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REVIEW ARTICLE

Comparative Study on Chinese and Western Aesthetics in Music Performance

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ABSTRACT

This study conducts a comparative analysis of Chinese and Western aesthetic principles in music performance, focusing on Confucian and Taoist aesthetic concepts (*He, Qing, Qi*) and Western notions of autonomy and heteronomy. Through qualitative content analysis of 61 scholarly texts, the research examines how these philosophies shape performance practices. Findings reveal that Confucian aesthetics emphasizes He as a tool for moral education and social cohesion, requiring performers to balance technical precision with ethical expression. Taoist aesthetics prioritizes spontaneity and natural flow (*Qi*), aligning music with cosmic harmony. In contrast, Western autonomy theory treats music as self-referential, valuing structural integrity, while heteronomy links music to external emotions and narratives. The study highlights significant differences, with Chinese aesthetics merging music with philosophical and societal principles, while Western aesthetics alternates between formalism and contextualism. The research adds to global music studies by exploring how cultural paradigms shape performers' interpretative perspectives in music performance. This cross-disciplinary dialogue links Chinese and Western aesthetic theories, establishing a basis for music performance informed by cultural perspectives.

Contribution/Originality: This study compares Chinese aesthetic principles (*He, Qing, Qi*) grounded in Confucian and Taoist philosophy with Western autonomy and heteronomy theories in music performance. The analysis of 61 scholarly texts identifies distinct approaches to musical expression between these traditions, formulating comparative perspectives for cross-cultural music aesthetics research.

1. Introduction

Chinese music aesthetics, embedded in the country's cultural and philosophical heritage, has developed over thousands of years, influenced by the convergence of music, politics,

and ethics (Huang, 2022). Originating in the Spring and Autumn Period, Chinese music aesthetics was influenced by the philosophical thoughts of Confucianism and Taoism, which linked music to moral cultivation, societal harmony, and spiritual elevation (Shu & Feng, 2007).

Confucian aesthetics, which emphasizes social order, morality, and virtue, has deeply shaped Chinese music. For Confucius, music was not just an art but a means of education and governance (Shusterman, 2009). Music was believed to regulate human desires, aligning them with the moral order of the universe, thereby promoting social stability. The performance of music reflects one's moral character, with its aesthetic value grounded in its ability to shape the individual and society (Gu, 2016).

In contrast, Taoist aesthetics, articulated by *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*, focuses more on the individual's alignment with the natural world and the *Tao* (*道*) (Brindley, 2007). Taoism values spontaneity, simplicity, and harmony with nature, viewing music as a natural expression that should not be imposed by human intervention. For *Laozi*, the pure sounds of the universe represented the highest form of music (Wertz, 2007). Taoist aesthetics emphasizes the pursuit of inner peace and spiritual clarity, with music serving as a means of transcending the self and connecting with the cosmos (Ivanhoe, 2003).

The philosophical foundations of Confucianism and Taoism have shaped Chinese music aesthetics, impacting both theoretical evolution and its practical implementation in performance (Chen et al., 2018). These two schools offer distinct yet complementary views on the purpose and value of music, shaping how music is created and appreciated in Chinese culture. Confucianism emphasizes the ethical and social functions of music, while Taoism highlights its spiritual qualities (Wang, 2019).

In the modern era, Chinese music aesthetics has been influenced by global music traditions and the fusion of Chinese and Western musical forms. This has prompted scholars to explore how ancient aesthetic principles can be adapted to contemporary practices, bridging historical Chinese traditions with modern artistic expressions (Chen, 2017; Kroier, 2012). This evolving landscape invites further inquiry into how music can embody the values and aspirations of both the past and present (Burnard, 2012; Hodgkinson, 2016).

Western music aesthetics, originating from ancient Greek philosophy, has influenced the understanding and practice of music in Western cultures. Originating from philosophers like Heraclitus, Plato, and Aristotle, early Greek ideas about music intertwined art, philosophy, and society. Music was viewed as a reflection of the cosmos, connecting the individual with divine and moral order (Cox, 1990; West, 1971). Plato, in particular, emphasized the social role of music, viewing it as a tool for moral and civic education rather than entertainment (Yob, 2006). Aristotle expanded on this by linking music to human emotions, asserting its ability to shape and regulate emotional states (Woerther, 2008). In addition, Pythagoras contributed significantly to the mathematical understanding of music, particularly through his exploration of musical intervals and their relationship to numbers. His work established the basis for Western music theory, showing that the structure of music could be explained through scientific principles (Juslin, 2010). This intersection of philosophy, science, and music established a framework that would shape Western music aesthetics for centuries.

Throughout history, Western music aesthetics evolved in response to shifting cultural and intellectual movements. During the Renaissance and Enlightenment, music became increasingly recognized as both an art form and a means of personal expression (Grenier, 1990). In the Romantic era, music was seen as a vehicle for expressing human emotions and individualism, further distancing itself from utilitarian views of music as a mere social function. In the modern era, Western music aesthetics is closely tied to broader cultural and social forces. The commodification of music and its mass production in the 20th century prompted discussions on its role in society and its potential to reflect or challenge prevailing ideologies (Lebaka, 2019). Moreover, the increasing globalization of music has led to a reevaluation of Western aesthetics, integrating non-Western influences and broadening the scope of musical understanding (Helmreich, 2015; Morley, 2014).

In the context of this comparative study, understanding Western music aesthetics is crucial for exploring how music performance interacts with or diverges from these ideas. The focus on music's moral, emotional, and social roles in Western thought provides a contrasting perspective to Chinese aesthetics, which is based on Confucian and Taoist philosophies. This comparison will provide a deeper understanding of the contrasting roles and interpretations of music within these two cultural traditions, especially regarding performance practices and their philosophical foundations.

1.1. Research Objectives

This study aims to investigate how music performance embodies aesthetic principles from both Chinese philosophy, specifically Confucianism and Taoism, and Western thought, with a particular focus on the notions of autonomy and heteronomy.

1.2. Research Question

The following questions shaped the direction of this research:

i. In what ways are Confucian and Taoist aesthetic principles manifested in music performance?
ii. How do Western aesthetic concepts, such as autonomy and heteronomy, interact with or contrast against Chinese aesthetic principles in music performance?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Confucianism and Taoism in the Context of Chinese Music Aesthetic Thoughts

Confucian and Taoist aesthetics, tied to philosophical and ethical thought, focus on human existence, emotion, and spiritual cultivation (Chen et al., 2018; Jullien, 2004; Liu, 2014). Their contrasting views laid the foundation for Chinese music aesthetics.

Confucian aesthetics integrates music with ethics, emphasizing the cultivation of morality and inner harmony through ritual and music. Music expresses emotions and regulates the mind, while ritual restrains behavior and desire (Huang, 2011; Li, 2006). The ideal sound, *Shi Yin* (*适音*), reflects balance and moderation, aligning music with social order (Jo, 2017). Confucius viewed music as a tool for moral education, with its value determined by conformity to ritual norms (Chen, 2012; Seligman et al., 2008). Thus, music becomes a means for self-cultivation, ethical refinement, and social harmony (Bell, 2010; Walker, 2007).

Taoist aesthetics emphasizes naturalness, spontaneity, and unity with the universe. Music is viewed as a medium to express Tao, aligning the human spirit with the cosmic order through the harmony of *Yin* (*阴*) and *Yang* (*阳*) (Jullien, 2004; Culham & Lin, 2020). Unlike Confucianism, Taoism values unprocessed, natural sound over artificial refinement, advocating detachment from desire and external forms (Chen, 1973; Bender, 1990; Guorong, 2016). Music serves as a spiritual practice that fosters inner clarity and universal connection, encouraging individuals to transcend social constructs and return to simplicity (Kohn, 1992; Ho, 2022).

Following these principles of Confucian and Taoist aesthetics, further analysis is needed to understand the key concepts informing their musical perspectives. Notions such as *He* (*和*), *Qing* (*情*), and *Qi* (*气*) serve as key elements that connect philosophical thought with musical expression. They reveal how these concepts shape the aesthetics of traditional Chinese music in both philosophies.

2.1.1. He (和) in Confucian and Taoist Aesthetic Thought: Harmony and Balance

By identifying *He* as a shared value in Confucian and Taoist traditions, Low (2011) provides a theoretical perspective that supports further inquiry into its relevance to early Chinese musical aesthetics. In Confucianism, *He* refers to an ideal state achieved through harmonious music that fosters social harmony, moral cultivation, and political clarity (Lam, 2002). Confucian aesthetics emphasizes the role of music in educating emotions and promoting societal peace (Chen et al., 2018). Music, in this context, embodies a universal emotion shaped by reason, guiding individuals toward collective harmony (Yang, 2024).

In Taoism, *He* is linked to the natural balance of the world, emphasizing the peaceful state of mind it induces in listeners (Zhou & Yu, 2024). Taoist aesthetics rejects the direct connection between music and emotion, viewing music as a manifestation of harmony that resonates with nature's laws (Dahlhaus, 1991; Becker, 2004). In Taoism, *He* is not only the unity of tone and rhythm but also symbolizes a deeper connection between humans, nature, and the universe (Torrance, 1994; Steben, 2005).

2.1.2. Qing (情) in Confucian and Taoist Aesthetic Thought: Emotion and Expression

In Confucianism, *Qing* is an essential element of music that reflects the principles of *Ren* (*仁*) and *Li* (*礼*), serving both as a medium for moral education and as a tool for cultivating social harmony (Chen, 2012). Music, in this context, plays a pivotal role in balancing emotion and reason, helping individuals refine their inner moral character while fostering harmony within society (Lee, 2021; Wen, 2020). Confucian aesthetics emphasizes the fusion of emotion and form in music, viewing *Qing* as a driving force that allows people to engage with life and ethical values through artistic expression (Dyson, 2014; Joshi et al., 2011). This process is central to creating an artistic conception that integrates emotion, reason, and spirit (Liu, 2013; Zhao, 2015).

In contrast, Taoism approaches *Qing* as the expression of natural harmony, emphasizing the free flow of emotions by the laws of nature (Xiangrui, 1983; Oldstone-Moore, 2003). Taoist aesthetics celebrates the sound of nature as the highest form of beauty, whereas *Qing* connects the finite to the infinite, allowing individuals to transcend earthly limitations and experience the unity of the universe (Qi, 2024). Taoism encourages a form of emotional expression that resonates with universal harmony, promoting a

harmonious balance between the finite and infinite and evoking profound emotional experiences (Joy & Sherry, 2003; Peerenboom, 1987). Through this perspective, Taoism seeks a deep connection between individuals and the natural world.

2.1.3. Qi (气) in Confucian and Taoist Aesthetic Thought: Vital Energy

In Confucian aesthetics, *Qi* serves as the internal force that connects the performer's emotions, skills, and moral values. It controls and guides emotional expression in a restrained and refined manner, aligning with Confucian ideals of balance and propriety (Chen, 2012; Hu, 2024). *Qi* also functions as the foundation of instrumental expressiveness, especially in traditional Chinese instruments like the erhu, where breath control directly influences tone and emotional nuance (Lian, 2019; Hakanpää, 2022). Thus, *Qi* is essential to both technical execution and ethical cultivation in Confucian performance practice (Li, 2024).

Taoist aesthetics emphasizes the natural and unforced flow of *Qi*, viewing it as the life force that links all things with the *Tao* (Bai & Cohen, 2008). In music performance, *Qi* should circulate effortlessly to create a calm and ethereal musical atmosphere. Rather than controlling *Qi*, the performer allows it to flow organically, achieving unity with nature and cultivating a tranquil spiritual state (Clippinger & Gracenin, 2016; Zhao, 2024). Through this flow, music becomes a medium for expressing emptiness, quietude, and harmony with the universe (Man, 2019; Zhang & Rose, 2001).

2.2. Autonomy and Heteronomy in the Context of Western Music Aesthetic Thoughts

In Western music aesthetics, form and content are central and inseparable elements that together define the artistic value of music (Scruton, 2018; Sonnett, 2004). Form refers to the structural organization of musical elements such as melody, rhythm, and harmony, while content conveys the emotions, ideas, and spiritual meanings perceived by listeners (Berry, 1987; Adorno & Gillespie, 1993). The form serves as the vehicle for expressing content, and content gives vitality to form (Wishart, 1996). Their unity enables music to connect technique with emotion and structure with meaning (Hills, 2017). Content cannot exist independently of form, as form materializes the artistic message (Spencer & Temko, 1994; Brandt, 2006). Western music often emphasizes regularity and contrast in form and focuses on melodic and harmonic aspects of content (Chao & Khomkrich, 2020; Tan, 2015; Yang & Saffle, 2017).

From a philosophical perspective, Western aesthetics also emphasizes the interdependence of form and content. Hegel and Wallace (1975) argue that form and content transform into one another, and that true aesthetic value lies in their unity. Formalist thinkers like Hanslick (1891) and Stravinsky (1958) view music as autonomous and deny its expressive capacity, emphasizing structure and sound as sources of beauty. In contrast, Dahlhaus (1991), Koelsch (2005), Juslin and Sloboda (2011) argue that music expresses universal human emotions through sound, making it a spiritual and emotional art. This tension between structure and expression forms the foundation of Western aesthetic thought in music.

2.2.1. Criteria for Distinguishing Autonomy and Heteronomy in Music Aesthetics

There are four criteria for distinguishing autonomy and heteronomy. The first one explains the source of the principles and rules of music; the second one is the essence of music; the third one is the content suggested by music; the fourth one analyzes the application of musical images in autonomy and heteronomy (Cook & Everist, 1999). Overall, the above perspective explores the criterion for distinguishing autonomy and heteronomy in music by analyzing their principles, essence, cues, and image in a detailed comparative approach (Liu, 2019). Table 1 summarizes the key differences between musical autonomy and heteronomy in terms of these aspects.

Table 1: Criteria for Assessing Non-Musical Content in Music (Liu, 2019)

	Autonomy	**Heteronomy**
Principles of music	Music is something of its own.	Music is something external.
Essence of music	Music is within the sound and structure itself.	The essence of music lies beyond sound, in elements such as emotions, narratives, or symbolic meanings.
Musical cues	Music does not imply anything other than sound; Music is only equivalent to itself.	Music suggests something other than sound, representing a reality that is non-musical (content aesthetics); Music is the expression and visualization of something other than sound (incarnation aesthetics).
Musical image	Music reshapes something that existed without music, or gives it a new image; Music invents, composes, and creates something new, unique, and incomparable, which is only equal to itself and can only be understood from its perspective.	Music is the processing and shaping of something already existing in reality (content aesthetics); Music is the new visualization and incarnation (incarnation aesthetics).

The criterion for distinguishing autonomy and heteronomy, if explained more simply, is to see whether they admit that the music expresses non-musical content such as thoughts and emotions (Stecker, 2013). Dufrenne (1973) regarded heteronomy as encompassing both content aesthetics and incarnation aesthetics. He argued that the former primarily manifests in the relationship between content and form, while the latter is evident in the relationship between essence and phenomenon. The difference between the two is that for content, music is equivalent to emotion, while incarnation aesthetics believes that music is emotion (Harré, 1997).

2.2.2. The Debate on Musical Representational Function

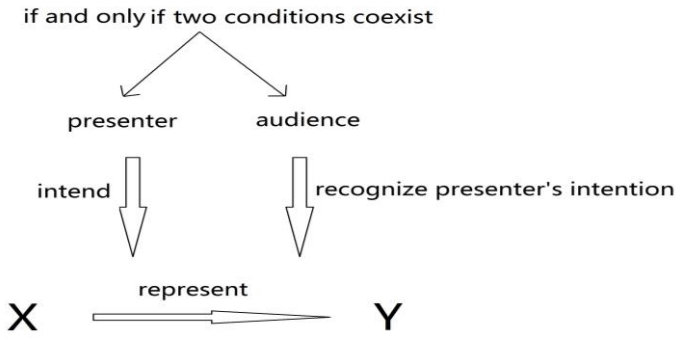
Autonomous aesthetics asserts that music is self-contained, referring only to its sonic structure without implying meanings beyond sound (Holopainen, 2012; Scherzinger, 1998; Swinkin, 2015). Risset (2003) argues that musical content consists solely of sound. Bonds (1991) and Dodd (2000) emphasize that understanding a musical work requires analyzing how content interacts with form, while Meyer (1973) highlights that structure conveys musical emotion. Zbikowski (2008) further insists that music is not a form of

expression, language, or metaphor, but a purely sonic art. Thus, form contrasts sharply with content, with Gatz (1941) claiming autonomy denies any external content in music.

Carroll (2001) defines analytical aesthetics as identifying the necessary and sufficient conditions of aesthetic concepts. This framework supports the evaluation of artistic phenomena and is applied to theories of musical representation (Taylor, 2016). A central question is whether music qualifies as representational art (Scruton, 1994). Analytical aestheticians often argue that music is an expressive auditory form rather than a representational visual one.

Carroll (2012) proposes that representation occurs when a creator intends X to represent Y, and the audience recognizes this intention (see Figure 1). He distinguishes between unconditional representation, which requires no cultural context (e.g., visual recognition in *Mona Lisa*), and conditional representation, which depends on contextual cues, such as programmatic texts guiding the listener in a symphony (Lowe, 2007). This process is illustrated in Figure 1, adapted from Carroll's (2012) explanatory model.

Figure 1: Model of Representational Conditions



Source: Carroll (2012)

3. Research Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design informed by interpretivism to examine how Chinese and Western aesthetic philosophies shape music performance. Interpretivism emphasizes cultural context and subjective meaning, making it suitable for analyzing aesthetic expressions in music (Chowdhury, 2014). The study uses an illustrative comparison method comprising vertical, horizontal, and integrated comparisons to explore historical evolution, theoretical contrasts, and cross-cultural influences in aesthetic thoughts.

3.2. Research Approach

An inductive approach underpins the research, allowing conclusions to emerge from detailed analysis rather than testing pre-existing hypotheses. This approach supports the comparative investigation of Confucianism, Taoism, and the Western concepts of autonomy and heteronomy in performance practice. Data were primarily derived from content analysis of secondary literature to explore the interpretation and application of aesthetic principles in musical contexts.

3.3. Data Selection and Analytical Approach

To address the research questions, this study conducted purposive information retrieval from China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) and Google Scholar databases to collect 17 music theory books, 20 critical articles, and 24 academic journal papers related to Chinese and Western aesthetic traditions. Selection criteria ensured representation across historical periods and musical genres to capture broad philosophical and performative perspectives. Data were analyzed using content analysis, categorizing key themes aligned with the research questions. Comparative tables were constructed to identify how each aesthetic tradition manifests in music performance.

4. Results

The results of this comparative study are based on content analysis of key texts on Chinese and Western aesthetics related to music performance. Chinese aesthetics emphasizes ideas such as *He*, *Qing*, and *Qi*, rooted in Confucian and Taoist thought. These findings reflect the different cultural and philosophical views that shape musical understanding and performance. In contrast, Western perspectives focus on autonomy and heteronomy, the relationship between form and content, and debates on whether music has representational meaning.

4.1. Result from Chinese Confucian and Taoist Aesthetic Thought

This research explores the influence of Confucianism and Taoism on music performance and music aesthetics. It examines how these philosophies, particularly the concepts of *He*, *Qing*, and *Qi*, shape the expressive techniques and unique aesthetic qualities of the music.

4.1.1. Confucian and Taoist Views on He (和)

The aesthetic concept *He* emphasizes neutrality and harmony and advocates for balance in music, neither excessive nor lacking (Chen & Hao, 2018). In music performance, *He* suggests that intensity, melody, and rhythm should align with listeners' senses to create aesthetic pleasure (Tu, 1998). Lee (2023) highlighted the connection between music performance and aesthetics, focusing on the interplay between strings, fingers, and notes. This aligns with Confucian and Taoist aesthetics, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Comparison of Confucian and Taoist Aesthetics in Music Performance

	Confucianism Aesthetics	**Taoism Aesthetics**
Aesthetic Thought of *He* in Music Performance (Du, 2004)	The form of music expression should be consistent with the connotation of music (Cook, 2001; Meyer, 2008); Music has an educational effect (Du, 2004).	Performance should grasp the connotation of the music so that the performance is closer to the intention of the original work (Kivy, 2018).
Emotional expression of *He* in Music Performance (Du, 2004)	Music can make people have emotional experiences (Dibben, 2004); Music is an expression of emotions (Robinson & Hatten, 2012).	The value of music lies not in the emotions it expresses, but in the beauty and skill of the music itself (Goldman, 1995).

4.1.2. Confucian and Taoist Views on Qing (情)

Qing refers to the emotional expression in music, serving as the purpose and meaning of music performance (Liu, 2014). It allows music to convey emotions and inner thoughts, enabling listeners to understand the work's deeper meaning (Meyer, 2008). This section compares Confucian and Taoist views on *Qing* in music performance, drawing from the Confucian text *Yue Ji* (*乐记*) and the Taoist work *Music has in it neither Grief nor Joy* (*声无哀乐论*). Table 3 presents a comparative summary of how *Qing* is understood and expressed in both traditions.

Table 3: Comparison of Confucian and Taoist Perspectives on Emotional Expression in Music Performance

	Yue ji	***Music has in it neither Grief nor Joy***
The essence of music aesthetics	Music is an art of entertainment and a way of expressing emotions (Wang, 1997); Music is the externalization of emotion (Scherer & Zentner, 2001).	Music is the movement of sounds and nothing else (Sherman & Plies, 2023); The emotional effect of music only acts on the internal structure of the piece (Scherer & Zentner, 2001).
Aesthetic thoughts about *Qing* in Music Performance	*Qing* is a combination of sound and emotion (Hansen, 1995).	*Qing* is a connotation of seeking beauty from emotional expression and experience (Hansen, 1995).

As shown in Table 3, *Yue Ji* emphasizes music's emotional content and social role, while *Music has in it neither Grief nor Joy* focuses on the musical form itself. Confucian aesthetics sees music as an expression of emotion, while Taoism argues that music does not inherently contain emotion, but reflects only the music itself (Gracyk, 2012). Both Confucianism and Taoism agree that performers should convey their inner feelings, understanding, and perception of the music to express their deeper thoughts and emotions to the audience (Nathanson, 2012).

4.1.3. Confucian and Taoist Views on Qi (气)

Music performance involves body movement, and *Qi* refers to the energy within physical motion expressed through body coordination and force application (Gladding, 1992). Some argue that sound quality is unrelated to *Qi*, but using force improperly, such as playing loudly or harshly, can result in dry and stiff sounds due to a lack of *Qi* (Szczepanski, 2016). This section compares Confucian and Taoist perspectives on *Qi* and its influence on music performance. Table 4 outlines the differing interpretations of *Qi* in each philosophy and how these interpretations affect approaches to musical expression.

From Table 4, Confucian aesthetic views on *Qi* include: Music as a medium for transmitting emotions and virtues, where *Qi* reflects the performer's inner emotions and character, influencing the music's emotional and moral content; *Qi*'s role in the performer's cultivation and the transmission of social values, contributing to social harmony and stability; *Qi* as a reflection of the performer's pursuit of unity and cohesion, conveying societal power and spirit through music.

Table 4: Confucian and Taoist Perspectives on *Qi* in Music Performance

	Confucianism Aesthetics	**Taoism Aesthetics**
Characteristics of *Qi* in music performance	*Qi* is the inner emotion and character of the performer (Brennan, 2016); *Qi* reflects the performer's inner cultivation of music and the transmission of social values (Deng, 2020); *Qi* is the true expression of musical emotion (David, 2009; Poškaitė, 2020).	*Qi* represents the performer's inner peace and harmony (Kim, 2015); *Qi* is the expression of inner emotions (Birling et al., 2023); The movement of *Qi* occurs naturally without human intervention (David, 2009).
Functions of *Qi* in music performance	Emotional expression and moral inheritance (Kim, 2015; Kim, 2023); Social harmony and education functions (Bin & Vaitkevičius, 2020); Performer's inner pursuit of unity and cohesive society (Fei, 1999).	Inner peace and harmony (Guying, 2018); Harmonious resonance with musical instruments (Jo, 2017); Natural and effortless performing (Gregory, 2018).

Taoist views on *Qi* emphasize inner peace and harmony can be achieved through breath control and emotional regulation, thus enhancing musical expression. Similarly, the harmonious interaction between performer and instrument is supported by breath control, which enables smooth and natural sound production. This contributes to a state of performance that feels effortless and spontaneous, allowing the music to convey inner emotions and artistic intent.

4.2. Results from Autonomy and Heteronomy in Western Aesthetics

This study examines how form and content, harmony and melody, and representational functions are interpreted through the perspectives of autonomy and heteronomy.

4.2.1. Form and Content in Music Performance: Autonomy vs. Heteronomy

Autonomy and heteronomy represent opposing views on music's form and content. From the form perspective, autonomy and heteronomy are inseparable, while content argues they are distinct and shaped by external factors (Åhlberg, 1991; Hulatt, 2013). This debate questions whether art reflects reality, the artist's interpretation, or exists independently (Edelman, 1995). It stems from Western philosophy's dichotomy, with autonomy viewing art as independent and heteronomy seeing it as shaped by society (Ebels-Duggan, 2014; Kupfer, 2015; Zhong, 2009).

Gatz (1941) categorized the essence of music aesthetics into autonomy and heteronomy, further breaking them down into distinct types of form and content (Hylland & Bjurström, 2018). The form was divided into two categories (see Table 5), while content was divided into six categories (see Table 6).

Gatz's (1941) division of musical form and content highlights the dichotomy between autonomy and heteronomy, with content incorporating both views. Autonomy emphasizes the performer's mastery of musical form, focusing on rhythm, tempo, pitch, and harmony (Shove & Repp, 1995), while heteronomy highlights the influence of

external factors such as emotional expression and cultural context on musical content (Herzog, 1995).

Table 5: Gatz's (1941) Classification of Form in Music: Empiricism and Metaphysics

Category (Form aesthetics)	Main Points
Empiricism	Use concrete musical phenomena as evidence (Huron, 1999); Attach importance to perceptual experience (Hooker, 1973; Nagel, 2000); No purely abstract discussion of musical aesthetics (Sharpe, 2000).
Metaphysics	Emphasis on the accuracy and absolute purity of music (Dahlhaus, 1991; Levinson, 2011); Advocate the concept of *art for art's sake* (Karahan Balya, 2015).

Table 6: Gatz's (1941) Classification of Content in Music: Diverse Theoretical Perspectives

Category (Content aesthetics)	Main Points
Dogmatism	The content of music is a certain fact (Audi, 1988; Tucker, 2010); The content of music does not require the participation of human subjects and musical subjects (Stravinsky, 1970; White, 2006); Reality is the object and subject of science and art (White, 2006).
Sensationism	Recognize people's subjective initiative (Schaffer, 2011); Argues that music reflects the real world beyond music (Austern, 2013); Musical expression means are formed in the real world outside of music (Austern, 2013; Schaffer, 2011).
Moderationism	Music reflects real life (Lu, 2012); The expression method of music is a unique method with its own rules (Lu, 2012).
Partial theory	Absorbing the rational viewpoints of two musical aesthetics, music works are divided into two categories (De Miles, 2016); Music that expresses something other than music (Benson, 2006; Bown & Martin, 2021); Music is a pure form, and the aesthetics of form is its content, there is no other content (Frosini, 2021; Stecker, 2013).
Hypothesis theory	Music requires a certain working process in the mind of the composer or the listener (Krumhansl, 1995; Perlovsky, 2010); Music is not a content art, but it can become a content art (Carroll, 2003); Music itself has the ability to express content (Cox, 2011).
Incarnationism	Use the essence and phenomenon to study music aesthetics (Bassuk, 1987; Sprinker, 1985); Essence resides in phenomenon (Folk, 2018; Norris, 1988); Music is the incarnation of emotion, will, and ideas (Folk, 2018).

In music performance, autonomy stresses the accurate interpretation of musical structure, whereas heteronomy emphasizes external guidance, including historical and personal influences (Frosini, 2021). Despite differing perspectives, both views acknowledge the inseparable relationship between form and content. Autonomists argue that music is self-contained, while heteronomists believe music reflects the

creator's emotions and context (Philpott, 2004). Ultimately, both approaches offer distinct but complementary understandings of music (Davies, 2001).

4.2.2. Harmony and Melody in Music Performance: Autonomy vs. Heteronomy

The debate between harmony and melody is often framed as a conflict between autonomy and heteronomy (Paddison, 1991). Harmony proponents, like Rameau, argued that music performance should follow objective principles akin to mathematical laws (Hennion, 2021; Papadopoulos, 2014). In contrast, philosophers like Matheson and Rousseau emphasized melody's primacy in music, viewing it as the emotional language of music, with harmony serving a secondary role (Kania, 2007; Scott, 2006). Melody, seen as a symbol of emotion, is considered central to musical expression (Spencer, 2015).

The discussion between harmony and melody reveals underlying disagreements about the nature of music, particularly concerning its form and content, or autonomy and heteronomy. Table 7 illustrates how harmony and melody are associated with different aesthetic priorities, reflecting the contrast between formal structure and expressive content. Rousseau argued that melody is central to expressing inner emotions, as it imitates the human voice and conveys emotional experience (Nettl & Bohlman, 1991; Kivy, 1989). In contrast, Rameau believed harmony, governed by logical structure and rules, is the true basis of emotional expression, with melody deriving from harmony (Christensen, 2004; Mathieu, 1997).

Table 7: Contrasting Aesthetic Perspectives: Harmony vs. Melody in Music

	Harmony (autonomy)	**Melody (heteronomy)**
Aesthetic perspectives on music	Imitation theory	Imitation theory
Representative figure	Rameau	Rousseau
Expression methods	Harmony can realize its expressive meaning through rational emotion and passion (Solomon, 1993; Vaillant, 2008).	Melody can express the composer's inner emotional experience (Zhou, 2011).
Music structure	Harmony originates from melody (Barron, 2006); Music is the unity of system and logic (Popović Mladjenović, 2019; Swinkin, 2015).	Melody is the foundation of music, and harmony is an assisted means (Adorno, 2020); Music only follows the logic of the musical works (Frosini, 2021; Hindrichs et al., 2018).

In music performance, some instruments align with harmony (e.g., pipa and guzheng, which create chord progressions), while others emphasize melody (e.g., erhu and dizi, which focus on expressive playing and adhering to specific musical structures) (Cheng et al., 2020). Despite the prominence of melody in Chinese music, harmonic elements add depth and variety to the performance (Tymoczko, 2010; Guo, 2002).

4.2.3. Representational Functions in Music: Autonomy vs. Heteronomy

The debate in analytic aesthetics on whether music has representational functions remains ongoing. Davies (1994) argues that music does not have representational

functions, while Kivy (2002) believes it does (Kania, 2007). The former two integrate autonomy and heteronomy, while Kivy (2002) leans toward autonomy. Davies (1994) argues that to classify art as representational, it must meet certain conditions. Table 8 lists the four specific criteria he proposes for determining whether a work of art is representational.

Table 8: Four Conditions for Defining Representational Art (Davies, 1994)

Intentionality	**X being intentionally used to represent Y is a necessary condition for X to represent Y.**
Difference between means and content	There is a distinction between the form of representation and what is represented.
Similarity of perceptual experience	A necessary condition for X to represent Y is that assuming a person views X according to appropriate conventions, there is a similarity between the perceptual experience of X and Y.
Convention	X represents Y (perhaps always) in the context of convention, the recognition of Y in X presupposes a viewer's intimacy with those conventions, and seeing X according to conventions and perceiving Y in X.

The four conditions proposed by Davies (1994) for representational art are necessary, with the fourth being sufficient. If music meets all four, it can be considered representational art (Nussbaum, 2007). However, Davies (1994) argues that music fails to meet the fourth condition, as there is no universal cultural rule that requires listeners to interpret music in a specific way. As a result, he denies that music is representational. Autonomists, too, argue that music performance lacks representational functions. They view music as a means for performers to express their internal emotions and understanding, rather than to represent specific emotions (Adams & Dickinson, 2014). This view emphasizes the subjective, abstract nature of music, with performers focusing on form, technique, and expression rather than on conveying specific emotional content (Williams, 2020).

In music performances, performers focus on structural, harmonic, and rhythmic aspects, exploring the music's depth rather than representing specific emotions (Gabrielsson, 1999). The expression reflects the performer's inner experiences and emotions, stemming from their interpretation of the music, not as a tool for emotional representation (Mazzola & Göller, 2002).

Kivy (2002) asserts that music possesses representational functions. He outlines two approaches to classifying artistic representation. The first categorizes it into pictorial and structural representation, as summarized in Table 9. The second approach, proposed by Ashby (2010), distinguishes between assisted and non-assisted reproduction. Kivy (2002) argues that while the expressive function is music's primary role, its representational functions also objectively exist.

Table 9: Classification of Artistic Representation in Music (Kivy, 2002)

	Pictorial representation	**Structural representation**
Represent content	Natural sound; Man-made sound.	Religion; Drama; Title.
Prerequisites	N/A	Isomorphic relationship

Kivy (2002) classifies the visual representation of music into two types: natural and man-made acoustic events. Music not only represents pictorial content but also structurally represents text, such as religious, dramatic, and title texts. This structural representation relies on the isomorphic relationship between music and text. Kivy (1997) argues that music can represent images and structures, but these abilities are assisted.

In heteronomy theory, music is viewed as capable of representing emotions or situations (Cobussen & Nielsen, 2016). Music performance allows performers to convey the emotional content of the work, enabling the audience to experience the emotions the composer intends to communicate (Leech-Wilkinson, 2013). Heteronomists believe music serves to trigger specific emotional responses in the audience through technique and expression (Frosini, 2021).

5. Discussion

5.1. Chinese Aesthetic Concepts in Music Performance: Philosophy of *He*, *Qing*, and *Qi*

This study suggests that *He* in Confucian aesthetics emphasizes the alignment between the form and emotional content of music, with a focus on technical execution to convey ethical values and promote social harmony (Chen, 2012). In contrast, Taoist aesthetics about *He* values authenticity, encouraging performers to connect with the music's intrinsic spirit rather than projecting emotions excessively (Zu, 2019). While Confucianism has been extensively discussed, Taoist *He* provides an alternative perspective on traditional Chinese music aesthetics. Confucianism emphasizes balance, structure, and the moral role of music, while Taoism focuses on spontaneity, natural flow, and intuitive expression (Ely, 2009; Ni, 2021). Both views highlight the importance of balancing form and freedom in music performance, blending technical skill with artistic expression. *He* shapes musical interpretation and its cultural significance.

Confucian and Taoist views of *Qing* shape music performance in distinct ways. Confucianism sees music as an expression of emotion and a tool for moral education. Performers should align emotional expression with techniques to reflect social and ethical values (Fei, 1999; Liu, 2014). In contrast, Taoism views music as an independent art form, where emotion arises naturally from sound rather than being imposed externally. The emotional impact of music stems from its internal structure, with beauty emerging from the interaction between sound and emotion (Chen, 2001; Wu, 2014).

Confucianism views *Qi* as the expression of the performer's inner emotion and character, connecting personal cultivation and social values (Liu, 2014). It emphasizes structured emotional expression, where *Qi* integrates breath, melody, and emotional flow to convey a coherent narrative (Guo, 2015). Control over *Qi* ensures a clear, moral performance (Hoch, 2020). In contrast, Taoism sees *Qi* as a natural, spontaneous force reflecting inner peace and harmony (Wong, 1989), advocating for unrestrained emotional expression and a natural flow of breath and technique, promoting a relaxed and organic performance (Li, 2013; Frank, 2006).

5.2. Western Aesthetic Theories of Autonomy and Heteronomy in Music Performance

This study compares the autonomy and heteronomy views on the relationship between music form and content. Autonomy sees them as inseparable, with form presenting content and their unity defining the music's artistic value. However, this may limit creativity, as music can explore independent forms (Burnard, 2012; Jenkins, 2011). Heteronomy views form and content as separate, with the form being the external structure and content expressing emotion. While this allows flexibility, it risks oversimplifying the interaction between form and content (Ingarden et al., 1986; Godlovitch, 1993).

Autonomy sees harmony as part of the musical structure, stemming from melody and essential for coherence and emotional expression (Scruton et al., 2011; Paddison, 2002). It emphasizes logical connections, though some argue harmony can have independent emotional value (De Sousa, 1990). Harmony may also develop apart from melody, contributing to emotional depth (Davies, 2001; Moore, 1992). Heteronomy prioritizes melody as the emotional core, with harmony supporting it (Adorno, 2020; Bogue, 2006). Melody conveys emotion, while harmony enhances it (Gabrielsson & Lindström, 2010). Some argue harmony can also drive emotion (Bonds, 1991; Lehman, 2018). In performance, autonomy focuses on structural precision, while heteronomy emphasizes expressive, emotional delivery (Okiji, 2015).

Autonomy theory views music as non-representational, focusing on its structure and form rather than conveying specific emotions (Chen, 2014; Holopainen, 2012). However, critics argue that this perspective overlooks how the audience's cultural and emotional context influences the meaning of music (Clarke, 2012). Heteronomy theory, on the other hand, sees music as a medium for expressing emotions or ideas, where the performer conveys specific feelings through the music (Finlayson, 2013; Bonds, 2014). It emphasizes the listener's role in interpreting the music based on their background and experiences (Susino & Schubert, 2020).

6. Conclusion

This study elucidates the interplay between Chinese and Western aesthetic philosophies in music performance. Confucian and Taoist principles (*He*, *Qing*, *Qi*) underscore music's role in moral cultivation and natural harmony, demanding performers to mediate technique and spiritual expression. Western autonomy and heteronomy theories, conversely, frame music either as an abstract form or a vehicle for external meaning. The comparison reveals that Chinese aesthetics embeds performance within broader ethical and cosmic frameworks, while Western theories dichotomize structure and context.

The key findings highlight Confucianism's structured emotional expression (*Qing*) versus Taoism's intuitive flow, mirroring autonomy's focus on technical precision and heteronomy's embrace of interpretative flexibility. Performers should adapt autonomy's structural rigor to preserve traditional techniques, while heteronomy's contextual sensitivity could enrich emotional engagement. For example, *Qi*'s controlled breath regulation (Confucian) contrasts with its natural flow (Taoist), mirroring Western discussions on the relationship between form and content. These insights advocate for a

hybrid performance that honors cultural specificity while fostering cross-cultural dialogue.

Ultimately, the study calls for rethinking music's universality by centering cultural discourse. Scholars and performers can consider how differing aesthetic values continue to interact and coexist within the globalized sphere of music performance.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

This study is based solely on content analysis of published materials and does not involve human participants. Consequently, the study did not require ethics approval or consent to participate.

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