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# When the local encounters the global: aesthetic conflicts in the Chinese traditional music world

Jiaxuan Yu\*

\*Correspondence:  
jiaxuan.yu@emory.edu

Department of Sociology, Emory  
University, 1555 Dickey Drive,  
Atlanta, GA 30322, USA

## Abstract

Through a case study of the Chinese traditional music world, this study explores how artists in different specializations within an art world working on an indigenous art form make sense of divergent aesthetics. By adopting both Becker's (Art worlds: 25th anniversary edition, updated and expanded, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2008) view of art worlds as substantially existing communities shared by artistic individuals and Bourdieu's (Poetics 12(4–5):311–356, 1983) emphasis on artistic divergences stemming from broader social structures, I build a theoretical framework regarding how implicit *aesthetic conflicts* coexist with explicit collaborations in an art world. Under the impact of cultural globalization, the Chinese traditional music world's conventions have experienced a historical revolution. Since then, music performers enact frames to defend the aesthetics that they consider "traditional" that emphasize stability in terms of the musical content but that have highly idiosyncratic styles of performance. However, other types of musicians—namely those involved in composing, conducting, theoretical research—are more likely to enact frames defending aesthetics that express a willingness to "Westernize" based on their understandings and emphasize on innovation in terms of musical content and systematic and routinized styles of performance. Their framings shape their different reactions to their art world's conventions. By analyzing this process, I show how local–global dynamics constitute aesthetic conflicts in an art world that is often considered highly local and traditional.

**Keywords:** Art world, Conventions, Aesthetic conflict, Chinese traditional music, Frames, Globalization

## Introduction

Artworks (e.g., musical compositions) should be viewed as the result of collaborative activity rather than the lone activity of isolated artists (e.g., composers, see Becker 2008). While artists of various types create artworks, they do so within communities that Becker famously described as "art worlds." With the artistic individuals' interactions and negotiations, the art worlds, as communities, along with their conventions (i.e., agreements regarding the general rules for art production), are thus formed. While the art worlds are marked by collaborations, consensus is not the whole story. The artists sometimes also compete for recognition or dominance (Bourdieu 1983). That is to say, art

world participants may also have different opinions regarding what constitute good arts, and these differing opinions can sometimes escalate into outright conflict (Becker and Pessin 2006).

In this paper, I explore how artists in different *specializations* within an art world working on an *indigenous* art form make sense of divergent *aesthetics* resulting from *globalization*. In this study, aesthetics refers to sets of concepts, norms, and activities that define the features of artworks that can be considered as “good” which often evoke pleasures in people either cognitively or affectively, or are considered have the potential to achieve this goal (Fine 1992; Becker 2008: 131; van der Laan and Kuipers 2016). Previous scholars have often examined the process by which a distant type of artwork takes a new form in a particular locale (e.g., Western classical music and pop-rock music, see. Regev 2011; Inoue 2018). The empirical case in this paper reminds us that the global diffusion of arts also has other aspects. These aspects occur during the process by which a well-established local genre (e.g., Chinese traditional music) evolves and takes a new form in its nation of origin. I show how an art world that is often considered local and traditional can also be deeply impacted by globalization.

The Chinese traditional music world provides an excellent opportunity to address how art world participants respond to the divergences caused by globalization. The local and global elements incorporated into this art world both rely upon centuries of practice; meanwhile, Chinese traditional music is still actively produced (i.e., new works are composed) and evaluated in contemporary China by local performers, composers, conductors, and music theorists. In this music world, the performers are the carriers of the aural traditional aesthetic, and they are more likely to maintain that high-quality music upholds long-held ideas developed locally and embodied across generations of performers. Other participants in this art world—namely those involved in composing, conducting, theoretical research, or pedagogy—are more likely to compliment Western aesthetics. They maintain that good music should continually break new ground while also adhering closely to the written musical text, thereby aligning with Western traditions.

Theoretically, to further the study of conflicts in the art worlds, I conceptualize these divergences among the musicians as a unique form of *aesthetic conflict* (DiMaggio 1982; DeNora 1991; Dowd et al. 2002; Becker 2008) evoked by cultural globalization. Aesthetic conflicts result from the coexistence of compelling aesthetics, that is, different norms regarding what constitutes good art as well as how to make it. To disentangle the dynamic of aesthetic conflicts, on the one hand, I adopt Becker’s (2008) view of art worlds as substantially existing communities shared by artists; on the other hand, I maintain Bourdieu’s (1983) emphasis on divergences among artists stemming from different positions. In this study, the divergences among musicians originate from the different levels of their involvement in the exotic elements of conventions that ultimately incorporated into the local musical world. These elements are introduced to China through cultural globalization.

Analytically, to elaborate on the contents of the musicians’ aesthetics, I focus on how the artists *frame* (i.e., shape their schemata of interpretations) their aesthetics and consider their positions concerning the conventions shared by this art world as the source of their sensemaking process (see Goffman 1974). Moreover, to demonstrate that the

frames can be very important not only to the evaluation process but also to artists' actions as activities (Becker 2008: 131; Roy and Dowd 2010), I reveal how Chinese traditional musicians build their actions by considering whether to accept (or conform to) or resist the aesthetics shared within their specialization based on their understandings of these frames. In this sense, cultural globalization is not only an outside-in process but also a reality that is actively practiced by the perceivers.

To interrogate this divergence in aesthetics and how musicians make sense of it, I take the following steps. First, I theorize that aesthetic conflicts are shaped by the changes to conventions within this art world as a result of globalization through a combination of both Becker's and Bourdieu's theoretical insights regarding the collaboration and struggles present in the art worlds. I also briefly delineate the historical context in which Western musical elements entered China and its traditional music art world in the twentieth century. Next, I focus my analysis on interviews with Chinese traditional musicians to show how they understand and negotiate their art world conventions within their respective aesthetics that designate quality in Chinese traditional music. Finally, I close by discussing the implications of my findings.

### **Aesthetic conflicts arising from globalization**

Cultural globalization has led the art world elements of traditional Chinese music to be enacted alongside elements that have been incorporated from the Western classical music world. As I show below, I theorize that this is the case because participants in the art world perceive aesthetic conflict while maintaining awareness of collaborative artwork productions.

To clarify this theoretical argument, I first address how aesthetic conflicts can arise in the art world. I then elucidate how cultural globalization, specifically global artistic diffusion, leads to the coexistence of the elements of conventions that originate from different cultural traditions and corresponding aesthetic conflicts within an existing local art world. After that, to situate the theoretical framework into the context of this study, I provide a brief description of how the divergent elements of conventions was introduced into the Chinese traditional music world and subsequently informed the current aesthetic conflicts among musicians.

### **Aesthetic conflicts in art worlds**

When artists collaborate to produce art works, they commit to both the pursuits of the artistic communities and to addressing their unique aesthetics that have been shaped by their life trajectories. On the one hand, they work within the context of the artistic communities in which they produce the art works together. To do so, they cooperate to achieve the goal of the communities. According to Becker, the artists' collaborations and interactions that aim to "do the things together" ultimately form the artistic communities, namely the "art worlds." In art worlds, artists are coordinated by *conventions*, i.e., sets of patterns and agreements regarding the general operational rules for art production (Becker 2008: 40–41).

On the other hand, beyond the shared general rules, the artists recognize their own ideas and preferences. According to Bourdieu (1983), the preferences of certain aesthetics represented by subgenres or styles within a larger category of art form also motivate

artists. Bourdieu conceptualizes aesthetics as *positions*. The struggles, conflicts, and competitions that aim to seek dominances, or the recognitions of these positions, inform the “field of art production.” In Bourdieu’s eyes, the field of art production is the aggregation of all these competitive interpersonal activities within or surrounding the art productions, and these interactions may not necessarily seem like communities in the artists’ eyes as assumed by Becker. More importantly, Bourdieu argues that the fields of art production are formed by the power and socioeconomic relations that exist in the broader society. While they pursue the positions, the artists match themselves to the positions that have the features they favor based on their *habitus* (i.e., a set of dispositions shaped by the social environment). Compared with Becker, Bourdieu pays more attention to how the social structures that exist prior to the art worlds exert influences on the artists.<sup>1</sup>

Despite focusing on different facets, both Becker and Bourdieu emphasize the importance of the artists’ own decision-making processes based on the perceptions of their relations to other people who are either inside or beyond the art worlds. Becker highlights that when artists communicate, they contemplate the existence of communities (i.e., art worlds) as important entities. Therefore, artists see collaborating as a given situation; Bourdieu, nevertheless, reminds us that the habitus shaped by external social structures beyond the art worlds also significantly guides the artists’ thoughts and behaviors.

Aesthetic conflicts could then emerge when artists with divergent positions, namely divergent aesthetics, are incorporated into a given art world under the new shared conventions. Put simply, they would be in a situation marked by explicit collaboration and implicit aesthetic conflicts: *they work together to produce art works, and they think they should do so, but they could have very different answers to the question “What constitutes good art?” based on their own experiences.* Although the divergent elements of conventions can be organized into an established or even enacted system, the individuals inside it may only stand for a certain kind of aesthetics. Once their habitus become very different from one other’s, they hold divergent aesthetics. Nevertheless, collective art production can continue because they can still produce creative works that fit into the conventions in a stable and routine manner.

### **Cultural globalization, changes of conventions, and aesthetic conflicts**

Cultural globalization is a distinct social process that could perpetuate aesthetic conflicts. As a source of cultural change, cultural globalization introduces new cultural elements into existing fields by spreading symbols and values (Lechner and Boli 2014: 8; Tugal 2017; Çakmaklı et al. 2017; Jijon 2017).

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<sup>1</sup> A common understanding of the coexistence of Becker’s and Bourdieu’s theories is that they serve as each other’s alternatives while explaining the social aspects of art productions. According to some existing theoretical studies, the former argues that the aggregations of personnel that produce and consume art per se are effective entities with the most important influence on art production (see Bottero and Crossley 2011; Becker and Pessin 2006; Bourdieu 1983). Meanwhile, the latter argues that the broader social structure beyond this group of personnel ultimately shapes not only the cultural production process but also the identity of the artists. In this article, since all my research subjects are personnel who produce and consume art per se, I use Becker’s term “art world” to better describe the population I am concerned with in this study.

Existing studies have documented at least three forms of changes that cultural globalization can bring into art worlds. First, cultural globalization can promote the transnational circulation of specific art works and art forms to build brand-new art worlds in many countries, such as through the importation and exportation of music repertoires (Inoue 2018), films (Wu and Chan 2007), exotic music genres (Regev 2011), forms of culinary arts (Lane 2019), and styles of clothing (Karademir-Hazir 2014) into a country or a region. Second, it can introduce new elements of *conventions*, namely new techniques and approaches for art production, into a given art world, such as through the introduction of new organizational forms for art producing entities (Santoro 2010; Kaplan 2012). Third, it can introduce or perpetuate the occurrences of certain *aesthetics*, such as ideologies and values that can guide practices of production (Shin et al. 2014) and ways of defining what can be considered authentic and good (Janssen et al. 2008; Wherry 2006). The latter two forms of global artistic diffusion play important roles in the dynamics of the transformations of existing local art worlds amid cultural globalization.

Rather than self-evolving in a transcendental manner, the conventions shared by the art worlds are constructed and transformed by social actors. Cultural entrepreneurs, namely prestigious individuals or social groups who have material and cultural capital, can promote the transformation of an art world (e.g., DiMaggio 1982; Santoro 2002; Phillips and Owens 2004; Kharchenkova 2019). Among many of practices, *isomorphism*, that is, emulations to institutions that are considered beneficial, is very commonly used when cultural entrepreneurs seek to improve or legitimate an organizational field (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). In particular, under the context of cultural globalization, isomorphism in art productions often aims to adopt many expressive features (e.g., appearances, styles) and, often times, conventions that seem useful for the production of a given feature. This process is called the *expressive isomorphism* (see Regev 2013: 31) of cultural production amid globalization. This kind of change results in a situation in which the local (“indigenous”) and global (“exotic”) elements of conventions eventually coexist within the same art world (Giuffrè 2009; Franssen and Kuipers 2013; Motherway 2013; Karadeir-Hazir 2014; Çakmaklı et al. 2017).

While the conventions serve as shared practical rules and bound the artists together explicitly in the art worlds, the aesthetics pertain to the realms of implicit normative values and logics, along with relevant embodied actions. Globalization is a unique context in which artists share the same conventions but hold divergent aesthetics. Shaped by their trainings and career trajectories, some artists may pay more attention to the aesthetics introduced amid globalization, while some of them may still see as more traditional aesthetics as being fundamental. The former group may show more willingness to “catch up with” global standards of art productions, while the latter group may consider their national and local characteristics as more important (Regev 2007).

#### **Incorporation of western elements into the Chinese traditional musical world in the twentieth century**

The conventional change of the Chinese traditional music world stemmed from cultural entrepreneurs’ commitments to incorporating musical elements from the Western music world. To do so, they tried to recruit people who had the desired skills and styles to contribute to the anticipated new Chinese traditional music world.

Therefore, in the twentieth century, the cultural entrepreneurs incorporated several specializations that originated from the Western music worlds into the Chinese music world to make the Chinese traditional music world more well-rounded; this system remains active to this day.

Chinese traditional music refers to existing forms of music that originated in ancient China or pieces and ways of performance that are created contemporarily but with tunes and musical forms adopted from the ancient style (Xiao 2009). Before the twentieth century, the Chinese traditional music world consisted solely of performers skilled in instrumental playing, dancing, dramatic performances, and ritual music (Qiao 2004). These performers were mainly trained through the inheritance of skills based on highly flexible notations and oral interpretations of the musical works according to their instructors' personal understanding of the works (Xiao 2009).

The first attempt to change the conventions of Chinese music production was to reshape it into a system that was as similar as possible to the Western system. At the start of the twentieth century, the Chinese music world incorporated numerous elements from Western music, which created a bounded system of musical production, thereby blending traditional Chinese and Western conventions but seeing the latter as the mainstream (Liu 2010). To build a new system of conventions to support music research and education in China, headed by several scholars who had studied abroad in Europe and the USA, the Chinese Ministry of Education introduced many key conventions that had been developed in Western musical worlds, such as the system of musical disciplines and their corresponding pedagogies (Zhou 1999). Such actions introduced several brand-new specializations to the Chinese music world, such as composing, conducting, and theoretical analysis, which were developed in Western countries.

Amid the transformation of the general Chinese music world, the subfield of Chinese traditional music gradually emerged. The specific realm of "Chinese traditional music" as an explicit music world with boundaries and members did not take shape until the performers, as the main group most likely to be trained in and thus inherit the traditional aesthetics of music production, called for attention to the necessity of protecting the traditional Chinese ways of producing music. Many of them were recruited by higher educational systems as instructors. After assuming their new positions, many of these individuals expressed concerns about the diminishment of Chinese traditional-style music. They argued that the current musical training and production systems were simply imitations of Western styles, which might be contradictory to Chinese people's aesthetics and the practitioners' identities as Chinese musicians and Chinese people (Wang 2009).

The performers tried to approach the ideal style of advanced Chinese traditional music in their own way but still attempted to integrate Western techniques and Chinese traditional musical elements. They differed from their colleagues who defended the Westernization of Chinese music, however, by contending that the Western elements of conventions should just be used to facilitate the expression of Chinese musical elements instead of being the ultimate principle of musical production. Despite being criticized by some theorists as a useless effort to restore a backward genre (Feng 2007), the musical performance groups initiated by the performers were also hailed

by some musicologists as the embryo of the Chinese traditional orchestral music developed in the 1950s (Liu 2009).

Chinese traditional music production was further transformed during the period of the Anti-Japanese war since 1930s and later under the new government of the People's Republic of China since 1949. During this period, the main goal of traditional musical practitioners was to collect traditional musical elements from various regions to create musical pieces that could be easily accepted by ordinary people and lift people's spirits to face the challenges of war and rebuilding national identity (Xiao 2009). For this purpose, the leaders of the traditional artistic groups advanced Chinese traditional music production with relatively systematic and advanced Western techniques. A typical musical form created in this period was Chinese traditional orchestral music, which was developed in the 1950s (Qian 2013). In this musical form, the Chinese instrumental sections, with some ancillary Western instrument sections (i.e., basses), sit together in an organizational style that is extremely similar to that of the Western orchestra. After the reform and opening up in 1978, even more forms of such hybrid Chinese traditional musical works were developed. Today, when examining the system produced by the practices in the early twentieth century, what can still be seen is more a bounded system of Western and Chinese traditional elements than a whole that perfectly integrated these two segments.

The historical patterns I describe above figured prominently in the interviews that I conducted, which shows that divergent aesthetics are still at play in this particular art world. In the next section, I turn to the analytical approach and research method through which I look at how the musicians address their aesthetics today.

### **Approaching the aesthetic conflict at present**

#### **Analytical strategy: identifying frames used by the musicians**

Aesthetics, as a form of evaluation, can be very vague and abstract (Fang 2020). As a result, when artists evaluate their aesthetics and the corresponding conflicts, they build more concrete understandings of these abstract aesthetics to both make sense of and address the aesthetics in the interactions.

The aesthetics, on the one hand, serve as positions in which the artists situate themselves; on the other hand, they also constitute the embodied activities and interactions of the artists. I argue that, to build these cognitions and organize the activities, musicians build shortcuts to obtain intuitive understandings of the complex aesthetics with which they work by coding and enacting these aesthetics as *frames*. Frames, as defined by Goffman (1974), are "schemata of interpretation" based on which people can "locate, perceive, identify, and label" that which they encounter in their daily lives (cf. Snow et al. 1986). Framing can affect social processes on multiple levels and in multiple ways. For individuals, this process can shape their understanding of social occurrences and guide their behavior (McCluskey et al. 2016). For groups, such as participants in social movements, the framing process can set their agendas (or targets) through meaning-making processes and thus guide their collective action (Snow et al. 1986; Vicari 2010). For the broader social system, changing the application of frames may alter institutional arrangements by establishing new norms and leading people to accept them. Multiple frames can often be applied simultaneously as individuals form their perceptions and

interpretations of a social phenomenon (Chong and Druckman 2007; Warikoo and de Novais 2015).

This framing process is mainly based on subjective cultural evaluation and construction processes. Each of the frames represent an important theme within the aesthetics. Artists use specific symbols, or “metaphors” (Kharchenkova 2019), to understand their art worlds. While not explicitly labeled in musicians’ everyday artistic evaluations, these frames are indeed very effective tools that allow musicians to identify the themes of divergent aesthetics. That is to say, in Chinese traditional music world, rather than being entirely vague and only be able to be illustrated with some typical exemplar narratives, the central themes of aesthetics (i.e., the “frames”) held by the Chinese traditional music practitioners appear in a quite strong and organized form that can be clearly grasped and clustered.

At the same time, artists also perceive the conflicts of aesthetics within the contents of frames. While musicians make explicit the frames they recognize within their own field of specialization, they also recognize how they are different from the specialization(s) that hold aesthetics that are divergent from theirs. They do so by mentioning the features of these aesthetics that quite fit into the frames used among those specializations. In this way, they make sense of and sometimes push back aesthetics that are divergent from theirs.

### **Data and methods**

To obtain a comprehensive understanding of the aesthetics and the elements of conventions in the Chinese traditional music world, I conducted interviews with different types of musicians, including performers, composers, conductors, and musical theorists. All the respondents were recruited in China, mainly from Beijing, Shandong, Shanghai, and Zhejiang. The reason for choosing multiple areas was to obtain comprehensive sources of data from multiple regions. I used the snowball sampling method with multiple starting points to recruit my respondents. This strategy recruits respondents who fit the criteria of this research but may not be able to represent the whole population of practitioners in the Chinese traditional music world because this is not a random sampling method. Respondents came from orchestras and local conservatories of music. The musicians’ conversations and opinions showed very similar patterns across the four regions during the interviews.

Before starting the work of data collection, I took several courses related to music history and musicology at a top-ranked conservatory of music in China to obtain the necessary professional knowledge of music production. The courses included History of Western Music, History of Chinese Music, Introduction of Music Theory, and seminars focused on Chinese traditional instruments. After obtaining this knowledge and some sociological knowledge of art production and globalization, I interviewed the respondents about (1) their training and career path, (2) their evaluation of what good performance and good works are (including questions regarding differences between Chinese traditional and Western standards of music production), and (3) their understandings



of the concrete operations they have seen during their music production process. Each topic included several general sub-questions.<sup>2</sup>

I conducted semi-structured interviews with 36 respondents. I conducted most of the interviews individually, but I also conducted some group interviews upon my interviewees' request, such as in the case that a group of musicians wanted to talk about their collaborative work or shared experiences together. During the process of data collection, as most of the respondents tended to see the difference between Chinese and Western music as a very important topic related to the production of Chinese traditional music, I expanded the length of the second section and made it the most important part of the interviews.

Data analysis was carried out with MAXQDA. Part of the data analysis was conducted in tandem with the data collection process. As 34 out of 36 respondents spontaneously expanded their talk on the topic about globalization, expressing strong preferences for either local or global elements of musical production, I excerpted all the relevant talk during the process of transcribing the audio recordings. I then classified all the respondents based on some of their basic characteristics (as shown in Table 1) and found that their specializations had the strongest connection to their musical preference. This was also in accordance with their self-identified differences in terms of aesthetics among themselves.

### **Framing divergent aesthetics in the Chinese traditional music world**

Performers and musicians in other specializations in the Chinese traditional musical world face aesthetic conflicts that have been caused by historical revolutionary changes in their conventions. The empirical findings of this study echo these historical trajectories. Figure 1 maps different streams of frames that prevail among performers (i.e., "traditional" aesthetics) and other types of musicians (i.e., "Westernized" aesthetics) based on two key procedures of music production, namely composition and performance, which were mentioned and recognized by most of the musicians I interviewed with the exception of a few outliers.

The columns represent divergent aesthetics of performers and musicians in specializations other than performers, and the rows represent the topics to which they refer. The word in each cell is the name of the frame that the musicians enacted regarding either composition or performance. The following part of this section is divided into two parts, and each part explains a stream of the frames by presenting how the musicians locate and ground the frames of performance or composition in their everyday understanding and practices. More importantly, each frame originates from the elements of the relevant conventions. To further detail the connections between aesthetics and the

<sup>2</sup> To get a better understanding of the major concerns of musicians during their production process, I tried to ask broader questions and include as many types of musicians as possible in my data collection process. During this process, I let the topics that the musicians are really interested in "emerge" from the conversation. This interviewing strategy was shown to be successful because the topic regarding how globalization affects the Chinese music world emerged (in most of the musicians' words, the topic concerned comparisons and combinations of Western and Chinese musical elements). All the questions were derived from topics (1) that were frequently covered in the music courses I took as worthy research topics for musicologists and (2) that seemed to be mentioned frequently by the musicians. The first set of questions collects information on their demographic background and career path, which can serve as the basis of potential groupings of the musicians. The second set of questions seeks to understand their aesthetics, and the third set of questions seeks to understand the elements of conventions they have perceived and their attitude toward them.

**Table 1** Basic information of the respondents

	Count
<i>Musicians</i>	
Composer	5
Conductor	2
Musical theorist	7
Performer	22
<i>Age</i>	
20–29	16
30–39	7
40–49	3
50–59	9
60 and above	1
<i>Affiliation</i>	
Orchestra	12
University/conservatory	24
<i>Gender</i>	
Female	17
Male	19

Topic	Traditional Aesthetics (Performers)	Westernized Aesthetics (Other specializations)
Composition	Stability	Innovation
Performance	Idiosyncrasy	Systematicity

**Fig. 1** Divergent frames in the Chinese traditional music world

corresponding conventions as well as the contents of the frames, Table 2 provides a summary of the main narratives that relevant to the frames and the related elements of conventions the musicians are exposed to. The narratives in Table 2 are extracted from the original conversations of the interviewees (including both interviews and some informal talks among them), and the names of the frames and aesthetics are summarized by the researcher based on the narratives.

**“Traditional” aesthetics among performers**

***Good composition: frame of “stability” emphasizing good command of inherited “natural rules”***

When the performers expressed their aesthetics about what good music is, they highlighted the importance of stability and maintaining traditional elements during the composition process. According to the performers, these traditional elements should follow certain rules representing “natural rules” that are supposedly consistent across human societies and the world. This preference was mainly shaped by their informal preference for highly diverse one-on-one training following certain traditions created long ago, i.e., a mode inherited from the traditional approach to musical pedagogy. In the context of

**Table 2** Aesthetics and relevant elements of conventions in the Chinese traditional music world

Specialization	Aesthetics	Topic	Frame: narratives	Elements of conventions
Performers	Traditional	Composition	Stability: following the natural rules	One-on-one trainings inheriting existing styles
		Performance	Idiosyncrasy: different performance/interpretations of the works among different performers	Individual differences among pedagogies and styles used by different performing instructors
Conductors, composers, musical theorists	Westernized	Composition	Innovation: (1) Revisions of current content and techniques and (2) producing academic outcomes rather than artistic works	The trends of composing innovative music works in higher education institutions
		Performance	Systematicity: Standardized and professionalized training and daily practice	Applications of standardized pedagogies in modern higher educational institutions and orchestras

musical teaching, instructors need to prove that the musical works selected by them are the best ones for their students.

In this situation, “being natural” and “stability” are two principal narratives used by the musicians to defend the appropriateness of the approach and the works they choose. In doing this, the performers claim that only after a composer is very familiar with the context and background of a place can he or she write good musical pieces that represent the naturalistic elements in real life:

*One day, I asked [composer and performer] Mr. Wenjin Liu about how to make good music as a young musician. He only said that if I can capture the correct “tone”, then I can be successful. But how to express the tones correctly? Different people have different tones. Northern people have straightforward tones, but southern people have milder tones. (P03, performer)*

In their eyes, the music following traditions (i.e., natural rules maintained for thousands of years) is the prototype of musical creation, and all other types of music are fairly functional. That is to say, the function of the compositions with many unfamiliar elements of music production is to increase diversities to their field. As seen from the descriptions of their preferences, these two performers used many discourses supporting the frame of “stability,” thereby emphasizing traditional aesthetics while also emphasizing the importance of natural elements:

*Deep inside, I like music with themes. I can’t accept modern music, and maybe that is due to my age...[Good music] should have a tune, a theme and a feeling of a scene, and then it should adjust the sound according to its theme...I feel like music should be a thing that people appreciate and indulge in, it should also have an aesthetic that can be enjoyed by people. When playing modern music, I cannot identify what it is after listening to it for a very long time, and I cannot understand its tune either. I cannot hear the beauty inside it! (P14, performer)*

*I treasure the lessons traditional music taught me. Now that I have a good command of traditional [music elements], I feel that my performance is very reliable...Say, in one of the concerts I performed this month, I felt that the pieces performed could be seen as contemporary music, but they contained many traditional elements. They were a little bit modernized, but they had a very strong traditional melodic line. (P18, performer)*

Therefore, except for a few outliers, the performers first stated their preference for works following traditional techniques and tunes first and then might express their conditional acceptance, with a very skeptical attitude, of more recent musical works with many innovative elements. This is a very important facet of the aesthetic conflicts between performers and other specializations in terms of how to define good compositions.

*In academia, as a form of exploring new pieces of music, definitely, I think it is necessary to compose very contemporary music. If you don't do this kind of avant-garde and front exploration in academia, then you won't find any other place to try it. But, if you want to produce concerts for ordinary people in society, then you should take the way ordinary people appreciate music into account at least a little bit. (P17, performer)*

Another young performer indicated that if composers want to introduce some new elements, they should be modeled after or represent aspects of the life world. A young *guzheng*<sup>3</sup> performer described her favorite musical work that depicted a typhoon, a natural disaster, in the following way:

*For example, the music of guzheng that I am most familiar with is War with Typhoon, which was created in 1965. This song depicts how the dockers defended the country's property when the typhoon came. It captures the sounds of the typhoon winds in its sound...in 1965, before the creation of this [War with Typhoon], the works of guzheng were usually relatively gentle. Usually, these small guzheng pieces would depict mountains and rivers, fishing boats sailing in the evening. Ten or twenty years earlier, I thought that the sound of guzheng could only capture water, but I never thought that it could depict wind as well. (P22, performer)*

Specifically, while talking about this topic, some of the performers used their knowledge of cultural differences to defend the appropriateness of inheriting traditional music elements (i.e., Western tunes and techniques such as standardized chords) and cast doubts on the applicability of Western music elements in the context of Chinese musical culture. In an informal chat, a performer of a wind instrument said that he believes there are stable universal norms of musical creation, and that music following the “natural rules” is the best. These “natural rules” refer to the cultural and natural environments in a certain time and space. Given this assumption, the “natural rules” vary from country to country and even from region to region. Therefore, in his opinion, introducing too many elements or principles of music production from the Western music field might

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<sup>3</sup> A Chinese traditional stringed instrument.

not work for people living in Chinese society (P01, performer, summarized from field notes).

***Good performance: frame of “idiosyncrasy” shaped by diverse trainings***

As mentioned above, in ancient times, performers inherited skills based on highly flexible notations and oral interpretations of the musical works according to the instructors’ (i.e., the senior performers who are often qualified to teach younger performers) personal understanding. Today, idiosyncratic approaches—namely flexibility and personalized styles—are still welcomed by the performers. This preference is reflected in their current pedagogies. One-on-one instruction, which strongly resembles apprenticeship, appeared to be the most popular choice among them.

Although one-on-one training is commonly used in the musical training process worldwide, compared with Western musicians, Chinese traditional music performers may have stronger boundaries among different genres of performance based on the origin of their training. In their view, it is common for every instructor to have their own style, pedagogy, and even techniques that shape their own unique strategy for training students.

Different instructors are assumed to have different strategies for training students. Therefore, it is common for Chinese traditional performance instructors to deliberately set aside time to correct the students’ habits learned from their previous instructor when accepting a new student from another instructor. In this way, the instructors can highlight their uniqueness. Their most common reason is that, for convenience in carrying out further teaching processes, it is better to have the students adapt to their pedagogies as early as possible.

In my interviews, all the performers who had experiences changing instructors indicated that they more or less struggled during the transition period. A current MFA student majoring in a stringed instrument who had changed instructors many times during her musical training process recalled that every time she changed to a new teacher or professor, she had to significantly change many of her habits of performance, including her gestures, the stress with which she struck the strings, and even the angles of her fingers while playing the instrument. Another performer recalled that even though her interpretation of a piece had been taught her by the composer of the work, when she met one of her instructors for the first time, she was required to change her style to perform this work in a completely different way. In her words, we can approximately consider the “latent standard” mentioned by her as a form of conventions, and see the actual operations and techniques as the approaches to produce the music that fits the aesthetics recognized by the teachers:

*That is to say, if you learn from a teacher, you have to change [many of your habits learned from other teachers]. I think it seems like a latent standard. Even if you feel extremely uncomfortable using the habit [taught by the new teacher], as he or she requires you to change, [you should do it]... [While performing,] I feel like every teacher has a different strategy for striking the strings. When I was learning from my previous teacher in Province A, he required me to lower the center of gravity of my hand because it can make the movements of the fingers faster... After*

*I moved to Province B my new teacher said that I definitely should not do it like that...He said this is an outdated technique, and now all the performers just let their fingers naturally fall and hit the strings...(P11, performer)*

Another young orchestral wind instrument performer even stated that as different instructors have distinctly different understandings of musical pieces, if a student studies with a relatively renowned teacher (or professor in performance), in his or her college or MFA entrance audition, even if he or she plays the instrument behind a curtain, the examiners can still immediately identify whose student he or she is after only a few notes because every performer has their own style of teaching<sup>4</sup> (P10, performer).

Given these facts, although the performers admit that there are drawbacks to this system, they still venerate the current system and feel it is unnecessary to make changes. According to them, a negative situation caused by this reality is that studying with only one teacher would limit their scope and ability in terms of the diversity and comprehensiveness of the skills they can command. However, in giving opinions about whether standardized pedagogies—as specified by the practitioners in the other specializations—should be developed for all the Chinese traditional instruments, they expressed their skepticism toward developing a universal pedagogy for their instruments. The reasons they provided for not initiating standard pedagogies were both normative and instrumental. First, from the perspective of protecting the aesthetic dimension of musical training, they argued that musical performance might become “unnatural” after being shaped by training that is too standardized. Furthermore, from a practical perspective, they believed it to be unfeasible and unnecessary to develop a standard pedagogy. They mentioned that establishing a standard system of pedagogy would mean that some pedagogies would seem better than others. Therefore, the owners of those pedagogies that were not selected into the system might feel offended, since their idiosyncratic way of playing their instruments had been ignored.

*I don't mean I disagree with compiling an encyclopedia or a standard textbook, but I feel like that no one wants to do this. To be frank, you can do it, but it is unnecessary. It will offend many people because you cannot decide which styles are “mainstream” ...That's just a “status symbol”, right? Moreover, if you would like to have it, you have to rank all the styles with an “order”. Beginning at that point, you will start to offend people...*

*Western people like compiling encyclopedias such as the Grove Dictionary of Music because they like to unify things, but in China, everyone just does things in their own way. Western people might have problems with right and wrong, but here you just do things that make you happy...Everyone has their own interpretations, you can just express what you want to express. (P11, performer)*

<sup>4</sup> This description is the interviewee's subjective feelings rather than a rule or finding that can be supported by concrete evidence.

### “Westernized” aesthetics among the other specializations

#### *Good composition: frame of “innovation” seeking for “new elements”*

The other types of musicians, however, considered innovation as their principle or the dominant rule of the subfields in which they participated. More specifically, as they considered innovation to be a norm usually adopted by Western societies, some of them treated it as one of the “more advanced” conventions of art production and tried very hard to internalize it. They considered producing innovative content a very important part of aesthetics for their specializations.

Some considered the revision of the current content and techniques used during the composing process a good strategy for innovation. In their eyes, whether the audience can accept it or not, this kind of practice itself is always meaningful in terms of bringing new things into the music world. From this perspective, they tended to consider pieces created by composers to be more valuable than those composed by performers with “existing traditional elements”:

*(Question: Normally speaking, how many kinds of pieces are there in Chinese traditional music?) The first one is music created by performers, which is different from the ones created by professional composers, and you can easily identify the difference by listening to them. They have stronger melodies and themes but maybe with nothing very new, right? In contrast, professional composers’ pieces try to find innovations and breakthroughs based on techniques of composition. Specifically, there are a group of pieces created by contemporary composers; they are pretty avant-garde, so the audience definitely cannot accept them. (NP04, theorist)*

Unlike performers, these musicians have a more relativistic view on what kinds of music can be considered good for a certain group and how to create it. Accordingly, what makes music good is not the features that echo specific norms and ideas shared by specific groups but the ones that are never heard by an audience or have unique features that can impact the target audience. In this way, the practitioners in the specializations other than performance show distinctly different aesthetic in terms of what constitutes good compositions. Specifically, for the field of Chinese traditional music, the best strategies are to bring Western elements to China and bring Chinese elements to the world in their original form or in a combination of Western and Chinese elements (NP11, composer).

Beyond their recognition of the frame of innovation, these musicians also admit that their practice of pursuing innovations can cause some side effects in the field of Chinese traditional music, which can to some extent be considered the cost of development in their own field. Two negative effects readily mentioned were (1) producing too many obscure works that are doomed to rapidly lose visibility because few can people understand them, let alone appreciate them, and (2) creating uncertainty regarding the trajectory of the development of the Chinese traditional music field as a whole.

*We made this way of composing Chinese traditional orchestral music in the 1950s at the time of the establishment of our country. At that time, no one could predict what it would look like now, so we cannot predict what it will look like in the future, like in 2020, either. But things will always change, even Western music [will also change]. As there are many people making music, there will be divergences; this should be the*

*rule of the development of things. (NP07, conductor)*

However, even if they assumed that these negative effects are highly likely to occur, they considered them necessary costs of pursuing innovation. They sometimes used the history of the development of other fields to support their beliefs. Sébastien (2018) finds that recognition from the higher education system can help artists legitimize their careers and work in the process of specialization. While talking with musicians other than performers, I found that their thoughts were in accordance with this finding. Among all the cases, stories stemming from academia were the most common. Higher educational institutions require musicians to be “innovative” and “contributive” in terms of adding to human beings’ understanding of the development of art as a system of knowledge, because, similar to other disciplines, music in universities is also expected to be a product of intellectual thought:

*Now, innovation, especially in universities, is necessary. If you don't innovate, you will die in the universities. Do you understand? In universities, there is a trend based on academic and historical trends. [The musical pieces] are not only artworks but also academic outcomes. It should first be an academic outcome, so its artistic value is sometimes unclear...You should first reach the academic standard, such as academic and technical level, and it is hard to say if such pieces are works of art... Sometimes these pieces will just have a “world premiere”, and then they are put on DVDs and stored. After that, they will never ever be performed again. There are too many cases like this. (NP11, composer)*

**Good performance: frame of “systematicity” emphasizing standard production and pedagogy**

These practitioners often expressed strong concerns about the unstandardized system of performance training, and they often compared it with Western music worlds according to their knowledge about these worlds. Based on this concern, the frame they used to narrate the ideal performance can be described as a frame of “systematicity” that emphasizes the use of standard pedagogy. Kharchenkova (2018) finds that in the market for contemporary art in China, artists often compare the market and art productions in China with their counterparts in the West. In this study, in accordance with existing studies, the “Western standard” is also an important reference for musicians other than performers when talking about how to achieve good performances. In their words, all the steps of performance training should have a standard and general guideline that can be used by every teacher, and such a standardized system should ultimately be developed for Chinese traditional musical systems just like “what Western musical fields have done,” in their understanding.

When I asked questions about globalization, a composer mentioned that Chinese traditional music should emulate German and Austrian music because these countries have a “higher standard” of music production (NP09, composer). Based on his understanding, the earlier commercialization and professionalization in the Western music field ultimately shaped Western practitioners’ pursuit of efficiency and quality in their music as a product. For their part, Chinese musicians could suspend these pursuits because of their tendency to please only themselves with their music:



*Our traditional Chinese musicians emphasize playing by ourselves or in small groups. So, it's a matter of personal private life, not professional playing for others. It's not real music, it's just performing for yourself. However, in the West, musical production has been professionalized for a long time. Say, Haydn, he lived on it. He wanted to create for others, so he had to make something like a mold. (NP09, composer)*

Additionally, a composer compared the current Chinese traditional performance training system and piano training based on his knowledge. In his view, compared with the system of piano pedagogy, which was mainly developed by the Western music field, the pedagogies of Chinese traditional music training seem too random and volatile:

*Let's take a simple example. Do you think the pedagogies of piano training are standardized? I think to some extent they are. They have has a set of standardized textbooks, although there are some slight differences among them, that's fine. For instance, while talking about the textbooks, I think most people just follow the track of 599, 849, and 740,<sup>5</sup> right? (NP11, composer)*

Therefore, these musicians feel that the musical training method currently widely used by performers is unstable (i.e., the feature that is often narrated by the performers as “idiosyncratic”) and thus to some extent outdated and in need of being improved. In their eyes, training and styles of performance should be highly unified and taught primarily by formal institutions. This preference for formal institutions is also reflected in the personal biographies they narrated. When asked to describe their musical training trajectories, they often listed the institutions they studied at but not the teachers they studied with. Specifically, while arguing for Western aesthetics, some of them expressed very radical and negative views on the current norms shared by the performers. In their view, some performers strongly resist new elements in musical pieces mainly because of their unwillingness to improve their skills diligently to adapt to new things.

*This kind of performer might have an attitude of resisting [the advancements of musical production]. That is to say, there is a group of performers who are satisfied with their current situation and do not want to make any progress...As contemporary people, you cannot simply reject anything new or refuse to study things diligently. (NP11, composer)*

What we can see from this quote is that this composer's attitude toward what constitute good musical training is also deeply shaped by the frame of innovation. By using the wordings of “making progress,” “contemporary people,” and “anything new,” beyond addressing the willingness of seeing that the performers make substantial progresses in their training pedagogies, the composer also tended to consider the performers' actions as a resistance of developing new things innovatively.

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<sup>5</sup> Textbooks of piano etudes written by Carl Czerny (1791–1857), a famous Austrian pianist.

### **Forming actions: accept or resist the current aesthetics in specialization?**

After constructing the frames, the artists may also negotiate the aesthetics (Fang 2020) they recognize with these frames. In this study, I identify two basic types of reactions. The first type is the acceptance of the attitudes within their own specializations toward the current conventions, and the second type is resistance. Both types are based on a strong understanding and awareness of the frames mentioned above. All of the interviewees built their reasoning and thoughts with the narratives directly related to the frames.

In this way, in accordance with Becker (2008)'s theory, they not only address their recognition of the collaborations within the art world but they also distinctively see the art worlds as important communities. According to my interviews, few respondents seemed indifferent to what was occurring in their field. Rather, each of them was keenly interested in the current situation of and potential future developments in the world of Chinese traditional music. They believed that their reactions would not harm their career path or the world of Chinese traditional music.

#### **Acceptance (or conformity)**

Most of the musicians chose to generally follow the aesthetics shared by their colleagues, and they tended to believe that their aesthetics would ultimately become the mainstream in the Chinese music field. Their acceptance tended to be a combination of authentic acceptance and conformity with some skepticism based on their sensemaking frame.

Bourdieu (1983) argues that the art productions are informed by "fields" that are defined by power struggles because every set of actors wants to be dominant. I agree somewhat but not completely with Bourdieu's argument. In this study, the practitioners of Chinese traditional music did not concentrate on the struggle for dominance. Instead, they tended to consider the collaborative situation as a more important method of building the thoughts regarding the development of Chinese traditional music. That is to say, despite they are different from each other in terms of the conceptual distinctions based on *symbolic boundaries* (Lamont and Molnar 2002), namely symbolic divides between their group and out-group members (Lacy 2004), they are not willing to further apply these conceptual distinctions to reinforce the social boundaries (i.e., unequal access to resources or opportunities) that could strengthen substantial segregations among them (Lamont and Molnar 2002). With this in mind, they thought that their own ideas were self-evidently better, and they believed that the system of musical production would adjust itself to achieve progress and balance without too much interference from the artists.

As mentioned above, many performers naturally accepted the "traditional" aesthetics that prevail in their own field. Some of the performers were slightly skeptical about them but still decided to follow them, as they thought that these aesthetics represented an inevitable destination for all the performers. One performer considered the traditional aesthetics "conservative" and a possible impediment to the development of his musical skills, but he still felt that he might fully accept them in the future. In his words, although he recognizes his tastes and musical skill, he would likely "stick to his own values" because it could be difficult to "get rid of many old habits." In this way, he himself might be entirely assimilated by his colleagues (P17, performer).

On the other side of the system of compelling aesthetics, namely the one shared by musicians other than performers, the performers had some insights into its rationales. Though admitting to the lack of concrete evidence for their postulations, they still provided some guesses as to why musicians other than performers give recognition to pieces that they can barely understand. They often mentioned that they more or less sensed that the composers, conductors, and theorists needed to find “new things” in their works to fulfill the requirements of their colleagues and their unique working environments.

*The composers might want to experiment based on some principles of composing skills. They have different aesthetics and concepts. They think they should break some rules of composing. I guess their approaches might be influenced by Western culture? I think that's OK. (P05, performer)*

As mentioned in the previous section, in most cases, in terms of aesthetic evaluations, the performers did not appreciate these efforts at innovation. However, most of the performers had a very strong sense that musical composition would become increasingly aesthetic and acceptable as it stabilized after the current period of chaos caused by inappropriate acceptance and imitations of Western-style music. Moreover, they believed that their norms of using traditional elements should be considered more appropriate and would eventually become the dominant aesthetic in the Chinese traditional music field once all the practitioners realize their reasonableness.

*Some composers or other music practitioners might be influenced by Western values, so they have made some attempts at innovation. I think this should be seen as a necessary step of our development...After all, Western music has also experienced many similar processes. For example, to let males sing a female's voice part or even soprano has been tried by opera singers. They were just explorations; if they could try something new after hundreds of years, then it should be seen as appropriate. Otherwise, it should be eliminated through selection or competition. (P07, performer)*

Many of these musicians also had their own understandings of the aesthetic conflicts, and they chose to adhere to their own norms. In this process, some of them also questioned the validity of their own efforts, but they still chose to follow the current trend because most of their colleagues just executed their work in that way. A composer contended that the pedagogies of composition and conducting should ultimately be standardized. However, at the same time, she also thought that under many conditions, the performers' aesthetics could also be acceptable because the standardization strategy just reflected a need for better teaching in the institutions:

*When I train my students in class, there must be a standard pitch system to train them. Whether they are students of national musical instruments, Western string music or piano music, there must be a unified standard. I can't say, "Let's use the pitch of erhu<sup>6</sup> instead of five tones when the students major in erhu come into the classroom!." No way.*

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<sup>6</sup> A Chinese traditional stringed instrument.

*So those things themselves are, actually, just imported means of doing things. We can only evaluate whether they are systematic, but not in terms of whether they are scientific. I think there is no comparison, since these pedagogies cannot be compared in the same dimensions. Like what you said, if someone asked you “Which one is better, Beethoven or Mozart”? You might answer, “Yeah, they are both great, but they are different.” That’s it. (NP10, composer)*

In this context, compared with their colleagues working within the specialization of performing, although the musicians in the other specializations remain skeptical of some elements in the Western tradition of music production in their eyes, they have a much stronger willingness to embrace the traditions from the Western music worlds. Therefore, instead of being influenced by the cultural globalization in an outside-in way, the artists might also actively embrace the globalization from the inside. Similar to the performers, many of the musicians also considered that their aesthetic based on the supposed Western values of music production had some potential to become the dominant one in the future. They expected the appearance of a perfect combination of both traditional and Western elements in musical production. However, again, they did not want to take any action to promote the wide acceptance of their aesthetics in the Chinese traditional music world either. They also considered the whole system and expected a natural evolution of the Chinese traditional music world.

### **Resistance**

In addition to those practitioners who were dedicated to the system of conventions, other practitioners showed a strong will to resist the current system, which could be seen as a unique type of negotiation among these musicians. By to some extent rejecting the core aesthetic accepted by their colleagues and accepting the aesthetic of the other side, the practitioners could also achieve success in their career by collaborating with practitioners with other roles or gaining recognition among musicians who were aware of the same aesthetics.

While recruiting my respondents, I found a group of musicians consisting of a composer and several performers. Unlike many other interviewees, instead of being two streams of practitioners with conflicting aesthetics, they were engaged in increasingly smooth and constant cooperation. According to their descriptions, each of them made some negative evaluations of their peers. Specifically, one of the performers in this group had thought about transforming to the area of theoretical research because she thought the subarea of performing was boring and defined by “outdated values and standards” (P15, performer). This performer also mentioned that she had wanted to quit her performance career and try to become a theorist by entering a musicology PhD program. However, as she had already been accepted by a prestigious MFA program in performance, she gave up this plan.

*Chinese traditional music is now undergoing rapid developments. If a teacher cannot keep in close touch with the frontier, or he or she cannot make rapid self-improvements, they might teach their students some very old and stagnant things and some outdated techniques and concepts could be shaped [in the students’ minds] ...If you keep emphasizing traditions, you will miss many creative or techni-*

*cal works. In this way, you may reject a sort of musical language, or in other words, a sort of audience or market. (P15, performer)*

The composer in this tiny group, at the same time, also tended to resist the common practice shared by his peers. This composer admitted that his works might be more acceptable to orchestras than his colleagues' compositions. Unlike other composers, he saw this recognition from performers as a form of success because, in this way, he could also be recognized by many people, including the audience and many musicians in the Chinese traditional music world. In this way, practically speaking, he could become increasingly famous as well:

*My choice is that a majority of my time and commitments are consumed with the composition of Chinese traditional pieces. I like to compose the kind of works that can be accepted by the masses and my audience. The orchestras very much like my works. I can feel that. They like my pieces from the heart. I think there might be two reasons. First, currently, many people in our circle know of me. The second one might be that this is my disposition of composing. I am very concerned about if my pieces can be easily accepted by others or not. I think maybe my aesthetics are closer to ordinary people and orchestras. I don't mean that other composers' works are worse, but they might just have other orientations, such as academic ones. That's just diversity. (NP08, composer)*

Although their unusual pathway of art production in the Chinese music field has brought success to this ensemble, what should be emphasized is that their actions are still mainly based on normative concerns (i.e., to produce good artwork) and are not driven merely by instrumental concerns (i.e., success). In this way, this group may have the potential to create new conventions by developing better modes of cooperation through their interactions with unique aesthetics.

This unusual resistance and solidarity might result from the idioculture (Fine 2012) shared by the members of this small group. According to Fine (2012), through interaction and shared memory in a given setting, a small group can develop its own local culture, which is a meso-level culture that can differ from the macro-level culture shared by the broader society. As the musicians in this small group have many experiences of working together on stage and backstage, they have had the opportunity to form their own idioculture. The formation process of their idioculture may be a possible direction for future studies.

## **Conclusion and discussion**

By researching the case of the Chinese traditional music world and its practitioners, this study argues that, under the impact of globalization, musicians make sense of the aesthetic conflicts (i.e., "traditional" or "Westernized") with divergent frames. In the Chinese traditional music world, for musicians other than performers, as their disciplines and their corresponding pedagogies (i.e., the elements of conventions) are adopted from the West, their thoughts about what and how to create good music have a strong tendency to be framed according to their perceptions of Western styles. For the performers, however, the aesthetics that emphasize their interpretations of local norms remain the most important concerns of their music production for most of them. Within these

frames that signify their current aesthetics, they grapple with conventions by accepting or resisting the aesthetics they perceive within their own specializations to navigate their career paths in the world of Chinese traditional music.

The aesthetic conflicts identified in this study provide important information with which to better understand the cultural reality of Chinese art production that is shaped by the dynamic of globalization. The “traditional” aesthetics consist of the frame of “stability,” which emphasizes a good command of the inherited natural rules of composition, and the frame of the “idiosyncrasy” of performance, which is shaped by diverse trainings. At the same time, the “Westernized” aesthetics consist of the frame of “innovation,” which seeks new elements of composition, and the frame of “systematicity,” which emphasize standard production and pedagogy in performance. For both activities analyzed in this study (i.e., composition and performance), the performers and musicians from specializations other than performing show very compelling aesthetics, and they form the aesthetic conflict that is present in the Chinese traditional music world today.

This study also provides an important case study to understand aesthetic and normative concerns in conflicts that occur in organizational fields that result from dynamic of cultural globalization by revealing the aesthetic conflicts in the Chinese traditional music world. The conflicts regarding norms and aesthetics may not only stem from the divergences based on positions in an organization but may also deeply affected by the cultural globalization (Giuffre 2009). In previous studies, the scholars often attribute the tensions between different norms (or institutions)—such as tension between conformity and innovation—to the different levels of engagements to commercialization or bureaucratization that solely developed within a given culture (e.g., Glynn 2000, 2002; Dowd 2004; Dowd and Kelly 2012). In this study, the case of the Chinese traditional music world shows that the conflicts that are playing out in a centuries-old art world may also result from and be narrated by multiple cultural resources with different origins.

Moreover, this coexistence shows the musicians’ acceptance of multiculturalism in the era of globalization, which should be considered an important context that enables the aesthetic conflicts to happen; i.e., the aesthetic conflicts cannot unfold while musicians can only perceive and accept only one culture. Despite their compelling features, the holder of each of the aesthetics seeks recognition. This is because each kind of aesthetic, from the musicians’ perspectives, represents a given form of culture. Therefore, both kinds of aesthetics have legitimacy as they stem from the cultures they represent. Based on the musicians’ recognition of the appropriateness of the existences of different cultures, rather than building strategies to dominate the conventions from their own aesthetic preference, they could allow the elements stemming for other cultural resources to exist.

In addition to the delineations of the appearances of the aesthetic conflicts in an art world, this study provides implications on the current mechanisms and motivations for individuals to involve themselves in globalization efforts. The frames in the Westernized aesthetics indicate that after the artists introduce new elements into an art world, the artists may also actively accept exotic cultural elements instead of being coerced to do so. The artists sometimes consider these actions as a way of embracing modernity (Regev 2007; Patel 2021). Moreover, the artists consider the possibilities of comparing their art world with others in the global art market. In this way, cultural globalization is not only an outside-in process but also an inside-out one.

This study can also point out new directions for empirical research on art worlds in non-Western societies. It provides a case representing the impacts of globalization in a field that tends to be considered exclusively local and traditional. The conclusion drawn from this study might be generalizable to the art worlds in other non-Western countries. As mentioned in the previous sections, as they are impacted by cultural globalization, the art worlds in many non-Western countries contain hybrid and conflicting opinions that originate from different sources, which can often lead to segregation and divergence. This paper provides a helpful perspective for probing these phenomena by looking into the concrete content of the understandings constructed by the artists themselves.

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#### Availability of data and materials

Since all the interviews in this study should be seen as confidential, the transcripts of interviews are unavailable in case the identities of the interviewees are identified.

#### Declarations

##### Competing interests

The author declares that she has no competing interests.

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