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Value Interpretation of Chinese Traditional Artistic Spirit “Harmony” in the Current Music Education of China

Abstract: As one of the Chinese traditional artistic spirits with philosophical implication, “harmony” has originated from the deep prototype psychological structure and its activity mode that had been long settled down in the context of Chinese traditional culture. The integrity, organism, coordination, and balance—all these features that constitute the spirit of “harmony” have always been the pursuit of the intrinsic value and the aesthetic standard for Chinese traditional culture, and in particular for Chinese music education since the ancient times. The spirit is of great significance in achieving harmonious life and integrated personality of people through music aesthetic education. Therefore, it is necessary to review and rediscover its connotation at the time when Chinese and western cultural and educational values collide in all aspects with each other, hoping to provide references for the current Chinese music education.

Key words: traditional artistic spirit; harmony; prototype; music education

INTRODUCTION As an old saying goes, “There is nothing better than music in altering social mores.” Music education has played a role in regulating and guiding people’s ethics and social behaviors especially after the establishment of the system of rites and music, and that’s how it gains the name “Yue Jiao” (Chinese characters for music education). Since ancient times, it has also been regarded as an important way to develop personality and open up the realm of life. Although its content was unfixed in the course of development, it retains “harmony” as its core spiritual connotation. According to some research, traditional art is part of Chinese traditional culture in a broad sense, while “in a narrow sense culture refers to literature and art only” (Liu Xinke, 2002: 2). Chinese traditional culture generally refers to those thoughts formed and developed throughout the historical stages before the May 4th New Culture Movement, including those of the Chinese slave and feudal societies that were centered upon Confucianism but also made up of the practical and theoretical heritage of the traditional Chinese education and arts. This argument might be biased, yet it

emphasizes the cultural attribute of music as an art form. It can be said that traditional artistic spirit is formed under the influence of traditional culture.

Emphasizing the harmonious unity of art and personality is a traditional Chinese artistic spirit with aesthetic implication. Chinese traditional music education attaches importance to teaching through lively activities and stresses the harmonious and balanced development of music and personality. As an ancient saying goes, “Music means joy” (*The Book of Rites*). Through the delightful learning of music, one can get physical and mental edification, with enriched personal and social emotions and harmoniously developed personality. That is the so-called “music education”, which is now called “aesthetic education through music.”

Taking “harmony” as its spiritual core in music education, the ancient sages organically integrated the growth of man and music and laid emphasis on the integrity of personality, which has become one of the Chinese cultural traditions. As a kind of spiritual image with aesthetic meaning, “harmony” originated from the prototype psychological structure of “bipolar dialogue” in the context of Chinese cultural philosophy. For thousands of years, as one kind of collective unconsciousness, it has controlled or restricted people’s thinking patterns and behaviors in the deepest psychological layer. It might go oblivious now and then in the history, yet when different cultural ideas collided, it would appear instantly or manifest itself.

This paper contends that the consciousness of “harmony” in music education is highlighted again with the discussion on the educational function, value and vitality of traditional music at the time when Chinese and western cultural and educational values collide in all aspects with each other, and it is worthwhile to attach importance to and rediscover the significance of traditional music, which takes “harmony”—one of the Chinese traditional aesthetics as the core spirit, to the intrinsic order, organism, equilibrium and expansibility of individual life.

This paper will focus its analyses on the following two aspects of the issue: one is the concept of “harmony” and prototype psychological structure, and the other is the “harmony” in music education.

“HARMONY” AND PROTOTYPE PSYCHOLOGICAL STRUCTURE

“Harmony” is an important connotation of Chinese traditional aesthetics and artistic spirit. It implies a specific aesthetic criterion as it represents an ideal state to be achieved between and among different components. Besides, it also implies the movement mode within

the relations, namely, dialogue and generation, or conflict and balance. As an image, “harmony” is the external expression of specific psychological structure mode and the result of specific thinking mode. “Harmony” being its reflection, the study of special psychological structure can help understand better the generation and connotation of “harmony,” discovering its value and providing references to the current music education in China.

“Harmony” as generated from the prototype psychological structure of the binary integration

What is prototype? Its synonym “archetype” is the core of Jung’s “personality structure” (“psyche” in Jung’s diction—a Latin word originally meaning “spirit” or “soul” but “mind” in modern times), which explores the interactions among the structures of personality, and the influence of this “self”—collective and relatively complete personality on an individual’s spirit and behavior. According to Jung’s research, the structure and dynamics of archetypal psychology, for its generative and binary characteristics, are primarily and universally significant (Jung, 1997: 40). Since the 20th century, archetypal methodologies have been widely applied in literature, art, science, philosophy and other fields of ideologies (Hall, 1987: 180).

There was no such thing as “prototype” in Chinese history, but the interaction between Yin and Yang represented by the Tai Chi Schema in *The Book of Changes*, an ancient Chinese theoretical classic, not only reflects the thinking mode of Chinese ancients, but also bears similarities with “prototype.” In fact, Jung admitted that his theory was “confirmed in the Old Orient.” Therefore, it can be assumed that the Tai Chi Schema in *The Book of Changes* implies the prototype psychological structure of the Chinese. Some domestic scholars believe “the way of thinking formed by Chinese people in their own historical practice, which is different from that of the West, the propositions put forward and concepts formed in Chinese cultural philosophy, and the conclusions on these issues have many important similarities with the prototype theory” (Cheng Jincheng, 2007: 269). The Chinese traditional culture with a long history is extensive, profound and ever-changing. However, it is always certain to find something “collective” and “universal” among all mortal beings, which is deeply rooted in and exerts great influences upon people’s spirit and behavior, constituting the prototypical gene of the relevant culture and spirit. “Harmony” is the external manifestation of the collective and universal psycho-logical prototype, the accumulation of the traditional culture in the

national psychology. It is one of the “genes” of the Chinese traditional artistic spirit.

“Harmony” is the external prototypical image resulting from the interaction between Yin and Yang, both of which, as the ancient primitive images, are submerged in the depths of collective unconscious. Once the prototypical shock produced by the interaction between Yin and Yang radiates outwards and correlates with the images in different cultural environments, the ever-changing and ever-developing “harmony” will correspondingly come into being. It is believed that the change of Yin and Yang in the universe is the root of everything; people then analogize Yin and Yang with man and universe, man and man, man and object, and objects them-selves. They gradually form the understanding that “harmony” containing the thought of “unity of nature and man” is the core of these relationships. From the unconscious to the conscious, and then vice versa, this is actually a cognitive process involving introspection and tracing to the origin. People experience “the way of Yin and Yang” in their understanding and grasp of the universe; they also experience the connection between man and the universe, the “unity of nature and man”, and the “harmony” of various structural relations in their discovery and scrutiny.

Therefore, the prototype psychological structure with “harmony” as the image is not only a kind of “meaningful form” with philosophical implication, as said by the semiotician Clive Bell, but also “affects all psychological activities such as thinking, emotion and intuition.” In the field of music education, the research on “harmony” and its internal psychological structure obviously focuses on “the currently so-called accumulation of cultural psychology” (Jung, 2014: 7).

“Harmony” and activity mode of prototype psychology Prototype is not the general accumulation of knowledge or a certain kind of knowledge structure, but the psychological experience mode generated by the understanding of the relationship between human beings and the universe, it is the “stereotyping” and repeated “triggering” of an accumulated emotion... Literature and art prototypes are the accumulation of aesthetic consciousness and psychological emotion gradually formed on the basis of long-term practice.... Literature and art prototypes are a psychological experience mode about “beauty”. (Cheng Jincheng, 2007: 245)

As a kind of spiritual core, the collective unconscious mental structure reflected by the image of “harmony” is universal, but combined

with the specific ethnic and cultural context, it will produce a unique cultural-mental structure. In the context of Chinese traditional culture, it manifests as the typical thinking mode of integration of Yin and Yang, which is different from dichotomy—the typical thinking mode in the West.

The so-called duality of Yin and Yang refers in essence to two different attributes of the same thing. The thinking mode of dual unity is the reflection of the prototype psychology, which holds that everything in the universe is connected to each other, thus habitually incorporating different objects as corresponding categories into the overall framework. In the long run, it has gradually formed one of the important characteristics of Chinese artistic thought.

As mentioned earlier, the thinking mode of dual unity refers to the corresponding duality—or the correspondence, interaction, conflict, development and balance between Yin and Yang, which constitute the key modes of thinking or psychological activities. Therefore, “harmony” first means “harmonious coordination”, that is, things with different attributes can coexist harmoniously, which is the ultimate state of bipolar dialogue in the prototype psychology; “harmony” also represents a kind of spirit, which not only indicates the final direction of bipolar dialogue but also provides dynamic for the prototype psychology. The connotation of “harmony” will change under different circumstances, and this displays the constant generative nature of the prototype psychology; that’s why it can be seen in the typical paradigm of traditional music education in China.

“HARMONY” IN MUSIC EDUCATION The harmonious unity of man and music is the core spiritual concept of traditional music education. For thousands of years, under the guidance of prototype psychology and traditional thinking mode, Chinese music is “humanized” music, life is “artistic” life, thus “music” and “human” have become an inseparable whole.

Why study “harmony” in music education? First of all, in traditional music education, the integrity of personality is an important manifestation of “harmony”. However, with the advent of the era of globalization, the eastern and western cultural psychology and thinking modes have undergone exchanges and collisions. When tradition meets modernity, traditional thinking mode is challenged, and this is also reflected in music education. With the emergence of postmodernism, people pay more and more attention to the display of personality and are more and more committed to getting rid of the shackles of traditional ethical and moral

education. With decline of traditional cultural spirit, learning music and learning to behave have shown signs of binary separation.

In the West, as long as a musician has excellent skills, he will be recognized and praised regardless of his character. However, in traditional Chinese culture, this is not possible, because “music” and “character” are interdependent. Good music won’t be recognized for poor character. Originally, music and character are totally different, having no necessary relationship and can be separated, but Chinese philosophical thinking is characterized by its well-known “analogical reasoning”, which puts music and character into a whole category under the situation of “harmony”. This also shows a cultural and psychological habit, which, over time, would become a convention.

It is worth noting that when western civilization is in a dilemma, as great discrepancy occurs between highly developed modern technology and severe alienation of man’s self-personality, philosophers begin to turn their eyes to eastern philosophy in an attempt to gain inspiration and find a way out. Hence, Chinese philosophy and the traditional thinking mode of achieving personality integrity through music and art education are of great significance to the current harmonious development of society and personality. Therefore, it is necessary to review, restudy and rediscover “harmony”—the core spirit in traditional music education.

In the second place, there are divergences concerning the position of music education at present, and deviation from “harmony” has appeared. For some people music education is thought to be about teaching great music skills and cultivating talented musicians; while for some others, the growth of students should take priority over skills in music education. In addition to these disputes, a third voice has emerged—the acquisition of skills must be in harmony and balance with the healthy growth of students, both mentally and physically. At first sight, this argument seems to be only a reflection on the role of music education, but in fact it echoes the habitual advocacy of “harmony” hidden in traditional Chinese culture.

As previously mentioned, in traditional Chinese culture, “learning music” and “learning to behave” have been the educational content and corresponding category that are linked together as a whole when one enters music learning from childhood. In addition, with the deepening of music learning and the improvement of musicianship, self-cultivation is also required to be improved simultaneously. In other words, an ideal state of

musicianship and personality, as a corresponding category, is for them to be in harmonious and balanced development, which is also the spirit of traditional Chinese music education.

The philosophical foundation for harmony consciousness in music education “Harmony”, first of all, is the external image of psychological activities with dual unity. In the traditional music education, “harmony of music” ranks the first, next is the “harmony of man”, and then the “harmony” between “man” and “music”. Under this mode of thinking, the attributes of music and man can be unified, and the corresponding unification of them becomes possible.

Let’s look at the philosophical foundation for “harmony of music.” Ancient Chinese music first emphasizes the most important aesthetic meaning of music—“harmony” and believes that harmonious music has the virtue in line with the beauty of the universe. In ancient China, the production and creation of music and melody were usually based on the imitation of the natural world and the understanding and practice of harmony between Yin-Yang concept, which embodied the psychological activity with “harmony” as the image and “interaction and generation” of Yin and Yang as the basic form. For example, *Shang Shu* records that “Eight kinds of musical instruments can harmonize with each other in perfect order”, which fully illustrates the philosophical implication of mutual restriction and harmonious coexistence. The musical harmony is based on the harmony of musical tones generated according to the specific ratio relations, which conforms to the rules of the universe and interrelation. It is well known that one of the generating methods of music sounds in traditional Chinese music is the “Pythagorean Tuning”, that is, each sound is generated by another sound according to a certain number ratio relationship, which has its scientific justifiability. Each musical tone is relatively independent, but there is a correlation between them. Moreover, the generated “Five Tones”, namely, Gong, Shang, Jue, Zhi, Yu, can be transformed to each other under certain rules. This kind of transformation endows the ancient music generating method with philosophical significance, given that it is based on the mutual promotion and restraint of Yin and Yang. Therefore, the Yin and Yang concept behind the “Pythagorean Tuning” can be regarded as the basic philosophical guiding thought of music tone generation, and we can thus see the traces of the prototype psychology.

It can be seen from the generation law of music that “harmony” of

music represents a kind of order, organism, vitality and development. This is exactly the key to keep the vitality of Chinese music cultural tradition under the guidance of “harmony”. In the same way, in order to maintain humanity of man, “harmony” also requires the order of ethics and the natural, organic and balanced development of body and mind. This is also the spiritual embodiment of man’s life. “Music” can be transformed, and man as an organic life, under the influence of “music”, can also be transformed at different stages, with coordinated growth in rhythm and in accordance with certain laws. Some scholars believe such to be an “artistic life”, therefore, “harmony of music” and “harmony of man” becomes correlated in a certain way.

“Harmony of man” refers to “harmony among human beings” and the individual’s self-perfection. However, either in “harmony of music” or “harmony of man”, “harmony” must conform to the cosmic spirit, namely, the order, organism, variability and constant growth as mentioned above, which ensures the sustainable development of life in the universe. Hence, based on the similarities of the generation of music and the life circle of man, Chinese ancient philosophers combined man and music together with “harmony” as the spiritual core and “unity of nature and man” as the cosmology. Of course, this also demonstrates the strong integration function of bipolar interactive prototype psychology.

“Harmony of man and music” theory under the harmony consciousness of music education Chinese culture of certain era can’t break away from its roots any more than music can jump out of its specific cultural background of the times, instead, it should be an inheritance and development of traditional Chinese culture. So is the cultural psychology implied in the field of traditional music education with the ideas of “music quality” and “charisma”, which echoes harmony consciousness, and is an instantaneous flash in the artistic and humanistic spirit of the new era.

What is music quality? “Quality” can refer to moral quality, style and profundity. Music quality refers to the style of music, which determines the level of music quality. It can be said that music itself does not have anything to do with moral quality; however, we can still use certain criteria to evaluate whether the social content and emotional orientation endowed by music conform to certain aesthetic standards, or to evaluate the “signified”, namely the content and cultural connotation of music.

What kind of music is stylish? Confucian scholars believe that music

in line with “courtesy” and “benevolence” is the high-style “goodness” music. “Courtesy” is a social system and behavior norm derived from the natural law of the universe according to Yin and Yang’s interaction. “Benevolence” is one of the spiritual cores of courtesy. As social beings, people should respect various social relations in the same way as they revere and observe the rules and relations of the universe. What’s more, “benevolence” requires mutual care and compassion. Compared with “courtesy”, “benevolence” not only focuses on mutual relations and rules, but also has some taste of human feelings. This is very important, and it is where “the benevolent loves others” comes from. Benevolence was set by Confucius as the highest moral standard.

Now let’s take a look at music. One of the aesthetic implications of music is “harmony”. The harmony of music is based on the harmony of music tones conforming to the rules of the universe and with mutual relations, which is generated according to specific ratio relations. In this regard, we have briefly discussed how the prototype psychology is related to culture, and then generates this unique traditional cultural psychology.

The ancients compared music tones with Yin-Yang and five elements to strengthen the association between music and cosmic rules. Although it may seem a bit mechanical to compare musical tones to the five elements one by one, we can get a glimpse of the ancestors’ view of the universe. So it makes sense that our ancestors believed that music generated according to the laws of the universe is one of the most appropriate art forms to realize the communication between man and nature.

The above discussion once again reflects the thinking mode and characteristics of the holistic intuition reflected by the contrary and complementary prototype psychology of the ancestors. From the very beginning, our ancestors regarded man and nature as a harmonious and unified organic whole, internalized the laws of the universe gained from the celestial phenomena observation into psychological cognition, and then extrapolated it into relationship principles between man and various things and objects. They habitually put people and relevant objects into a unified and overall framework for consideration. The four seasons of the universe are not isolated and external, but are transformed under the overall order of the universe in a conscious and orderly way according to a certain relationship. Then, as a part of the universe, the behavior norm of human beings should conform to the rules of the universe, so as to be integrated

with the universe. Therefore, human behavior and communication etiquette should be as rhythmic, regular, temperate and harmonious as the operation of the universe. The music that people use to communicate with the universe should have a similar rhythm and degree. That is, the so-called “the etiquette of the universe is the greatest etiquette; the most perfect music can achieve harmony with nature” (*The Book of Rites*). Isn’t the emergence of this kind of cultural psychology and thinking mode the cultural manifestation of the prototype psychology?

Based on this philosophy, the ancients put forward the unity and correlation of “music” and “benevolence” on the humanistic level. “Human beings should harbor benevolence.” “Benevolence” is first of all the mutual relationship (its Chinese character consists of “Er Ren” meaning two people); “benevolence” is also good deeds, and the universe will become “better” for “doing good”. Music for the benevolent is abstemious, consistent with the etiquette and moral-oriented without emotional catharsis: this is the reason why the ancients thought of “Shao music” as better than “Zheng music.” The unity of music and “benevolence” can be tentatively suggested as aesthetic psychological orientation of “harmony worship” produced by prototype.

Therefore, music that conforms to “etiquette” is also stipulated: music should always maintain an orderly, “peaceful” and “neutral” aesthetic state, such as “mournful but not distressing”, “joyous but not indecent” and so on to meet the “etiquette”, and if a music style is too emotionally cathartic, it’s not elegant. Hence, Confucius criticized that “Zheng music is indecent,” and “Shao music is marvelous.” Obviously, in Confucius’s view, compared with “Zheng music”, “Shao music” is elegant.

What is moral quality? Moral quality is a person’s self-cultivation, social character and moral conduct. The ancients believed that a person with high cultural attainment and noble conduct should appreciate “elegant” music; otherwise, he still needs refinement. In this way, the ancients associated music with character and placed them on an equal footing. Therefore, those who like and insist on elegant music can have a better understanding of music, and their own cultural accomplishment, social integrity, or character style can be called elegant; in this way, they can have “gentle” and elegant demeanor. The music produced by people with harmonious character of “benevolence” and “kindness” will also be filtered by their intrinsic value judgment and aesthetic standards and be consistent

with their personal character, presenting an elegant style. Confucius once said, “one’s self-cultivation starts from the study of *The Book of Songs*, and his self-reliance begins from the study of etiquette and completes with the study of music.” He also said, “the principle of playing music can be grasped: the beginning of the playing should be harmonious; then the sound should be beautiful and the rhythm should be clear; the final tone should linger and leave a deep impression” (Confucius). Poetry is emotional and romantic, etiquette is moderate and restrained, and music can precisely be in harmony with the characteristics of poetry and etiquette, so that the cultivation of personality can achieve the harmony and balance of emotion and reason. Confucius believed that “in beautiful music, there is the most harmonious structure and the most heart-touching rhythm.” However, “in his aesthetic experience of art, Confucius not only focused on the blind unity of some kind of human inner emotion and artistic form, rhythm or order, but also further saw the implied personality and specific social content” (Teng Shouyao, 2005: 9-10). In this sense, music education can lead people to goodness and benevolence, and eventually form a harmonious personality and create an elegant and artistic life. “Pay equal attention to etiquette and music, but treat music as prior to etiquette, and believe that music is the key to achieve the perfect personality, which is the tenet of Confucius”, Confucius thus exemplified “art for life’s sake” (Xu Fuguan, 2002: 4).

In fact, not only ancient sages attached importance to the relationship between human character and music quality, but also many modern and contemporary respected musicians influenced by traditional culture have been adhering to and pursuing the harmony between “human” and “music”. For example, the musician Zhang Rui, a lifetime achievement award winner of China’s top music award “Golden Bell Awards”, believes that music is not an end but a means, through which to show one’s will. His article “Taste—My Twelve Yuhuashi Mirrors” reflects his independent spiritual realm: “Art reflects character, and character is present in music; since character has its own superiority and inferiority, it is revealed accordingly through music” (Zhang Rui, 1992: 95). He always admonished young performers to learn to be a real person (that is, a person with virtue and sound personality) before learning art. Mr. Zhang Rui and some other elderly artists have very high artistic attainments; that is because they attach great importance to the internal relationship between art and life, and to the harmony between the flow of life and rhythms of the Nature. They keep

themselves informed of the society, but properly filter the irrelevant part, so that they can maintain a stable state of mind in the world of art, in this way they obtain harmony with the society and the Nature.

The harmony consciousness of music education is the driving force of educational value and vitality The development of human life is characterized by rhythm, organism and growth, and Chinese people have always advocated the personality development in line with the cosmic spirit. The universe alternates with four seasons, reflecting a natural order and the spirit of transcending utilitarianism; it silently nourishes all things, so that all things in the world can realize harmonious growth, and this is the so-called “silent great merit” and “great virtues”. The harmony between music and man should conform to the natural beauty of the universe because vitality can only be realized through harmonious generation and natural development in accordance with the rules of Nature. This is also the “virtue” of the universe, according with this virtue means according with the cosmic spirit for man and music.

The “virtue” of the universe is beyond utilitarianism, so is the greatest value of education. Teaching the ability to survive is not the entire function of education. Instead, it should enable people to become “real people”, that is, to acquire skills beyond survival, so that they can try to grasp a good rhythm and maintain psychological balance in both prosperity and adversity. Through music and music related practice or aesthetic education activities, people can understand the artistic spirit of “harmony” based on the “unity of man and nature” in traditional Chinese culture, so as to realize “an organic and holistic reactive education for cultivating people” (Teng Shouyao, 2005: 333). Therefore, the current music education focuses on the traditional artistic spirit and its value in the present, and believes that “the awareness of artists, composers, writers and philosophers in the past and present should be shared” through continuous music education activities (Janaro, 2007: 10). Only by cultivating the mind that can connect ancient and modern times, and further forming the ability to calmly cope with the tension between ourselves and the ever-changing society, can we enrich our life into infinity.

THE VALUE OF “HARMONY” IN CURRENT MUSIC EDUCATION “Harmony” implies certain degrees as in the expressions of “peaceful harmony”, “light harmony”, “moderate harmony” in history, and also in its implications for the present. Xunzi believed that a gentleman should advocate “neutrality”, Confucianism advocates “the doctrine of the

mean”, and aesthetic education at present focuses on “harmony”, which all involve the handling and balance of various internal and external relations between man and himself, man and others, and man and society. “Harmony” attaches importance to the balance between the two poles, but this “balance” isn’t something mechanical, but a dynamic state out of active choice. Music education should enable people to gain a correct understanding of this state, acquire the ability to grasp the dynamic balance, thus become gentle and elegant individuals with a sense of achievement and happiness.

As mentioned above, the harmony of the universe, the harmony of music and the harmony of personality all contain the word “harmony”, which runs through and connects life, music and the universe. Hence, some scholars believe that the “harmony” concept is not only a kind of aesthetic law, but also a certain potential stipulation of Chinese artistic thinking (Jin Danyuan, 2005: 39). This paper further argues that “harmony” is not only the inherent prescriptive nature of art, but also the collective unconsciousness of traditional Chinese music education. Over the past hundred years, exchanges between China and the West have become increasingly frequent. In the past 40 years, especially around the 21st century, many western educational concepts and values have flooded into China, which have shown a tendency to break away from traditional music education while absorbing the valuable educational ideas. In the process of industrialization, utility and utilitarianism have received too much attention in education, which also leads to the alienation of some people’s personality. Rediscover the value of the traditional music education under the guidance of “harmony” for the cultivation of harmonious personality and its inherent stipulation of order, organism, balance and development will undoubtedly stimulate the positive value of music education in the current context and promote its vitality.

CONCLUSION This paper argues that “harmony”, as an important part of traditional artistic spirit, manifests the true value and vitality of music education. The “harmony” consciousness and the cultural spirit of “harmony as beauty” in Chinese traditional music education originated from the prototype psychological structure and the philosophy of binary integration, which also laid foundation for the correspondence and harmony between man and music, man and the cosmic spirit. In education, virtue acquisition must be required, and virtue usually can be found in a harmonious person, therefore “harmonious” growth distinguishes a person with real humanity. With “harmony” as the spiritual core, this growth can be achieved through

traditional music education.

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