

The Function of Subconscious Stimulus in Chopin's Creation of *g Minor Ballade*

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Abstract

Chopin's famous *g Minor Ballade* is not only affected by Mickiewicz's narrative poem as other scholars claimed, the pain of subjugation and long-term sadness of being a guest in a foreign land Chopin himself suffered are also outer and inner motivations. The combination of Chopin's personal experience, musical accomplishment and patriotic complex promotes his own subconscious activities, which lead to his inspiration and motion in creation.

Key words: Subconscious activities; Compensation motivation; Creation stimulation

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INTRODUCTION

Frederic Chopin (1810-1849) is one of the most outstanding representatives for early European music romanticism. His works are mainly on piano with a strong characteristic of Polish national music and under the influence of Bach, was hailed as the "romantic piano poet" of people. Chopin was born in 1810 in suburbs of the Polish capital Warsaw. While in his childhood, he was influenced by his father and musician Eisner, and laid a solid foundation in music. He then graduated with honors from the Warsaw Academy of Music. During this period, Chopin's music is "warm and cheerful, carefree, full of youthful fantasy and longing" (Yu, 2008, introduction,

pp.5-9) and rich in Polish characters. Representatives of them are *d Minor Polish Dance*, *a Minor Mazurka Dance*. In 1830, Poland political was full of turmoil and chaos. Although Chopin had left motherland and settled in Paris, he still cared his country. Loss of motherland has brought infinite sorrow to Chopin, which affects his works in the rest of his life. In this period, Chopin's creations have completely different style, which contain more thought and deeper emotion than before. Runyang Yu calls it as "full of contradiction and conflict-caused tragedies with internal tension". Representative works are four ballads and *Polonaise-Fantaisie*.

Among them, *g Minor Ballade*, also known as the first narrative, is created in 1831-1835 when Warsaw revolt was failed and Poland became a Russian territory. The news made Chopin incomparable anger. He recorded his inner surge in grief. This narrative is full of tragedy and heroic color, which exhibits musician's pain and patriotic plot performance vividly, and achieves a masterpiece.

The in the It has been a long time for the music field to discuss *g Minor Ballade* diverse respects. However, the discussion of motion of creation is limited to *g Minor Ballade* and Mickiewicz's long poem and personal experience of Chopin. The author believes that the creation is more from the heart, it is necessary to study in-depth on what is the origin that directly drives Chopin to write masterpiece works.

1. REFLECTION THEORY

Narrative refers to rich narrative and dramatic solo, which are characterized by abundant and complete narrative pictures. The reason that *g Minor Ballade* is called narrative is it uses music to narrate a dramatic story. It is widely acknowledged by Chopin scholars that creation of *g Minor Ballade* is highly related to Polish poet Mickiewicz's long poem *Conrad Warren Lloyd*.

The story in the long poem happened in end of 13th century when the Lithuanian and Teutonic Knights were at war. A Lithuanian boy, Walter was swept by the Knights as a slave. He gradually grew up and learned martial arts. In a battle, he occasionally met Vaidlot, an old Lithuanian brother, and knew his story. Walter and Vaidlot decided to revenge for their motherland. He faked Conrad Warren Lloyd, a knight who has been killed, to stay deeply inside enemy and disrupt their operation plans. He heroically died after being exposed (Mickiewicz, 1958, pp.1-138).

There are three points to support the opinion that *g Minor Ballade* matches this long poem. First is Schumann's quote that "Chopin admitted that his narratives were inspired by Mickiewicz's poems". Secondly, "grand and legendary characters, dramatic and dense tragedy atmosphere, as well as emotional and colorful life interest" that *g Minor Ballade* exhibits are similar to the long poem. Thirdly, Mickiewicz and Chopin are both Polish. The spirit of patriotism in the long poem resonates with Chopin. Therefore most of scholars prove that *Conrad Warren Lloyd* inspires Chopin to create *g Minor Ballade* with conclusive evidences. The poem wakes up Chopin's emotion and passion, which are expressed by sound as mediate.

This opinion matches Chernyshevsky's theory mentioned in *Life and Aesthetics*. Chernyshevsky believes that art is a direct reflection to some phenomenon or words in books, which refer to reflection theory (Lu & Qian, 1987, pp.32-35). The long poem does have lots of influence on Chopin's creation, as well as playing important role in inspiring him. It is subconscious activity in musician's mind that transforms inspiration to music. It is superficial to explain narrative from resonance between the long poem and Chopin's life experience only.

2. SUBCONSCIOUS ACTIVITY

Subconscious is a psychological term which refers to the part of human mental activities that can not be recognized or be aware of. It is mental activity that has been processed however not been aware of. More or less, human's behavior will be affected of driven by subconscious. Chopin is not an exception during his invention. It is analyzed in detail in below.

Motivations of subconscious activity can be classified as outer motivation and inner motivation (Chen, 2012, pp.191-196). Outer motivation mainly comes from environmental stimulation since environmental condition will leave marks deeply in mind. It is not a specific event or time point, but mental effects or feelings. Chopin has a tough life. In his life, environment brings suffering and grief to him mainly as being a guest in other countries. Living in Paris since 1830 until he dead, Chopin has never returned to his motherland. He is not only an exile but also the one who has lost his motherland. Schumann

once described Chopin: "He is a Polish, the nation that is now wearing mourning". Loneliness in a foreign country and humiliation of the fallen motherland overlaps. The grief is difficult to resolve and the unforgettable anger is difficult to express. Those emotions are deeply carved in his life and memory. They are environmental stimulations that can be recognized by the musician himself. The subconscious from those stimulations exist everywhere in *g Minor Ballade*. For example, there are only 8 bars in the introduction part. The introduction is feathered by "reciting tone, wide range and heavy and loud sound" (Qian, 2006, pp.76-98). The general characteristics of the introduction laid the whole narrative song to the foundation of a heavy, solemn and tragic emotional tone. Especially in the third bar, it goes downward four degrees followed by upward three degrees, which is known as the "sigh tone".



This is a typical tone in Chopin's creation to express grief. This tone also has leading function in tones that construct narrative. Grief and sorrow in narrative actually result from emotional marks that come from Chopin's personal experience. Those marks become one of stimulations that affect his subconscious and reflected in music sheet automatically.

In addition, inner motivation is necessary. Inner motivations include thought, imagination, emotion and physical motivations. Thoughts and imaginal motivation usually are nerve activity in the cerebral cortex that arrange and combine information orderly. For same feeling, poet uses words to express, painter uses picture and musician uses tone. They have different thought and imagine motivations which cause different activities. However emotional motivation refers to inner repression or needs of emotional character that are difficult to achieve the. The result of long-term stagnation of this character in the chest is "it will stay in subconscious and action those surface memories that are related to this feeling" (Chen, 2012, pp.191-196). For Chopin, his dream is to return to Poland, which is impossible to come true. This dream that buried deeply in mind inspires his desire to create.

As a conclusion, outer and inner motivations promote surficial subconscious together. In case of *g Minor Ballade*, Chopin's personal experience, music

accomplishment and patriotic feeling promote his own subconscious activity comprehensively, which in turn activates his inspiration and enthusiasm.

3. COMPENSATION MOTIVATION

Emotional motivation in inner motivations comes from depressing emotion. The reason that depressed emotion becomes the source is compensation motivation. Austrian psychologist Adler proposed that from the perspective of compensation, when human spiritual power needs to find alternative objects to be transferred, it will produce the needs of artistic creation (Luo & Hong, 2008, pp.70-98). The need for artistic creation can be considered as the transfer and sublimation of human emotions, which is also a sense of self-realization. Freud believes that emotional repression will produce a "displacement effect", that is if a person can not get an object, the internal reference will be transferred to another object to seek compensation. This transfer works in music field also, "for experience and desire that some musicians in real life can not get, or can not achieve, they create their own music in the world to achieve it ... to make their own spiritual compensation" (Ibid.).



The dream of a strong Poland and returns to homeland in Chopin's heart is impossible to come true. Travelling alone in foreign country, Chopin couldn't help but watch Poland was conquered. Such sorrow was accumulated in his mind. In addition, his relatives passed away one by one, which made him suffer in lonely. He barely had

any chance to express his grief, which made him feel like a "real Polish orphan" (Yu, 2008, pp.42-60). At this time, compensation motivation will calm him down in the subconscious. It will promote subconscious activity to find the best way to release his depression, which is putting emotion into music for a musician.

Therefore, a classic narrative is formed. In *g Minor Ballade*, the hero sacrificed himself and his family of the motherland. He used his spirit to guard glory and honor of his motherland, which is impossible for Chopin in real life. Chopin and the hero are both proud of their motherland and suffering from pain of subjugation. They are both patriotic. Therefore, for the thing that is not able to achieve in real life, Chopin leaves it to the hero to accomplish in narrative. This is how does compensation system release his spirit. Subconscious activated by compensation systems provide both inspiration and calm to Chopin's mind.

SUMMARY

Objectively speaking, the use of "reflection" or "subconscious theory" alone to analyze Chopin's creation on *g Minor Ballade* is one-sided. Human conscious activities are driven by a combination of factors, including composer activities.

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