

# Starting a New Chapter of the History, Sailing in the History

## A Review of "The Thoughts of Music in Modern China" (New Edition)

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### ABSTRACT

As a book review of Feng Changchun's "The Thoughts of Music in Modern China" (New Edition), this article briefly sorts out, responds to, and evaluates the ideological path in the book, providing scholars studying music history with a path to observe history and ideas for constructing an artistic theoretical discourse system. The new edition refines the historical facts on the basis of the old edition, and enhances the objectivity and integrity of historical data. This book uses the research methods of dialectical materialism and historical materialism to construct the evolution process of Chinese modern music trends. By closely combining the thinking methods of historical criticism and aesthetic criticism, the book enumerates the historical views of thoughts such as music aesthetic education, quintessence of Chinese culture, improvement of national music, and national salvation music that have been raised by overseas Chinese under the influence of Western culture, and interprets the attribute of "historical theory" that "history leads theory, history has theory, and theory comes from history".

**Keywords:** Feng Changchun, History of modern Chinese music, Musical trend, Commentary.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

"The Thoughts of Music in Modern China" (New Edition) is the first historical work in China to systematically study the country's modern music trends. The author's unique historical perspective, fluent writing, and detailed historical materials have won the favor of readers. After being published by People's Music Publishing House in 2007, the book won the Second "Three Hundred" Original Book Award from the State Press and Publication Administration. In 2018, it was selected as an art source book in the Chinese Academic Book Citation Index (CBKCI) and included in some national entrance examination reference books for colleges and universities. Feng Changchun has opened up a new journey in the study of music trends by exploring the ideological concepts, humanistic spirit, and literary ideas of excellent traditional Chinese culture. He combines aesthetic spirit with contemporary aesthetic forms to nourish people's aesthetic and value systems, making important contributions to promoting literary and

artistic trends, conveying cultural connotations, and expressing humanistic feelings. In 2021, Professor Luo Qin selected it into the "New Perspectives on Chinese Musicology Research" series, which was reprinted by Shanghai Conservatory of Music Press. This work has important academic value and reference significance in the academic community.

### 2. THE PREDECESSORS LEADING THE WAY AND RESTORING THE OLD AS NEW

Studying music trends is an indispensable part of improving the discipline of Chinese music history. Studying a specific topic in music history is an important way to establish a good national music history, and it is also a necessary path to enrich music history textbooks and teaching aids. The study of music trends can be traced back to Zhang Jingwei's article "Modern Chinese Music Trends".<sup>1</sup>

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1. Zhang Jingwei, Modern Chinese Music Trends [J]. Music Research, 1985(4): 1-16.

His exploration strengthened the attention of the Chinese music history community to the study of "Chinese music trends" and became a guiding stone for the works evaluated in this article. Under the guidance of his mentor Wei Tingge and deputy mentor Ju Qihong, Feng Changchun expanded his research time, enriched the appearance of historical materials, refined the concept of historiography, and inherited the pragmatic, truth-seeking, and innovative spirit of the older generation of scholars in the study of history, based on the historical materials, historical views, and historical methods of Zhang Jingwei's "Modern Chinese Music Trends".

The new and old versions of "Research on Modern Chinese Music Trends" are basically consistent in content, covering six parts: the rise of new music trends in the late Qing Dynasty and early Republic of China, the music aesthetic education trend in the 1920s, the deepening development of the learning of Western music trend in the 1920s and 1940s, the national quintessence music trend in the 1920s and 1930s, the improvement trend of national music in the 1920s and 1940s, and the salvation music trend in the 1930s and 1940s. The sources of historical materials in the article include monographs, collections, biographies, journals, papers, newspapers, oral accounts, etc. Based on rich historical materials, a combination of interpretation and analysis is adopted to analyze the origin and influence of each ideological trend. The content is highly concise and easy to understand, making it convenient for scholars of different stages and majors to study. Once this book was published, it has aroused the concern of people from all walks of life. Many experts and scholars in the Chinese music industry highly praised the rich historical materials in the book and commented on it from different perspectives. For example, Wei Tingge commented on the importance of the book, the feasibility of the writing method, and the persistence of the academic spirit from the core of "music trend". Ju Qihong compared the content of his thesis defense with that of its publication, elaborating on the solid historical foundation, strong speculative thinking, and influence of the book. Chen Quanyou explained the rationality of the framework of this book and the preciousness of Feng Changchun's historical spirit from the perspective of an editor.

The emergence of the old version has led to a gradual increase in academic attention to the study of "ideological trends". Then, there were several

works created. For example, Wu Weixi's "Universal or National Music? The Chinese Contemporary Musical Thoughts in a Context of Ideology"<sup>2</sup> summarizes the trend of thought of ritual music and national music in the forty years from the Westernization Movement to the outbreak of the Anti-Japanese War from the "ideology" as the starting point; Ju Qihong's "Research on the Practical Bookishness Trend in the Music Industry"<sup>3</sup> summarizes the three major characteristics, historical development, and interpretation of the practical Benvisism trend in the music industry with "practical bookishness" as the core; Ju Qihong and Qiao Bangli's "Reform and Opening up and the New Era of Music Trends"<sup>4</sup> adopts a historical oriented and historical theoretical approach in the first part to comprehensively sort out and evaluate the important events, representative literature, and main achievements of music trends in different stages of the new era. The second part adopts a thematic research form to review and analyze the propositions or events that have had a significant impact on the history of music trends in the new era according to their own nature. The study of music trends has sprouted like mushrooms after rain, laying an important foundation for the construction and development of the discipline of Chinese music history.

### **3. ACHIEVEMENT BEING FOUNDED ON DILIGENCE, AND A DEED BEING ACCOMPLISHED THROUGH TAKING THOUGHT**

The historical research between Zhang Jingwei's "Modern Chinese Music Trends" and Feng Changchun's "The Thoughts of Music in Modern China" (New Edition) plays a bridging role, with the latter promoting the inheritance, innovation, and creativity of the former's cultural and historical research. Upon closer examination of the two editions, the author believes that their ideological path has three similarities and three differences. The three similarities refer to the researchers' focus on the overall appearance of modern music trends

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2. Wu Weixi, *Universal or National Music? The Chinese Contemporary Musical Thoughts in a Context of Ideology* [M]. East China Normal University Press, 2019.

3. Ju Qihong, *Research on the Practical Bookishness Trend in the Music Industry* [M]. Central Conservatory of Music Press, 2012.

4. Ju Qihong, Qiao Bangli, *Reform and Opening up and the New Era of Music Trends* [M]. Central Conservatory of Music Press, 2008.

in their respective countries; The discourse on music trends revolves around the theme of creating "new music with Chinese characteristics"; The starting point and foothold of music trends are both centered around the people. The three differences refer to: the first is the differences in the time range of the research object. The former defines the physical time of "modern" as the historical period from the Opium War to around the May Fourth Movement, while the latter extends the physical time of "modern" to the late Qing Dynasty and early Republic of China to the early establishment of the People's Republic of China; The second difference lies in the research approach, where the former presents a network like discourse in chronological order, while the latter presents a summary based depiction of ideological concepts as gathering points; The third is the difference in the definition of research concepts. The former summarizes the concept of modern Chinese music thought as follows: "The music thought tendency reflected in the music field during the historical period from the Opium War to the May Fourth Movement, representing the interests and demands of the bourgeoisie and the new intellectual class, that is, the music thought trend during the old democratic revolution period."<sup>5</sup> The latter believes that "ideological trends" can better summarize the essence of "trends" than "ideological tendencies". Music trends belong to the category of artistic trends and are ideas and concepts triggered or reflected by the special spiritual existence of music. They have diverse ways of existence and grow in certain political, economic, and cultural environments, while directly or indirectly reflecting the influence of these environmental factors.<sup>6</sup> The author also believes that "trend" is more systematic and authoritative than "inclination", and can better indicate the essence and characteristics of the development of things, highlighting the crucial historical position and historical value of "music trend" in historical research. Feng Changchun, through interdisciplinary theories and methods such as aesthetics, history, and philosophy, combined the cultural perspective of the new era with personal speculative thinking to shape the overall context of modern Chinese music trend.

The development of things is an eternal and unchanging law, and the ability to create new things in a rapidly changing world is infinite. However,

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5. Zhang Jingwei, Modern Chinese Music Trends [J]. Music Research, 1985(4): 1-16.

6. Feng Changchun, The Thoughts of Music in Modern China [M]. Shanghai Conservatory of Music Press, 2021, p2-6.

the ability of people to accept and express new things while mastering existing things is limited. This requires every scholar to view problems from a developmental perspective, pay attention to reviewing existing knowledge while accepting new things. The reprint of the book is the best example to confirm this law. The author has made some minor adjustments to the framework and historical viewpoints of the new version, focusing on the accuracy of details and the evidence of historical materials. The annotations have been revised, historical materials have been added, and academic standards have been adjusted. For example, 1. in the new version, missing references such as authors, publishers, and words have been supplemented. (The editor is added to each page where the dictionary is cited. The author and publisher of the historical materials cited in the "Compilation of Chinese Modern Music Historical Materials (1840-1919)" are added on pages 34 and 60. The publisher is filled in when quoting Qian Renkang's "Examination of the Source of School Music Songs" on page 52. The historical sources of Yang Yinliu's views are clearly marked on pages 274 to 278.) 2. The new version fills in new historical information. (On page 17, a personal profile of Zhang Deyi, a long-term official who served as the Qing Dynasty's envoy to England, Italy, Belgium, and other countries, has been added.) 3. The new version uses more concrete words. (On page 3, when citing the academic viewpoint of "the formation and conditions of Liang Qichao's ideological trend in the era", specific books are directly labeled. On page 261, the previous publication words are refined to the Guangzhou music publication words. Each selected collection in the book is specific to the editor and author and the number of episodes. All expressions of the 1920s, 1930s, etc. in the text are changed to the 1920s, 1930s, etc. On page 134, when stating that "Xiao Youmei has established that in order to give China a new life and welcome the development of the new era, the premise is that people must learn and draw on the ideas and concepts of polyphonic thinking in Western music. The formation period of Xiao Youmei's ideas and concepts was precise from the early 20th century to the 2010s.) 4. The new version verifies the original historical materials. (On page 172, when quoting the words of Liao Fushu, the younger brother of Qingzhu, the footnote author revised from Qingzhu to Li Fei, the pen name of his younger brother Liao Fushu.) 5. When quoting others' opinions, the new version uses fonts that are different from the main text.

Feng Changchun, with his simple and unadorned editing spirit, demonstrated the emotional journey of "perseverance" during the writing process, setting an example for many professionals in the academic community. He continuously improved, speculated, and excavated in historical research, demonstrating the academic character of historians who reflect and seek things; He applied the methods and theories of "dialectical materialism and historical materialism" to his academic career, examining music events from various periods with a developmental, open, and objective perspective. He did not blindly worship historical figures and authorities, but instead examined and traced the historical roots, theoretical significance, and academic influence of each trend with a broad perspective and scientific attitude, while respecting the objectivity and correctness of original data. He adhered to the ethical principles of objective historical facts as a historian.

#### **4. ADHERING TO CULTURE AND BUILDING A NEW LIFE**

A historian with a sense of historical and cultural mission usually considers and speculates on their thoughts and insights from the perspective of historical dimensions and cultural contexts. After five thousand years of sedimentation and baptism, the music of our country has maintained eternal and strong vitality in the long river of history. The book "The Thoughts of Music in Modern China" (New Edition) focuses on issues such as the preservation, inheritance, innovation, and development of traditional Chinese music. While elaborating on the positions and viewpoints of different scholars, it presents China's long and splendid culture; In the course of the contending of musical thoughts, with the introduction of Western culture, Eurocentrism has quietly sprouted in China. In music, foreigners have called China's music noise, ugly and disgusting.<sup>7</sup> China's no music theory and Chinese music backwardness theory have flooded into China, which has been sleeping for a long time. Some countrymen have put forward radical views such as "balance the West with China, melt the West with China, and source the West music in China". Faced with a complex ideological path, countrymen, led by Liu Tianhua and Zhao Yuanren, have not abandoned their excellent traditional music culture, but have explored a road of "integration of China and the West" that continues

to this day; Secondly, all Chinese trends of thought are discussed along the main line of Chinese traditional music. In the process of new music creation, in addition to borrowing foreign songs for "filling in words according to songs", some musicians also choose ethnic music, traditional folk songs and ballads as the motive for creation, and use familiar music to awaken people's thoughts, improve folk wisdom, and convey the voice of Chinese people. Its view is fully proved by the reflection of the trend of music inspiring people in school songs; In the trend of music aesthetic education, representatives such as Xiao Youmei and Li Jinhui, who explored the path of new music development in their own country, were also reflected in their music practice after being influenced by their ideas. For example, in 1916, Li Jinhui joined the "Peking University Music Troupe" and became the leader of the Xiaoxiang Music Group of the Chinese Music Group, dedicating himself to the study of folk music; The ideas of "excluding Western music and reviving ancient music" and "reviving elegant music and revitalizing national music" in the quintessence of Chinese culture reflect the people's love for traditional Chinese culture and their persistent pursuit of promoting and revitalizing Chinese culture; In the trend of improving traditional Chinese music, people advocate for preserving the spirit of Chinese music, reviving national characteristics, improving old instruments and music scores, and creating new Chinese music. It is not difficult to find people's firm beliefs and faith in traditional culture from the historical evolution of Chinese music improvement; In the trend of music for national salvation, inspired by the spirit of Comrade Mao Zedong's speech at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art, music workers turned their attention to folk music, traditional music, and ethnic minority music. Musicians led by Lv Ji began to carry out the New Yangge Movement centered on Yan'an, collecting music and culture of all ethnic groups in China, and picking up cultural imprints left behind in various regions. While consolidating the excellent traditional culture of the country, they also forged the strong growth of new culture.

In the 1920s, Feng Changchun explored the aesthetic ideas and practices of Confucius, the founder of Confucianism, Wang Guowei, the earliest enlightener and founder of modern Chinese aesthetics, and Cai Yuanpei, the Minister of Education of the Republic of China. He emphasized the importance of music aesthetic education in creating human nature and cultivating aesthetic

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7. Feng Changchun, *The Thoughts of Music in Modern China* [M]. Shanghai Conservatory of Music Press, 2021, p16.

sense, and practiced the particularity and advantages of aesthetic education in education through the establishment of new art societies and professional art education institutions<sup>8</sup>; In the in-depth development of the trend of learning western music in the 1920-1940's, Feng Changchun discussed that countrymen "introduced" Western composition techniques, concepts and "output" classic works with national characteristics to seek the way to develop their own new music, inject new energy into Chinese culture in the form of improving the artistic value and aesthetic value of music works, express the national heart in the language of the world, and enjoy the sound of Chinese music in the language of art.

Historiography is the core key to understanding and interpreting human historical civilization, and it is the foundation for safeguarding China's excellent traditional culture and building a solid foundation for new literature and art. This book takes history as its foundation, conducting in-depth research and analysis of music historical events from the late Qing Dynasty and early Republic of China to the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. It collects and organizes historical materials scattered in newspapers, works, journals, collections, and biographies, and conducts research, comparison, and empirical analysis. Through case studies, it dissects the historical behaviors and concepts of experts and scholars in different periods, adhering to the writing spirit of evidence-based, trustworthy, communicative, and knowledgeable language. It expresses national emotions in the language of the nation, gathers complex music trends with time as the main line, and presents the music trends of Fanwu clearly in front of readers, becoming an indelible spiritual wealth in the development process of China's music culture.

The modern music trend in China has important theoretical significance and practical reference value for the development of contemporary music culture and the formulation of future literary and artistic trends; The development of modern music trend of thought in countrymen started with the spread and popularization of western music, the inheritance and innovation of traditional music. In the continuation of traditional music ideas and the germination of new music ideas, Chinese people began to review their own culture and western civilization again. While adhering to the traditional Chinese culture, they began to accept the advanced

western culture, while introducing foreign culture, they also exported new culture with their own characteristics, which promoted the modernization process of music development, promoted the popularization of music education, and promoted the diversification and personalization of music creation, becoming the guide for the development of contemporary and upcoming music culture in China.

## 5. CONCLUSION

During the long years of compiling this book, Feng Changchun consistently adhered to the writing approach of combining "history and reality" and "history and interdisciplinary theory". Throughout the complex process of selecting historical materials and evaluating historical objects, he upheld the basic principles of "seeking truth from facts and analyzing specific problems", achieving a high degree of unity between "quality" and "quantity"; On the basis of predecessors, Feng Changchun examined issues with a dialectical way of thinking, paid attention to the verification of historical materials, respected objective historical facts, modified and added historical information, and set an example for the academic community with a rigorous and meticulous academic attitude and a virtuous and artistic academic character. The spirit of striving for excellence and tireless historiography will be passed down from generation to generation.

The new version of "The Thoughts of Music in Modern China" uses a writing style that integrates points, lines, surfaces, and networks to trace the development and historical significance of various music trends in modern China. Based on a deep exploration of the cultural roots of the country, it constructs a literary framework using music aesthetics, philosophy, and historical theory, and produces the first work in the field of modern Chinese music history research that focuses on music trends. It breaks the trend of "music trends" research and provides scholars in the music history field with different ways and methods to observe history when sorting out the music practice activities of people from all walks of life in different periods.

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