

Harmony and Passion - Learning Tradition at Zhi Hua Temple

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Located in Beijing, Zhi-Hua Temple, not only famous for its architecture and collection of Buddhist sutras, but also the old musical scores, instruments, and especially its "capital music" are also valuable documents to the music world. The old music preserved by this Temple carries a significant meaning to the research of Buddhist music, ethnic music and the musical history of China.

There are many introductions about Zhihua Temple on the Internet, so I won't repeat them here. In today's meaningful Buddhist music seminar, I will focus on the music of Zhihua Temple, and share with you some of my experiences as the 27th generation in learning and protecting the music of Zhihua Temple.

The temple was built in 1443 and bestowed the name Zhihua by Emperor Yingzhong, referencing "Buddha imparting wisdom upon mankind". Zhihua Temple was used as a private temple by the family of Wang Zheng, who was the first Ming Dynasty eunuch with prominent power and position in the court, to house former court musicians with profound knowledge in music, and a strictly organized and complete band. Their performances are mainly used for Buddhist events and sacrificial activities, that is, they use music to worship Buddha.

In the early 1980s, after more than 560 years of inheritance, the last generation of monk musicians (The 26th generation) were already in their 70s. In order to rescue and preserve the ancient Zhihua Temple

music, In March 1986, with the blessing and support of Banchan Lama and Mr. Zhao Puchu, president of the Chinese Buddhist Association, the Beijing Buddhist Music Ensemble was formed. The ensemble was led by the 26th generation of the temple's music masters, with teachers from the Central Conservatory of Music as members. Later, the teachers who studied under the monks during this time would be considered the 27th generation of inheritors to Zhihua music.

Singing and playing with Chinese traditional wind and percussion instruments. . . The solemn and elegant Buddhist music was floating from the air of pure land. It was the first impression that I had when I stepped into Zhihua Temple.

The repertoire played by the monk musicians is mainly derived from " Scores of the Tune of the Music 音乐腔谱 ". These scores were hand copied by the 15th generation of Zhi-Hua Temple musicians during the Qing dynasty. However, from the scores, we could trace back some of Tang and Song music notation characters.

The music is used as a daily morning and evening worship, as well as ordinary Buddhist activities. The inheritance of Zhihua Temple music has always been the method of oral teaching, that is, the master plays a phrase of music and the disciple repeats it, so back and forth until the whole piece of music is completed. However, because of masters' aging and limited time, it is impossible for us to use the same method to learn the tradition. In such circumstances, we played our specialties as professional musicians to record the music played by the masters and write down the score afterwards for each instrument. Since there is no problem for us to play, once the score is notated, the rest is how to master the music style and how to cooperate. Therefore, after nearly half

a year of notation and subsequent improvements, the score we recorded finally reached two sets of Buddhist music that can be served in the Buddhist ritual ceremony - “Zhong Tang Qu 中堂曲” and “Yu Jia Yan Kou 瑜伽焰口- Honoring the deceased ”.

Buddhism was introduced to China during the Eastern Han Dynasty. As practiced in China, it is the result of cultural exchanges with India and Central Asia via the Silk Road. Other than chanting, Spoken-Singing the Buddhist scripture became popular during the Tang Dynasty. Buddhist stories were transcribed into paintings, and then told using the traditional Chinese form of spoken-singing. This gradually developed into an independent musical format and finally into the tao qu (a set of pieces) structure of Zhihua Temple music. Zhihua Temple music can be categorized by “zhi qu” (只曲) and “tao qu” (套曲). Zhi qu is a single piece by themselves. Tao qu are several pieces combined together.

Ceremonies during day time (including the morning and evening worship) are typically accompanied by the tao qu “Zhong Tang Qu” (中堂曲). In the evening, the “tao qu” called Liao Qiao” (料峭) for 瑜伽焰口 “honoring the deceased”) is played and typically with heavy percussions. The structure of “tao qu” consists of an overture, a main body and an ending. For example, in “Liao Qiao”, the overture is “Hao Shi Jin” (好事近), the main body comprises of “Qian Qiu Shui” (千秋岁), “Zui Tai Ping” (醉太平), and “Gun Xiu Qiu” (滚绣球), the ending is “Si Ji” (四季).

The style of Zhihua music is solemn, august and elegant. Guanzi is the leading instrument and plays the main melody, while dizi adds ornamentation. The speed of the music progresses from slow to fast, ending in a cadenza-esque freestyle. The music of “tao qu” is linked by percussion.

It has high requirements in terms of inheritance, does not add or delete at will, and pays attention to protecting the integrity of the music tradition. The music of Zhihua Temple is only passed on to monks, not nuns, not to non-Buddha disciples. The melodies are mainly taught via oral tradition, with the written score usually serving only as a reference. Zhihua music today serves as an invaluable living resource for the study of traditional Chinese culture, having preserved very much intact music that, according to the research conducted by scholars, traces its roots back to the Tang and Song dynasties.

At the end of the Ming Dynasty, the three religions of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism merged, and the rituals in the temple music combined Buddhism, Taoism, and Folk music. Among the pieces that remain, the magnificent court music and the otherworldly Buddhist music is also combined with vivid, enthusiastic Folk music.

For a ritual ceremony, there are typically nine monks chanting accompanied by wind and percussion instruments. According to the “Book of Music” compiled by Chen Yang 陈旸 of the Northern Song dynasty that the 9-holed guanzi and 17-piped sheng came into use during the late Tang dynasty.

When playing, the guanzi leads the melody and it is required to be faithful to the original score, in order to play a good charm. It also

establishes the meditative atmosphere and the idea of entering concentration. All other instruments improvise based upon the main melody, with the sound of harmony played by Sheng, combining the Guanzi and Dizi together. The Guanzi served as Buddha, and the Dizi played as human beings, which freely and lively interspersed in the melody with different ornaments, symbolizing the chaotic society of man. The Shen serves as a harmonizer to the guanzi and the dizi, fusing together the Buddha (guanzi) and man (dizi).

[Zhihua Temple Music excerpt here.]

From the above we are certain that in matters of musical scores, instrument, tunes, and titles, as well as performing styles and techniques, Zhi-Hua Temple Music has preserved the music of Tang and Song periods. In some cases, it even traces to more ancient times. It is because Zhi-Hua Temple's insistence on the preservation of the original qualities of their music through meticulous, direct transmission of those qualities from teacher to student, disallowing any changes, even slightest modification, so that their music still maintains (retains) the specific flavor of remoteness, emptiness, blandness, and serenity of Buddhist Music.

In 1987, the Zhihua Temple Buddhist Ensemble was invited by the European Folk-Art Association to tour through Germany, France, and Switzerland. The tour was a great success with Zhihua music being elevated to the status of a “living fossil of Chinese music”. In 1989, the Ensemble was invited multiple times by the Singapore Buddhist Association to perform in Singapore; spreading awareness and appreciation of the Buddhist music. The same year, JVC released a CD with recordings from our European tour. It can be said that, the heirs of

the 26th generation of Zhihua music, together with the teachers of the conservatory, brought the music tradition from the brink of extinction to a new zenith.

However, it is sad that with the passing of the older generation of musician monks, Zhihua music is once again verging on the edge of demise. Although the teachers of the conservatory were able to record the music scores played by the monk musicians, this is only part of the intangible heritage of the Buddhist music tradition. Elements like chanting and the overall entails of the rituals can only be transmitted and passed down to the monks of the temple. On the other hand, the disciples recruited by the temple today, due to their backgrounds and inexperience with music as well as the realities of maintaining a living, have mostly given up on music to pursue their personal life. This is the current state of Zhihua music.

Regardless, as a musician, especially as the 27th generation of Zhihua music, we have presented what we've learned to Western audiences. In addition to trying to continue the incense of Zhihua Temple, it is also our wish to carry forward the true essence of Buddhism.

In spring of 2013, invited by the Foundation for Chinese Performing Arts, we had a Zhihua Temple music concert in Boston. As the 27th generation of musicians to inherit the Zhihua music tradition, I was honored by the opportunity to introduce Zhihua music to Western audiences, together with other musicians including Mr. Bao Jian (also 27th generation of Zhihua Temple music), Mr. Hu Jianbing, and others. Before the concert, I gave an overview on the history and main characteristics of Zhihua music to orient the audience in understanding and appreciation. Afterwards, the overwhelming feedback was that the

introduction had helped the audience to fully immerse in the experience, almost as if witnessing first-hand a Buddhist ritual.

As early as 2001, invited and supported by the New Jersey Buddha's Light Association, I assisted in the establishment of the New Jersey Buddha Light Youth Chinese Orchestra, which is under the management of Buddha's Light International Association founded by Master Xingyun 星云法师. In addition to training them in the most basic traditional Chinese music, I've also focused on rehearsing some repertoires related to Buddhist music, and regularly performed in Buddhist ceremonial activities. I also composed a piece "Thought of Zen" for Chinese Dizi and orchestra... and I believe that all of this is related to the Buddhist sentence of "Circular Causality"

In 2017, invited by The Smithsonian Institution, Mr. Bao Jian, me and seven other professional musicians once again presented the music of Zhihua Temple in an exhibition hall at the Freer Gallery with Buddha sculptures in Washington DC.

Finally, as the title of our seminar - "Harmony and Compassion", I hope that we can live in a wonderful world with a compassionate mind. May the world be peaceful and all beings be safe. Amitabha! 阿弥陀佛

中國北京佛教音樂團團員

顧問：姜立勛



團長：呂香光 副團長：李真貴 副團長：胡志厚 秘書長：孔勤



高增遠 徐明聲 楊福廣 張本興



丁青海 陳家齊 蔣志超 陳濤

(This picture shows the first batch of all members of the Zhihua Buddhist Music ensemble when it was established in 1986)