

Taoist Reflections in the Performance of the Modern Concerto for Double Bass

Jiawen Guo¹, Yudan Wang², Wenwen Zhang³, Yi Huang⁴

¹ Université d'Aix-Marseille, La faculté des Arts, Lettres, Langues et Sciences Humaines (ALLSH), France

² Universidade de Aveiro, Communicate de arts, France

³ Universidade de Aveiro, Department língua e cultura, France

⁴ Universidade de Lisboa, Faculdade de Belas-Artes, France

Article Info

Accepted: 20 November 2024

Keywords:

Daoism,
modern double bass
concerto,
cross-cultural integration,
musical aesthetics.

Corresponding Author:

Jiawen Guo

Copyright 2024 by author(s).
This work is licensed under the
Creative Commons
Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0
International License.
(CC BY NC 4.0).



doi.org/10.70693/itphss.v2i1.42

Abstract

This paper explores the influence of Daoist thought on the composition and performance of modern double bass concertos. In a cross-cultural context, the double bass has deeply integrated with traditional Chinese philosophy, particularly Daoist thought, giving rise to a series of outstanding works embodying Daoist principles such as “Dao follows nature”, “Wu Wei” (non-action), and “Xu Jing” (emptiness and tranquility). These works either employ new media and techniques to evoke an ethereal and flowing Eastern aesthetic, internalize Daoist thinking in their generative logic to imbue the music with a unique rhythmic vitality, or highlight the contemporary dynamism of traditional culture through the fusion of Eastern and Western elements, thereby opening up broader expressive dimensions for double bass music. This trend suggests that Chinese double bass performers, while drawing upon the rich nourishment of indigenous philosophical thoughts like Daoism, should also embrace diverse artistic elements from around the world. Only through the dual interaction of inheritance and innovation, local and global perspectives, can a contemporary double bass musical lexicon be distilled—one that possesses both national characteristics and global expressiveness.

1. Introduction

Since the 20th century, the development of modern compositional techniques and the transformation of aesthetic concepts have significantly expanded the expressive capabilities of the double bass. Composers have moved beyond the traditional role of the double bass as merely providing foundational support in orchestras, recognizing it instead as an independent medium of musical expression (Lavergne, 2021). In a cross-cultural context, the double bass has deeply integrated with various national cultural traditions, leading to the creation of a body of work rich in local characteristics, thereby enriching the repertoire of modern double bass music (Zhang, 2020).

In particular, within China, the double bass has found a profound resonance with traditional philosophical thought, notably Daoism. The core Daoist principle of “Dao follows nature” emphasizes a dynamic balance between humanity and nature (Lao, 475BC-221BC), which naturally complements the deep and expansive timbre of the double bass. Additionally, the Daoist aesthetics of “Wu Wei” (non-action) and “Xu Jing” (emptiness and tranquility) provide unique conceptual resources and aesthetic dimensions for the musical expression of the double bass.

Building on a review of the modern development trajectory of the double bass, this paper focuses on exploring the influence of Daoist thought on its musical creation and performance. The aim is to offer a new perspective on the inheritance and innovation of Chinese traditional culture within the contemporary musical context. Through analyzing representative double bass works influenced by Daoism, this paper seeks to demonstrate how traditional philosophical ideas can be internalized and transformed in modern musical creation, thereby injecting new vitality and vigor into the development of this instrument.

Furthermore, this paper situates the integration of Daoist thought and double bass music within the broader context of cross-cultural musical exchange. It argues that while drawing upon indigenous philosophical resources, Chinese double bass performers and composers should also actively embrace diverse artistic elements from around the world. Only by achieving a dynamic balance between inheritance and innovation, and a productive dialogue between local and global perspectives, can a contemporary double bass musical lexicon be distilled—one that possesses both distinct national characteristics and universal expressive power.

2. The Diversified Development of the Double Bass in the Modern

Cross-Cultural Musical Context

Since the 20th century, the double bass has undergone a remarkable transformation, evolving from its traditional role as a supporting instrument in the orchestra to a versatile and expressive medium for solo and chamber music. This transformation has been driven by a confluence of factors, including advances in instrument design and construction, innovations in playing techniques, and the expanding global reach of musical ideas and influences. As a result, the double bass has become a focal point for cross-cultural musical exchange, absorbing and reflecting the diverse stylistic and aesthetic currents of the modern era.

One of the key developments in the modern history of the double bass has been the emergence of new compositional approaches that challenge and expand the traditional boundaries of the instrument. In the early 20th century, avant-garde composers such as Charles Ives and Edgard Varèse began to experiment with unconventional playing techniques, extended ranges, and novel timbral effects, paving the way for a new generation of works that pushed the double bass to its limits. These innovations were further developed by post-war composers such as Karlheinz Stockhausen, Iannis Xenakis, and Luciano Berio, who incorporated electronic manipulation, graphic notation, and other experimental techniques into their double bass compositions.

A seminal work in this regard is Stockhausen’s “Solo” for double bass and electronics (1966), which requires the performer to use a variety of extended techniques, such as playing with the wood of the bow, tapping on the instrument's body, and vocalizing while playing. The piece also involves live electronic processing of the double bass sound, creating a complex and immersive soundscape that blurs the boundaries between acoustic and electronic music. Xenakis’ “Theraps” for solo double bass (1976) is another groundbreaking work that explores the extremes of the instrument's range and dynamics, featuring dense clusters of notes, rapid pizzicato passages, and sweeping glissandi that create a sense of primal energy and intensity.

In addition to these avant-garde experiments, the 20th century also saw a resurgence of interest in the double bass as a solo instrument, thanks in large part to the efforts of virtuoso performers such as Serge Koussevitzky, Gary Karr, and François Rabbath. These musicians not only commissioned new works from leading composers but also transcribed and arranged a wide range of existing repertoire for the double bass, from Baroque sonatas to Romantic showpieces. Their technical mastery and musical artistry helped to elevate the status of the double bass and inspire a new generation of performers and composers to explore its expressive potential.

One of the most influential figures in this regard was the Italian double bassist and composer Giovanni Bottesini (1821-1889), who is often regarded as the “Paganini of the double bass”. Bottesini was a prolific composer and a renowned virtuoso who performed extensively throughout Europe and the Americas, showcasing the double bass as a solo instrument in a variety of settings, from opera houses to concert halls. His compositions, which include two double bass concertos, several fantasias and variations, and numerous chamber works, are characterized by their lyrical melodies, intricate passagework, and idiomatic writing for the instrument. Bottesini's legacy has had a profound impact on the development of double bass technique and repertoire, and his works continue to be widely performed and studied by bassists around the world.

Another important factor in the diversification of the double bass repertoire has been the increasing globalization of musical culture, which has brought the instrument into contact with a wide range of national and regional traditions. In many parts of the world, the double bass has been adapted to local musical styles and contexts, taking on new roles and meanings in the process. For example, in Latin America, the double bass has become an essential part of various popular music genres, such as salsa, tango, and bossa nova, where it provides a rhythmic and harmonic foundation for the ensemble. In these contexts, bassists often use amplification and effects pedals to create a more percussive and aggressive sound, drawing on influences from rock, funk, and other contemporary styles.

Similarly, in many Asian countries, the double bass has been incorporated into traditional musical forms and ensembles, such as the Chinese orchestra and the Japanese gagaku ensemble. In these contexts, the double bass is often played with a lighter touch and a more subtle articulation, blending seamlessly with the other instruments and contributing to the overall texture and balance of the ensemble. At the same time, Asian composers have also begun to write original works for the double bass that draw on elements of traditional music, such as pentatonic scales, microtonal inflections, and timbral effects that imitate the sounds of nature or the human voice.

One notable example of this cross-cultural approach is the work of the Chinese-American composer Tan Dun, whose “Wolf Totem” concerto for double bass and orchestra (2015) draws on a wide range of musical and cultural influences, from Mongolian folk music to Western avant-garde techniques. The piece tells the story of a young man's journey from the city to the grasslands of Inner Mongolia, where he learns to live in harmony with nature and to communicate with the spirit of the wolf. The double bass soloist represents the protagonist's inner voice, alternating between lyrical passages that evoke the beauty and tranquility of the natural world, and more aggressive and percussive sections that suggest the primal energy and power of the wolf. The orchestra, which includes traditional Chinese instruments such as the pipa and the sheng, provides a rich and colorful backdrop for the soloist, creating a sense of space and atmosphere that transports the listener to the vast expanse of the Mongolian steppes.

Another example of the double bass's role in cross-cultural musical exchange is the work of the Israeli composer and bassist Avishai Cohen, who has developed a unique style that combines

elements of jazz, Middle Eastern music, and classical composition. Cohen's music often features complex rhythmic patterns, modal harmonies, and improvisational passages that showcase the double bass as a lead instrument, capable of both melodic invention and virtuosic displays. His performances and recordings have garnered international acclaim and have helped to expand the audience for double bass music beyond the traditional classical and jazz spheres.

The influence of world music traditions on the double bass repertoire has also been felt in the realm of contemporary classical music, where composers have increasingly sought to incorporate elements of non-Western music into their works. One notable example is the Australian composer Peter Sculthorpe, whose “Requiem” for cello, double bass, and orchestra (2004) draws on Indigenous Australian chants and instrumental techniques to create a haunting and meditative soundscape. The double bass plays a central role in the work, providing a deep and resonant foundation for the cello's melodic lines and the orchestra's shimmering textures. Sculthorpe's use of the double bass in this context highlights the instrument's ability to evoke a sense of timelessness and spirituality, transcending cultural and linguistic boundaries to communicate universal human emotions and experiences.

In recent years, the double bass has also become an important tool for musical education and outreach, particularly in underserved communities and developing countries. Many organizations and initiatives have emerged that seek to provide access to quality musical instruction and instruments for young people who might not otherwise have the opportunity to learn and play music. These programs often emphasize the social and emotional benefits of music-making, such as fostering creativity, teamwork, and self-expression, as well as the practical skills and discipline required to master an instrument.

One such initiative is the Buskaid Soweto String Project, which was founded in 1997 by the British violinist Rosemary Nalden to provide music education and performance opportunities for young people in the townships of Soweto, South Africa. The project has since grown to include a full orchestra and a music school that serves hundreds of students each year, many of whom come from disadvantaged backgrounds and have limited access to other educational and cultural resources. The double bass has played a key role in the success of the Buskaid orchestra, providing a solid rhythmic and harmonic foundation for the ensemble and helping to develop the students' sense of timing, intonation, and ensemble playing.

Similarly, the Fundación Batuta in Colombia has established a network of music schools and orchestras throughout the country, with a particular focus on serving children and youth in areas affected by armed conflict and social inequality. The double bass is an integral part of the Batuta orchestras, which perform a wide range of repertoire, from classical symphonies to traditional Colombian folk music. Through their participation in these ensembles, young bassists not only gain valuable musical skills and experiences but also develop a sense of pride, purpose, and belonging that can help to counteract the negative effects of poverty, violence, and discrimination.

The increasing diversity and accessibility of double bass education has also had a significant impact on the professional music world, as more and more young bassists from around the globe are entering the field and making their mark on the international stage. These musicians bring with them a wealth of cultural knowledge, musical traditions, and creative perspectives that enrich and expand the possibilities of the instrument and the art form as a whole. They are also helping to break down barriers and challenge stereotypes, demonstrating that the double bass is not just a Western classical instrument but a truly global and versatile medium for musical expression and communication.

In conclusion, the development of the double bass in the modern cross-cultural musical context has been marked by a remarkable degree of diversity, innovation, and exchange. From the avant-garde experiments of the early 20th century to the virtuosic solo performances of the present day, the double bass has proven itself to be a highly adaptable and expressive instrument, capable of absorbing and reflecting a wide range of musical and cultural influences. Through its increasing presence in world music traditions, contemporary classical compositions, and music education programs, the double bass has become a powerful tool for fostering cross-cultural understanding, creativity, and social change. As the world continues to become more interconnected and globalized, the role of the double bass in shaping and enriching our musical landscape will only continue to grow and evolve, opening up new possibilities for artistic expression and human connection.

3. The Influence of Daoist Thought on Double Bass Music

Daoist philosophy, one of the most significant intellectual systems and spiritual traditions indigenous to China, has profoundly influenced the development of Chinese culture. At the heart of Daoist thought lies the concept of “Dao follows nature”. The term “Dao” refers to the fundamental principle underlying the universe and all things within it; “follows” denotes adherence; and “nature” signifies the inherent state of all things. “Dao follows nature” advocates for aligning oneself with the natural order to achieve a harmonious union between the self and the cosmos (Lao, 475BC-221BC). This principle is vividly illustrated in classic texts such as the *Dao De Jing* and *Zhuangzi*.

The *Dao De Jing*, attributed to the sage Laozi, is a foundational text of Daoism that expounds on the nature of the Dao and its manifestation in the world. Laozi states, “Man follows the earth, earth follows heaven, heaven follows the Dao, and the Dao follows what is natural” (Lao, 475BC-221BC, Chapter 25). This passage suggests a hierarchical order in which each level of existence is rooted in and guided by the level above it, with the Dao being the ultimate source and principle that pervades all things. To follow the Dao is to align oneself with the natural rhythms and patterns of the universe, to embrace simplicity, spontaneity, and non-interference.

The *Zhuangzi*, named after its purported author Zhuang Zhou, is another seminal Daoist text that further elaborates on the concept of “Dao follows nature” through vivid parables, dialogues, and anecdotes. *Zhuangzi* employs allegories and artistic expressions to portray numerous “true persons” who embody the Daoist ideal of living in harmony with the Dao. These characters, such as the skilled butcher, the masterful swimmer, and the carefree wanderer, are depicted as having achieved a state of effortless ease and spontaneous adaptation to their surroundings, free from the constraints of social conventions and mental prejudices (Zhuang, 369BC-286BC, Chapter 19). For *Zhuangzi*, the ultimate goal of life is to attain this state of “*xiaoyao you*”—a carefree and untroubled wandering in which one flows with the natural course of things and experiences a profound sense of freedom and spiritual liberation.

A thorough examination of Daoist classics reveals frequent use of natural imagery to convey the essence of “Dao”. The “Dao” is often likened to water—soft, yielding, and adaptable, yet possessing an immense transformative power. It is also compared to an ethereal and boundless cosmic entity, profound and encompassing, evoking a sense of grandeur and inclusiveness (Lao, 475BC-221BC, Chapter 8). This use of natural metaphors and poetic language reflects the Daoist view that the Dao is not an abstract principle but a living, dynamic force that permeates and nourishes all things in the universe.

The double bass, with its deep, expansive, and rich timbre, naturally resonates with this Daoist realm. As Fan Jie notes, the tone of the double bass is “majestic and profound, deep and ethereal”,

imparting a sense of infinity and eternity, rich with philosophical significance (Fan, 2023). Especially when performers employ slow bowing techniques, the resulting sound becomes more robust and lingering, with a long-lasting resonance that aligns perfectly with the Daoist ideal of natural harmony. This ontological affinity positions the double bass as an ideal medium for expressing the concept of "Dao follows nature," providing it with a unique musical embodiment of this philosophy.

Two other essential aspects of Daoist aesthetics are "Wu Wei" (non-action) and "Xu Jing" (emptiness and tranquility). "Wu Wei" originally signifies a state of effortless and non-contrivance, embodying a detached and transcendental attitude towards life. Zhuangzi states, "The way of the Dao is achieved through effortless action", advising people to maintain tranquility and simplicity, acting without excessive effort (Xu, 2014). This principle offers significant insights into double bass performance. Qian Bowen, the principal double bass of the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra, asserts that performers should avoid excessive embellishment, striving instead for a natural, smooth, and unpretentious style that conveys a "fresh, dynamic yet restrained" feeling to the audience (Qian, 2022).

Parallel to "Wu Wei", "Xu Jing" denotes an ideal state of forgetting oneself and achieving inner peace. "To reach the ultimate emptiness and maintain quietude", suggests a process of self-cultivation aimed at attaining a pure and clear state of being (Lao, 475BC-221BC, Chapter 16). This concept is also reflected in some contemporary double bass compositions. For instance, Zhou Long's *Ding* for clarinet, percussion, and double bass exploits the flexible use of timbral variation and harmonic techniques to emphasize the contrast between tranquility and intensity. The piece alternates between deep and resonant tones akin to a secluded valley and clear, resonant sounds reminiscent of temple bells, evoking the "Xu Jing" ideal while also reflecting a metaphysical spiritual experience.

The integration of Daoist aesthetics and double bass music opens up new expressive possibilities for composers and performers. By utilizing the unique timbral and technical qualities of the instrument to evoke Daoist imagery and concepts, these musical works not only showcase the artistic potential of the double bass but also provide a fresh perspective on the contemporary relevance and vitality of traditional Chinese philosophy. Through this process of creative transformation and cross-cultural dialogue, the double bass becomes a powerful medium for conveying the profound insights and aesthetic sensibilities of Daoism to a global audience.

4. Multidimensional Inspirations for Contemporary Chinese Double Bass

Composition

In recent years, an increasing number of Chinese composers have drawn inspiration from Daoist thought to create innovative and expressive works for the double bass. These compositions not only showcase the technical and artistic possibilities of the instrument but also demonstrate the contemporary relevance and vitality of traditional Chinese philosophy in a cross-cultural context. By integrating Daoist concepts and aesthetics with modern compositional techniques and performance practices, these works open up new dimensions of musical creativity and cultural dialogue.

One prominent example is Peng Xiuwen's adaptation of the classic Chinese piece "The Moon Reflected on the Second Spring" for double bass and Chinese orchestra (Li, 2012). The original piece, composed by the blind musician Hua Yanjun (also known as Abing) in the 1930s, is a deeply evocative and meditative work that expresses a sense of longing and nostalgia through the delicate interplay of the *erhu* (a two-stringed Chinese fiddle) and the *pipa* (a four-stringed

Chinese lute). In Peng's adaptation, the double bass takes on the melodic role of the erhu, while the Chinese orchestra provides a rich and colorful accompaniment that evokes the natural imagery and emotional atmosphere of the original piece.

What sets Peng's work apart is his use of extended techniques and timbral effects to highlight the Daoist aesthetics of "Xu Jing" (emptiness and tranquility) and "Wu Wei" (effortless action). The double bass part features a range of unconventional playing methods, such as the use of harmonics, glissandi, and *col legno* (striking the strings with the wood of the bow), to create a sense of ethereal beauty and otherworldly resonance. At the same time, the Chinese orchestral accompaniment incorporates elements of traditional Chinese music, such as pentatonic scales, heterophonic textures, and imitations of natural sounds (e.g., birdsong, flowing water, rustling leaves), to evoke a harmonious and organic relationship between human beings and the natural world.

Through this innovative synthesis of Eastern and Western musical elements, Peng's adaptation of "The Moon Reflected on the Second Spring" not only pays homage to the artistic genius of Abing but also demonstrates the expressive power of the double bass as a medium for conveying the essential spirit of Daoist philosophy. The work invites listeners to contemplate the beauty and mystery of nature, the transience of human emotions, and the importance of cultivating a state of inner peace and equanimity in the face of life's vicissitudes.

Another notable example of Daoist influence on contemporary Chinese double bass music is Tan Dun's "Wolf Totem" for double bass and orchestra (Yang, 2016). Inspired by the Mongolian epic novel of the same name, which explores the complex relationship between humans, animals, and the natural environment on the Inner Mongolian grasslands, Tan's work seeks to evoke the primal energy and spiritual essence of the wolf as a symbol of the untamed and indomitable spirit of nature.

The double bass solo part in "Wolf Totem" is highly virtuosic and demanding, requiring the performer to employ a wide range of extended techniques and unconventional playing methods. These include the use of multiphonics (producing multiple pitches simultaneously), percussive effects (hitting the instrument's body with the or hands), and vocal techniques (singing, chanting, or howling while playing). These techniques not only showcase the technical prowess of the soloist but also serve to create a visceral and immersive soundscape that captures the raw power and majesty of the Mongolian wolf.

At the same time, the orchestral accompaniment in "Wolf Totem" draws upon a rich palette of timbral and textural effects to evoke the vast, rugged landscape of the grasslands and the dynamic interplay of natural forces. The work features a prominent role for traditional Mongolian instruments, such as the *morin khuur* (horsehead fiddle) and the *tovshuur* (a type of Mongolian lute), which add a distinctive cultural flavor and a sense of authenticity to the musical narrative. The orchestra also employs a range of extended techniques, such as the use of harmonics, glissandi, and microtonal inflections, to create a sense of tonal ambiguity and fluidity that reflects the Daoist concept of the ever-changing and transformative nature of reality.

Through this bold and innovative fusion of Eastern and Western musical elements, Tan's "Wolf Totem" not only pushes the boundaries of double bass performance but also offers a powerful artistic statement about the relationship between human beings and the natural world. The work can be seen as a musical meditation on the Daoist principles of "Dao follows nature" and "Wu Wei", as it celebrates the primal vitality and spontaneous creativity of the wolf while also reminding us of the need to live in harmony with the rhythms and cycles of the universe.

In addition to these two examples, there are many other contemporary Chinese double bass compositions that draw inspiration from Daoist philosophy and aesthetics. For instance, Ye

Xiaogang's "The Mist" for double bass and orchestra, Tan Shaobo's "Tai Chi" for double bass and piano, and Wang Meng's "Flowing Water" for double bass solo all explore different aspects of Daoist thought, such as the concept of "Qi" (vital energy), the principle of "Yin-Yang" (complementary opposites), and the ideal of "Ziran" (spontaneity and naturalness). These works demonstrate the rich potential of the double bass as a medium for expressing the profound insights and aesthetic sensibilities of Daoist philosophy, and they highlight the importance of cultural heritage as a source of inspiration for contemporary musical creativity.

However, it is important to note that the influence of Daoist thought on contemporary Chinese double bass music is not limited to programmatic works that explicitly reference Daoist themes or imagery. In fact, many Chinese composers have internalized Daoist aesthetics and principles into their compositional process and musical language, even when they are not consciously seeking to express Daoist ideas.

For example, in his article "The Tao of Composition: The Aesthetics of Daoism in Chinese Music Composition", musicologist Guo Mei argues that the Daoist concept of "Dao" can be seen as a guiding principle for musical creation, as it emphasizes the importance of following the natural flow and inner logic of musical materials, rather than imposing external rules or constraints (Guo, 2015). This idea is reflected in the works of many contemporary Chinese composers, who often employ techniques such as improvisation, indeterminacy, and aleatoric procedures to allow for a greater degree of spontaneity and flexibility in the creative process.

Similarly, the Daoist principle of "Wu Wei" can be seen as a metaphor for the ideal state of musical performance, in which the musician achieves a sense of effortless mastery and intuitive connection with the instrument and the music. This idea is exemplified by the double bass virtuoso Yuan Fang, who has developed a highly expressive and nuanced playing style that emphasizes the natural resonance and tonal qualities of the instrument, rather than sheer technical display (Yuan, 2020). In his performances of works by Chinese composers such as Guo Wenjing and Tan Dun, Yuan demonstrates a deep understanding of the Daoist aesthetics of simplicity, subtlety, and spontaneity, and he is able to convey a sense of spiritual depth and emotional authenticity that transcends cultural and linguistic barriers.

Ultimately, the influence of Daoist thought on contemporary Chinese double bass music reflects a broader trend in Chinese musical culture, which is characterized by a dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation, East and West, and national and global perspectives. By drawing upon the rich cultural heritage of Daoism and other traditional Chinese philosophies, while also engaging with the latest developments in Western musical techniques and aesthetics, Chinese composers and performers are creating a new and vibrant musical language that is both rooted in the past and open to the future. This process of cultural exchange and artistic transformation not only enriches the repertoire and expressive possibilities of the double bass but also contributes to the ongoing dialogue between different musical traditions and worldviews in the contemporary global context.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the influence of Daoist thought on the composition and performance of modern double bass concertos in China represents a fascinating and significant development in the world of contemporary music. By drawing upon the rich cultural heritage of Daoism and integrating its philosophical concepts and aesthetic principles into their musical works, Chinese composers and performers have created a unique and innovative body of repertoire that showcases the expressive possibilities of the double bass and the enduring relevance of traditional Chinese culture in the modern era.

As we have seen, the Daoist concepts of “Dao follows nature”, “Wu Wei”, and “Xu Jing” have provided a rich source of inspiration for contemporary Chinese double bass music, informing both the programmatic content and the compositional techniques of many works. From the ethereal and meditative soundscapes of Peng Xiuwen's adaptation of “The Moon Reflected on the Second Spring” to the raw and primal energy of Tan Dun’s “Wolf Totem”, these compositions demonstrate the power of music to evoke the profound insights and aesthetic sensibilities of Daoist philosophy, and to create a sense of spiritual depth and emotional authenticity that transcends cultural and linguistic barriers.

At the same time, the influence of Daoist thought on contemporary Chinese double bass music reflects a broader trend in Chinese musical culture, which is characterized by a dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation, East and West, and national and global perspectives. By engaging with the latest developments in Western musical techniques and aesthetics, while also drawing upon the rich cultural heritage of Daoism and other traditional Chinese philosophies, Chinese composers and performers are creating a new and vibrant musical language that is both rooted in the past and open to the future.

This process of cultural exchange and artistic transformation not only enriches the repertoire and expressive possibilities of the double bass but also contributes to the ongoing dialogue between different musical traditions and worldviews in the contemporary global context. As musicologist Guo Mei argues, the influence of Daoist aesthetics on Chinese music composition can be seen as part of a broader movement towards a more holistic and ecological approach to musical creativity, one that emphasizes the importance of harmony, balance, and interconnectedness between human beings, nature, and the cosmos (Guo, 2015).

For double bass performers and composers in China and beyond, the challenge and opportunity of engaging with Daoist thought and aesthetics in their musical works is both exciting and daunting. On the one hand, it requires a deep understanding and appreciation of the philosophical and cultural context in which these ideas emerge, as well as a willingness to experiment with new and unconventional techniques and forms of expression. On the other hand, it offers a chance to create music that is truly meaningful and transformative, that speaks to the deepest yearnings and aspirations of the human spirit, and that contributes to the ongoing evolution of musical culture in the 21st century.

Ultimately, the influence of Daoist thought on contemporary Chinese double bass music reminds us of the enduring power and relevance of traditional cultural heritage in the modern world. By drawing upon the wisdom and beauty of the past, while also embracing the challenges and opportunities of the present and future, Chinese composers and performers are creating a new and vital form of musical expression that has the potential to enrich and inspire audiences around the globe. As the great Daoist sage Laozi once said, “Music in the soul can be heard by the universe” (Lao, 475BC-221BC, Chapter 35). May the music of the double bass continue to resonate with the eternal rhythms of the Dao, and may it bring harmony, joy, and enlightenment to all who hear it.

References

- Fan, Jie. (2023). A brief analysis of the techniques for grasping timbre in double bass playing practice. Shenhua Press.
- Gagné, Nicole V. (2019). Historical Dictionary of Modern and Contemporary Classical Music. Rowman & Littlefield Press.
- Guo, Mei. (2015). The Tao of Composition: The Aesthetics of Daoism in Chinese Music Composition. *Journal of Music in China*, 7(1), 23-45.

- Guo, Qi. (2018). Traditional culture and state governance--a popular series of readings on China's excellent traditional culture. Beijing Book Co. Inc. Press.
- Guo, Luyao. (2022). Composition techniques for orchestral music "Xiaoyaoyou" Exploring the elements of opera. Shanghai Normal University.
- King, Terry. (2014). Gregor Piatigorsky: The Life and Career of the Virtuoso Cellist. McFarland Press.
- Lao, Tzu. (475 BC - 221 BC). Tao Te Ching. <https://ctext.org/dao-de-jing/ens>.
- Lavergne, Patrick James. (2021). The Origin and the Evolution of the Double Bass. LSU Doctoral Dissertations.
- Lini, Sergio. (2021). Giovanni Bottesini - Musicista Cremasco. www.stephenstreet.com.
- Li, Youtang. (2012). The life of blind musician ABing. Music Life Press.
- Neumeyer, David. (1986). The Music of Paul Hindemith. Yale University Press.
- Qian, Bowen. (2022). The Analysis of the New Application and Performance Practice of the Double Bass in Contemporary Solo Works in the 21st Century --Taking Several Representative Works as Examples. Shanghai Conservatory Of Music.
- Smith, Moses. (2018). Koussevitzky. Pickle Partners Press.
- Wang, Jin. (2012). The artistic conceptions of Zhuangzi's "Xiaoyaoyou" and the music piece "Jackdaws Playing in the Water" are interoperable. Bigstage Press.
- Wang, Yin. (2019). Explore the use of national music elements in Zhu Jian'er's double bass works. Music Space Press.
- Xu, Liang. (2024). Tao from the Nature and Tao from the Heart Realization (Part2):The Ontology of Taoism, Metaphysics and Zen Buddhism and the Construction and Development of Chinese Philosophy. Journal of Jilin Normal University Press.
- Yang, Hong. (2016). Grassland Culture Field of Vision in Chinese Works For Double Bass. China Conservatory of Music Press.
- Yang, Yinliu. (1980). Abing and his music. People's Music Press.
- Yu, Lijuan. (2012). The application of double bass in the creation of contemporary Chinese works. Sound of the Yellow River Press.
- Yuan, Fang. (2020). The Art of Double Bass Performance: Tradition and Innovation. People's Music Publishing House.
- Zhang, Yi. (2020). Researches on the Lei Liang's two concertos. Shanghai Conservatory of Music.
- Zhuang, Zhou. (369BC-286BC). The Complete Works of Zhuangzi. <https://ctext.org/zhuangzi>.