

Chapter 10

Teaching Traditional Music in Mainland China

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10.1 Introduction

In the past 100 years, China went through two large-scale political and cultural changes related to western culture. At the end of the nineteenth century, the introduction of western culture ended thousands years long feudal society, and marked the beginning of the modern era of China. By the end of the twentieth century, China's mainland opened to the world again after being isolated for dozens of years. The political and economic reforms since then have brought China to a significant position in the world. But a heavy price was paid as a result of economic and political reforms because traditional Chinese culture was increasingly tainted by western commercial culture. Young people have relied on western popular culture more and more, as well as also being indifferent to traditional Chinese culture.

During the reform in the nineteenth century, China imported the Western modern education system, including music curriculum. In the past decades this historical fact was evaluated positively because the music teaching based on European music theory had made Chinese music and music education systematized and normalized. But some scholars now have different views and have begun to reevaluate how this has affected China. In their opinion, it is a shame that music lessons in schools are based on the Western music system. Since the introduction of Western music into Chinese schools, authentic Chinese music has been elbowed out. Western-worship has been developed and made students to blindly follow (Wang 1996). This is a great loss for China.

Beside the influence of Western music, there is another reason responsible for the lack of authentic Chinese music in schools today. After the year of 1949, newly composed music with certain political and educational purpose has taken up an

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important place in school music education. The political and economic progress at the end of the last century caused scholars and educators to reflect not only on the present, but also on the past. Just when music education was looking for a new way out, the concept of multicultural education came from western countries into mainland China and echoed the appeal of defending traditional culture, and gradually impacted the educational practice in China.

In December 1995, the State Education Commission and China Musicians' Association held the Sixth Conference of National Musical Education and encouraged the use of the motto "music education based on native Chinese culture". This appeal of reform received a positive response from participants. Thereafter, the idea of native music education has been developed in many areas of the territory.

Taking a textbook published in Shanghai as an example, this article describes and summarizes teaching of traditional music in mainland China since the end of the twentieth century. In the last part, reflections and discussion topics are posed for further pondering.

10.2 Teaching Traditional Chinese Music in Schools

10.2.1 *Concepts*

In the last 10 years of the twentieth century, people in different culture and education circles had begun to worry about the influence of western popular culture on mainland China. At this time, however, the idea of western multicultural music education came to China. Encouraging equality of different ethnic groups and putting its attention on non-western culture, this idea has pushed forward the education of authentic traditional music in China's mainland. In December 1995, the Sixth Conference of National Musical Education was held in Guangdong province. The main topic of this Conference was "Music education based on traditional culture". This idea has a great meaning not only in education, but could also trigger consideration for modern industrial culture and commodity economy, etc. Traditional cultures in many countries have been greatly challenged under the globalization of the economy and cultural exchanges in such an environment with modern communication and mass media. It is incumbent for music education to establish its native music culture and to foster the spirit of traditional culture among students. A slogan "mother-tongue music education" was proposed on this conference and thus marked this event as a milestone.

"Mother-tongue music education" energized the lively discussion on China's traditional music and its education. This resulted in dozens of papers being published in all music periodicals. Writers talk about music education with traditional Chinese music from different aspects and discussed meanings, theoretical basis and contents of "mother-tongue music education".

The aim of China's "mother-tongue music education" is to preserve Chinese traditional music culture in the course of world's economic integration (Zhou 1996). This idea shows not only alleviates the worry about traditional culture dying out

under the influence of economy, but also helps us reflect on issues of music education based on Western music what has lasted for hundreds of years.

Scholars who advanced the idea of “mother-tongue music education” think that “mother tongue” could be regarded as symbol of authentic culture. Mother tongue is close to one’s personal culture and style of thinking (Zhang 1996). Chinese “mother-tongue” music means native music which is created according to Chinese traditional culture. Tian (1996) thinks that culture includes ways of thinking, activities and results. As ways of thinking, it represents thoughts of music aesthetics accumulated over thousands of years; as pattern of certain activities, it represents the way of putting thought into practice. The results are handed down music creations and works. In accordance with this view, Chinese “mother-tongue” music should be ancient music based on agricultural civilization and feudal society for thousands of years, excluding modern national music under the influence of western classical music. Looking into the history of Chinese music, real Chinese traditional music consists of ancient palace music, folk music, temple music and scholar music. Among them, palace music, however, almost disappeared during the Song dynasty (960–1279). Temple music has not died out because it was used only in the temple for its own use, and Scholar music is just played by a few of intellectuals. Chinese traditional music is in fact, is mostly folk music by the way of oral transformation and rote memories (Li 2001). But now, folk music has been disappearing because of the rapid development of the economy.

Just discussing the meaning of “Mother-tongue music education” seems inadequate and needs to be specified with details. Wang, a “bellwether” in music education thinks that people of China will benefit from folk music for their lives. In his book “Meaning of Music Education Based on Chinese Culture” (Wang 1996), he points out that favorable traditional culture are presented in traditional folk events and activities, such as Spring Festival, Lantern Festival, Qingming, and Dragon Boat Festival. Traditional music is part of those. He makes the appeal that music groups, schools, organizations, and mass media should strive to develop traditional music as well as to create a good ecological environment. According to Wang (*ibid.*), music education based on Chinese “mother-tongue” should consist mainly of folk music. The idea by Wang received a welcome response among many scholars.

Three years later at the Sixth Conference of National Music Education, a Symposium of Ethnical Music Education was held in Inner Mongolia. Attendants of this symposium discussed how to implement traditional music into school education, by asking “Every student should be able to sing folk songs from his (her) hometown”. This slogan will instigate two benefits to China: (1) ask every student to show consideration for music culture of his (her) hometown, so that the unique feature of multiculturalism through territories China’s can be revealed, and (2) by singing folk songs in schools traditional culture will be inherited and passed on to the next generations.

From that time on, the slogan of “mother-tongue music education” has gradually become rare and been mostly replaced by “the meaning of school education for inheritance of traditional music”. In 2000, Zhao (2000) took a series of examples for using folk music in classrooms and explained the idea of having a “Grounded

Education” in music activities and teaching based on local indigenous music. From the culture context aspect, Xie (2000), another leader of music education in China, thinks that music cultural phenomenon, music and culture, those three cannot be separated. On the one hand, one can only recognize and realize music through culture activities and appreciation. On the other hand, through culture one can understand music in a holistic way. Since music can express social realities, people always set up a close relationship between their music and culture or make music and culture in one. Since the natural space for handing down folk songs orally has been narrowed day by day, the slogan of “Every student should be able to sing folk songs of his (her) hometown” aims to protect traditional culture and music through school education. Also Document of General Office of the State Council points out: “along with the development of globalization and rapid changes of economy and society, we will face many challenges in surviving, protecting and developing our nonmaterial cultural heritage. ... There is no time to lose; we must take immediate action to protect our nonmaterial cultural heritage” (p. 181).

In the article “Reflection and exploration – music education and national music in school”, Xie (2005–2006) expresses how urgent it is to save indigenous culture by telling the result of a survey: among 1,700 students from minority nationalities of Zhuang, Yao, Miao, Dong, etc., only 3 % students from Zhuang, 5 % students from Yao, 29 % students from Miao, and 31 % students from Dong can sing folk songs of their hometowns (p. 239). School education seems, in Xie’s point view, to be the “last rice straw” for saving national music. He stressed that school education has been based more on politics instead of culture since 1949. Nowadays, as the natural environment from which indigenous music culture relies for existence has been damaged, teachers and students will bear the responsibility of cultural inheritance.

“Every student should be able to sing folk songs from his (her) hometown” is more specific than “mother-tongue music education”, thus put the music education with traditional culture further into practice.

10.2.2 Traditional Music in Government’s Documentation

Teaching system in schools of Mainland China is under the Ministry of Education. Teaching programs issued by the Ministry of Education are based on national syllabuses. Since the 1980s, these documents have detailed the regulations for traditional Chinese music.

The syllabus of the 9-year Compulsory Education for Full-time Primary School issued by Ministry of Education in 1989 pointed out: we should understand excellent national music and foster national sense of pride and confidence among students. This document also specially indicated: in order to develop fine music culture and show us the characteristics of music teaching in all areas, local schools can choose native teaching materials of their own, as a part of total teaching contents.

The syllabus (draft) of Artistic Appreciation for High School issued in 1995 asked educators to emphasize Chinese fine national works of our country and develop music culture of our motherland; teaching materials should have national songs, folk songs, plays, national compositions for instruments (Xie 2005–2006).

The Standard of Compulsory Music Education for Full-time Schools (draft) issued in 2001 clearly raises the idea of developing national music and indicates that fine examples of traditional music should be taken as important contents of music teaching, asking students to know Chinese music culture and raising patriotic enthusiasm through study of national music. This document also points out: works of modern national music should also be imported in music teaching. In 2011, the Standard of Compulsory Music Education for Full-time Schools was issued regularly, reserving the contents mentioned above. Both documents not only stressed using Chinese traditional music in teaching, but also advanced the idea of realizing multicultural in the world today.

By summarizing the texts above, we can perceive that music syllabus issued in 1989 and 1995 both stressed on traditional music teaching. Documents issued in 2003 and 2011 advanced the idea of developing traditional music.

10.2.3 Chinese Indigenous Music as Teaching Materials

Music textbook and materials used in schools are mainly centralized and follow the National Ministry of Education and are published by People's Music Press and People's Education Press in China. Music textbooks published after 1996 show some differences: (1) in the centralized edition, music of minorities are included, (2) provinces are allowed to have their own textbook with indigenous music from that area, and (3) some editions offered as supplement are allowed, such as "*Collection of Folk Song*" by Jiangxi province, "*Charming Qinghai*" by Qinghai province, etc. In 2011, "*Shanghai Local Music Culture*", offered as an additional material for schools around Shanghai, was published. This textbook, generally introduces music culture in Shanghai area, and can be taken as a model for current music education. The following part will show some details of this book, aimed at introducing teaching of indigenous music in Shanghai as an example for mainland China.

There are several reasons for choosing this book: (1) Shanghai has the largest population in mainland China. School education in Shanghai has been an example for other localities. (2) Mainland China is undergoing a process of urbanization. The writers of this book investigated the surrounding areas of Shanghai and applied firsthand knowledge and resources for this book. This effort shows a sense of responsibility for traditional culture and education. (3) This book is designed according to laws of teaching and learning instead of being heavily loaded with materials. It's not only a book for school use, but also has a reference function for music teachers in other areas.

"*Shanghai Local Music Culture*", to be used as supplementary material, was together compiled by Ms. Shi Honglian, music instructor for schools from Minhang district,

and Mr. Shi Zhong, professor from Shanghai Normal University. Shanghai is one of the most developed cities in China. During the last 30 years, its suburbs have been rapidly urbanized. Modernization has been making indigenous music around the city die out. Editors feel a responsibility to collect and develop local indigenous music and to encourage students to be proud of their native music culture (Shi and Shi 2011). With great passion the authors completed the field investigations and acquired first hand material by using anthropological methods. Material for this book was then carefully collected and selected for classroom use.

This book was edited for all levels from primary to high school rather than for a certain grade. It contains six units based on different kinds of music forms: Unit I, "Folk Songs in a New Tone" shows an outline of folk songs. "Blowing and Playing with Hometown Sentiments" includes instrumental music which specially expresses people's joys and sorrows. In "Ballad Singing Arts Rhymed Clear" some pieces of narrative art were collected, which is the generic term for all kinds of Chinese traditional "rap arts". Units IV and V introduce folk dance and local operas. In the last Unit, under the title "Folk Customs in New Styles" various ethnic events in nowadays are presented. Editors designed five learning steps for each unit concerning classroom teaching: "Learning Corner", "Artistic Practice", "Expanded Study", "Assessment of Unit" and "Selected Works".

"Learning Corner" is mainly appreciation of folk music singing, playing and relevant knowledge. "Artistic Practice" is the activity part. Students are asked to sing or play certain pieces related to "Learning Corner". "Expanded Study" is divided into expanded research I and II. More interactive activities and requirements are offered for students to have learning by doing, such like imitating a song or finding more music online etc. "Assessment of Unit" gives students a chance to assess their learning by filling out questionnaires or answering questions. The design of this textbook clearly enhances a process of "sense – practice – thinking – evaluation – further learning", while conforming to student's cognitive abilities.

The most problematical issue of teaching indigenous music is the lack of competent teachers. As this book was first tried out in Minhang district, the government of Minhang district has made a consistent effort to train teachers since 2009. To provide teachers with opportunities to experience authentic indigenous music, local artists are invited for giving lessons. The training program is done in a systematical way: first, only six teachers are trained, each teacher for one of the six units. After that, each of these six teachers will train six more teachers. Gradually more and more competent teachers are trained.

Teaching indigenous music has achieved good results in Shanghai, especially in the Minhang district. According to Ms Shi Honglian, teaching indigenous music has benefited teachers in Shanghai. Seventy percent of the music teachers in Minhang district are from other areas. By teaching indigenous music, most of them have learned to speak the Shanghai dialect and sing Shanghai songs; furthermore, they become competent with the history of Shanghai. But short time training is not enough. Native music and knowledge are scattered, therefore it is necessary for teachers to investigate local culture by themselves. The experience in Minhang also

confirms that teaching indigenous music can help music teachers developing from using skills to having a desire for research and become creative.¹

According to the curriculum for music, native music courses can only take 20 % of the time in music lessons. This means that only six to eight classes can be integrated native music for a total 22 classes in each semester. With such few classes, students may only be able to get a taste of native music. Fortunately, many schools in Shanghai offer elective courses for music. In an elective course there are more possibilities for learning, e.g. local artists can be invited to give performances and lectures. Some performing groups can be also set up, such as “group of shadow play”, “group of Shanghai opera”, etc. With these activities students can learn and gain more knowledge and skill through creative processes.

Many students in middle and primary schools in Shanghai are unable to speak Shanghai dialect today. According to an investigation by Shanghai Academy of Social Science, students of middle and primary schools in Shanghai speak standard Chinese or Putonghua in daily life, only half of them can understand and speak Shanghai dialect.² The benefit of learning indigenous music for students is quite obvious. By appreciating and performing local music they have to understand and speak Shanghai dialect. The result shows that many students cannot only speak Shanghai dialect now, but also start to like indigenous music.³

Although the above example is from Shanghai, it could also represent the tendency of teaching local music in mainland China. Applying the slogans “mother-tongue” music education and “Every student should be able to sing folk songs from his (her) hometown” truly seem to have begun.

10.3 Reflection and Discussion

The success of teaching indigenous music in Shanghai has encouraged teachers, students, local artists and the government feeling confident to go further. The approach of saving traditional music culture and building a new music education system are seemingly on the way. But there are questions that have also come up: Music education is not just singing and dancing. Behind all music activities there must be further goals that music education should achieve. What can students learn from indigenous culture? What are the ultimate goals of multicultural music education? In accordance with the viewpoints of the leaders of music education mentioned above, teaching indigenous music could help transmit the traditional Chinese culture.

By the end of the last century, the influence of Western popular culture aroused the issue of traditional cultural education in mainland China. The idea of multicultural education however helped music educators to rethink the Chinese music education

¹ Interview with Ms. Shi Honglian, Sept. 11, 2012.

² See <http://bbs.eastday.com/forum.php?mod=viewthread&tid=1551757>

³ Interview with Ms Shi Honglian on Sept. 11, 2012.

system and try to introduce indigenous music culture into schools. The positive experience seems to be able to have met the goals once set up: (1) learning traditional Chinese culture, (2) inheriting traditional Chinese culture. But have these goals been really reached? In other words, are they reachable? What could our students and society benefit from multicultural music education?

10.3.1 Inheritance vs. Education

Indigenous music is natural and “live”. It can only exist when the soil could provide sufficient nutrition. The soil means the natural environment, and “live” means oral transmission. Globalization today has destroyed much of indigenous culture. Can school education save it? If yes, what can schools do? In order to answer these questions, we must first understand the characteristics of school and indigenous culture.

The system of grades, classes and subject teaching build the structure of modern schools. Teaching content taught in schools are carefully chosen and well structured. Some Chinese intellectuals think that schools will be the last places for inheriting traditional music culture today. But hope does not consistently equal to realities. Indigenous culture has always been inherited naturally instead of artificially. Therefore modern schools cannot offer an appropriate place for accomplishing this kind of mission. We can cultivate organisms and plants in the school laboratory, but cannot turn the laboratory into a farm. Under the modern educational system teaching materials are those structured and generalized. Indigenous culture belongs to folk customs and habit. Therefore it exists in the local community as a part of their knowledge. There is no doubt, teaching indigenous culture in schools is not only necessary, but it is also possible. The aims and goals of the teaching curriculum however should be appropriately standardized.

The theoretical foundation of teaching indigenous music is the one of anthropology. Anthropological research is study of the relationship between mankind and nature, mankind and society, as well as the developing law of mankind through observing and awareness of phenomenon. Geertz, anthropologist, told us: anthropologists don't investigate villages (or tribes, towns, communities ...) they investigate in villages (Cai 2011). His words give us a proper perspective to understand what kind of goals we should set up for teaching indigenous music in school. Recognizing rules of nature and understanding the society are more appropriate goals than inheriting indigenous culture. In contrast, by overstating and inappropriate education goals because of unawareness of the deeper meanings of culture, could lead to inadequate policies and teaching.

Mere music activities are not enough for a real multicultural education. Questions should be raised and discussed including: How indigenous music is formed and transmitted? Why is it disappearing today? Is it possible to save it from extinction? What could happen to a culture with long tradition when it is modernized? Is this change positive or negative for people living there? If these questions could be discussed in schools, students would learn more than just singing and dancing.

Thus, teaching indigenous music could develop student's ability of high level thinking. Music education would become more meaningful if lessons could go in-depth.

10.3.2 Western Multicultural Education & Traditional Music Culture Education in China

Traditional music culture education in China's mainland has been greatly inspired by Western multicultural education, and also has drawn on some ideas of multicultural education. Multicultural education originally was encouraged in developed countries to help of integrate the social differences of ethnic minorities. This changed the curriculum from a Western-centered view to an integrated and valued-centered view. This tendency has not only brought changes in developed countries, but also aroused awareness in protecting traditional culture in some developing countries. Multicultural education is primarily to support a multicultural society, aims at protecting ethnic groups. The idea of multicultural education has a history of over a half century and also a long history in Europe in western countries. It has established the theoretic basis, such as Cultural Pluralism of national theory, Cultural-Pluralism, Culture-Relativism of Cultural Anthropology, religions, psychology of social learning, and Equal Education Opportunity. Multicultural means: in a multinational country, every national group should not only keep languages and traditional culture of its own, but also merge into common languages and culture of country where they live. On this theoretical background the multicultural education in western countries has been developed and standardized (Wang and Yi 2008).

It is clear that multicultural education is a response to social problems. Therefore its practice in different countries and societies cannot be a coincidence. Under the influence of multicultural education in Western countries, many developing countries have become aware of the value of traditional cultures themselves and developed traditional cultural education in their own countries. In the latter half of the twentieth century, multicultural education all over the world demonstrated two situations: one is the development of multicultural education in developed countries, and the other is the upsurge of multicultural education in developing countries (Guan 2003).

Teaching music is deemed to be a suitable way of leading to multicultural education. Multicultural music education in Western countries has been adjusted and moderated over a long period of time. Traditional music from immigration and music of other non-mainstream societies are appreciated in classrooms and thus all the theories mentioned above have been carefully and appropriately put into practice.

Multicultural music education, beginning in the 1990s of the last century in mainland China, was inspired by multicultural music education in Western countries, with an emphasis on traditional indigenous music. It reflects a cultural consciousness of Chinese people during the process of economic globalization. This can also be understood as nostalgia in modern society. If we can think of the gain

and loss of economic development from a historical, social and psychological perspective, we will be able to explain cultural confusion. Multicultural music education should encourage students to understand all kinds of music styles and culture and prepare them for various living situations they will encounter one day. Wisdom and reflection are needed while teaching traditional music as a part of multicultural music education. Just having appreciation and imitating in the classroom is not enough.

Fan (2001), a significant musicologist once said, “In the twentieth century we took European monotheism as the philosophical basis of music education in China. In the twenty-first century, we need to take world’s multicultural and ecological civilization as the philosophical basis of music education” (p. 5). Music education in China with this anticipation is surely deep in its tenet. An open mind is a precondition for accomplishing educational tasks through teaching indigenous and multicultural music.

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