



# The change of concept: the formation and reflection of applied ethnomusicology

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## ABSTRACT

*If the study of Jesse Fewkes and Frances Densmore in the late 19th century is taken into account, western Applied Ethnomusicology is entering its second century. After more than one hundred years of development, Applied Ethnomusicology has basically become a relatively mature research path in the West, which not only provides scholars with a new research perspective but also enriches the subject connotation of Ethnomusicology to a certain extent with its research philosophy and value pursuit. In China, Applied Ethnomusicology has attracted more and more attention. Therefore, reviewing the development history of the discipline is not only conducive to clarifying the development context of the discipline but also conducive to reflecting on the current problems and better grasping the development trend of the discipline. In the first part of this paper, the factors influencing the birth and development of applied ethnomusicology are further discussed from within and outside the discipline, respectively based on consulting relevant literature and briefly summarizing the existing discussions of scholars. The second part mainly discusses the research characteristics of Applied Ethnomusicology, such as "pragmatic orientation", "change of researcher's identity", and "emphasis on intervention and intervention". The third part of the Applied Ethnomusicology on the "intervention", "the definition of" discipline "and the edge of two issues are discussed.*

## KEYWORDS

Ethnomusicology;  
Applied  
Ethnomusicology;  
Reflect on the  
discipline

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## 1. Introduction

If we start from the research of Jesse Fewkes and Frances Densmore in the late 19th century (Lobley 2020; Neubarth and Conklin 2020), applied ethnomusicology in the West is approaching its second century of birth. After more than one hundred years of development, applied ethnomusicology has basically become a relatively mature research path in the West (Campbell 2020), which not only provides a new research perspective for scholars but also enriches the disciplinary connotation of ethnomusicology to some extent with its research concept and value appeal. Under the comprehensive influence of many factors, such as the cross of many disciplines and the collision of various ideas, the birth and development of applied ethnomusicology is also a process of constantly improving itself, expanding the research path, enriching the research orientation and the research results. Therefore, reviewing the history of discipline development not only helps to clarify the development context of the discipline but also helps to reflect on the current problems and better grasp the development trend of the discipline. The birth of applied ethnomusicology "is the result of multiple factors acting together in a certain historical context" is more likely to stand scrutiny and doubt than the argument that "comes from a single factor" (Fox 2020). Hao Miaomiao divided the development of western applied ethnomusicology into three periods, namely, germination (1890-1960), initial development (1960-2000), boom and contemporary practice (2000-), in his article A Dynamic Study on the Evolution and Development of Western Applied Ethnomusicology (Titon and Pettan 2015). In her opinion, the



research of applied ethnomusicology in its infancy is more of a "practice activity of individual spontaneity of musicologists", which is not universal, but "it has been fundamentally different from the work of the orthodox academic school, which emphasizes academic research as its own duty". That is to say, although the applied research of ethnomusicology in this period was based on a small number of people, the research of this small group has promoted the qualitative change of applied ethnomusicology diverting from ethnomusicology (Müller et al. 2017).

In the early development period, the application value of ethnomusicology research is still a conscious and active appeal of scholars. However, a significant change is that this appeal has shown a tendency of shifting from the marginal and non-academic group to the mainstream and academic group of scholars in the previous period, as he said: Some scholars who hold orthodox academic ideas also reflect on their own "non-self" cultural research work: what contribution can ethnomusicologists or ethnographers make to humankind? Do ethnomusicologists have special missions and responsibilities as field investigators and musicologists? Some scholars pointed out that "ethnomusicologists not only failed to recognize the legal issues in their [music research] in a rational way but also failed to help the subjects being studied and recorded to protect their own cultural ownership rights related to music, dance and performing arts. In this regard, our dual negligence at the level of thought and behaviour can only render our research worthless in the region under study and only make us suspect and reputable in the region under study." There are two main factors that promote the change of this appeal. One is the reflection of colonialism and Eurocentrism within the discipline and the promotion of cultural diversity and equality as a core discourse. The other is the external factors, mainly the influence of the disciplines such as "public folklore" and "applied anthropology" and the scholars who study from such disciplines. With the combined action of these two factors, applied ethnomusicology developed further after its initial development and took on a flourishing attitude in the new millennium (Sweers 2020).

Based on the analysis, the influencing factors of applied ethnomusicology can be further analyzed from both internal and external perspectives. Scholars should be a group that is good at "looking back". Reflection and criticism are the inexhaustible driving force for academic development and the lifeblood of academic research. In terms of national music subject in the history of research continuously promote the ethnomusicology research development, with the attitude of a thriving but this vibrant booming but also have to face such a question—the ethnomusicology from the Angle of man's idea, the behaviour, culture to explain music "why" is a novel and effective research path, but explain later? What is the application value of the results? In other words, the question itself is also a question, that is, should the value orientation of academic research consider its application? In his *Why We Write*, Xue Yibing used the phrase "Whom do we write for?—On where texts go" as one of the chapter titles, and by considering the subjects of the survey, the social people, the natural disciplines outside of musicology and the social humanities, and the non-ethnomusicology within musicology, he argues that "we are writing for ourselves...the information we pour into the text... just passing it around in our own little circles...this kind of transmission can only be called internal transmission, rather than widespread social transmission". A retorter might say that "professionalization" is inevitably accompanied by self-imposed limits and erecting barriers and that academic research is inherently unsuitable for widespread social dissemination. However, if most of the academic research results are confined to the small circle of ethnomusicology, then not only the significance of ethnomusicology academic research is easily questioned but also the development of the discipline itself will be constrained. As Xue Yibing said, "everyone who engaged in academic writing is never stopping on the question of" why write "thinking" Mr Yu Run ocean sense from "the theory of national music culture thinking" answered this question in macro and microphase Angle is more types of academic research results and practical guiding significance for application, which is the value realization of academic text, and scholars research on its significance to reconfirm. Second, a long time slowly dissolves the field of "outsiders" and "insiders" identity; instead, the researchers of self-awareness of the identity of the "players", the heart to the field of business and establish sincere emotion allows researchers to can no longer only have entered the field of rational like Yang Xifan t often reflect on: we are in the field is often a taker's identity, we get a degree, title, subject, from the



field object, but what we bring them? Such humanistic care makes some ethnomusicologists always highlight their concern for "field feedback" and reflect on the identity of a taker. On the one hand, applied ethnomusicology bears the researchers' reflection on "why to write", on the other hand, bears the researchers' deep emotion, and gradually establishes the good vision of "public benefit, appeal for humanistic care".

By comparing the concerns of Applied Anthropology and applied ethnomusicology on various current practical problems, even if the latter can not be confirmed to follow the former research path, they do have very similar research purports. Perhaps the reality is that, on the one hand, race, human rights, ecological environment and other issues are highlighted in contemporary times, which makes it inevitable for the two countries to pay close attention to practical problems; On the other hand, even in the two parallel research fields, the connection between the two fields often exists, especially in today's interdisciplinary dialogue. The existence of this connection makes the attention to practical problems between the two fields often look at each other and draw lessons from each other, resulting in a great convergence of the research purports of the two fields. Through further combing, this paper contributes to finding that the birth and development of applied ethnomusicology has always been accompanied by the reflection of scholars and the influence of other disciplines. The exploration of this research significance has also expanded from the initial concern of "field feedback" to the concern of various social problems, further closing the distance between applied Ethnomusicology as academic research and social reality.

## 2. Method

This paper discusses the change of formation and reflection of applied ethnomusicology concepts based on a literature review. The perspective based on anthropology, folklore, ethnology and other disciplines has been explored as a general influence on ethnomusicology, the formation and development of applied ethnomusicology. It reflected the traces of being influenced by other disciplines. With the attention to this new discipline and the cooperation with public folklore scholars, "musicologists begin to realize their role in helping the studied community". The beginning of applied ethnomusicology consciously refers to and draws lessons from public folklore research ideas and methods. In the new millennium and contemporary practice, the applied ethnomusicology research group, as a branch of the American ethnomusicology society, was formally established and held the "First Conference on applied ethnomusicology". The Department of applied ethnomusicology is mainly responsible for the work beyond the typical academic horizon and research purpose in the field of ethnomusicology, which is basically consistent with the connotation of the public sector in the field of folklore", and formally finalized the relationship between applied ethnomusicology and public folklore. Melissa checker, an American anthropologist, summarized the research works of Applied Anthropology (2008) into six themes: War and peace; climate change; disasters and recovery caused by nature, industry and development; human rights; health gap; racial equality. Harrison summarized the research focus of applied ethnomusicology into six themes: disease, war and violent conflict; forced migration; violence in depressed urban areas; special natural and man-made disasters; ecological environment change and global warming. Yang Mu also summed up the application of ethnomusicology (Ethnomusicology): culture, art institutions and groups; law, politics and government; education; medicine and health; community development and welfare; war, conflict and disaster aftermath.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1. The change of research methods and orientation of Applied Ethnomusicology

Ethnomusicology research has changed from the positivist orientation of emphasizing scientific and objective investigation and analysis, and focusing on the authenticity and reliability of research results to the humanistic orientation of accepting and admitting subjectivity, focusing on the fusion of horizons between researchers and the studied, and emphasizing the interpretative and poetic space of



understanding, then applied ethnomusicology is more inclined to the part orientation of "pragmatism", that is to say, "research should be liberated from absolute material and spiritual entities and abstract concepts, and be oriented to people's real-life and practice", "emphasize the unity of experience and real-life, practice and action", "advocate taking people as the centre", and face up to people's "various desires, needs and benefits".<sup>1</sup> The basic values of applied ethnomusicology are to pay attention to the application significance of ethnomusicology research and to solve practical problems by using ethnomusicology research results. Just like James peacock's criticism of anthropology, "if anthropology wants to get more recognition and more valuable recognition, it must accomplish some things, and it must bet more actions besides the strategy of analysis. "Pragmatism and seeking criticism should not be excluded from each other",<sup>2</sup> the practicability of ethnomusicology research is often questioned and criticized from all sides. In addition, the scholars' Reflection on the discipline itself makes the pleasure obtained by immersing themselves in books, stepping into the field or completing academic research not always satisfying because when they look up, they have to face the dark clouds of nihilism hanging in the air of ethnomusicology. Nevertheless, from another point of view, it is these doubts, criticisms and reflections that promote the birth of applied ethnomusicology from ethnomusicology, which not only makes clear the "practical" orientation of applied ethnomusicology research but also stresses that academic research should pay attention to practical problems all the time.

At the beginning of the development of applied ethnomusicology, the pursuit of the diversity of researchers' identities was revealed. When Frances Densmore presided over preserving Native American live audio files, he expressed his idea of "hoping to preserve these cultures for them" to the local indigenous community. Even though she was criticized for her "unique evolutionism in the academic context of that era", her efforts in cultural inheritance, historical retrospect and reconstruction of community identity in the contemporary cultural context have been affirmed.<sup>3</sup> In the late 1930s, Charles Siegel's definition of applied ethnomusicology also expressed the idea of "using his knowledge to produce influence and serve the music cultural community", and in the later practice, he actively explored to seek more ways of economic production for the community through music, so as to improve their living standards. The word "service" expresses the aspirations of applied ethnomusicologists such as signal, which is due to the researchers' desire to expand their research value and driven by a sincere and simple emotion of "what can we do for them". Therefore, the applied ethnomusicologists who focus on the application of research results and the value demands of relevant interviewees add a layer of identity characteristics of "service" on the basis of "researcher" and "serve" the community groups carried by the research objects, seeking more practical benefits beyond pure academic research.

Compared with the requirement of ethnomusicology for "value neutrality", applied ethnomusicology especially emphasizes intervention and intervention. First of all, music is regarded as a kind of functional existence, emphasizing the involvement of music in various social problems. In 2013, the applied ethnomusicology research group of ICTM further revised its discipline category as "committed to putting music into various contexts, academic environments and other backgrounds including education, cultural policy, conflict resolution, medical care, art design and community music". Through the analysis of the abstracts of the annual meeting of American folk music, we can also find that music plays a special role in cultural blending and conflict, the change of the trend of thought of the times, art and commerce, intangible cultural heritage and other social issues. Music is not only an artistic activity on the stage or the existence of sound embedded in an existing cultural order but also a tool to reconcile or alleviate some social problems. The functional significance of music intervention highlighted by the latter is the primary concern of applied ethnomusicology research. The second is the intervention of researchers. An ethnomusicologist is an objective researcher of collection, recording, thinking and analysis and an actor who is actively involved in the research object, has multiple identities, and plays various roles. Finally, applied ethnomusicology research does not exclude and actively seek the intervention of the third party, such as public welfare

<sup>1</sup> 马玉凤. 实用主义哲学的起源与发展[D]. 辽宁大学, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> 马腾嶽. 英美应用人类学与公共人类学之历史、争论与发展[J]. 思想战线, 2014, 40(01): 77-88.

<sup>3</sup> 郝苗苗, 梁辉. 西方应用民族音乐学的演进与发展动态研究[J]. 中央音乐学院学报, 2015.



organizations, social institutions, government, etc. The practical problems faced by applied ethnomusicology not only focus on the groups they study, but also actively seek government intervention or cooperation with some social institutions to explore the value expansion of applied practice; For researchers, the funding of some public welfare organizations or foundations can provide not only support for academic research but also an incentive factor for "bringing motivation to applied work within or outside ethnomusicology" as Harrison said. As a result, applied ethnomusicology is more open than ethnomusicologists who are cautious about the involvement of music, researchers and the third party.

### 3.2. Rethinking on "intervention and intervention" and "definition and edge of the discipline."

*About intervention and intervention.* The more open attitude of applied ethnomusicology gives more bold space for academic research and practice, but it can not avoid all kinds of possible wrong practices and subsequent criticism. Intervention and intervention, especially the intervention between researchers and the third party, often leads to criticism and doubts about the moral concepts and value positions (even the most widely accepted cultural relativism), the influence of the third party on application practice, how to evaluate the significance of feedback, how to recognize social responsibility, and so on. In her article, Anna Hofman questions the ideology that may be implied in the application of academic research.<sup>4</sup> In the review of the latest developments in Western applied anthropology, Yang Mu pointed out that "the guiding principle of applied music anthropology should be social responsibility, and Applied Music anthropologists should abide by professional ethics to benefit the community and individuals" in the Oxford Handbook of Applied Music Anthropology, saying that "this is a very dangerous principle". Because it "completely ignores a fundamental factor - what criteria or whose criteria we should base on" to determine benefits and harms, social responsibility and morality, etc. We can also learn from anthropologists' Thinking on similar problems. Applied anthropology's participation in development work and intervention is accused of "easily becoming an ethnocentric intervention, or believing that others need such development and assistance." "Applied anthropology will not only destroy the reputation of anthropology, but also make others angry and alienated from anthropology, and eventually lead to the face of complex political issues",<sup>5</sup> however, applied anthropologists countered that "anthropology is full of indifference and inhumanity." if anthropologists remain neutral on issues such as poverty, they agree to maintain the status quo, that is, except that the first world will continue to exploit the third world, and sit back and watch the occurrence of poverty and related problems, "Anthropology must admit that it is the product of Western civilization, and the West should be responsible for the oppression and exploitation of the aborigines" and help them to seek free revolution or "help the oppressors to improve their lives".<sup>6</sup> This kind of debate has always occurred in the intervention of Applied Anthropology in the topic of "anti-colonialism and anti-development". After a period of debate, anthropologists tend to agree with the view of applied anthropologists that "applied anthropology is the effort of value-oriented and value explicit",<sup>7</sup> And accept the change of the relationship between the researcher and the studied—"from the bystander of value-neutrality to the actor of value intervention, to the cultural intermediary of equal partnership",<sup>8</sup> which is what He Xingliang said, "from value-neutrality to the stage of coexistence of value neutrality and value intervention".<sup>9</sup> It seems that the controversy of "intervention and intervention" in applied ethnomusicology is not very clear, but its further development has to respond to these doubts and criticisms.

*About the definition and edge of "discipline".* Whether it is the ICTM or the SEM, there seems to be no dispute about the fact that applied ethnomusicology has always been a branch of

<sup>4</sup> Pettan, Svanibor, and Jeff Todd Titon, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Applied Ethnomusicology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2015.

<sup>5</sup> 马腾嶽. 英美应用人类学与公共人类学之历史、争论与发展[J]. 思想战线, 2014, 40(01): 77-88.

<sup>6</sup> 马腾嶽. 英美应用人类学与公共人类学之历史、争论与发展[J]. 思想战线, 2014, 40(01): 77-88.

<sup>7</sup> 马腾嶽. 英美应用人类学与公共人类学之历史、争论与发展[J]. 思想战线, 2014, 40(01): 77-88.

<sup>8</sup> 陈刚. 西方应用人类学最新发展述评[J]. 民族研究, 2011(01): 86-96+110.

<sup>9</sup> 何星亮. 关于我国应用人类学研究的若干问题[J]. 中南民族大学学报(人文社会科学版), 2011, 31(05): 11-14.



ethnomusicology. However, in the discussion of the subject category and definition of applied Ethnomusicology in the literature about applied ethnomusicology referred to in this paper, there is often a striking question How to define the same academic achievement as applied ethnomusicology research or ethnomusicology research different from the former? The reality is that applied ethnomusicology, which is placed in a relatively university discipline, maintains a vague edge with the former, which is wide enough to accommodate many research achievements that are difficult to define or have both characteristics. So, is this area becoming narrower and narrower until it becomes a clear line between ethnomusicology and applied nationalities, or is it becoming wider and wider until it coincides with the research scope of ethnomusicology so that the meaning of "definition" itself is dispelled and does not exist? However, the problem itself is also thought-provoking. The "definition" of applied ethnomusicology has not only focused on the definition of this discipline but also triggered the "historical debate on pure knowledge and applied knowledge", as Harrison said. The contradiction between academic / theory and application/practice that applied anthropology once faced reappeared in the field of applied ethnomusicology. However, the former's debate and criticism on this issue led to the solution that "more and more anthropologists give up arguing and seek an intermediate position between academic research and practical intervention. It is believed that "the difference between applied anthropology and academic anthropology is more difficult to see or meaningless than at any time in the past 50 years",<sup>10</sup> and it turns to more pragmatic research, reducing the controversy. The debate on this issue in the field of ethnomusicology broke out in the 1990s. Both sides of the debate are also based on the academic/theoretical and applied / practical positions. The final result is like a "compromise" - that is, "the relationship between pure knowledge and applied work is highly complex", "it is difficult to simply distinguish research knowledge and applied knowledge".<sup>11</sup> On the surface, the problem has been shelved, but after that, the research idea and value orientation of applied ethnomusicology are likely to be completely integrated into ethnomusicology, completely eliminating the research distinction between applied ethnomusicology and ethnomusicology, which is similar to the idea that ethnomusicology has been integrated into the past development and also caused controversy. Moreover, academic theory and application practice no longer highlight the contradiction of opposition but also as the value pursuit of ethnomusicology research, guiding the academic research of ethnomusicology.

#### 4. Conclusion

More than 100 years of Western applied ethnomusicology survey shows that the change from being excluded to being recognized reflects a change of academic concept, which benefits from reflection and further leads to reflection. Perhaps there is still a way to go for applied ethnomusicology to attract the attention, face up to and discuss the group of scholars in China. However, the transplantation and adaptation of the research paradigm of applied ethnomusicology abroad in China need to think about its possibility and necessity. Some research results have consciously or unconsciously practised the research concept of applied ethnomusicology and boldly tried and explored in this practice. I only hope that when we trace back the development history of ethnomusicology for more than 100 years, the foundation laid by modern people's research can be more consolidated.

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<sup>10</sup> 陈刚.西方应用人类学最新发展述评[J].民族研究,2011(01):86-96+110.

<sup>11</sup> 克里萨拉·哈里森,陈心杰.应用民族音乐学:认识论,方法论与实践[J].中央音乐学院学报,2014(01):46-56.



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