

# A Study on the Romantic Thoughts of Ancient Greek Music Aesthetics From the Perspective of Emotional Art

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**Abstract:** When it refers to music aesthetics in ancient Greece, there are three development trends: harmony theory, purification theory and imitation theory. The representative philosophers are Pythagoras, Plato and Aristotle respectively. Music aesthetics in ancient Greece contains strong humanistic thought and emphasizes the educational role of music. From the perspective of music emotional art, this paper analyzes the romantic art elements in music aesthetic thoughts of ancient Greece.

**Keywords:** Emotional art; Music aesthetics; Ancient Greek; Romance

## 1. Introduction

The words “lang man” in Chinese is the transliteration of romantic, and it means poetic and full of fantasy. The term is often used in the romanticism of the 18th and 19th centuries, and its roots are deeply rooted in epistemological aesthetics. Its origins can be traced back to ancient Greece and Rome. Through the analysis of the ancient Greek philosophical theories, we find that music aesthetics in ancient Greece sometimes expresses the tendency of idealism, and sometimes goes to the other side, which is based on the different philosophers’ cognition of the role of sensibility and reason, and different philosophers always have different focuses. This paper only analyzes the irrational side of ancient Greek music aesthetics from the perspective of emotional art, and discusses the positive role of sensibility in the development of human aesthetics [1].

## 2. Understand the Music Emotional Power Reflected in Ancient Greek Mythology

Ancient Greek mythology and music are inseparable, and examples which reflect music’s emotional power abound, often in the form of magic. In the long narrative epic <Odyssey> of ancient Greece, there are such records. When the hero Odysseus returns home from the Trojan War, he encounters a siren at sea. In the legend, they are a group of half-human and half-bird monsters that spend their lives on islands surrounded by reefs, and their song can confuse the mind and drive people crazy to the banshee, and then die on the rocks. Odysseus wanted to see if the banshee’s song was as good as it had been said, so he had his companions tie himself to the mast. And then they sealed their ears with wax balls and sailed to the banshee’s island. When Odysseus heard the song of the

banshee and went into such a crazy that he wanted to break the rope and jump into the sea. With his companions unable to hear anything, they finally crossed the island safely and Odysseus came to his senses again. This myth vividly reflects the ancient Greeks’ cognition of the emotional power of music, that is, music has the ability to make people’s emotions reach pole. Music is often synonymous with magic and seduction here.

Another example is about the musician Orpheus, and legend has it that he and his wife Eurydice were immortal lovers. But Eurydice was suddenly bitten to death one day by poisonous snakes, in order to find his love, so Orpheus went to the underworld alone. His tweedle was so beautiful that he not only conquered the boatmen of three rivers, but pacified the three-headed dogs of hell that kept the gate, and even charmed the furies. This allowed him to meet Hades and Persephone safely. Moved by Orpheus’s music and his undying love for his wife, the couple granted his request with one proviso. Orpheus must return to earth alone, with his wife at his heels. But he must not turn back before going back to earth, or his wife will die forever. They walked silently. When they were about to reach the ground, Orpheus was too excited to share the joy of rebirth with his wife, so he couldn’t help turning his head. Tragedy struck and death befell his beloved wife forever. In this myth, Orpheus moved the heaven and earth with the music full of love, he can even bring his beloved back to life. It was also because of this love that Orpheus broke the ban.

Throughout the ancient Greek mythology, the gods of Olympus are the ones closest to human character. Therefore, their stories can also be regarded as an embodiment of the secular life of ancient Greece. In mythology, both Odysseus and Orpheus show the triumph of emotion over reason, even when it leads to irretrievable results. This

undoubtedly positively confirms the influence of music on human emotions, in ancient Greek music aesthetics, the emphasis on the effect of music on people's emotions is the concrete embodiment of romantic thought.

### 3. The Corresponding Relationship and Application Between the form of Music and Human Emotion

From the perspective of music composition, music in ancient Greece had its own mode system, which was a series of notes arranged from top to bottom and divided into various modes due to the different positions of semi-tones, such as "Dolla", "phrygian", "Lydia" and so on. According to the ancient greeks, different modes have different personality types and emotional characteristics, thus forming different music styles, and different music styles have an impact on the mood of people who listening to music and cause personality changes [2] (Xiu Hailin: Overview of music aesthetics in ancient Greece). That is to say, a disposition slant rigid listener when hearing slow and gentle mode, will also raise gentle and compassionate feelings in the bottom of heart. And a man with weak temper who hears Frijia-style music can be macho.

In the early Greek philosophy system, Pythagoras school holds the pivotal position. The main idea of this school is harmony theory, especially the harmony of numbers. The Pythagorean School first discovered and established the fourth, fifth and octave intervals. Accordingly, they believe that the harmony of the universe is hidden in the harmony of numbers.

But Pythagoras still admits the power of music over emotions. It is embodied in this school's understanding of music purification. According to the study of music thought of Pythagoras school, Pythagoras determined the primary purification function of music, using music and some melody and rhythm can educate people as well as heal one's temper and lust, and restore the harmony of inner powers. And the proper use of music can greatly contribute to the health of the body. There are melodies for the healing of the lust in heart, melodies for the cure of the melancholy and the disease of the heart, and there are others: melodies for the cure of the anger, the cure of the change of the heart, and there is another song for the cure of the lust [3] (yamflich:<About the life of Pythagoras>). These data fully show that Pythagoras recognized and affirmed the emotional impact of music. However, this kind of purification is more of a physiological and psychological function, and it has not yet risen to the level of ethics and aesthetics. It's not like Plato or Aristotle's moral purification.

Plato, on the other hand, holds a derogatory attitude towards the imitation of art, because in his opinion, people tend to imitate emotions and personalities that are easily changeable. Although this will please the audience, and it

is easy to imitate, it will lose the display of the rational part of human beings. Specific to the music mode, the trade-off in the emotional form is more obvious. He acknowledges the emotional impact of music, but argues that sad Lydia music should be ditched, and even mixed Lydia music should be ditched. And the gently Ionian style is not suitable to appear. Because in Plato's view, fickle character or emotion is a flawed part of human nature. This excludes pleasurable emotional experiences. This rejection is caused by the thought held by Plato, who highlighted the rational side of music aesthetics, which was less romantic among many ancient Greek philosophers.

According to Aristotle, different musical notes can arouse different emotional attitudes and bring different experiences to people. In political science, he said, musical notes unlike other forms of imitation, are imitations of character, and the reason for this is that different tones of nature elicit different moods and attitudes. For example, music mixed with the Lydian style can cause sadness and serious mood, and music with loose and harmonious tone can make people weak in heart. As for Doric music, it gives people a sense of peace and tranquility, while Fuliyya music stimulates people to excite. Aristotle reveals the truth that music first relates to man's inner emotional life. Music in different modes brings people different emotional experience, so each type of music has its own reasons for existence. The influence of this thought is undoubtedly very profound on later generations.

### 4. The Contrast of Plato and Aristotle music Purification Theories

Pythagoras's theory of music's purification of the soul as a pioneer has inspired later philosophers. Plato also advocated the use of harmonious music to educate the people, so that the restless soul can restore harmony and tranquility. But Plato divided the notion of beauty, and thought that the essence of beauty was the idea of beauty. So his emphasis on harmony music was not the music of a trained music on a worldly instrument, but a pure harmony hidden in the abstract. Plato said that even if the entire lyre in the world were broken or its strings were broken, the beauty of harmony would still exist. What music plays was to imitate such harmonious beauty. He believed that only a musician who achieved perfect harmony in his mind, and played harmonically music according to the principle of simple number-ratio relations, and that kind of music was truly perfect and able to purify the music of the soul. Such music aesthetic concept has a strong color of moral utilitarianism, which doubted the authenticity of art, despised the emotional experience of art, and belittled the beauty of specific forms of music. Plato, on the other hand, emphasized the source of inspiration as a gift from the Muses. Muses were attracting poets as magnet, poets and Muses combined to form a

chain of interlocking. When given inspiration by the Muses, the poets will have a crazy irrational state, and get a transcendental experience to accomplish the work that ordinary people can't do. To sum up, Plato's music aesthetic concept laid particular stress on rational participation. He believed that music should not only be the experience of sensory pleasure, but should be sublimated into spiritual pleasure and satisfaction, so as to achieve the function of educating people's hearts. This is where Plato's music aesthetic is really valuable.

Aristotle, Plato's disciple, agreed that music had an educational function, but he also had his own new insight. He believed that the essence of art was imitation. Music was an imitation of human behavior pattern, which would arouse the resonance of human mind, and then affected human mood. So music did have a moral function, but it was not the only one. Aristotle emphasized the Katharsis function of music, which was different from the purification meaning of Pythagoras. This could be translated as edification, and edification also meant catharsis and balance in ancient Greek medical expression. Therefore, Katharsis here mainly refers to that through vocal music or comprehensive form of music art, so that some excessive accumulation of emotions in the heart can be effectively vented, and then restored spiritual calm, and protected psychological health. Therefore, music can also be seen as a way of catharsis, by analogy, human emotions are diverse, and every emotion needs an appropriate way of catharsis, so it is bound to need the corresponding form of music. Therefore, Aristotle has affirmed the existence rationality of various forms of music, that is, all modes have the right to appear on the stage of music world. But he has added a small condition: they need to be used at the right time and in the right circumstances. So Aristotle is more enlightened than Plato. He

did not separate reason from sensibility, nor did he favor either side. He emphasized that reason and sensibility should cooperate and merge to reach the new realm of music harmony.

What is commendable is that Aristotle admits that music is a pure spiritual enjoyment, which can have no utilitarian purpose. He affirmed the pleasure function of music, the purely perceptual side of music. And it was rejected by Plato. This reflects his strong humanistic thought and provides the source of inspiration for the Renaissance, romanticism and other later movements.

## 5. Conclusions

Music aesthetic thought in ancient Greece is not systematic, which is often seen in the works of various philosophers, but it shines like gold in the limited space. Music's aesthetic thought in ancient Greece was full of romance. philosophers affirmed the influence of music on people's inner emotional life, acknowledged that music's aesthetic psychology needed the combined effect of reason and sensibility, and emphasized that music as an object of beauty, had a purely emotional side. It has laid a theoretical foundation for the later western music aesthetics.

## References

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