

# Study on the operation mode of Harbin Russian overseas Chinese music culture mechanism

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**Abstract:** In the first half of the 20th century, Harbin was the “Eastern Moscow” of the Russian overseas Chinese, the “cultural island” isolated from Russia, and the “musical enclave” on which the Russian overseas Chinese spirit and culture depended. Inspired by Loqin’s “Poetics of music culture” research model, this paper probes into the operation mode of the Russian overseas Chinese music culture mechanism in Harbin, and holds that the construction of Harbin Middle East Railway, the establishment of Harbin Symphony Orchestra and the establishment of Harbin No. 1 Music School are important specific mechanism factors that support the emergence and existence of the Russian overseas Chinese “enclave” music society.

**Key words:** Russian overseas Chinese in Harbin; “Music enclave”; Cultural mechanism; “Poetics of music Culture”

The construction of the Middle East Railway in 1898 and the October Revolution in 1917 brought more and more Russian overseas Chinese to Harbin. In the prosperous period, Harbin was affectionately called “Eastern Moscow” by Russian overseas Chinese. On this “enclave” far from their native land, the Russian overseas Chinese in Harbin built an isolated island to preserve Russian culture. In 1936, Viltinsky, “the great singer of Russian land”, came to Harbin to perform. When he left, he talked about his impression of Harbin in a local newspaper. In the article titled “Candlelight on a Foreign Road”, he said: “For many years, in many countries on tour, there was no audience more attentive and sensitive than the Far East. The Russian expatriates in France, England and Germany have begun to become French, English and German. I am deeply moved by the efforts you are making here to preserve your national nature and culture..... Harbin has left me a deep impression..... It brings back warm memories of Russia in the past.”

The reason why the Russian expatriates in Harbin retained the traditional Russian culture, customs, religion and other characteristics in all aspects of social life, but did not integrate into Chinese society, has an important connection with the special cultural environment and special cultural operation mechanism of Harbin in the social background at that time. On the basis of Rice’s “tripartite model”, that is, historical composition, social maintenance, individual creation and experience, Loqin proposed a research model of “poetics of musical culture”. According to Lozin, culture is essentially a matter of people and things, and the research mode of “music culture poetics” emphasizes the personnel related to music, while the historical field and music society are the prerequisite of demand for the occurrence and existence of “music personnel”, and individual conditions and specific mechanisms are the possibility basis for supporting the existence and development of “music personnel”. The core of this model focuses on the “mechanism” in the cultural environment (history/society), and the characteristics or forms of the “mechanism” can be ideology, such as thought, concept, belief, etc.; It can also be dominant forces, such as related powers, institutions, institutions, places, etc.; It can also be the mode of operation of activities and events, such as education, publicity, business activities, etc.

According to the analysis of the above research models, the author believes that three specific cultural mechanisms played an important role in influencing or even changing the musical cultural environment during the process of the Russian overseas Chinese “music enclave” in Harbin becoming an isolated island of Russian culture. First, the construction of the Middle East Railway is a key mechanism; Second, Harbin Symphony Orchestra, one of the earliest symphony orchestras in China; Third, Harbin No. 1 Music School, the earliest music institution in Harbin.

## I. Chinese Eastern Railway

Harbin has a special geographical location, in order to enhance their influence in the region, Japan, Russia and the Western powers accelerated the pace of competition, especially in order to better control and development of the Far East far from its center, the Tsar Russia finally decided to build a railway that could directly connect the Russian Far East and extend to the territory of China. In order to serve its foreign expansionist policy.

In 1895, Russia provided the Qing government with a loan of 400 million gold rubles at 3% annual interest to build the railway; In 1896, the two countries signed a treaty in Moscow. In 1898, the construction of the railway was officially started. In the same year, the first railway hospital, the first school for Russian overseas Chinese and the first Orthodox church appeared in Harbin. The construction of the Middle East Railway is an important event in the history of the Russian overseas Chinese in Harbin. As a key mechanism for the Russian overseas Chinese in Harbin to carry out musical cultural activities, the construction and operation of the Middle East Railway brought the Russian overseas Chinese “music enclave” mainly reflected in the following two aspects:

First, the construction of the railway brought a large number of Russian expatriates. After the construction of the Middle East Railway began in 1897, a large number of Russian emigrants came to northeast China. Among them, there were not only railway engineers and technicians, managers and their families, but also capitalists, factory owners, merchants, craftsmen, and a considerable number of officers and soldiers who followed in the process of Harbin’s urban construction. The engineers, technicians and managers of the Middle East

railway are generally appointed by the government. They are different from those who move freely to make a living, so most of them bring their families with them. By the time the Middle East Railway was fully opened to traffic on July 14, 1903, the total number of Russian overseas Chinese in Heilongjiang had reached more than 30,000. The population migration promoted the construction of the city, promoted the economic development, and on this basis promoted the prosperity of Harbin city music culture, which provided the prerequisite for the formation of Russian overseas Chinese “music enclave”. At that time, musicians from all over the world were keen to come to Harbin in the Far East to hold various forms of concerts, and the wind of loving music prevailed.

Second, the establishment of the Middle East Railway Administration and its affiliated places delimited the space boundary range for the “enclaves” of Russian overseas Chinese. According to the sixth paragraph of the Contract of Joint Dong Province Railway Company signed by China and Russia on September 8, 1896, Russia could occupy a certain amount of land called “railway land” when building Dong Province Railway and pay no land tax. Accordingly, Russia appropriated a large amount of land on both sides of the railway. The Russian government regarded the Middle East Railway as its own colony, which is evident from the organization of the Middle East Railway. A large number of Russian overseas Chinese left the mainland and came to Harbin, and gathered in the “Harbin Annex of Middle East Railway” similar to the nature of lease, and began to live in a foreign country. Education, business activities flourished in the attached place, freedom of speech and publication, which not only became a “refuge space” for Russian overseas Chinese to carry out a series of political and economic activities, but also a “cultural space” for Russian overseas Chinese in Harbin to inherit and spread national traditions, and an important soil for the survival and development of “music enclave”.

## II. Harbin Symphony Orchestra

The establishment of Harbin Symphony Orchestra and its series of musical activities are two of the important specific cultural mechanisms that support the occurrence and existence of musical cultural activities in the “musical enclave” of overseas Russian. In order to meet the request of the Railway Administration, the orchestra of the Second Amur Railway Corps on the Russian border was transferred to Harbin. At the beginning of the Harbin Symphony Orchestra, the Middle East Railway Administration allocated 20,000 rubles per year to maintain the expenses and operation of the orchestra, and the rest was raised by the orchestra itself. Today, the historical achievements of Harbin Symphony Orchestra are obvious -- it was one of the earliest symphony orchestras on Chinese soil, and at the same time, the Orchestra of Shanghai Ministry of Works Bureau was renowned both at home and abroad as the best symphony orchestra in China, one from the South and one from the north. It gave the citizens of Harbin more priority than the citizens of other cities in China to contact with western symphony music, and promoted the development of modern music culture in China. By carrying out private teaching activities and running music schools, the musicians of “Haxiang” have cultivated a batch of Chinese performers and music lovers. In addition, its existence has also laid a good foundation for the elegant urban cultural atmosphere of Harbin, which loves music and art.

However, at that time, the Harbin Symphony Orchestra, which was founded by Russian overseas Chinese and mainly served Russian overseas Chinese, and was funded by the Middle East Railway Administration, was also an important cultural mechanism supporting the economic security of the life of Russian overseas musicians in the “musical enclave” and an important cultural entertainment and social exchange.

After the October Revolution in Russia, some of the overseas Russians who came to Harbin were excellent musicians and became members of Harbin Symphony Orchestra at that time. Working as “Haxiang” was one of the ways to make a living for the musicians who came to Harbin for the first time. It was a relatively stable and well-paid job, which provided the basic economic security for the musicians in exile. Some other musicians rely on the orchestra to carry out private teaching activities or open music schools after they settle down.

The repertoire of Harbin Symphony Orchestra is very rich, including almost all the works of Western classical music, of course, the most is Russian composers. Harbin Symphony Orchestra, as the most popular music group in Harbin, has always been an important cultural entertainment and social communication group for the Russian overseas Chinese in Harbin. It has also become a base for the spread of Russian music culture and even cultural identity. In the process of preserving Russian characteristics, Harbin is the brightest light on the island of Russian culture.

## III. Harbin No. 1 Music School

Founded in May 1921, Harbin No. 1 Music School was established in Nangang Dazhi Street Business School. In the 27 years since its establishment, more than 2,000 students have studied in the school. However, due to the strict graduation requirements, only a few of them have obtained the graduation diploma. Some of them were also the teachers of famous musicians in China.

The No. 1 Music School completely follows the syllabus of the Royal Russian Music Association, with a total of six years of schooling, including preparatory classes. In addition to professional extracurricular courses such as piano, violin, cello, woodwind, brass and vocal music, there are also theoretical courses such as music theory, music history and harmony, and chamber music classes are also offered in senior grades. The school attaches great importance to students’ artistic practice level. In the 1930s, the First Music School actively created conditions for students, led students out of the school, and frequently held various performance activities. According to records, from 1930 to 1940, the No. 1 School of Music performed a total of 88 concerts, which not only improved the students’ artistic level, but also contributed to enriching the cultural life of Harbin. The school carries out the art committee leadership system, and the teachers are almost all graduates from Moscow, St. Petersburg and other professional music colleges. The excellent teachers guarantee the high quality of teaching and

cultivate a batch of high-level graduates.

The musical function of Harbin Russian overseas Chinese “music enclave” is mainly to maintain the cultural characteristics of the ethnic group, maintain the cultural memory of the mother country, and build a sense of cultural identity and belonging within the ethnic group with the help of musical activities, so as to construct an island of Russian culture in the Russian overseas Chinese “enclave” isolated in Harbin. In this process, Harbin No. 1 Music School, as an educational base for the inheritance and dissemination of Russian music culture, is an important specific cultural mechanism supporting the emergence and existence of the “enclave” music society.

## Conclusion

Music is created by people, and human activities cannot be separated from their historical background and social environment. Based on the research model of Loqin’s “Poetics of music culture”, this paper structurally expounds how the relationship between music personnel and culture is influenced, facilitated and supported by the specific mechanism formed in the musical social environment under the role of specific historical fields. Looking at the relationship between music and the nation and the state, as well as the cultural operation mechanism of today’s society, the exploration of the operation mode of the musical culture mechanism of Russian overseas Chinese in Harbin can give us a lot of enlightenment. For example, the emergence and existence of a music society cannot be separated from the gathering and prosperity of the population, the construction and development of the city, and the health, elegance and strong musical culture atmosphere of a city are established on a solid economic foundation. For another example, the high-quality development of urban music activities requires an open and equal cultural exchange environment and a diversified cultural context. Only by maintaining constant communication and mutual learning can the performance level of musical groups and musicians be continuously improved. Finally, excellent musical cultural traditions need to be inherited and carried forward, and the cultural operation mechanism without education links to promote their continuation and dissemination is incomplete. The research of this paper has a positive enlightenment significance for us to understand the diversified urban cultural context and the formulation of urban cultural strategies.

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