



Analysis on the Aesthetic Characteristics and Aesthetic Significance of Modern Popular Music - Explore the structure of popular songs composed by Jay Chou as an example

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ABSTRACT

The aesthetic characteristics (or aesthetics) and aesthetic significance of "modern popular music" mean that they enhance people's spiritual connotation and life value by appreciating popular music, thus gaining life perception and even determining their behavior. The meaning of researching the aesthetic characteristics of modern popular music is not only that the modern popular music profession is continuously developing from popularization and entertainment to professionalization and academicization. More importantly, in the current era when popular music has a lot to do with people's lives, the aesthetic significance of modern popular music has a profound impact on the overall spiritual guidance, emotional sustenance, and ideological pursuit of human social civilization. By analyzing the music and song works of Jay Chou, a well-recognized music creator with outstanding influence at home and abroad, this article studies why the majority of the people love his works, which can also be recognized by the modern popular music field, and how to become the symbol for modern popular music creation. This article will conduct research from three aspects: First, the article will research the aesthetic characteristics of his composition of the song in terms of aesthetics; Second, the article will analyze the connotation value of his song style to the field in terms of aesthetic significance; Third, the article will analyze the reasons for the lack of aesthetic characteristics and aesthetics in the modern popular music and will discuss the future development trend of modern popular music.

Keywords: modern popular music, song creation, aesthetics, aesthetics significance, artistic connotation

I. Introduction

The origin of "modern pop music" is based on a kind of popular music derived from the black slaves' life in North America after the British slave trade. And later on, through cultural evolution and dissemination, it gradually formed a kind of music system with the main purpose of commercial purposes, and a lot of music styles were produced as a result. Because of its characteristics of being popular, universal and fashionable, as well as its unique characteristics of being easy to spread after the modern scientific and technological revolution, it has become the main form of music in contemporary society to meet the needs of human spiritual civilization. Popular music has been popular since the 1930s, and now has a history of nearly one hundred years. Since the "Shanghai period" of Zhou Xuan and Li Xianglan to the current "Chinese pop music" era, China's pop music has undergone a variety of evolution and renewal. Although many excellent pop songwriters have been born, the current domestic pop music has experienced its initial heyday from 1990 to 2000. At present, the social and cultural construction is in a relatively stable stage of development, without a dramatic rise at the time but with a certain downward trend. The attention to popular music has been gradually replaced by other media, and many people attribute this to the impact of new technology on the spiritual entertainment of human beings, which has weakened the infectious power of music itself. In fact, the current market has lost the absolute appeal of popular songs, which has led to an error and prejudice about the aesthetics of music.

Therefore, this paper takes some works of Jay Chou, a pop music composer with remarkable achievements in the field of pop music songs, as an example, and interprets the reasonable aesthetic qualities and aesthetic significance of his different musical styles as the main axis of analysis. It is divided into three main parts: firstly, analysis of the aesthetic qualities of his music by discussing the structural characteristics of the music he composed; secondly, analysis of the value and impact of his songs on the industry in terms of aesthetic significance; thirdly, discussion of the absence of aesthetic qualities and aesthetic shortcomings in the development of the current popular music discipline.

II. Aesthetic characteristics of his musical structure

After nearly a hundred years of evolution in style, structure and genre, modern pop music is mainly divided into the following categories: Blues, Jazz, Rock and Roll, Soul, R&B, Latin, Country, Reggae, New Age, Pop and Rap. The most popular styles in mainland China are Pop, Blues, Jazz, Rock and

Roll, R&B, Country, and Rap, and Jay Chou's music not only follows the above styles, but also features structural improvements and changes based on them. He not only changed the dominant position of Japanese and Korean pop music in the late 1990s, but also created the basic structural characteristics of a Chinese music style (Chinoiserie) that is unique to the Chinese pop music.

(1) The main structural components of modern pop music

Generally, the main structural parts of a pop song are the introduction, which heightens and creates the atmosphere, and build the tune and rhythm; the verse (section A), which is a smoothing narrative of the main melody; the expanded (section B), which heightens the mood and is a connecting link between the preceding and the following; chorus (section C), which is the climax part, and is the main melody of the song, and popular lines generally from this section; interlude, which is generally and the pre-chorus or chorus echo and pay the way for the next section. Ending, which is the very end in the form of absolute music, or is the chorus as an ending. Few songs use a closing sentence (section D) after two choruses before ending because of the emotional needs of the song. This closing sentence (section D) is commonly used in modern movies and TV series, ending, and setting rendering when the soundtrack of a popular song is used to summarize the overall plot of the movie to heighten the emotion.

(2) Analysis of its aesthetic qualities in terms of the variation and rationality of the musical structure

Structure 1: It refers to ABABCBB. The progression is introduction → verse A → verse B → verse A2 → chorus B2 → middle section C → chorus B3 → chorus B4 → ending. Of course, the structure of the music is not fixed, and there are many variations, such as AABABA, ABAB, and ABABA, etc. Some of these parts even evolved into the form of instrumental accompaniment (the more rare form is AAA). With the change and evolution of the times, the most commonly used in modern times are the structural form of ABABC, that is, introduction → verse A → expanded B → verse A2 → expanded 2 → chorus C → interlude → verse A3 → expanded B3 → verse A4 → expanded 4 → chorus C2 → ending. The distinctive feature of this kind of music structure is that the emotional articulation between the main body and the chorus is more intense, making the appearance of the chorus in the C section more explosive. In the early music works of Jay Chou, it is featured in songs of Rock and Roll, R&B, and Jazz styles. By using such structural improvements and changes, the audience is given a stronger sense of "emotional expectation" before the beginning of the C section by laying the groundwork for the AB section twice. For example, *Old Indian Dove*, a jazz pop song from his debut album *JAY*, uses such a rational structure, in which the rational application as well as the improvement effect can be clearly found.

Analysis based on the first verse of the song *Old Indian Turtle Dove*

「沙漠之中怎么会有泥鳅，话说完飞过一只海鸥， (Verse A starts)

(How can there be loaches in the desert? After the words were said, a seagull flew by,)

大峡谷的风呼啸而过，是谁说没有。 (Verse A ends)

(The winds of the Grand Canyon whistled by; who said no.)

有一条热昏头的响尾蛇，无力的躺在干枯的河。 (Expanded B starts)

(There's a rattlesnake with a hot head, lying helpless in a dry river.)

在等待雨季来临变沼泽。 (Expanded B ends)

(Waiting for the rainy season to turn it into a swamp.)

灰狼啃食着水鹿的骨头，秃鹰盘旋死盯着腐肉， (Verse A2 starts)

(The gray wolf is gnawing on the bones of a sambar, the vulture is circling and staring hard at the carrion.)

草原上两只敌对野牛，在远方决斗。 (Verse A2 ends)

(On the prairie are two hostile bison, dueling in the distance.)

在一处被废弃的白蚁丘， (Expanded B2 starts)

(On an abandoned termite mound.)

站着一只饿昏的老斑鸠。 (Expanded B2 ends with the connection to Chorus C)

(Is standing an old turtle dove that has fainted from hunger.)

印地安老斑鸠，腿短毛不多， (Chorus C1 starts)

(The old Indian turtle dove, with short legs and little hair,)

几天都没有喝水也能活。

(It can live without water for days.)

脑袋瓜有一点秀逗，猎物死了它比谁都难过， (Chorus C1 ends)

(It's a little bit stupid, and it will feel sad when its prey dies,)

印地安斑鸠，会学人开口。 (Chorus C2 starts)

(The Indian turtle dove learns to speak like a man.)

仙人掌怕羞，蜥蜴横着走。

(Cacti are shy and lizards walk sideways.)

这里什么奇怪的事都有，包括像猫狗。 (Chorus C2 ends)

(There are all kinds of strange things here, including dogs that look like cats.)

印地安老斑鸠平常话不多，除非是乌鸦抢了它的窝， (Chorus C3 starts)

(The old Indian turtle dove doesn't usually talk much, except when a crow takes its nest,)

它在灌木丛旁邂逅，一只令它心仪的母斑鸠。」 (Chorus C3 ends)

(It met a female turtledove by a bush whom it loved.)

For the composer, only the appropriate form can fully express his inner world, and any composer who is considered a master is an explorer and creator of musical structure and form^[1]. Analyzed in terms of musical structure characteristics, this jazz song breaks the traditional simpler form of pop songs, in which the musical structure is no longer less developed^[2]. This avant-garde musical structure emerged in the pop music scene in the early 21st century. Its use of this ever-changing musical structure and unique combination of rapping and singing brings listeners a rich auditory experience of novelty, modernist style, fusion of multiple musical elements, and ups and downs.

(2) Structure 2: It refers to ABCABCBC, and the progression is the introduction → verse A → expanded B → chorus C → interlude → verse A2 → expanded B2 → chorus C2 (→ expanded B3 → chorus C3 → closing sentence D) → Ending. It's also not fixed, and generally, its musical structure is ABCABCD. With its constant use and optimization, this structure is the most common type of structure in modern pop music today, and it is used in a large number of mainstream pop songs. It is important to emphasize here that pop music does not represent a degradation of human musical aesthetics compared to classical music. Instead, it represents a progress. The complexity of popular music does not lie in its structure and regulations, but rather in its content, style, rhythm, variation, variety, and narrative, which is more like a "summary and condensation" and "improvement and sublimation" of the music of the past centuries. One obvious proof of this is the fact that it is difficult to find the use of rhythms, melodies, and narratives in classical music that are used in pop music today, but the structural features used in the creation of classical music can be found everywhere in pop music. For example, a comparison is made between two songs of the same lyrical mood from different eras and in different regional styles -- the Chinese song *Hair Like Snow* composed by Jay Chou and the German song *Ständchen* composed by Franz-Schubert, an Austrian music artist of the Romantic period.

A. Analysis based on the first verse of the Chinese popular song *Hair Like Snow* composed by Jay Chou.

「狼牙月伊人憔悴，我举杯饮尽了风雪，(Verse A1 starts)

(A crescent moon, cold and gray, Is when my fair lady pines away. A cup in my hand, Downing snow and wind of all kind.)

是谁打翻前世柜，惹尘埃是非，(Verse A1 ends)

(Who upsets my former life, Stirring up dust and grief?)

缘字诀几番轮回，你锁眉哭红颜唤不回，(Verse A2 is repeated and ends)

(Our fate is already written down, No matter how many times it goes round. Hard and sad you wrinkle your brows, Crying over beauty fading like the hours.)

纵然青史已经成灰，我爱不灭。(Verse A2 is repeated and ends)

(Even if history goes up in ashes, My love never ever dies.)

繁华如三千东流水，(Expanded B starts)

(Of all the bustling waters flowing east in thousands,)

我只取一瓢爱了解，

(I only take one scoop to bear in minds)

只恋你化身的蝶。(Expanded B ends with a connection)

(Obsessed with the butterfly flapping in your after life.)

你发如雪凄美了离别，我焚香感动了谁，(Chorus C1 starts)

(Hair flowing, snow falling, It takes beauty and sorrow to make a parting. Whose heart is touched when incenses are burnt?)

邀明月让回忆皎洁，爱在月光下完美。(Chorus C1 ends)

(Inviting the moon to light up a past, Full and bright, the love shall ever last.)

你发如雪纷飞了眼泪，我等待苍老了谁，(Chorus C2 starts)

(Your hair flows as the snow falls, Scattering away hot tears, Whom I wait, has advanced in years?)

红尘醉微醺的岁月，我用无悔刻永世爱你的碑。」(Chorus C2 ends)

(Slightly drunken is the worldly Red Dust, Regret-it-not is the memorial ever carved in my heart.)

.....

[the interlude part of rap is omitted.]

啦啦啦啦啦啦啦啦啦啦啦啦啦啦啦啦啦啦 (Ending D1 starts)

(La la la...)

铜镜映无邪扎马尾你若撒野今生我把酒奉陪。」(Ending D1 ends)

(Bronze mirror reflects your innocent face, You have your hair in a ponytail, If you behave atrociously, I will drink with you in my life.)

B. Analysis based on the first verse of the classical German song *Ständchen* composed by Franz-Schubert.

“Leise flehen meine Lieder(Verse A starts)

Durch die Nacht zu dir,

(My songs beckon softly through the night to you;)

In den stillen Hain hernieder,

Liebchen, komm zu mir!(Verse A ends)

(Come to me beloved, below in the quiet grove!)

Flüsternd schlanke Wipfel rauschen (Expanded B starts)

In des Mondes Licht;

In des Mondes Licht;(Expanded B ends)

(The rustle of slender leaf tips whispers in the moonlight;)

Des Verräters feindlich Lauschen(Chorus C starts)
 Fürchte, Holde, nicht.
 Fürchte, Holde, nicht.”(Chorus C is repeated and ends)
 (Do not fear the evil spying of the betrayer, my dear.)
 [the second paragraph is repeated and the ending is omitted.]

From this we can easily find that both are very popular and circulated in the field of pop music and classical music respectively. There is a commonality of aesthetics and rationality in the aesthetic form of the music structure, which is easily accepted by modern people and coincides with the fast-paced mode of the development of things and life in today's society. People are more willing to accept that pop music is different from the complex and complicated structure and regulations of classical music, which can be developed in a fast-paced sequence from laying the groundwork to development to climax. It allows people to experience an "emotional roller coaster" in listening, with the first part of the verse being the emotional narration, the second part the emotional development, and the third part of the chorus generally the the climax of the whole song. The three parts contrasts with each other, but are also harmonious and complete. The application and improvement of this structure in Jay Chou's pop music, combined with the common use of tonality, tonal contraposition, abrupt transposition between verses, and the color contrast of the song are unexpected and refreshing, allowing people to quickly experience the rich and wonderful emotional satisfaction of the musical art.

III. Analysis of the value and impact of his song creation on the industry in terms of aesthetic significance

(1) The value of his song creation

Throughout the pop music created by Jay Chou, all the styles and characteristics of pop music are basically covered in terms of the qualities of musical aesthetics. The singing style of the pop music created by him is very unique. The "fusion of structure and rhythm" approach in the compositions makes the rap part of the songs more casual and natural, and the lyrics have a melodic variation of creativity. Later, the singer-composers [2], such as the Phoenix Legend and Hoho, also incorporated rap, R&B, and Rock and Roll into their music works. Moreover, it can enhance the diversity of the performing form of pop music. In the development of pop music, the rich structure of the music used in the performing form presents the characteristics of diversity, which can better meet the musical needs of more popular groups. The song *Dragon Fist* in the follow-up album *Fantasy Plus*, the songs *Nunchaku* and *Ninja* in the album *Fantasy*, and the song *In the Name of the Father* in *Ye Huimei* all follow and sublimate this song style, highlighting the charm of the diverse artistic style of pop music^[3]. It has evoked a strong reaction and gotten recognition from the pop music market and the Chinese music industry, and has pushed Chinese pop music to a new level.

Finally, the rational use of its musical structure in combination with its musical style can highlight the changing characteristics of pop song singing (the combination of talking and singing). For example, the inclusion of a reasonable structural composition in the part of "talking" can also influence the change of tone. In the field of rap, it is called "rap flow" and refers to a variety of techniques such as rhythmic pauses, rhymes and stress in the voice to make the lyrics more distinctive. It mainly focuses on the variation between tone, lyrics and rhythm. Therefore, depending on the singing situation, the "rap flow" varies, and different pronunciation, phrasing, speed of speech, and musical treatment can also affect the different ways of presenting the song. By incorporating dotted notes, dotted notes with high notes, and syncopated notes in the rich song structure, the song is rich in variations. During the same period, whether it is rap, rhythm and blues (R&B) or the new hip-hop style that has emerged in recent years, or the lyrical pop style songs of love between men and women, all of them have extremely avant-garde musical aesthetics that other songs do not have, leading the way for the Chinese pop music of the 21st century. They have led the trend of pop music in the 21st century and given commercial value to original Chinese pop music.

(2) The influence of his songs on the aesthetic development of Chinese pop music

The period from the 1980s to the late 1990s was the "Hong Kong-Taiwan period" of Chinese pop music, when a large number of pop songs sung by A-list pop artists were mainly performed in Cantonese and Mandarin to cover original pop songs from Japan, Korea, Europe and America etc. The creation of Jay Chou's music, especially the creation of songs in the Chinese style, changed the way of thinking in the pop music world at that time. The use of his rational aesthetic structure of music composition, combined with the melodic characteristics of Chinese culture, inspired many music composers to start scrambling to explore and create a new style of Chinese pop music. They began to gradually ponder over and understand and analyze various elements of Chinese local music, looking for folk music, classical music, and even ancient music of Chinese folk instruments in Chinese music, as well as learning from the folk music and folk music ensembles composed by modern Chinese artists. Furthermore, they promote the popularity of this structural system in the field of Chinese pop music, and promote the diversified way of combining Chinese music elements with pop music elements, which is an essential excavation and development for the aesthetics and application of music art and culture in the field of Chinese music.

Nowadays, the major mainstream music platforms pop songs, film and animation soundtracks, etc., are filled with pop music style and Chinese national music combined with each other in the music digital media, and pop music is the most perfect carrier of all current music types combined with the development of technology and network. As beneficiaries of the development of science and technology and the development of the Internet, we should take a look at the future direction of popular music from its successful creation, be influenced by it and follow the trend and pace of the times. We should explore the profound and long-standing essence and aesthetic qualities of Chinese music and art culture itself. On the one hand, it is necessary to promote people' aesthetic level of popular music itself, and on the other hand, it is more important to keep the aesthetic qualities of local music culture.

IV. The lack of aesthetic qualities and aesthetic deficiencies in the development of current pop music songs

As mentioned in the previous analysis, the development of pop music is not just imitation and shoddy production without restraint. Although the current pop music market is still booming and growing, the problems and confusion are still the problems that have to be faced and urgently solved. In addition to the capital-controlled industry operations that dominate the entire market towards entertainment, the lack of awareness and aesthetics of both creators and listeners from an academic perspective is also a key factor that hinders the emergence of talents and the blossoming of modern pop music.

(1) The lack of academic and aesthetic definitions of pop music in the discipline

Compared to other majors, modern pop music is still a brand-new art discipline after it was introduced as a discipline in higher education, and it has only existed for about twenty years. Researchers and scholars of popular music at universities and colleges have not yet established a similar school of ethnomusicology. High-end academic forum and artistic research center for exchange and cooperation between genres, and some institutions have misconceptions about the naming of courses for discipline construction, and are unable to form the cognition and communication of popular music aesthetics, let alone the construction of pop music styles, structures, characteristics, and development directions. All of them have a necessary relationship with the level of development of the pop music profession itself and the philosophy of university education.

“In art education, one certainly needs to learn the techniques of artistic creation, but the techniques can only be truly legitimate when they are matched with the expression of the artistic concept. Otherwise, the most excellent techniques will not touch people, and that is the difference between an artist and a craftsman^[5].”

(2) Lack of improvement in the aesthetic level of the general public and the disparity between them

There has always been a threshold for the promotion of the aesthetics of music art. Except for higher professional colleges and universities that specialize in certain fields of art to study and explore, there is a lack of education on the aesthetics of popular music art in the basic education of primary and secondary schools, social non-disciplinary specialties education, and national quality education. And there is also a general lack of disciplinary awareness and a gap in the aesthetic cognition of pop music among current educators at all stages, which is a huge gap that needs to be filled in the education of pop music in the future. It is important to know how to popularize the aesthetic awareness and the aesthetic cognition of pop music, so that the music on the market has a high artistic value and connotation. It also enables the people to gain the meaning of life, the value and level of life, the satisfaction of emotions and the reasonable catharsis from songs with real connotations. It is important to define precisely the structure and style of popular music within the discipline, so that the music in the market can be classified more clearly and the musical characteristics can be more prominent. In the aesthetic level of the general public, the promotion of awareness of popular music styles and the proper development of the discipline are both issues that we have needed to urgently address in the next decade in terms of the lack of aesthetic education and the lack of improvement.

(3) Suggested solutions

First of all, modern pop music as a music discipline also needs to be put into the right direction of academic research work in universities and colleges in a healthy and positive way. A large number of scholars and workers should not hold the superficial and self-conceited mindset in which "knowing is understanding" and "everyone can sing a pop song". That will only make it easier for the outside world to treat it as an "inferior art form" and "popular street art" in differentiation from other traditional music professional disciplines.

Secondly, workers in the professional field of pop music should explore the artistic level of pop music in depth, inspire the aesthetic cognition and aesthetics of social nature, and avoid the pop music market from continuing to be filled with the commodity attributes and market environment of vulgarity, deformity, and over entertainment.

Finally, since pop music songs are closely and ubiquitously related to people's lives, improving pop music aesthetics and perfecting the unity of the structure, style, and scholarship of pop music is not only related to the aesthetic definition and aesthetic cognition of the discipline, but also affects the spiritual construction and the level of aesthetic cognition of the whole society.

V. Conclusion

From the success of Jay Chou's music, we, as workers and researchers in the professional field, should truly recognize his pioneering spirit and dedicated attitude towards the structure and style of pop music, while humbly studying and researching his works. At the same time, we will explore and study the more advanced pop music knowledge system in North American pop music, the birthplace of pop music, as well as its root, the culture of black music, to expand our knowledge and scientific attainment in this major and to enhance our understanding of the aesthetics of the popular music discipline. What's more, we should put aside narrow prejudices and the limitations of self-understanding, and establish a good basic environment for the future of a real academic high-end forum and artistic research center of pop music, leading people to establish a healthy and positive aesthetic of the discipline, and to build a good cognition of pop music aesthetics. We will provide the necessary academic support for the discipline to continue to explore the path of development and promote the flourishing of the discipline of "modern popular music".

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