

Bridging the East and the West: My Reflection on Leehom Wang's Speech

Le Wang

School of Chinese Language and Literature, Southwest University for Nationalities, Chengdu, Sichuan Province, 610225, China

Abstract: In his speech at Oxford University, Leehom Wang pointed out the current situation of soft power cultural exchanges between the East and the West, and proposed three solutions. At the same time, he also put forward the concept of constructing world popular music, suggesting that the Chinese music world has real connotation, and music with Chinese elements improves market competitiveness and takes a place on the stage of world music.

Keywords: World pop music; East-West soft power exchange; Leehom Wang

Beginning in the early 1990s, Chinese popular music has seen an increase in the number of Chinese American or American-Born Chinese (ABC) musicians who have left the United States to pursue careers in China. These musicians not only possess their Chinese cultural heritage, but also bring with them aspects of the American experience^[1]. Wang Leehom is the most representative one. I enjoyed the great benefit of LeeHom Wang's speech, he took the music that contemporary young people are keen on as a starting point, and pointed out the status of cultural exchanges between the East and the West in a simple way, then issued a call for this purpose.

To begin with, the relationship between East and West as freshmen roommates is used as a metaphor for soft power, and then the concept of soft power is introduced. Compared with Oxford scholars' rigorous definition of high-end, Leehom Wang vividly explained through personal experience--the opposite situation of getting along with the two types of roommates. The status quo of soft power communication is that East and West are like two roommates who don't get along well, such as Sinophobia mood and Chinese people's not polite address to foreigners. East and West is wished to re-establish a new rapport, and thus leads to topic: The relationship between the east and west needs to be and be fixed via pop culture.

The second point of the speech mainly states the power of music: it can break all barriers between people, including racial separation, then discover the common language of both parties. Music has transformed Leehom Wang from being bullied to being accepted equally, as well as music has enabled him to gain self-confidence and like-minded partners. In addition through the touching actions of the janitor he found out the music play a vital role in empowering and motivating people.

The following quite a few examples to demonstrate that there is a serious imbalance in this soft power exchange process, especially in the popular culture exchanges between East and West: the West has far greater influence on the East than the East has on the West. Before putting it right, Leehom Wang analyzed two causes for the question: by comparing Korean music and Chinese music, it is concluded that Chinese music lacks the sensitivity to compete in the international market, and he encouraged everyone to change their music appreciation and try different viewpoints receive the same excellent music through his own foreign growth background.

The Internet provides a role in boosting the world flow slowly formed, at the end of the speech Wang called on to do the following three points to reduce imbalances in popular culture: on the one hand, establish roommate friendships, stay with people from diverse countries frequently and exchange mutual cultures. On the other hand, have own judgment instead of being manipulated by the title party and with own tools of critical thinking to think independently. Leehom Wang positively shared his ten favorite Chinese songs, hoping to let more person feel the power of Chinese music, East and West can take advantage of the power of music as well to live in harmony he believed, like him and his roommates.

"Music is powerful", it is by no means a nice empty phrase, not only through my own experience, but the conclusion I got from observing the world. The sudden outbreak of new coronary pneumonia in 2020 broke the peace of the world. As of 19:30 on December 18, Beijing time, there were 75,396,939 confirmed cases of new coronary pneumonia worldwide. I have no doubt that no matter whether the case is confirmed or not, there will be fear and depression in this unpredictable epidemic. If modern medical technology is used to heal the physical, the music must be indispensable to heal our soul. When negative emotions flood in and a series of numbers make us uneasy, we are in hoping to find peace and fighting spirit in the music. It is hard to convince a person to be optimistic again, but music sometimes resonates it's a piece of cake. During this year, dozens of anti-epidemic songs has flowed into my ears, some are passionate, some are sad. I often wonder that do we really need anti-epidemic music? I think so. A melody, a

sentence of lyrics has incredible power, can give person unlimited hope and expectations for the future, at the same time, it also means collective cohesion. In May, the charity anti-epidemic song *Stuck with u* which collaborated by Ariana Grande and Justin Bieber was one of my favorites. There is no complicated instrumental accompaniment, but a simple voice with a sense of truth. They use practical actions to tell people that we should unite and fight. “The world is a whole”, I was even more convinced at that time.

Global Pop examines the rise of “world musics” and “world beat”^[2]. It seems to me that the world pop music proposed by Leehom Wang is very novel, owing to it is consistent with the current international situation. Countries should make joint efforts to build a community with a shared future and find common ground. When we unfold the entire world map, I find that European folk music has developed vigorously during the classical period and become canonical. The trajectory of movement and evolution could be traced and reconstructed in the long term exchanges of cultures and beliefs. From 5th · 9th centuries China and Eurasia are in a broad historical context^[3]. In the 20th, it is the process of the rise of African and American music to occupy the world. Take the reverse into consideration, oriental music seems to have been in a low state throughout the ages. Oriental music has actually had lots of attempts to rise up, and the course of rising up and seizing the right to speak is actually a balanced game of uniqueness and moderation: only uniqueness will be reduced to curiosity, and only modularization demonstrates that the national significance does not exist. If you ask me, our generation does not have many music works which are familiar and affect the world. The ethnic minority elements in Sadingding’s music are representative of them. Unfortunately, it didn’t grab a place in the trend of world music. Where are our music characteristics? Perhaps the most appropriate is a more concise artistic conception, which uses the advantages of solo to sublimate the realm with white space.

The sentence that moved me the most in the speech was “I was going to learn how to hear with local ears and I deconstructed and analyzed what it was that made Chinese audiences connect with certain types of melodies and rhythms and songs structures and lyrics. That’s what I’ve been doing for the past almost twenty years. And it took me a long time and I am still learning”, compared with the “musicians” who only rely on fan reposting, homepage recommendations, and strong online media pushes, Leehom Wang is a person who is serious about studying music, earnestly integrating Chinese music and leading it to the world. Today’s domestic music market seems to lack such a role, a great many emphasis on packaging and promotion while ignoring the emotions injected into the music itself. There is no doubt that such commercialized works cannot impress the audience. Music is borderless, excellent compositions can transcend countries and classes. Nevertheless, the domestic music market as a whole is in a low state and has not broken the shackles of self-sufficiency.

I was quite curious about the ten best Chinese songs recommended by Leehom Wang in his mind, so I couldn’t wait to listen to after watching the speech. Although the times of these songs are far away from me, I can still feel a firm strength in each piece. In the internationally renowned Chinese local musicians, China itself does not receive much attention, because the world is currently paying more attention to some Chinese music with exotic characteristics. For the West, the East is mysterious and has a rich sense of history, so I don’t think there is any uncomfortable with having Chinese classical elements, not to mention rigid. Music itself is the language of humanistic exchanges, and it is also a paradise of national culture. There is nothing wrong with having its own unique characteristics. At least it can make foreigners accurately recognize that this is something related to China. If it were me, I would recommend the song *Jasmine*, extremely simple, plain and elegant, melody-tone temperament extremely in line with China. In summary, I desire to be a member of promoting cultural exchanges between the East and the West.

Conclusion

The world needs music. The concept of world popular music is necessary. It can connect the East and the West to a certain extent, and it can also connect the world to each other. Chinese music needs to take its essence and discard its dross to improve our market competitiveness. We need to break the prejudice against the outside world, seek common ground while reserving differences, and better let music heal everything.

About the author

Wang Le (1999.10-), female, Mongolia, Hebei, undergraduate student, majoring in Chinese International Education, School of Chinese Language and Literature, Southwest University for Nationalities.

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