingly frequent. This kind of communication not only promotes the understanding and integration between different cultures, but also provides more abundant materials and inspiration for the aesthetic expression of modern composition theory.

In cross-cultural communication, music, as a borderless language, can break the barriers of language and culture and connect people's hearts. Through music festivals, concerts and collaborative creations, the music of different cultures blends with each other, promoting cultural diversity and global exchange. For example, activities such as international music festivals and international music competitions provide a platform for musicians from different cultural backgrounds to display their works and promote musical exchanges and cooperation between different cultures<sup>[9]</sup>. In addition, the phenomenon of music in cross-cultural communication is also reflected in the creation and performance of music works. Many modern composers draw on and integrate musical elements and styles of different cultures in their creation, thus creating works with unique aesthetic characteristics, which can often resonate and echo the audience during performances, and promote understanding and integration between different cultures.

## **4. Construction of cultural identity in cross-cultural context**

In the cross-cultural context, the construction of cultural identity in modern composition theory is a complicated and important process. This process involves not only the creation and performance of

musical works, but also the dissemination and reception of musical works.

#### **4.1. Refinement and expression of cultural elements**

In the cross-cultural context, the construction of cultural identity in modern composition theory first needs to extract and express the unique elements of different cultures. Composers need to deeply understand the history, traditions and customs of different cultures, extract representative and unique cultural elements from them, and transform them into musical language for expression<sup>[10]</sup>. For example, some modern music works show the unique charm and connotation of different cultures through the use of different ethnic instruments, folk music and other elements. These music works not only have unique aesthetic value, but also allow the audience to appreciate the unique charm of different cultures while enjoying the music works.

#### **4.2. Respect and tolerance for cultural differences**

In the cross-cultural context, the construction of cultural identity in modern composition theory also needs to respect and tolerate the differences between different cultures. Composers need to realize that the differences between different cultures are objective, and need to fully take these differences into account in the creation and performance, and strive to seek the common ground and convergence of different cultures. For example, some modern music works try to integrate and innovate the elements of different cultures in the creation, so as to create music works with cross-cultural characteristics. These musical works not only have unique aesthetic value, but also can promote the exchange and integration of different cultures and enhance mutual understanding and recognition.

#### **4.3. Dissemination and acceptance of cultural identity**

In the cross-cultural context, the construction of cultural identity in modern composition theory also needs to pay attention to the transmission and acceptance of cultural identity. Composers need to spread their music works to audiences with different cultural backgrounds through various channels and ways, and strive to seek resonance and identity with the audience. For example, some modern music works are performed and promoted in international music festivals, concerts and other occasions, so that audiences from different cultural backgrounds have the opportunity to contact these music works and feel the cultural connotation and aesthetic value contained in them. At the same time, composers can also communicate and interact with audiences to understand their views and feelings on musical works, so as to further promote the spread and acceptance of cultural identity.

### **5. Case study of aesthetic expression and cultural identity of modern composition theory in cross-cultural context**

#### **5.1. Tan Dun's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* soundtrack**

Tan Dun is a famous Chinese composer and musician. His works are famous for their unique national style and cross-cultural characteristics. In *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, Tan Dun composed the soundtrack, which incorporates a large number of traditional Chinese musical elements and Western musical techniques.

In the soundtrack of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, Tan Dun skillfully uses traditional folk instruments such as the guzheng and Erhu, as well as Western orchestral instruments to perfectly integrate traditional Chinese music with Western musical techniques. At the same time, he also uses

different musical elements and techniques to express the emotions and artistic conception in the film, so that the music works complement the picture and plot of the film (see Table 2).

The soundtrack of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* not only has unique aesthetic value, but also successfully realizes cross-cultural communication and dialogue. Through the film and its soundtrack, Tan Dun has shown the world the unique charm and connotation of traditional Chinese music, while also promoting the exchange and integration of different cultures.

Table 2: Cultural elements and techniques in soundtrack of Tan Dun's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*

Cultural element	Technique	Give an example
Chinese traditional music	Guzheng, Erhu and other ethnic Musical Instruments	Such as "Moonlight lover"
Western music technique	Orchestral playing, harmony, etc	Such as the Eternal Vow
Emotion and artistic conception	Use musical elements to express emotion and artistic conception	Such as "Flying Bamboo Flute" and so on

## 5.2. Akhenaten by Philip Glass

Philip Glass is a famous American composer and musician. His works are famous for their unique musical language and profound philosophical thinking. In the opera *Akhenaten*, Glass combines ancient Egyptian culture with modern musical techniques.

In *Akhenaten*, Glass used rich musical elements and techniques, including repetitive melody and complex rhythm, to express the unique charm and connotation of ancient Egyptian culture. At the same time, he also combines ancient Egyptian culture with modern music through the use of modern music techniques, such as electronic music and synthesizers. *Akhenaten* not only has unique aesthetic value, but also successfully realizes cross-cultural communication and dialogue. Through this opera and its music, Glass showed the world the unique charm and connotation of ancient Egyptian culture, and also promoted the exchange and integration of different cultures.

## 5.3. Nixon in China by John Adams

John Adams is a famous contemporary American composer. His works often involve social, political and other issues, and integrate a variety of musical styles and elements. In the opera "*Nixon in China*", Adams skillfully integrated the two cultures of the United States and China, and expressed his thoughts and feelings on the relationship between the two countries through music.

In *Nixon in China*, Adams uses a wealth of musical elements and techniques, including modern music styles such as jazz and rock, as well as traditional Chinese music elements such as Erhu and Guzheng. The fusion of these elements in the opera not only brings a unique auditory experience to the audience, but also expresses Adams' deep thinking on the cultural integration of the two countries. In addition, through dialogue and monologues in the opera, Adams presents the historical context of President Nixon's visit to China and the complexity of the relationship between the two countries. The combination of these elements with music makes opera more expressive and appealing in conveying emotions and artistic conception (see Table 3).

The success of "*Nixon in China*" lies not only in its unique musical style and integration of elements, but also in its deep understanding and recognition of cross-cultural communication through music. The opera not only brings artistic enjoyment to the audience, but also promotes mutual understanding and respect among different cultures.



Table 3: Cultural elements and techniques in Nixon in China by John Adams

Cultural element	Technique	Give an example
American culture	Jazz, rock and roll and other modern music styles	Such as background music in an opera
Chinese culture	Erhu, Guzheng and other traditional music elements	Such as solos and ensembles in opera
Historical background	The historical context is presented through dialogues and monologues	Like the scene of President Nixon's visit to China in the opera
Cross-cultural communication	Through the integration of musical elements and techniques to express cross-cultural communication	As in opera, music is combined with dialogue

## 6. Conclusion

This paper discusses the aesthetic expression and cultural identity of modern composition theory in the cross-cultural context. By analyzing the aesthetic features of modern composition theory, the construction of cultural identity in cross-cultural communication and specific cases, this paper reveals the unique value and significance of modern composition theory in cross-cultural context. In the future, with the deepening of globalization and the continuous development of cross-cultural communication, the aesthetic expression and cultural identity of modern composition theory will continue to play an important role. Composers need to constantly innovate and explore, integrate and innovate elements and techniques from different cultures, bring more diverse and rich musical experience to the audience, and promote the exchange and integration of different cultures.

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