A Study on the Differentiation Phenomenon of Cultural Identity and Social Role of Chinese Qin Musicians in Modern Social Context

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With the social change, the role behavior of Qin culture’s producers and inheritors have changed from traditional to modern, among which the significant symbol is the differentiation of cultural identity and social role. Starting with the historical perspective, social-cultural perspective, etc., and analyzing the role differentiation phenomenon of Qin musicians, this thesis considers that the changes in the role of the Qin musician are influenced by various external strong discourses in different periods. How to maintain the cultural creation and role responsibility of the Qin musicians’ self-consciousness under the interaction of various external forces becomes the key to the successful protection and inheritance of the Qin cultural heritage.

Keywords: Qin musicians, cultural identity, social role, modern social context

Qin music has always been classified as “literati music”, which has already become the direct impression of Qin musician’s identity role. Whether that knowing Qin-playing and music is the highest level of gentleman’s cultivation put forward by Confucius, or the ancients regarding “lyre-playing, chess, calligraphy and painting” as a necessary condition for gentleman’s cultivation, the symbolic connection between Qin, literati, and gentleman has been firmly established, it has become an important aspect of people’s understanding of Qin culture. However, analyzing from the change and development of the cultural identity of the ancient Qin musicians, the establishment and determination of this symbolic association have surely gone through a process from complicated to definite.

In Miao Jianhua’s book Study on Aesthetic Thoughts of Qin, he had classified the Qin musicians who were recorded in the literature and found out that the Qin musicians had no fixed identities, including emperors, princes, nobles, hermits, immortals, empresses, slaves, folk artists, literati, housewives, etc. They either served in the court, or lived among the people, or stayed in seclusion field, but they all had excellent Qin skills. It is worth noting that after Confucius, scholars began to account for the larger proportion of the Qin musicians. It means that with the rise of the scholar class in the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period, the relationship between Qin and the scholars gradually became closer. However, the relationship between Qin and the scholars did not affect its popularity in court, folk, and other occasions. Court Qin masters, folk Qin players, etc. of the

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same period also can be found in the records. The situation continued until the Han Dynasty. After Wei and Jin Dynasties, Qin was regarded as the king of musical instruments, and further divorced from ordinary people to become a special musical instrument for literati. After Tang, Song and Yuan Dynasties, “Qin music finally cut off from the masses and mainly become the art for the scholar class and upper-class nobles” (Miao, 2006, pp. 56-57). From this, it can be seen that the Qin has changed from popularization to the scholar class, and its symbolic symbols of identity were finally clear, which is closely related to the factors like acoustic characteristics of Qin music, the requirements of Confucianism and Taoism on the style of Qin music, and the scholars’ desire to distinguish themselves from common people through Qin.

However, as numerous great changes happened in China’s modern and contemporary society, the character and formation of Qin’s cultural subject are undergoing a new transformation process. If the development of Qin culture in ancient society can be described as a process in which the role definition of the Qin musician group and their cultural identity tend to be centralized and clear, then in modern and contemporary society, the identity, role and cultural identity of Qin musicians are undergoing a process from centralization to differentiation.

I. Two Differentiations of Qin musicians’ Social Roles in Modern and Contemporary Society

As far as the development of modern Qin culture is concerned, two main differentiation processes can be spotted in Qin musicians’ social roles.

The first role differentiation was in the early 20th century, that is, the cultural choices made by the traditional Qin musicians when facing the overwhelming new culture and new ideas. The symbol to determine the role differentiation of the Qin musicians is the difference in the cultural identification way of Qin, that is, the difference in the meaning of the symbolic symbols of the Qin acting on the cultural subjects.

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published in 1937 has posted a variety of perspectives on Qin studies representing different cultural positions, from which we can see that different Qin musicians choose different positions for their social roles. Among them, quite a several Qin musicians still follow the traditional idea of “Saints make rites and music to teach people” (Zhang, 1937, p. 35) in their literary theories. And there is also some view that emphasizes applying the Western music theories to the study of Qin studies. They even think that Chinese twelve pitch pipes are the Western twelve-tone equal temperament, and Biangong of Qing and Jiao tune is the Western F and B. Therefore, “Qin musicians must pay attention to the common sense of modern music” (Shi, 1937, p. 51). In addition, the prevalence of western music has stimulated the self-esteem and self-confidence of some Chinese people, the concept of using Qin as “music art above the horizon” (Zha, 1937, p. 4) to compete with Western music also appeared in “Qin Journal”. Two tendencies in the Qin musicians’ ideas of Qin studies at that time can be seen clearly: advocating Qin to revive the traditional social and cultural norms or using new studies to actively participate in social changes. This is an obvious difference in cultural ideas between traditional literati and modern intellectuals, while the latter one also had different tendencies of “western centralism” and “nationalism”. But they have one thing in common, that is they all hope to use Qin to change the present situation through participation in social and cultural practices. So far, none of the above-mentioned musical concepts has entered the mainstream category of social culture. No need to mention those who were trying to advocate the idea

of improving the national fate by promoting elegant music under the old order. As for the concept of using ancient musical instruments to participate in new studies and social changes, Western music was popular among China at that time and replacing the cultural function of ancient musical instruments in the upper class. The rapid development of popular culture and citizen culture is incompatible with the artistic temperament of Qin. The revolutionary spirit needed by the left-wing culture and the cultural movement carried out are even less connected with Qin. Therefore, although the Qin musicians experienced the cultural choices brought about by social changes, they gradually became silent because they could not integrate into social practice.

The second role differentiation happened after the reform and open policy, that is, the social culture begun to show the relative differentiation of politics, economy, and culture from a highly integrated structure. Qin musicians also faced cultural choices in many fields such as social dominant culture, popular culture, and elite culture.

Before the reform and open policy, Chinese society was a highly integrated structure. The low differentiation and high integration were shown in all aspects of culture. Although the distinction between amateur and professional began to emerge after the country founding, under the strong integration of socialist ideology at that time, various types of cultural resources were uniformly allocated by the state. During the literary rectification movement in 1953, the CCP put forward the policy of “letting different flowers blossom and bringing forth new ones through innovation”. The policy of “coming from the masses and going to the masses” put forward in Yan’an period was further promoted at that time. Therefore, from the perspective of the cultural role, both folk musicians and professional musicians at that time must be literary and artistic workers stipulated and requisitioned by the socialist cultural system. The operation mode of the administrative system made its cultural role correspond to the social and cultural system. This cultural tendency was manifested in many Qin activities at that time. For example, after attending at the performance of the National Music Federation in 1953, Jin Yu Qin Musicians Association was criticized for “thinking that Qin was a self-entertained musical instrument for literati and officialdom. The tune was dull and monotonous and could not come to the public. It would be eliminated in the future if alienating the mass and adhering to the conventions” (May 3, 1953)\(^2\). Since then, the association has stepped up rehearsing new music, accepted the leadership of the Federation and various assigned performance tasks, and even changed the form of private gatherings in the past to accept the suggestion of the music association that “the park can be used as a gathering place every Sunday, playing at will, not only can popularize Qin, but also can complete the performance plan” (June 22, 1958)\(^3\). In the following years, the association insisted on holding public gatherings and performances in Xiangyang Park. To meet the needs of the society, both amateur and professional musicians began to create new works for the revolutionary masses. The idea of “using national forms to express socialist content” was the mainstream literary thought at that time. Therefore, Qin musicians not only lived in this system but also strengthened it, resulting in consistent cultural behaviors in the highly integrated social culture.

After the reform and open policy, the integration and homogeneity structure of socialist ideology has changed, and the situation that folk culture, popular culture, and elite culture coexist has been formed. Beyond

these, the official dominant culture also plays its role. Different cultural fields have formed their unique operating rules, and the subject identity of the Qin musicians as cultural producers has changed again in the process of social-cultural differentiation and development.

From the perspective of the cultural field in which Qin’s cultural subjects are located, there is a problem of the modern distribution of Qin’s cultural resources. The cultural subjects of different cultural fields emphasize their right to speak in their respective cultural contexts. Producers of the official dominant culture take the protection of intangible cultural heritage and cultural heritage as the theme discourse, guiding Qin’s modern development. Professional musicians representing modern elite culture are actively or passively carrying out cultural practices in line with modern social and cultural standards and aesthetic experiences by various methods including Western musical cultural means. In the context of consumption, the cultural masses realize the entertainment and commercial value of Qin to the urban population through market regulation, thus further realizing their cultural consumption. Qin musicians scattered in the folk lost their original mainstream status as traditional literati and also failed to enter the modern professional elite discourse system. However, as folk Qin musicians are the main cultural subject of Qin’s folk inheritance, their social roles and behaviors conform to the mainstream consciousness of the official dominant culture on the one hand, and on the other hand, they also have the flexibility to enter the field of mass consumer culture, so they also assume important social functions in the current society. In terms of several relations, the official dominant culture plays the role of balancing and guiding between the folk Qin culture subject and the elite Qin culture subject, while the Qin culture practice in the mass culture seems to be in the opposite position to the official dominant culture. Its characteristic of obeying the operation rules of the market economy also works on the folk and professional Qin musicians, and the Qin culture capital is constantly flowing in this relationship.

The second differentiation of the social roles of Qin musicians is far more thorough than that of the first time. Due to the comprehensive and effective participation in and interaction with a wide range of social practices, the Qin has diversified its ways as cultural capital. Moreover, as both the national dominant culture and the popular culture have participated in the competition and distribution of the Qin cultural capital, the Qin has maximized its capital benefits, and that is the part that the cultural subjects of different social roles can share. Therefore, all kinds of Qin cultural subjects, on the one hand, emphasize their legitimacy and reject others through their unique context in their specific cultural field, but on the other hand, they need to change roles from time to time to maximize the benefits of their own Qin cultural capital. Different cultural fields have different rules of the game. Institutional dominant culture can embody the ideology of public authority, such as the identification of Qin as intangible cultural heritage, the holding of Qin competition, the identification of descendants of Qin cultural heritage, etc. Although the rules of the game of popular culture may conflict with the dominant culture, the rules based on the realization of exchange value are the most direct means to realize the commercial value of Qin cultural capital. Applying this rule, both the buyer and the seller must obey the market rules and take what they need. The difference between identities and roles are no longer important, and even the consumer has a more dominant position. Both the dominant culture and the popular culture are carrying out reproduction and resource competition of Qin culture according to their own rules. They have conflicts of concept and consciousness, and they are making use of each other in reality. However, for those who bear the real Qin culture, whether folk or professional, are under the dual pressure of the dominant culture and the popular culture. They hope to stick to the
norms of behavior in their respective cultural contexts and have to face pressure from the outside. Therefore, they either depend on the official dominant culture or take the initiative to participate in the consumer market to maintain their cultural capital of Qin through the continuous change of roles. While some exiled Qin musicians neither want to participate in the system distribution of the dominant culture nor aim at the realization of commercial interests, their final result can only be marginalized.

II. Formation of Multiple Roles and Identities under the Background of Cultural Differentiation

Cultural differentiation on the level of “folk, elite and public” leads to the role differentiation of Qin cultural subject in modern society, and also leads to the emergence of multiple identities of Qin cultural groups. Folk Qin musicians maintain their legal status with the orthodoxy of the folk heritage of Qin, but objectively, the students they cultivate also tend to enter the specialized field through examination or qualification. In addition, folk Qin musicians have become the spokesmen of the dominant culture by accepting the official recognition of “successor”, strengthening their right to speak. This right to speak is more easily converted into the cultural capital of Qin, thus realizing greater benefits and values in the circulation of market-oriented cultural resources of Qin. Since professional musicians are mostly from the folk, and Qin art schools are diverse, it is impossible to completely separate from the folk. They still need to draw more resources from the folk and make them enter the professional teaching field or academic research field. And professional performers must consider the needs of the cultural market and the aesthetic habits of the public. In addition, professional musicians have to face domination from the dominant culture and consumer culture as well as folk musicians. The dominant culture gives the musicians a new identity and symbolism in the form of ideology. For example, the officially recognized “successor” actually has the effect of “distinguishing” the musicians from the public, making them shoulder the important task of inheriting the cultural treasures of the Chinese nation. However, consumer culture is just the opposite, it equalizes Qin musician and consumers in the way of commercial value exchange. Both folk musicians and professional musicians have to constantly change their roles to adapt to various official and consumer cultures.

Besides, as for the new cultural subjects of Qin in consumer culture, they are mainly the new people shaped by mass culture, including the cultural producers, managers and consumers necessary for the industrialization of Qin. For example, the social students who come to consume are beyond the scope of the so-called “Qin musicians”. Due to the emergence of the mass cultural consumption system, the original Qin cultural resources have been re-divided and further capitalized. The original cultural resources of Qin can no longer be judged by traditional methods for their artistic value, but can be operated and hyped through industrial methods, thus enhancing the vested interests of “sellers”. Most of the social students have received good social education, and they are less constrained by traditional aesthetic norms. So they are more sensitive to the new trend of mass culture. The Qin students coming out of professional colleges have professional backgrounds that meet the requirements of modern people and can smoothly enter the production and circulation fields of the cultural market. Producers and consumers of the Qin market often carry out cultural practice on the premise of advocating cultural consumption or pursuing realistic functions. The intangible cultural heritage that dominates cultural publicity is undoubtedly the best advertisement in Qin cultural market. However, the cultural market has also
made the exclusive Qin cultural more lifestyle, i.e. Qin cultural products, like other commodities, no longer belong to a specific cultural field, and can even be further popularized through adaptation and transplantation of popular music. This kind of cultural characteristic, which may transcend the traditional boundaries and transforms Qin into a shared culture in this consumption era, is exactly what new cultural groups show in the contemporary society.

It is worth noting that with the arrival of the Qin craze, the role of popular culture has become generalized and has gradually infiltrated into other cultural fields. Qin musicians originally belonging to different cultural fields are also evolving to this new role more or less, and their own cultural identity has also undergone considerable changes in the process of cultural capitalization. Due to the differences in cultural environment and field, Qin musicians can move freely through various cultural spaces. While the cultural boundaries between folk culture and elite culture in the official dominant culture and the mass culture in the market are intertwined and difficult to discern, which leads to the fact that most Qin musicians are in a state of multiple cultural identities.

When the original social norms are broken or the old system is replaced by a new political, economic and cultural system, the social roles and cultural functions of the Qin musicians will be confused, and the confusion of roles will surely lead to an identity crisis. Nowadays people’s cultural imagination of Qin is still based on its specific cultural situation, and the identity of the Qin musicians often stays in the traditional role under the constraints of traditional cultural norms. No matter the rendering and use of Qin culture in movies and TV plays or the packaging and promotion of Qin in the modern cultural consumption market, it is hoping to bring people a kind of cultural cognition of Qin that conforms to the traditional reality. Although this kind of imagination and cognition of the traditional culture is often deliberately deduced to serve other purposes, in reality, it also reflects people’s strong recognition of the traditional Qin culture from the other side. In other words, people’s subconscious still believes that Qin culture and Qin musicians are only reasonable if they are deliberately returned to the traditional role standard, and only in this way it can realize the perfect combination of ideological content and artistic quality. The deep self-shaping spirit of the traditional Qin musicians is what the impetuous society lacks at present. Modern people need a sense of responsibility for the older Qin musician to protect the spiritual world. Traditional Qin musicians who have deeply felt the influence of modern cultural system and market consumption culture may realize that their traditional role behavior has been somewhat inconsistent with the new cultural norms or cultural aesthetics, which may cause confusion and doubt about their inherent role. The traditional inheriting way of Qin needs to be reformed in the field of modern professional teaching. The artistic practice of self-entertainment and self-cultivation of Qin players does not meet the public needs in the field of modern public entertainment and performance. Qin’s cultural function of nourishing the spirit has changed due to the modern cultural policies and market economic factors. Various new cultural situations have gradually deviated the traditional role of the Qin player from its actual core position. The former legitimacy and discourse rights have been redefined. We have to rethink this phenomenon.

III. Reflection on the Contemporary Differentiation of Qin Musicians’ Social Roles

The social-cultural labor division has broken the traditional Qin musicians’ exclusive right to possess the Qin culture. To gain social recognition, one must re-allocate one’s cultural resources according to the social system structure standard. The traditional literati can no longer maintain the superiority of the “literati class”
through self-cultivation and self-spiritual transcendence, and it is not suitable for the needs of industrialized production modern society. They can be “literary and artistic workers”, can be “professionals” and can be “cultural businessmen”, but it is difficult for them to regain their dominant position as discourse producers in traditional society. In fact, in the current development of Qin culture, “production” occupied less while “transformation and utilization” is the majority. In the modern cultural system, Qin musicians are more subject to multiple requirements from different links in the social structure. The dominant culture requires the Qin musicians to undertake the important task of inheriting the classical culture of the Chinese nation and to elevate the Qin from the symbol of literati music to the symbol of the nation. Qin musicians are restricted by the demand side in the consumer market system, and consumers of Qin culture dominate cultural production. Even within the music art, Western music and pop music have gradually infiltrated into the production field of Qin culture. The dispersion and transfer of the center of cultural activities of the Qin have left the Qin player in a confusion of identity and roles.

Traditional Qin players are divided into folk Qin player and professional Qin player, they need to face influences from the dominant culture and popular culture at the same time. The dominant role originally in the state of “self-produced and self-sold” is loosing, and finally, it is in a passive position in the “production” and “sale” relationship of the Qin culture, i.e. the produced Qin cultural products have to adapt to different needs of the dominant culture and the popular culture on the one hand, and on the other hand, the “sale” side is no longer the player itself. Part of the cultural products is expropriated by the state, while the other part enters the mass cultural consumption market. The dissemination and circulation of Qin cultural products no longer revolve around the player as the core. What to produce, how to produce, from content to style, are no longer the Qin players’ purely self-choices. Planned production and market regulation act on the Qin musicians group at the same time. As a result, the cultural identity and role-playing of the traditional Qin player are separated, gradually changing from the central role to a certain link in different production lines, and becoming the nominal producers of products.

The changes in the system will inevitably lead to the rearrangement of the social-cultural groups in politics, economy, and social status. The new arrangement and combination will create new requirements for the cultural groups. People’s role-playing must be consistent with the cultural expectations of the system. Change of role-playing also means the change of role status and the redistribution of cultural capital to a certain extent. Therefore, the role status, capital distribution, and system rules formed a variable restriction relationship.

The roles and positions of literati and officialdom in traditional culture are complete and unified. They have relatively independent culture and personality models. They attached to the feudal ruling class and kept the side of confrontation and reflection at the same time. Until modern times, the scholar-bureaucrat class always maintained their unique thoughts, social status, and relatively superior living conditions, which can still be seen in the living conditions of the Chinese Qin musicians. This state was quickly broken by social changes. However, Qin players as literati, their sense of superiority in current social status, and economic status have disappeared. If they want to regain their dominant position or improve their economy, they must leave their traditional cultural norms, enter the cultural context of modern politics and economy, and re-stipulate their code of conduct according to the game rules of the dominant culture and market economy. Those Qin musicians who still want to keep their tradition and hide in the city can only stay in the folk.
In a particular cultural field, the particular role has its particular role responsibility and power. No matter in the traditional context of literati and officialdom or in the present modern society, the role responsibility of Qin musicians exists in reality. This role responsibility and power includes two aspects, the first is the role player’s self-awareness and self-cultural judgment about his responsibility, and the second is the cultural function expected and required by the social-cultural system and conduct code. When the two things mentioned above are not in conflict, this self-consciousness and social expectation form a unified cultural identity. However, when the two conflicts, that is, when the cultural responsibility formed by the role player’s self-consciousness judgment is different from the requirements and expectations of the social-cultural system, this leads to the selection dilemma of the next Qin cultural practice mode, and even causes embarrassment and conflict between the player’s self-consciousness and various social-cultural practices. This kind of embarrassment and conflict is essentially embodied as a conflict of cultural values, that is, the relationship between intellectuals and social-cultural practices that is both dependent and critical. From the perspective of Qin culture development and social practice, Qin musicians who have changed from traditional literati to contemporary intellectuals still retain the right and obligation to criticize the social-cultural values. However, when the cultural value judgment under this right and obligation is limited by various new conduct codes caused by social changes, conflicts between the internal consciousness of Qin musicians and the social reality are formed. Role responsibility undoubtedly embodies values, which is also the most important cognitive element of Qin musicians who undertake the important task of Qin culture inheriting in the current society. Different attitudes towards this element directly determine how the Qin musicians, the main body of Qin culture, will act. Repeated changes in the cultural identity and social role of Qin musicians are irresistible objective facts. Therefore, how to maintain the cultural creation and role responsibility of the Qin musicians’ self-consciousness under the interaction of various external forces becomes the key to the successful protection and inheritance of Qin cultural heritage.

Conclusion

From the perspective of “cultural identity”, this paper analyzes the social role differentiation of Chinese Qin players in the context of modern society. It is believed that in the early 20th century, the first role differentiation took place. Influenced by the western culture, some Qin players gradually changed their cultural identity from traditional literati to modern intellectuals; The second role differentiation took place after China’s reform and opening up in 1979, Influenced by folk culture, popular culture, elite culture and official dominant culture, The cultural identity of Qin players gradually changed from literary and art workers under the “Political System” to multiple identities that could coexist and transform with each other. The article hopes to show that, as the traditional Qin players gradually leave the center of political culture, they will inevitably face many problems, such as social and cultural changes, the direct control of modern public authority over the Guqin culture and the market-oriented tendency of Guqin culture. At the same time, the new cultural context makes the Qin players gradually produce new Guqin cultural identity. In the current multi-cultural context, the cultural role of Qin players have appeared the reality of multiple identity choice and traditional role identity crisis, which makes us have to reconsider how to treat the discourse right of Guqin culture interpretation and how to maintain the cultural function of traditional Guqin main role under the condition of multiple identity ways and multiple contradictions and conflicts.
References