On Ruan Ji’s Music Aesthetics

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Abstract: Ruan Ji was a representative thinker in the Wei and Jin Dynasties. In the history of Chinese music, Ruan Ji’s music has not only the shadow of Confucian music, but also the influence of Taoism. Therefore, Ruan Ji’s music thought is the product of Confucianism and Taoism, and Ruan Ji has also made important contributions in the history of Chinese music organization. This paper will briefly discuss Ruan Ji’s music art from the two aspects of “the existence of music” and “the function of music”.

Keywords: Ruan Ji, On music, Music Aesthetics.

1. Introduction

Ruan Ji, a thinker, musician and writer in the Three Kingdoms period, believed that Confucianism was his spiritual guide in the first half of his life. Subsequently, during the Wei, Jin, southern and Northern Dynasties, great changes took place in the social and political pattern. As Ruan Ji’s early works, Le Lun is also Ruan Ji’s representative work and his aesthetic thought. Ruan Ji’s thought integrates the essence of Taoism and Confucianism. First of all, he takes “harmony” as the essential feature of music. His purpose is “the music of the former saints will become the nature of all things by following the body of heaven and earth”, which requires the consistency of yin and yang to adapt to the sensory harmony of all things. Secondly, it integrates Confucianism into music and emphasizes that the role of education is the core idea “harmony is beauty” introduced into music theory, which requires us to keep consistent in nature. Ruan Ji believes that everything is in complete harmony with everything around the world, and the essence of music should be reflected in the harmony of everything in the world. Only when it is in harmony with all things in heaven and earth can music remain natural and all things remain harmonious.

2. The Essence of “Music”

The essence of music is where music comes from? This is the core issue of music aesthetics, and it is also the most important issue to be answered. Music aestheticians of all ages have answered what is the essence of music. Ruan Ji described “harmony” as the essence of music. As the existence of natural essence, music should be the most harmonious. On the contrary, it breaks away from the original system, loses its original essence, and deviates from the essence of nature, that is, imbalance or disharmony, so it is not music. Saints enjoy according to the laws of nature. As Ruan Ji said, “the music of saints” can reflect the essence of nature and has the most harmonious characteristics. Ruan Ji put forward the viewpoint of “great music and harmony between heaven and earth”. According to Ruan Ji, “music” is the expression of “the body of heaven and earth and the nature of all things”, and “harmony” is the most essential characteristic of music. Therefore, the essence of natural harmony is the essence of music. Ruan Ji also believes that the elegant music of saints is the most appropriate music.

The music thought embodied in Ruan Ji’s music theory has something in common with the traditional music thought of Confucianism. In the discussion of Yue Lun, He skillfully integrated the views of Taoism and the school of yin and Yang into the Confucian “the man who enjoys music, the body of heaven and earth, and the nature of all things.” there is a typical Taoist thought here, “so it defines the sound of heaven and earth in all directions, so as to form the sound of yin and Yang and the eight winds “The yin-yang School of thought is embodied here. In Taoism, music should be integrated with nature and live in harmony with nature. This is a typical traditional Chinese Confucianism. Ruan Ji used Taoism and eventually turned to Confucianism. The combination of Confucianism, Taoism and the yin-yang five elements theory is seamless. He put the traditional Chinese feudal Confucianism under the cloak of Taoism, which is not only Mr. Ruan Ji’s point of view, but also Mr. Ruan Ji’s music Integration with “nature”.

Ruan Ji conforms to the “happiness of neutralization” of “the body of heaven and earth, becoming the nature of all things” “It is the most perfect music. Ruan Ji believes that music can cultivate sentiment and promote social stability. Ruan Ji advocates using elegant music as national music. Only traditional elegant music is the purest music. Although elegant music is simple, the simplicity and calmness contained in simplicity are exactly what Taoism needs. The most natural, purest and primitive sound in elegant music. It is called the most basic music and the most harmonious music. Music has been considered the purest music since ancient times. Ruan Ji’s view of “the body of heaven and earth, the nature of all things” reflects the connection between music and nature.

3. The Function of “Music”

In ancient tradition, the appearance of music was often related to sacrificial activities and large-scale ceremonies, and music played an important role in sacrificial ceremonies. In his works, Ruan Ji believes that music can improve customs, rectify social customs and safeguard the long-term stability of the country. Music can have social, political and emotional functions. Ruan Ji’s article has repeatedly discussed the function of “music”. In Yue Ji, ritual and music are interrelated. Music plays a very good role in social education. This is the so-called “musicians and saints can also enjoy music, but they can be kind to the people’s hearts.” Ruan Ji said in Yue Lun, “it is better to govern the people than to be good at ritual;” changing customs and not good at music “. Starting with detailed analysis and discussion, he proposed that” morality is flat, and the five tones are tasteless. “Ruan Ji
Ruan Ji said in his article, “Changing customs and changing customs, don’t be good at music”; that is to say, there is no better tool than music to improve customs and habits. Ruan Ji believes that saints advocate peaceful music. Ruling the country with elegant music can make people simple and tidy, and affect the social atmosphere. Music can also regulate people's emotions and psychology. Ruan Ji’s thought was already a kind of progress at that time. He clearly put forward that “people are at peace with their lives, feelings are not sad”, “music is at peace with their hearts”, and “music is inside” “At that time, when music became the tool of rulers, Ruan Ji was able to clearly put forward this idea, which was a progress in the history of music.

4. “Promoting Elegance and Suppressing Vulgarity”

Ruan Ji has always been in favor of elegant music and restrained folk music. Ruan Ji believes that only elegant music is music in line with the development of the current situation. In the passage “the former sage’s music”, we can see that Ruan Ji supports the former king and the sage’s praise for elegant music. Ruan Ji gradually shows his love for elegant music by describing the music made by the former king and the sage’s elegant music. While affirming the music made by the former king, he also put forward the essence of “harmony” of music, and also advocated the “change of accessibility” of the music made by the former king in China. Ruan Ji explained that “music makes people want nothing”. Taking Confucius’ “Confucius hears Shao, but doesn’t know meat in March” as an example, this paper demonstrates his point of view, and comes to the conclusion that saints do not pursue whether music is beautiful, but whether the music they make is harmonious. Ruan Ji also gave more stringent conditions for the production of elegant music. He believed that the standards of the former king’s music were optimistic about the “unified” system. Ruan Ji believed that these unified standards were not enough, and added a series of measurement requirements on the basis of the former king. And explain the benefits of unification. Ruan Ji borrowed the natural thought of Taoism to realize the Confucian ideal. Finally, Ruan Ji expounded that “peace and unity”, “making people want nothing”, “making their voice flat, their tolerance and harmony, not thinking about the voice of their superiors, not wanting the color of their ministers, and being loyal and righteous without dispute” these views represent Ruan Ji’s musical aesthetic views on the interests of the ruling class. The elegant music advocated by Ruan Ji is the product of Confucianism that serves the ruling class. Ruan Ji, while advocating elegant music, was certainly against folk music. He put forward the harm of listening to folk music and put forward a series of methods to prohibit folk music.

5. Conclusion

Ruan Ji’s music aesthetics thought is mainly analyzed from the two perspectives of music essence and music function. His music aesthetics thought is mainly established in the ideological origin of the integration of Confucianism and Taoism. We can sort out his music aesthetics as follows: first, Ruan Ji believes that “harmony” is the essence of music. Music, as a kind of existence of natural essence, should be the most harmonious. Secondly, music is a favorable ruling tool for rulers, so music has political and social functions. Third, Ruan Ji’s view of “promoting elegance and suppressing vulgarity” is a traditional Confucian thought that stands entirely on the position of the ruling class. Ruan Ji’s music aesthetics does have some historical limitations now, but it was a historical progress to clearly put forward his own music aesthetics views and some innovative collating views at that time, and we are still discussing it today. The social politics of this period may not be very stable, but Ruan Ji played his own value in this prosperous cultural era and left an imprint on the history of Chinese music aesthetics.