

Chinese and Western Aesthetic Realization in Traditional Chinese Instrumental Performance: Perspectives of Scholars and Students

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ABSTRACT

Chinese and Western music aesthetics arise from two different cultural backgrounds. While previous research has explored the evolution and interaction of Chinese and Western aesthetics, their specific impact on Traditional Chinese Instrumental Performance (TCIP) has been overlooked. This study investigates the intersection of Chinese and Western music aesthetics in TCIP, focusing on the perspectives of music scholars and students. To address this gap, the study employed narrative inquiry with music scholars (n=4) and semi-structured interviews with music major students (n=8). It explores how Confucianism and Taoism aesthetics, alongside Western concepts of autonomy and heteronomy, influence music scholars' and students' perspectives and practices in TCIP. The findings reveal that these aesthetic principles shape musicians' artistic choices and interpretations. This research highlights the importance of integrating aesthetic thoughts into TCIP, offering insights for fostering Chinese and Western aesthetic appreciation and understanding of TCIP. These explorations extend to enhancing educational practices and promoting a more comprehensive interpretation of music aesthetics in both scholarly and performance contexts.

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Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature by examining the integration of Chinese and Western aesthetic principles in Traditional Chinese Instrumental Performance and revealing their influence on artistic interpretation and educational practices through an original qualitative approach involving music scholars and music major students.

1. Introduction

Over the past century of cultural fusion between the East and West, some contradictions and conflicts have been difficult to reconcile between Western aesthetics and Chinese aesthetics (Shu & Feng, 2007). Despite these challenges, cultural exchanges continue to

expand rapidly, bringing into focus the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western musical traditions (Yang & Saffle, 2017). This dynamic is acknowledged by both Chinese and Western musicologists and aestheticians, contributing to a lasting cultural dialogue (Wang, 2004).

Traditional Chinese aesthetic thoughts originated from Confucianism and Taoism, and both of the two philosophies are complementary to each other. Confucianism aesthetics mainly explains the relationship between music and society and attaches to the political and educational functions of music, developing a mature ideology of ritual and music (Li, 2010). Liu et al. (2000) clarified that Confucianism music aesthetics is the earliest music aesthetics thought in Chinese history. The feudal ritual music thought was promoted by Confucius and became the mainstream of traditional Chinese music aesthetics. It was because this thought safeguarded the interests of feudal rulers (Freiberg, 1977). Taoism is an ancient thought in the Spring and Autumn period that uses Tao to explore the relationship between nature, society, and life (Jullien, 2004; Miller, 2022). Taoist music aesthetics oppose all primitive desires of fixed social ethics to discipline human emotions and hold a repulsive attitude towards science, culture, and art. The philosophy of Taoism music emphasizes spiritual purification and sublimation, as well as the pursuit of harmonious coexistence with nature (Wang, 2021). The music advocated by Laozi is a spiritual pursuit, a natural law of operation, rather than a man-made sound (Freiberg, 1977). It is characterized by simple melodies and slow rhythms, often imitating the sounds of nature, and aims to guide people to inner peace through music (Hagen, 2012).

Liu (2014) argues that Western music aesthetics developed under the influence of religion, philosophy, and natural science, with natural science playing a significant role. Aristotle, one of the most prominent ancient Greek philosophers, emphasized the ethical and emotional dimensions of aesthetics, notably focusing on the purifying effect of music on the purification effect of music on people's souls to cultivate temperament (Anderson, 1983). According to Stamou (2002), Aristotle not only recognized the role of music in moral education but also recognized the role of music entertainment, that it can make people experience the spiritual aspects of leisure and obtain soul purification.

Western aesthetics, characterized by the notions of autonomy and heteronomy, offers a contrasting perspective that highlights the artist's creativity and the external influences shaping the artistic process (Bertelsen, 2016; Brown, 2019; Carroll, 2010). Despite the distinct origins and principles of these aesthetic traditions, their intersection within the realm of TCIP provides a unique lens through which to explore their coexistence and mutual influence (Tan, 2008). The aesthetics of autonomy mainly emphasize the individual's inner self-control and regulation, linking aesthetic values with the individual's inner moral principles, aesthetic standards, and self-restraint (Shell, 2009). However, the aesthetics of heteronomy emphasizes the influence of external factors on aesthetic experience and judgment, regarding aesthetic value as the result of being shaped by external social, cultural, and historical factors (Hulatt, 2013).

In music aesthetics, autonomy and heteronomy represent two different aesthetic concepts, focusing on form and content (Miles, 1997). The formal aesthetics in autonomy emphasizes the independence of works and focuses on internal elements such as the structure, form, and melody of music (Swinkin, 2015). This perspective is derived from Kant's aesthetic theory, which asserts that art should be distinct from external functions and purposes, deriving its aesthetic value solely from its inherent formal beauty (Zuckert, 2006). Formal aesthetics emphasizes the symmetry and unity of melody and rhythm,

positing that these elements are the basis for the existence of music as an independent art form (Downes, 2014). In contrast, the content aesthetics in heteronomy emphasizes the external function of musical works and the expression of society, culture, and emotion (Staubmann, 2022). According to the view of heteronomy, music is not only a display of form but also bears the function of conveying emotions, social values, and moral concepts (Cobussen & Nielsen, 2016). This perspective is endorsed by philosophers like Hegel, who argue that art cannot be separated from its social context, with the value of music being more evident in its interaction with the external world (Rutter, 2010).

Current research in music aesthetics largely focuses on shared issues between Chinese perspectives and the development of Western instruments like the piano and violin (Whitcomb et al., 2011). However, there is limited study on the perspectives of music scholars and students regarding TCIP, and the impact of Western aesthetics on Chinese instruments is rarely addressed. This creates a theoretical gap in understanding the interaction and influence between these aesthetic traditions (Liu et al., 2000; Nettle & Bohlman, 1991; Saussy, 1995). For instance, while Confucianism and Taoism have influenced Chinese aesthetics, their specific impact on TCIP has not been examined along with Western aesthetic concepts of autonomy and heteronomy.

This article explores the perspectives of music scholars specialized in TCIP and music aesthetics, as well as undergraduate students majoring in music, regarding the role of Chinese and Western music aesthetics in TCIP. TCIP is shaped by Confucianism and Taoism aesthetics, while Western notions of autonomy and heteronomy have gradually become integrated into it (Fung, 2008). This fusion of Chinese and Western aesthetics not only enriches the expressive range of traditional instrumental music but also offers performers a more multidimensional artistic perspective (Guo, 2002).

1.1. Research Objectives

The objective of this research is to explore how Chinese and Western aesthetics are realized in traditional Chinese instrumental performance (TCIP) from the perspectives of scholars and music major students.

1.2. Research Question

This research proposes one research question:

How are Chinese and Western aesthetics realized in traditional Chinese instrumental performance (TCIP) from the perspectives of scholars and music major students?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Chinese Aesthetic Thoughts of *He*, *Qing*, and *Qi* in TCIP

Chinese aesthetics emphasize harmony, balance, and the expression of profound philosophical concepts (Ko, 2006; Li, 2008; Zhang et al., 2011; Zhirong, 2022). The performance and aesthetics of TCIP are deeply intertwined with Confucianism and Taoism thoughts, yet they also possess distinct individual characteristics (Fung, 2017). TCIP is known for its diverse performance techniques, rich expressiveness, and unique

aesthetic dimensions, particularly in the aspects of *He* (和), *Qing* (情), and *Qi* (气) (Lam, 1994).

The aesthetic concept of *He* emphasizes neutrality and harmony, advocating for balance without excess or deficiency (Chen et al., 2018). As far as TCIP is concerned, *He* requires the music to be moderate, that is, the intensity, melody, and rhythm of the music must be able to adapt to people's auditory senses to produce aesthetic pleasure (Tu, 1998). As Lee (2023) argues, there is a harmonious and supportive relationship between the performer's fingers, the instrument, and the musical score, which is closely connected to the aesthetic thoughts of *He* in Confucianism and Taoism. The Confucian concept of *He* in TCIP is reflected in the coordination and unity of notes, rhythms, and emotions (Fung, 1994). The Confucian principle of harmony in diversity is especially evident in both ensemble and solo performances, where performers strive to balance various timbres and rhythms to create a sense of harmonious beauty (Banban, 2018). Taoist notion focuses on the integration of nature and music, which is expressed through ease and fluidity in performance, emphasizing a deep resonance with nature and inner tranquility (Portelli, 2012).

Qing is translated as expression and emotion. In music performance, music becomes the medium to project expression and emotion (Liu, 2014). According to Meyer (2008), TCIP aims to render *Qing*, allowing emotional and expressive content to be conveyed to the audience through musical sound. Confucian aesthetics believes that the *Qing* in music should serve moral education and express emotions that conform to social ethical norms (Gu, 2016; Thrasher, 1980; Wang, 2024). In TCIP, performers need to maintain a dignified and appropriate demeanor and avoid excessive showmanship (Wnezhuo, 2023). Unlike Confucianism, Taoism believes that the expression of *Qing* should conform to nature rather than be constrained by social norms (Tang, 2015). Performers pursue the natural flow of emotions in performance rather than deliberately control them (Barrett, 2011).

Qi, as understood in TCIP, relates to physical movement. *Qi* at the level of material movement means that *Qi* contained in the physical movement is externalized through the coordination of the body and scientific exertion of force during TCIP (Major et al., 2012). Some argue that the sound produced in TCIP is solely dependent on the force exerted, with no relation to *Qi*. However, when a performer produces hard, loud sounds that lack *Qi*, the resulting sound is dry and stiff, indicating a failure to effectively harness *Qi* (Szczepanski, 2016). In Chinese culture, *Qi* encompasses both material and spiritual aspects, permeating the ideological systems of Confucianism and Taoism (Ekken, 2007; Yang & Tamney, 2011). In TCIP, Confucian *Qi* emphasizes the balance of rhythm, emotion, and momentum in music (Liu, 1985). *Qi* not only refers to the control of breathing but also represents the overall charm and fluidity of music (Zhang & Rose, 2001). Taoism's interpretation of *Qi* is more naturalistic, highlighting the alignment of the performer's breathing with the rhythm of the music and seeking the unity found in the natural flow of music (Hagen, 2012).

2.2. Western Aesthetic Thoughts of Autonomy and Heteronomy in TCIP

The integration of Western aesthetics of autonomy and heteronomy introduces a nuanced approach to musical interpretation in TCIP (Yang, 2021). Autonomy in TCIP allows performers to exercise their creative independence, shaping their interpretations based on personal insights and artistic preferences (Wang & Wong, 2022). This

encourages individuality in the performance, where the musician's internal judgment guides the expression of the piece (Cheng et al., 2020). On the other hand, the concept of heteronomy acknowledges that TCIP is also influenced by external factors such as cultural expectations, historical traditions, and the audience's reception (Yang, 2021). These influences shape the interpretative choices made by performers, ensuring that the music remains connected to its cultural roots while also responding to contemporary contexts (Davies, 2001). By balancing autonomy with heteronomy, TCIP achieves a dynamic interplay between the performer's creative freedom and the external elements that ground the music in its cultural and historical significance (Stecker, 2013). This synthesis enriches the expressive possibilities within TCIP, allowing for performances that are both personally meaningful and culturally resonant (Tan, 2012).

While TCIP is primarily rooted in Chinese aesthetic traditions, the integration of Western music aesthetics introduces a complex layer of cultural-aesthetic hybridity. The concepts of autonomy and heteronomy in music aesthetics were first proposed by the German musicologist Felix Gatz (Bujic, 1988). Autonomy and heteronomy in music aesthetics conflict with the views on the relationship between content and form (Lütticken, 2014). Music form in autonomy theory refers to the structural framework that organizes and arranges various musical elements, aiming to effectively convey musical expression (Tan, 2015). It is characterized by regularity and contrast (Chao & Khomkrich, 2020; Yang & Saffle, 2017; Li, 2010; Man, 2015). However, Kivy (1990) argues that aesthetic satisfaction in music comes from focusing on how the interaction between form and content affects musical works in the arts. In TCIP, autonomy is associated with form because it emphasizes the inner self-discipline and management of the performer (Clarke, 2012).

In contrast, heteronomy highlights the influence of external factors and guidance on musical performance (Frosini, 2021). In heteronomous aesthetics, content refers to the expression of emotions, cultural meanings, ideas, or external reality reflected in a musical work (Staubmann, 2022). Unlike the focus on internal structure and techniques in autonomous aesthetics, heteronomous aesthetics emphasizes the interaction between music and external influences (Benson, 2006). The tension between form and content reflects the larger discourse surrounding autonomy and heteronomy in aesthetics. Proponents of form-based aesthetics argue for the intrinsic unity and independence of form and content, whereas advocates of content-based aesthetics contend that these elements can be separated and suggest a reliance on external factors (Hulatt, 2013).

In TCIP, autonomy and heteronomy are not opposite but can complement each other (Liu, 2024). Herzog (1995) posits that melody embodies autonomy through its formal refinement, emphasizing the structural coherence of the musical piece. In the context of TCIP, this concept is reflected in the role of melody in maintaining the unity and integrity of the performance (Nzewi & Nzewi, 2007). The aesthetic principle of autonomy is evident in the prioritization of form. Bogue (2006) highlights the theory of heteronomy, in which harmony, including mode and timbre, conveys cultural and emotional content.

The debate between harmony and melody can be seen as the debate between autonomy and heteronomy (Paddison, 1991). The form (autonomy) and content (heteronomy) of music aesthetics, mainly involve several thoughts rooted in Western music aesthetics (Man, 2015; Shu & Feng, 2007; Whitcomb et al., 2011). Rameau, a composer and theorist who specialized in harmony, emphasized that the laws of instrumental music forms marked by harmony were objective (Papadopoulos, 2014). However, German music

theorist Matheson believes that among the many elements of instrumental music, melody is the most important (Kania, 2007). Rousseau also supported this attitude, elaborated on the theoretical viewpoint of melody, and believed that melody is the foundation of instrumental music, with harmony serving only as an auxiliary means (Scott, 2006).

2.3. Empirical Study of Chinese and Western Aesthetics

To understand the practical integration of Chinese and Western aesthetics, empirical studies provide essential insights (Odena, 2012). These studies involve qualitative and quantitative interviews with performers and students, shedding light on how these aesthetic principles are applied and perceived in practice.

Lowry and Wolf (1988) conducted a study exploring the adaptation of Western aesthetic principles into TCIP. The research involved interviews with 33 musicians, revealing that Western concepts of autonomy and heteronomy influence the creative decisions of performers while maintaining traditional Chinese aesthetics. The findings show that performers navigate a balance between personal artistic freedom and adherence to traditional practices.

Wang and Kantasiri (2024) explored music performance approaches through questionnaires with 75 undergraduate music students. The study highlighted that students benefit from exposure to both Western and Chinese aesthetic theories, as it enhances their interpretative skills and broadens their artistic perspectives. However, students also expressed challenges in reconciling these diverse aesthetic frameworks within their performance practice.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Research Design

This research uses qualitative research design through narrative inquiry and semi-structured interview. A narrative inquiry was conducted with four seasoned music scholars, each possessing over 25 years of expertise in the field of music aesthetics and TCIP. The objective of this inquiry was to gather their insights and practical applications regarding the integration of Chinese and Western aesthetic principles in TCIP. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with eight undergraduate music majors. The purpose of these interviews was to examine the students' understanding of music aesthetics, particularly their approaches to TCIP.

3.2. Participants Sampling and Methods

Snowball sampling was used for the narrative inquiry to identify niche participants with specific expertise in music aesthetics and TCIP. This method was effective in reaching individuals with unique insights not readily accessible through other means (Cohen & Arieli, 2011; Sadler et al., 2010). The narrative inquiry included four participants: two music scholars with extensive experience in music aesthetics and TCIP, and two performers specialized in sheng and erhu. Purposive sampling was employed for the semi-structured interviews to ensure that students with relevant backgrounds from music universities were selected, aligning with the study's objectives of exploring their

perspectives. Eight undergraduate music students specializing in TCIP were chosen for the study.

Both narrative inquiry and semi-structured interviews were conducted online via Tencent Meeting and offline in private settings. The narrative inquiry focused on participants' views of aesthetic principles in TCIP, while the semi-structured interviews followed an interview guide but retained flexibility in follow-up questions. Each interview lasted 30 to 60 minutes. Data from both methods were analyzed using thematic analysis with NVivo software for coding. Initial transcription was done using Microsoft Word, followed by open coding to identify themes in the data. The thematic structure was refined through cross-coding to compare responses across participants, establishing commonalities and differences.

4. Results

The findings from the narrative inquiry with music scholars (n=4) and semi-structured interviews with music major students (n=8) concerning TCIP are presented. Through thematic analysis, key themes emerged, highlighting diverse perspectives on the aesthetic principles shaping TCIP.

4.1. Results from Music Scholars

From the narrative inquiry, several themes and codes relevant to this study were summarized (see [Table 1](#)).

Table 1: Scholars' Perspectives in TCIP

Theme	Codes
<i>He, Qing, and Qi</i> guide TCIP	Harmonious development Harmony and balance Expression of emotion Emotional experience Flow and variation of breath Breathing control Fluidity of music
Confucianism seeks Harmony, Taoism values Nature	Harmonious temperament Harmonic structure Connected with nature
Content (Heteronomy) is crucial in TCIP	Conductor embodies heteronomy Scores reflect the composer's intent Music shaped by social norms
Emotional Significance of Melody in TCIP	Music guides interpretation in TCIP Melody evokes stronger emotions

4.1.1. *He, Qing, and Qi* guide TCIP

Music scholars assert that the Confucian and Taoist aesthetic concepts of *He*, *Qing*, and *Qi* play a guiding role in TCIP, encompassing the harmonious development of musical structure, emotional expression, and breathing techniques in performance. M1 and M2 contend that *He* is understood as a principle of harmony, balance, and unity within Confucian and Taoist musical aesthetics, which can be reflected in the structure of instrumental music. As M1 explains:

Performers might want to think about using the idea of He when choosing and shaping the structure of a piece. This could mean organizing the sections in a way that they flow and connect smoothly, so everything feels balanced and not jarring or out of place.

M3 and M4 believe that *Qing* conveys emotional experience in TCIP. They assert that by controlling the volume and intensity of the music, performers can express the intensity of emotions. For example, a gentle pianissimo can express soft and quiet emotions, while a strong volume can convey intense or exciting feelings. Regarding *Qi*, M2 provides the example of the dizi work *Autumn Moon on A Calm Lake*, arguing that *Qi* is a crucial concept in dizi performance. *Qi* involves the performer's mastery of breathing techniques and how these techniques influence musical expression. Variations in the depth, length, and intensity of breathing can articulate the breathing sensation of the music and present dynamic musical characteristics.

4.1.2. Confucianism seeks Harmony, Taoism values Nature

M1 and M3 assert that, within Confucian thought, music is regarded as a significant means to convey morality, educate human nature, and harmonize emotions. Confucianism emphasizes the appropriate arrangement of musical notes and intervals (using consonant intervals), believing that it will reflect the proper order and principles of human nature. M4 suggests that using well-balanced musical intervals is believed to evoke resonance within individuals, stimulate positive emotions, and foster inner tranquility and comfort. M2 perceived that: "Through reasonable temperament and harmony, music can convey moral concepts of integrity, kindness, and harmony, emotionally guide individuals towards positive growth and development." From the viewpoint of M1, the harmonic structure of music in Confucianism should reflect a sense of balance. The combination of different notes and vocal parts should be harmonious, avoiding discordance to maintain an overall sense of balance in the music.

The Taoism aesthetic thoughts in TCIP are connected with nature and can better convey the artistic conception of nature. M1 and M2 assumed that performers can use skills to imitate the sounds of nature, such as simulating birdsong, hydroacoustic, and wind sound. Scholar M3 also believed that Taoism aesthetics emphasizes the combination of movement and stillness, believing that tranquility contains dynamic beauty.

4.1.3. Content (Heteronomy) is crucial in TCIP

Both M2 and M4 emphasized that heteronomous content in TCIP relevant to the impact of external rules or conventions on performers, which shapes how they express the music. M1 highlighted the significance of external influences, particularly the role of conductors in TCIP ensembles, where the conductor's baton and body language guide performers in adjusting speed, intensity, and expression for a cohesive performance, which in a way reflect how the conductor's cultural upbringings influence the music interpretation.

M1 and M4 noted that social aesthetic concepts, values, and norms influence the creation and interpretation of music within TCIP, as it exists in a dynamic relationship with society. This interaction can encompass social, cultural, political, and economic factors that impact how music is performed and understood. M3 pointed out that certain musical styles may be viewed differently at various times, with some considered

inappropriate or controversial while others gain popularity. M2 and M3 agreed that the evaluation of specific music styles can shift due to changes in social attitudes, reflecting the evolving nature of music about societal changes within TCIP.

4.1.4. Emotional Significance of Melody in TCIP

M1 and M3 posited that in TCIP, melody serves as a primary vehicle for conveying emotions, utilizing elements such as pitch, interval changes, and note duration. Both M1 and M2 stressed that melody establishes a direct emotional connection with the audience, making it a standout and recognizable aspect of TCIP. M2 noted that melody acts as the principal means of conveying the theme and emotional depth of the music, thus fostering a stronger resonance with listeners. In contrast, M3 and M4 acknowledged that while harmony enriches the musical texture and adds layers of complexity, its impact on emotional expression in TCIP is more indirect. They argued that harmony complements the melody but does not evoke emotions directly, highlighting the unique role of melody in creating emotional responses within the context of TCIP.

4.2. Results from Music Major Students

Table 2 illustrates the themes with their corresponding codes.

Table 2: Students’ Perspectives in TCIP

Theme	Codes
<i>Qi</i> shapes TCIP expression	Emotional shifts Musical understanding Performer-audience connection
<i>Nature</i> embodies TCIP	Technique refines natural performance Timbre mimics nature’s sounds Smooth transitions ensure natural flow
Melody dominates TCIP	The composition of melody demands expert playing techniques Melody expresses emotion Balance melody with harmony

4.2.1. Qi shapes emotional rendition and performative demeanor in TCIP

Qi is an important and complex concept in Confucian aesthetics, describing an inner force, spiritual quality, and emotional shifts. S2 and S4 considered that in TCIP, *Qi* influences the expressiveness of music by reflecting the performer’s emotional state and overall musical expression. This perspective aligns with S3 and S7, who view *Qi* as a means of expressing emotion through adjustments in tempo, timbre, and volume.

S6, a pipa major student, also believes that *Qi* can reflect the emotional shifts of the performer during the performance, who describes the experience with the pipa piece:

When I play Moonlight on The Spring River, I see how Qi really affects how I express emotions. For example, in the delicate parts where the music mimics the gentle flow of water, I focus on slow, controlled breathing and light, precise plucking to show a calm and reflective mood... In the more intense parts, like towards the end of the piece, I use deeper breaths and stronger plucking to convey urgency and strong emotions...

Using Qi this way helps me bring those emotional shifts to life in my performance.

S5 and S7 suggested that *Qi* may influence a performer's facial demeanor and expressions, which could enhance the connection with the audience. For example, S5 noted that in the erhu work Snow Mountain Soul Sculpture, the coordination of facial expressions might help engage the audience more deeply with the music. S7 observed that in guzheng performances, facial expressions like smiles or contemplative looks often accompany the music, which may enhance the overall presentation. S1 and S4 noted that while the understanding of music and *Qi* helps performers in conveying subtleties through their performance, facial expressions are not a direct mechanism for affecting musical output but may contribute to the audience's perception of the performance.

4.2.2. Nature embodies TCIP

Imitating sounds in nature is one of the common devices used in music compositions. Concerning that, S2 and S4 believed that by choosing specific performance techniques, performers could restore or simulate the sounds of nature in music. S7 described the motivation behind imitating natural sounds in the guzheng piece:

In Listen To The Rain On The Mountain, the score is marked with a strong intensity, and I will play the passage according to my own associations... I will create the effect of raindrops hitting and stroking the mountains by changing the strength and speed of sweeping the strings. I also use portamento and vibrato to imitate the natural sounds of raindrops and running water. I think this way of playing can make the music richer and convey deeper emotions.

S3, S5, and S6 suggested that the pursuit of a natural state is seen as the highest form of art in Taoist aesthetics. In TCIP, this is evident in the performer's efforts to achieve smooth transitions in musical expression and avoid abrupt elements. Similarly, S4 emphasized the importance of avoiding unnecessary complexity and excessive changes in expression, advocating for simplicity and naturalness instead. Techniques like soft timbre and moderate volume changes are used to create a more stable and natural sound. Therefore, S1 and S8 argued that these Taoist ideas about nature are reflected in the performer's techniques and expressive abilities, aiming for smoothness and improving the overall performance.

4.2.3. Melody dominates TCIP

A melody is a series of organically linked notes that form a musical motif through a combination of time value and pitch. S2 considered that in TCIP, the melody is often one of the key elements that leads the listener's emotions and conveys expression. However, S1 argued that performers interpret the melody through the volume, timbre, pitch, and the emotion expressed in the notes. Skillful interpretation of melody in performance can demonstrate a performer's understanding of music and performance skills.

Musical expression could be presented through the performer's special treatment of the melody. S5 and S6 believed that the performer could make the melody more dynamic and expressive by adjusting the strength of the notes and changes in volume. S7

mentioned the concepts of melody in autonomy theory and harmony in heteronomy theory:

In TCIP, I think melody is the foundation of autonomy, it often makes me feel a greater sense of freedom. It allows me flexibility in interpretation... Harmony is like a dialogue, being more collaborative and influenced by the surrounding environment.

Similarly, S3 said: “Although the melody is the core of the music, performers also need to pay attention to the balance between melody and harmony to ensure that the melody remains harmonious with other instruments”. This perspective aligns with Western aesthetics, which emphasizes the important relationship between melody and harmony in creating a cohesive musical experience. In Western musical traditions, the interaction between these two elements is crucial, as harmony supports the melody and adds richness to the overall sound.

5. Discussion

The findings from both music scholars and undergraduate students underscore the influence of Chinese aesthetic principles on TCIP. Lee (2023) highlights the importance of *He*, emphasizing that it plays a crucial role not only in the technical aspects of performance but also in shaping the interpretive and emotional qualities of the music. This is corroborated by participants in the study, who acknowledge that *He* informs their approach to integrating traditional musical elements with their interpretations. The balance between form and emotion, guided by *He*, is thus perceived as a fundamental aspect of TCIP.

The concept of *Qing*, as elaborated by Liu (2014), highlights the centrality of emotional depth and expressiveness in TCIP. The findings of this study affirm this view, with both scholars and students recognizing the pivotal role emotions play in their performances. For undergraduate students, *Qing* serves as a bridge between technical proficiency and the emotional expression of a musical work, allowing them to articulate the underlying affective dimensions of the music. Music scholars, conversely, emphasize that *Qing* is not merely an unrefined emotional expression but a cultivated and disciplined aspect of performance, requiring a nuanced understanding of both the music and its cultural context.

Both music scholars and students underscored that *Qi* is not solely a theoretical construct but a practical element that influences the performer’s emotional state and technical delivery. *Qi* is manifested in music through the performer’s inner emotions and character (David, 2009). By mastering *Qi*, performers infuse their emotions and virtues into the music, expressing the emotional depth and moral qualities valued in Confucianism (Szczepanski, 2016). Scholars have observed that this control of *Qi* not only facilitates emotional expression but also aligns with Confucian ideals of self-cultivation and moral integrity through musical performance. Students noted that their control over *Qi* enables them to channel their emotions more effectively, resulting in performances that embody deeper emotional resonance and cultural significance.

Through interviews with music scholars and music undergraduate students, it can be seen that Western aesthetic thoughts of autonomy and heteronomy play a significant role in TCIP. Scholars emphasized that heteronomy, defined by external factors such as

social norms, cultural values, and the role of conductors, plays a pivotal role in shaping musical interpretation. M1 and M4 noted how conductors' guidance directly impacts performers' actions regarding tempo, dynamics, and expression. This reflects the idea of heteronomy in music, where performers' actions and interpretations are influenced by external elements, such as the conductor's guidance. As conductors set the overarching vision for a piece, performers adjust their playing to match the desired emotional and technical expression (Cottrell, 2017). This guidance reflects social and cultural influences that impact musical expression, as the conductor brings their interpretative background, often informed by contextual factors (Garnett, 2017). The findings indicate that external influences not only guide the performers but also reflect how cultural upbringing informs musical interpretation.

Students emphasized the significance of melody as a central element in TCIP, reflecting principles of autonomy theory. S7 described melody as the foundation of autonomy, highlighting the personal expression that performers experience when interpreting melodic phrases. This viewpoint is consistent with the argument presented by Herzog (1995) that melody serves as a crucial means of expressing emotions. While both scholars and students recognized the complementary role of harmony in enhancing the musical texture, however, its emotional impact was perceived as secondary to that of melody. As pointed out by Kania (2007), melody is recognized as the most essential component among the various elements of instrumental music. Thus, the findings indicate that Western aesthetics of autonomy and heteronomy significantly shape how both scholars and students engage with TCIP, particularly in balancing individual expression with external influences.

6. Conclusion

The influence of Confucianism and Taoism principles is evident in the emphasis on harmony, emotional expression, and connection to nature. Scholars pointed out *He*, *Qing*, and *Qi* guide performers in achieving a balanced musical expression that reflects both emotional depth and nature. The emotional significance of melody in TCIP aligns with the idea that music serves as a medium for moral and emotional guidance. The scholars' perspectives emphasize that the structure of music should embody a sense of balance and unity, aligning with broader cultural values that stress moral development and emotional harmony.

Western autonomy and heteronomy aesthetic principles were acknowledged by student participants. The autonomy of melody is viewed as a vital aspect that allows performers a degree of interpretative freedom, while harmony functions as a complementary dialogue that enhances the overall musical experience. This reflects a broader Western aesthetic emphasis on the relationship between melody and harmony, where both elements are crucial for TCIP. The students' insights illustrate a dynamic interplay between individual expression and adherence to established conventions, suggesting that Western aesthetics can enhance the understanding of TCIP.

In conclusion, this research illuminates the interaction between Chinese and Western aesthetic traditions within TCIP, providing contributions to both theoretical scholarship and practical execution. Both groups of participants emphasized the emotional connection that music fosters between performers and audiences. The scholars noted the importance of emotional expression through melody, while students highlighted how *Qi* is not only a part of Chinese music aesthetics, but also influences the performers. This

highlights the understanding of music aesthetics as a means of emotional communication, regardless of cultural origin. Furthermore, the integration of nature within TCIP, as emphasized by both scholars and students, underscores a commonality between Chinese and Western aesthetics. The desire to express natural beauty in TCIP links both traditions, even though their approaches were through different philosophical views.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Universiti Malaya Research Ethics Committee (UMREC) with the reference number UM.TNC2/UMREC_2843. To prevent any potential harm to participants during the interviews, strict confidentiality measures were implemented throughout the data collection and analysis process. All interview data and research materials were securely handled to safeguard the names and identities of the participants, ensuring their privacy and protection.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest concerning the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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