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THE CATEGORY OF “CONCEPT” IN THE PARADIGM OF EUROPEAN AND CHINESE MUSIC CULTURES

Leading concepts of European and Chinese tradition, mapped to the artistically-aesthetic world view of the Chinese musicians and composers, is compared in the article. The category of «concept» in her projection on the musical essence appears in this foreshortening expedient, as helps to understand the deep level of maintenance. Although Chinese musical concepts adapt the specific of the European artistic thinking, but in the primary meaning always lean against national attitude in his spiritually-philosophical measuring, in his special method of co-operation of musical intonation and word.

Keywords: concept, national musical culture, the dominant concept.

Nowadays humanities, including Music Studies, of different countries and continents manifest remarkable convergence of interests to some fundamental categories of existence and development of different types of artistic phenomena and notions that are interpreted in new ways and scrutinized from unusual points of view. Apparently, this stage of evolution of the humanities is quite logical: globalization processes could not leave the basics of music culture unaffected. Besides, in the actual interrelations and mutual influences of different civilization slices, in the intonation vision of the world, they are naturally concentrated on some fundamental notions. One of them is the notion of concept, which has been recently applied not only in the ethnic and mental, sociological and historical spheres of research but also to art in general and music in particular.

However, applying the category of “concept” in researching music artifacts or phenomena of music culture in general, we also should pay attention to the specific features of its application in the plane of various historical and civilizational levels. In this context, it would be interesting to compare the leading concepts of European and Chinese traditions and project them upon the artistic and esthetic worldview of Chinese musicians and composers. The changes of this worldview and its leading concepts were especially interesting and diverse in the 20th century when Chinese composers were conscientiously adopting the great practices of European artistic centers, were mastering typical European instruments, genres and ways of introducing academic music in society, for instance, among other things, in a very short time they popularized the fortepiano and violin in their didactic and concert practices, and started to actively generate symphonic genres. In the 1920s, first

conservatories of the European type were established and rapidly spread all over the country; and Chinese artists were confidently mastering the widest spheres of the European repertoire.

However, despite all innovations and the powerful process of “Europeanization” that significantly influence the directions of development of Far East art, including that of China, the mental foundation is uniquely and artistically integrated in the theme and expressive devices used by Chinese artists. The category of “concept” as projected upon the musical foundation seems to be rather relevant in this context since it helps reflect the deep level of content, which, despite the appropriation of the specific features of the European artistic thinking, in its primary meaning is still based in the national world perception in its spiritual and philosophical dimensions and the special way of combining music intonation and words.

First of all, let us consider the category of “concept” and its key characteristics that in the direct or indirect meaning can be projected on the musical content in general and program instrumental music in particular.

A new philosophy dictionary describes “concept (lat. Conceptus – an act of collection, perception, conception)”, as “grasping” senses (of a problem) in the unity of a speech expression.

Term “concept” was introduced in philosophy by medieval scholar Abelard in relation to the analysis of the problem of universals requiring a chapter of language and speech¹. According to Abelard, pronounced speech is perceived as a “concept in the listener’s soul”².

Abelard considered a concept to be a result of dynamic activity of the elevated spirit capable of creative filling up and compilation (*concipere*) of senses rather than a process of intellectual (*intellectus*) interpretation of objects and processes. That is to say, as early as in the medieval philosophy of Abelard, a concept is not the same as a notion or category; it is higher and more complex than that.

The quoted entry from *New Encyclopedia of Philosophy* emphasizes the spiritual and personal nature of the *concept* compared to the rational and objective essence of the *notion*. It underscores the following: “The concept is shaped by speech evolving in the spiritual

¹ S.S. Neretina. Новая философская энциклопедия (New Encyclopedia of Philosophy): in 4 vol. Ed. V.S. Stepin. – vol.2. – Moscow: Mysl. 2001. – P. 1080.

² Abelard P. Диалектика (Dialectics). In publication: Abelard P. Теологические трактаты (Theological Treatises). – Moscow, 1995. – P.121.

plane with its rhythms, energy, gestures, intonation, and endless specifications that make up the sense of commenting.”

Concept is extremely subjective. Altering the soul of the individual who is pondering over the essence of a phenomenon, it implies another subject (listener, reader) in its evolving and actualizes senses in answers to his/her questions. Addressing a listener has always implied simultaneously addressing the transcendental source of speech, i.e. God. Memory and imagination are integral qualities of a concept aimed, on the one hand, at understanding here and now, and, on the other hand, the concept synthesizes the three faculties of the soul and as an act of memory it is targeted at the past, as an act of imagination it is targeted at the future and as an act of judgment it is targeted at the present”³.

Let us cite some other ideas of great thinkers of the past who directly describe the category of concept as a way of cognition of and involvement in the reality through art. For instance, Thomas Aquinas defines concept as natural internal comprehension of an external object (thing) in thoughts, and expression of this comprehension through a distinct sign or symbol, in some situations through their sum and interaction but in any case through the unity of the ideal, on the one hand, and material and phenomenal, on the other hand⁴. There can hardly exist a more precise characteristic of the emergence of music images first in the composer’s imagination and then the way the listener’s experiences them.

The artistic and creative dominant of the concept drew attention of the thinkers of early modern period, specifically such outstanding philosophers of the German Classic School as Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schelling who defined the essence of “grasping the sense” via various creative figures⁵.

Out of contemporary Ukrainian philosophers, it is Anatoliy Svidzynskyi who consistently works with term “concept” elaborating it, first of all, in the sphere of national culture. Thus, it seems to be important to rely on his vision of the essence and role of the concept in a certain national society, since the researcher places the key emphasis on this aspect, as well as due to the fact that this approach is the most consistent with the scholarly aim of this article, i.e. to reveal the specific features of concept in its comparative parallel of Europe and China. In the context of the relation of the concept to the unique national

³ S.S. Neretina...

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

traditions of different peoples, the author introduces the extremely important notion of “mythological conceptual sphere” and specifies that along with cultural and spiritual sense it also has very practical ontological foundation for a certain society: “The totality of myths of a certain community and associated views, which are not necessarily arranged into stories (superstitions, beliefs, taboos and other forms of folk culture), make up the conceptual sphere that provides for the stability of social existence and proper orientation of community members in different life situations.⁶”

However, the author does not rule out the existence and provides a list of universal concepts, which, nonetheless, are differently interpreted at every civilization stage of history and in every national culture: “Concepts function not only as the most important creations of culture and language, but also as the locomotives of culture, a means of effective influence on the individual and his/her evolving into a full-fledged society member. It is possible due to the fact that concepts do not simply reflect very general notions, they also contain assessment of reality, conjure up some emotions and influence the development of values. Examples of concepts include “God”, “nature”, “world”, “time”, “society”, “people”, “culture”, “civilization”, “freedom”, “law”, “state”, “moral”, “human”, “love”, “word”, “creativity, etc.”⁷”

In the context of the above cited, and especially in relation to the introduction of the definition of a “mythological conceptual sphere”⁸, some comments should be made pertaining to the issue that is key both to the concept and to the topic of this article (the possibility of applying term “concept” to instrumental program music), i.e. the notion of “national world perception” that naturally corresponds to and relates with the notion of “national mentality”. This notion mostly is considered to embrace generalizations of some unique principles of thinking, emotions, esthetic priorities and the very socio-economic order that develops in every nation depending on its mental complex. “General categories of ideas”, “imagination”, “vision of the world”, “deep and archaic strata of psyche”, “unconscious”, “the daily side of consciousness”, “mindset”, “behavior” – all of these are

⁶ Svidzynskiy A. V. Національна ідея як концепт культури (National idea as a concept of culture) / in *Фундаментальні орієнтири науки (Fundamental guidelines for research)*. Kyiv: Publishing house *Akadempriodyka* 2005, and in a more general context in the cited work by Svidzynskiy A. V. *Синергетична концепція культури (Synergetic concept of culture)*. – Lutsk, 2008 – P. 75.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 179

⁸ Some studies provide other definitions of the “conceptual sphere”: moral and ethical, folklore, existential, artistic, etc., however, by their content they correspond to the provided definition.

definitions of mentality⁹. They in this or that way refer to more popular definitions of the “national character”. One of the founders of the school of “Annals”, Alexander Gurevich considered that “the notion is somewhat vague due to the nature of the phenomenon itself: mentality is omnipresent, it permeates the entire human life, invades all levels of consciousness and behavior of people, this is why it is so complicated to define it or set a framework for it”¹⁰. However, there is a number of specifying categories that streamline the undesirable vagueness of the *mental* into a clear-cut channel, one of them is the notion of concept rather convincingly connected with the mental world by Yu. Stepanov: “concept is like a clot of culture in the consciousness of an individual; this is the way for culture to enter the mental world of a person. On the other hand, the concept is a means for people – common people who are not “creators of cultural values” – to enter culture and in some cases to influence it”¹¹.

The above ideas evoke two legitimate questions. First: what are the specific features of Chinese national and traditional concepts (elements of the mythological conceptual sphere, to use Svidzynskyi’s terms), i.e. its distinctiveness, compared to the European versions of universal concepts? The second question is wider and comprises a couple of sub-questions: to what extent can we treat music as a “concept” in the above philosophical and esthetic sense, and/or what internal concepts of its own does it contain, and to what extent can they be determined in this or that national continuum based on its interpretation of music and its social and/or individual role?

The answer to the first question is rather evident, it is provided in a number of both ancient philosophic systems and in modern academic studies. Let us provide one of the generalizing comparative definitions of the specific features of the Chinese world perception as compared to the European one: “the key specific features of the traditional Chinese system of philosophical thinking in all its modifications (from legitimism and Confucianism to Daoism and Chinese Buddhism) consists in the fact that they do not focus on the individual and personal perception, realization of the problem of existence and the place of the human

⁹ Gurevich A. Ya. Исторический синтез и школа «Анналов» (Historical synthesis and the school of “Annals”). – Moscow: Indrik, 1993. – P. 193 – 194.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 195

¹¹ Stepanov Yuriy S. Концепт (Concept) / Yu.S. Stepanov // Константы: Словарь русской культуры. Опыт исследования (Constants: Dictionary of Russian culture. Study.) – Moscow: Shkola “Языки русской культуры” (Languages of Russian culture), 1997. – P. 42-43.

being in it, but rather on the socially significant behavior of people determined by external forces (the Heaven, Dao), i.e. social ethics and policy that are of major and exceptional importance in society.”¹²

In this context, special attention should be paid to the concept of Dao that belongs to the key concepts of the Chinese conceptual sphere: “ancient Chinese word *Dao* has a wide spectrum of meanings: road, way, method, means, art, law, principle, truth, doctrine, view, speak, express and make sacrifice to the spirit of the road. Most of these meanings are implied and played upon in works of philosophy and literature, as well as in the idiomatic heritage of the Chinese language”¹³.

The above list of the meanings of Dao manifests clear parallels with the universal concepts described by Svidzynskyi, specifically “truth”, “creativity” (in Dao: art), “law”.

Another understanding of Dao that radically differs from all concepts of the European spiritual tradition is its interpretation as emptiness, i.e. the substance containing everything that exists that never remains fixed and, thus, cannot be comprehended and concretized “since anything that has been or will be said about it characterizes something else rather than Dao (from zhang 1 of *Dao de Jing*: 道可道，非常道。 the Dao that can be spoken of is not the constant Dao). Therefore, no matter how hard thinkers of all nations try to identify and explain the essence of Dao, these attempts are doomed to failure”¹⁴.

In the context of this interpretation of Dao as avoiding cognition and concrete definition, we should again compare it to the European understanding of existence–nonexistence: “If in the West “nothing emerges from nothing”, in the East “everything emerges from nothing”, this is why “the problem of Nonexistence in the Far East philosophy in its conceptual essential and practical form turns into a particularly necessary meaning of human life”¹⁵.

¹² Abramova N. A. Традиционная культура Китая и межкультурное взаимодействие: (Социально-философский аспект) (Traditional culture of China and intercultural interaction: (The social and philosophic aspect)) – Chita: ChiGTU, 1998. - P– 125.

¹³ Poinar L.M. Семантичний простір фразеології як джерело інтерпретації концепту ІСТИННИЙ ШЛЯХ у картині світу китайського етносу (The semantic space of phraseology as a source of interpretation of the concept of TRUE WAY in the picture of the world of the Chinese ethnicity) // Studia Linguistica. Issue 6/2012 – Kyiv: Kyiv Taras Shevchenko National University, 2012 – P. 127

¹⁴ Shekera Ya. V. Концепт порожнечі в китайській культурі: походження та репрезентація в поезії доби Сун (X–XIII ст.) (The concept of emptiness in Chinese culture: origin and representation of the poetry of Song Dynasty (X–XIII centuries)). Available at: <http://www.sinologist.com.ua/doc/Shekera/33%20Порожнеча%20ЦИ20+походження.pdf>

¹⁵ Atash B.M. Древневосточный концепт «пустоты» и его проявление в антропологической парадигме (The ancient oriental concept of emptiness and its manifestation in the anthropological paradigm.) Available at: <http://www.jurnal.org/articles/2010/filos4.html> (24.04.2015)

Thus, both the historically established and modern interpretation of “concept” makes it possible to understand both its universals relevant for all types of human civilization and the specifics of its application in individual national and cultural areas.

The national unique intonation is especially organically synthesized with the work it expresses and it will be differently decoded by a European and a representative of the Chinese cultural tradition. This is a very important prerequisite for the correct understanding of the content of music works of various genres composed outside of the European cultural continuum. This very understanding pertains to the image and sense load of their interaction with the word, ritual and symbolism of the timbral sound and other elements of the integral artistic image, as well as the intonation complex itself underlying the music work.

The assumption about different “hearing” of the very elements of music works are indirectly confirmed by the analogy with the language and literary sphere. The difference of language and sense concepts expressed in different languages with the same word is pointed out by the above-cited author A. Svidzynskyi, who emphasized that: “national and cultural specificity may manifest itself even in cognate languages, such as Ukrainian and Russian. Thus, the Ukrainian concept of “rushnyk” is not equivalent to the Russian “polotentse” (towel) and compared to the Russian word contains much more culturally marked senses fixed in so-called precedential texts (folk and literary works widely known to the carriers of the culture). This is why this Ukrainian word cannot be replaced with the Russian one in all context... even the basic representants of (fundamental one of the most important in the consciousness of every human being – Lu Jie) concepts, i.e. words “maty” and “mat” (the Ukrainian and Russian for “mother”), turn out to be not absolutely equivalent”¹⁶.

For us these definitions are very important, since multilevel, multidirectional impulses reflected in the mental structure which in the above quotation are projected onto language and sense ranges of cognate languages are surely the most concentrated in national artistic traditions, including the national music – in an absolutely specific way. Based on the above consideration, we assume the hypothesis of the availability of specific Chinese cultural concepts (on two levels: as a national version of universal concepts and as the existence of self-valuable concepts that are fundamentally different from their European counterparts) as one that can be applied in researching Chinese fortepiano program music.

¹⁶ Svidzynskyi A. V. Синергетична концепція культури (Synergetic concept of culture). – Lutsk, 2008 – P.168.

Therefore, we naturally shift to the second question: how can we apply the definition of “concept” to music? In this respect we can also rely on a number of authoritative sources, specifically on works of Odessa scholar Oleksandra Samoilenko and first of all on her fundamental research “Музикознавство і методологія гуманітарного знання. Проблема діалогу” (“Music studies and the methodology of humanities knowledge. The problem of dialogue”)¹⁷. The “typifying semantic properties of a music text” analyzed and generalized by the author are, in fact, the prerequisites for outlining concepts in music “noosphere”.

A more concise analysis of the issue is presented in the work by Valeriya Marik¹⁸ elaborating among other things on the phenomena of “music concept” and “music noosphere”. She provides her own definition of the concept that logically brings us to accepting music as a kind of “a first level concept” or a general universal (we can even use attribute “transcendental” in this context) concept that can integrate a number of other sense concepts more directly related to ontological ranges and in this incarnation provides a more accurate reflection of the spiritual essences of different national cultures. According to V. Marik, “The concept is an image that became a text. A text, in its turn, is a unity of semantic interpretations of the concept”¹⁹. The author also point out the multidimensional nature of concepts that can acquire different semantic coloring and have different functions in the creative and spiritually coordinating processes not only in the general philosophical field (as it was demonstrated above by the example of philosophical and ethical concepts of the European origin – and Dao) but also in music.

“A music concept consists in the introduction of some objective sense in the music structure; at that, the structure manifests its capabilities as a non-verbal language. An integral property of a music concept is actualization of the present moment via emotions; but in this way the music concept manifests the importance of involvement, embeddedness in the present time for any conceptualization. We should also emphasize the special role of genre and stylistic context in forming the music concept. The musical conceptual sphere, on the

¹⁷ Samoilenko A. I. Музиковедение и методология гуманитарного знания. Проблема диалога (Music studies and the methodology of humanities knowledge. The problem of dialogue). Monograph / ed. N. G. Aleksandrova. – Odessa: Astroprint, 2002. – 244 p.

¹⁸ Marik V.V. Явища концепта і концептосфери в музичному мистецтві: до проблеми вічного образу (The phenomena of concept and conceptual sphere: On the issue of the eternal image). Autoref. of a dissertation for the academic degree of the Candidate of Arts, specialty 17.00.03 – Music art. – Odessa Nezhdanova State Music Academy. – Odessa, 2008.

¹⁹ Ibid. – P. 8.

one hand, is a system that unites the conceptual properties of music within certain historical and stylistic limits..., and on the other hand, it is individual composer's poetics"²⁰.

Based on this definition of the music concept and conceptual sphere, we will, however, draw attention to the fact that the author apparently having the European cultural dominant in mind naturally singled out "individual composer's poetics" as its fundamental element. In the Chinese variant of the concept, instead social and educational role should be mentioned closely related to the ritual and ceremonial tradition in the Chinese music art.

This fact was noticed by ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius, who considered: the order and harmony in a people's music to be the most effective means for maintaining the order in society and for the best spiritual and intellectual upbringing of people. To determine the state of a country and its level of development, Confucius listened to the Chinese ceremonial music. Through it, he grasped the harmony of world construction himself, and considered music education to be the most important state task²¹.

In this respect, we can formulate the following hypothesis: the guidelines of artistic content that arise on the basis of adaptation of essentially European elements of music culture in the widest spectrum of notions that were integrated in Chinese music life around a hundred years ago, in Chinese national music will most certainly reflect unique mental signs, as well as unique concepts that do not always overlap with the European ones, even if verbal or other concepts that are key to this or that sound artefact seem to be similar.

The above hypothesis can be exemplified with such a self-evident "crossing point" of two distant cultural traditions as program instrumental music. The general psychological basis for perception of program music in different civilizations is the natural desire to find an adequate objective and notional range for music intonation, texture juxtaposition, rhythmic complexes and other musical expressive means, as well as an opportunity to outline the sphere of specific emotions, feelings and associations, and contrast music images with verbal (or occasionally visual ones that are after all also transformed into the verbal plane) notions and images.

In this respect, it is very important to penetrate the nature of illustrative thinking or, to be more precise, that of selection of illustrative themes in European music and the legacy of

²⁰ Ibid. – P. 12-13.

²¹ Perelomov L. S. Конфуций: «Лунь юй» (Confucius: "Lun Yu"). – Moscow: Vostochnaya Literatura: RAS, 1998. – P. 56 – 59.

Chinese composers. One of the key difference is the duration of the period of application of the program principles in works of artists from different continents. In Europe, the practice of giving a program name to instrumental works was launched as early as a couple of thousand years ago. It appeared in the ancient world; in the Middle Ages it receded to the background; in the Renaissance period and especially during that of Baroque it gradually returned primarily as a sound-expressive and sound-imitating phenomenon. And its program characteristics for a very longtime of the development of European music were actively evolving, exerting more and more influence on the processes of renewal and widening of the semantic field of music and its expressive means. For various styles, trends and national schools, the program aspect is an integral component of the artistic image that every time manifests its new properties. That is to say, the concept of programty here is shaped according to the regularity described by V. Marik: “manifest the importance of involvement, embeddedness in the present time for any conceptualization.”

The situation is different with Chinese music. Unlike European, Chinese music for European instruments (mainly the fortepiano and violin) started developing not that long ago. Researchers refer its origins to the 1920s. It should be also pointed out that leading composers in the sphere Lee Inhye, Van Lisan, Xian Venie and others didn't just borrow the highly developed European tradition of instrumental art, they transformed it and enriched with original achievements of Chinese culture, filled it with symbolism and associations of the national spiritual continuum, and, most importantly, interpreted the key concept encoded in the programty in a different way. This is why it is important to point out another divergence in the program music by Chinese composers – it represents the cultural tradition in the synthesis with European legacy of musical expressive system for *exclusively* European instruments. The concept of national culture in these opuses is usually represented by programs that in this or that way expose the philosophical and ethical principles of Confucianism or express different aspects of Dao.

Based on the above arguments, we conclude that term “concept” seems to be very accurate in exposing the way of thinking of musicians whose mentality and upbringing traditions, world view shaping and artistic values are embedded in a unique attitude to nature, universe and the human being in the circle of existence that all in all differs for the European transcendental dimensions. For the Chinese, cognition of the human via

worshipping and deification of nature permeates the multi-millennia history of the development of the nation, its spirituality and philosophy, unites Daoism, Confucianism and Buddhism being one of the mental principles of world perception. To sum up, we can metaphorically claim that while the European civilization is gradually developing anthropocentrism as the key worldview principle and transcendental concept, the oriental image of the world focuses on nature, and the human being should be in unity and harmony with it in accordance with the principles of Dao. The music art of both civilization spheres distinctively confirms and uniquely transforms these fundamental conceptual essences providing modern overtones to the content and new material forms of expression.

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