

Differences between Chinese and Western music classroom systems in education and the integration of borrowing path research

Qiyang Huang^{1,*}

¹Department of Music Performance,
Guangzhou College of Technology
and Business, Guangzhou, China

*Corresponding author:
1812010830@stu.hrbust.edu.cn

Abstract:

The distinctive differences between the Chinese and Western music education systems in the educational stage, based on which this paper proposes strategies for effective integration of the two. With the increasingly close international exchanges and the in-depth development of the concept of multicultural education, how to promote mutual learning and integration between Chinese and Western music education based on the uniqueness of their respective cultures has become an important issue in the field of music education. This issue is not only related to the innovation and development of music education but also has great significance for promoting cultural diversity and international understanding and cooperation. In this article, through literature review, comparative analysis, and other methods, we study and explore the comparison of classroom models between Chinese and Western classrooms and explore the effective ways to promote mutual learning and integration based on the differences between the two. It is found that this integration path significantly improves students' musical literacy, creativity, and all-round development, and provides a valuable reference for the reform and innovation of music education.

Keywords: Classroom; chinese and western music; differences; borrowing and integrating; the three main pedagogies of music.

1. Introduction

The globalization boom has resulted in unprecedented depth and breadth of communication and integration of cultures, and the field of education has also undergone significant changes. Music, as a cultural bridge that transcends geographical and linguistic

boundaries and communicates with the heart, has made a significant impact on the global education system. The Chinese and Western music classroom systems, shaped by their respective historical legacies, cultural traditions, and social frameworks—including educational concepts, teaching content, and methods—have diverged significantly, resulting in

distinct characteristics. Consequently, this subject matter is not only pertinent to the advancement and evolution of music education but also pertains to the safeguarding and preservation of cultural diversity. This is of paramount importance for the nurturing of prospective talents with an international perspective. It has consequently become a pivotal topic and a field worthy of comprehensive investigation within the domain of music education. The initial sections of this study present an overview of the historical development of music education in China and the West, along with an examination of the fundamental characteristics of contemporary music teaching systems. The subsequent section delves into the underlying factors that have shaped the divergence between Chinese and Western music teaching systems. The following section then explores the potential for integration between the two systems, drawing upon the preceding analysis. Finally, the study concludes with a summary of its key findings.

2. History of the Development of Music Education in China and the Basic Features of the Modern Music Teaching System

2.1 History of the Development of Chinese Music Education

In ancient China, successive rulers regarded music education as a fundamental instrument of political control. From the Zhou clan in the Shang Dynasty to the various music offices in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, numerous music education institutions were established to foster the cultivation of aristocratic rituals and music. Concurrently, these institutions emphasized the role of music as a corrective to the civil society, and as a means of promoting societal stability and the dissemination of knowledge. Palace and folk music education were mutually reinforcing, with each genre exhibiting distinctive characteristics. These include Confucius' private school, Han Dynasty folk songs, and Tang Dynasty music workshops, which collectively illustrate a multifaceted evolution trajectory [1]. In the context of modern Chinese music education, the period between 1840 and 1919 represents a significant historical transition. During this time, Chinese society underwent a profound transformation, evolving from a closed and traditional society to one that was more open and modern. This period also saw the flourishing of music education in China. During this period, the smoke of the Opium War forced China's doors to open, providing an opportunity for the infiltration of foreign cultures; the Xinhai Revolution promoted the renewal of the political

system, clearing the way for the progress of culture and education; and then the May Fourth Revolution, which led to the establishment of a new political system. The 'May Fourth' New Culture Movement swept the country like a fresh wind, leading to an unprecedented wave of intellectual emancipation and cultural innovation [2].

2.2 The Fundamental Characteristics of the Contemporary Chinese Music Pedagogical System

The Chinese music classroom is based on a teaching concept that has been in place since ancient times. Throughout history, Chinese music education has placed great emphasis on moral edification and aesthetic interest cultivation. This is achieved through the enhancement of students' moral qualities and aesthetic interests through music education. Furthermore, the content of Chinese music education places significant emphasis on the preservation and advancement of traditional Chinese culture. It is dedicated to facilitating students' comprehensive comprehension of and engagement with the exemplary cultural heritage of the Chinese nation, particularly through the medium of music education. The traditional Chinese music classroom model frequently employs a didactic approach, whereby the teacher serves as the primary source of knowledge transfer, with students relying on passive observation and repetitive practice to acquire the desired competencies. This pedagogical strategy tends to be deficient in interactive and engaging elements, which can render the learning process tedious and uninspiring and may prove challenging to stimulate students' interest and enthusiasm. Furthermore, in numerous music classrooms in China, there is an undue emphasis on the transmission of theoretical knowledge, with insufficient attention paid to practical application. This has the effect of undermining students' motivation to learn and making it challenging for them to sustain their interest and commitment to music over an extended period. It is also important to note that within the context of traditional Chinese education, teachers often occupy a dominant position, while students unconsciously assume a passive receptive role. As a consequence of this educational model, students are more likely to pursue the precision of the given answers and the perfection of the external performance, rather than being encouraged to express their inner feelings and creativity freely. Furthermore, music education is also affected by this, with an excessive focus on standardized tests such as art examinations. This results in a single performance evaluation system being used as the primary means of measuring students' progress, which inevitably restricts children's unlimited potential in imagination, innova-

tion, and creativity [3]. Regarding teaching methods, the Chinese tend to emphasize rote learning, with students needing to enhance their playing skills and expressiveness through repeated practice [4].

3. History of the Development of Western Music Education and the Basic Characteristics of the Modern Music Teaching System

3.1 History of the Development of Western Music Education

The development of Western music education can be divided into eight distinct stages. These are the Ancient Period, the Ancient Greek and Roman Period, the Medieval Period, the Renaissance Period, the Baroque Period, the Classical Period, the Romantic Period, and the modern twentieth-century period. Each of these periods has accumulated a wealth of theoretical and practical experience in music education. In the historical evolution of the philosophy of Western music education, from the Platonic era to the post-modernist period, a plethora of significant schools of thought and ideas have emerged. Most notably, in the modern period, the West initially established a standardized, systematic model of music education, encompassing the conceptualization of music education, the design of educational forms and methods, the implementation of strategies, and other aspects of advanced and innovative features [5]. To illustrate, the three most renowned music pedagogical approaches in the world, in chronological order, are the Dalcroze system of music education, established in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which has consistently exerted a profound global influence on music education systems. The founder of the system, Emile Jacques Dalcroze, was an eminent music educator in Switzerland. Around 1900, he proposed the revolutionary doctrine of ‘body rhythm’ and constructed a distinctive music education system based on it. Following decades of development and refinement, the Dalcroze system of music education has become a significant and pervasive influence in contemporary music education worldwide.

3.2 An Overview of the Fundamental Characteristics of the Contemporary Western music Education System

The teaching concept of the Western classroom is characterized by an emphasis on open music education. This educational model is predicated on the active participation and centrality of the learner. This openness is manifested

in various ways in the teaching practice, including but not limited to the open space layout, the creation of a relaxed and free learning environment, flexible and diverse curricula, the open and inclusive teaching attitude held by the teacher, as well as the open use of all kinds of educational resources and technology [6]. For instance, the Hungarian pedagogy of the musician Kodály emphasizes the practical aspects of music education. This approach holds that musical understanding and experience are shaped by the individual and that these can be developed through engagement with the subject matter. It places greater emphasis on the subjectivity and participation of the student than is typical of traditional music education [7]. In the American music education system, the scope of musical thought is exceptionally broad, encompassing a multitude of aspects. Primarily, it posits that music is a significant mode of human communication, equating its function with that of language. The American music education tradition has broadened the scope of musical interpretation, positing that music, like reading and writing, can convey information between individuals. Concurrently, the process of musical learning can facilitate the integration of music with other disciplines, thereby exemplifying the multifaceted value of music education [8]. Dr. Shinichi Suzuki is a renowned Japanese music education expert who posits that interest is a crucial factor in a child’s re-engagement with musical learning, and who also emphasizes the optimization of the musical environment in which children are taught. He posits that music education is not solely concerned with the training of skills; rather, it also underscores the capacity of music to illuminate children’s minds and foster their noble sentiments and ideals of life [9]. In terms of curriculum, Western music education places particular emphasis on the refinement of basic professional skills and the construction of theoretical knowledge. This includes, for example, sight-singing, ear training, and basic music theory. The aim is to comprehensively improve students’ musical skills, musical thinking ability, creative inspiration, and emotional expression. At the same time, students’ personalized growth is respected and promoted [10].

4. Reasons for the Formation of Differences between Chinese and Western Music Teaching Systems

4.1 Differences between Chinese and Western Cultures

Music, like language, is an integral aspect of a nation’s cultural identity, reflecting a distinct national character.

The differences in ethnicity and geography, such as the distinct grammatical rules and the abundance and variety of vocabulary among different languages, have also contributed to the rich and diverse landscape of music, giving rise to notable stylistic variations [4]. The significant contrasts between Chinese and Western music can be attributed to the profound divergence and distinctive evolutionary trajectory of Chinese and Western cultures. In Chinese culture, the concept of the collective occupies a central position, with a particular emphasis on the importance of achieving harmony and unity between the individual and the collective. Conversely, an excessive focus on personal development without consideration of collective interests is often perceived as an exemplification of individualism. Such conduct may be subject to scrutiny and criticism to a certain extent by social opinion [10]. Western music has its roots in the ancient Greek period, a time characterized by a profound respect for and admiration of the arts. It developed during the Renaissance, a period of considerable economic growth and advancement in European culture and intellectual discourse. During this period, humanists advanced the view that all focus should be centred on ‘human beings’, oriented to reality, and established the status of human beings as masters of their lives [5]. They demanded the abolition of the feudal hierarchy of the Middle Ages and the restrictions imposed by religion, which severely limited human freedom and equality. They sought a free, equal, and fully liberated social environment in which everyone could live and develop according to their own will and ability. Consequently, when regional differences in human culture emerged, so too did differences in music [11].

4.2 Differences in Worldviews and Ways of Thinking

A comparison of Chinese and Western cultures reveals that the West places significant emphasis on science and mathematical logic, which provide a foundation for a clear understanding of the world as a separate entity. In contrast, Chinese philosophy, particularly the ideas of Laozi and Zhuangzi, emphasizes an empty, holistic, and vitalistic perspective. In this universe, the fundamental force, Qi, propels all living entities toward the pinnacle of concord and unity. This state is characterized by the absence of barriers between entities and the absence of boundaries between things and us. This distinction in cultural origins is especially pronounced in the domain of music and art education. Chinese music is deeply rooted in the soil of sensibility, focusing on the delicate flow of emotions and the deep resonance of the soul. Each note seems to carry rich emotional colours, reflecting a sensibility attuned to

the nuances of feeling. In contrast, Western music is more inclined to the construction of rationality, with a tendency towards the pursuit of a rigorous logical structure between the notes and the harmony of the aesthetic sense. This approach demonstrates a unique combination of order and beauty. The Chinese way of thinking is known for its comprehensive, holistic, and inclusive nature. However, this approach also has the unintended consequence of neglecting the sharp light of analysis. This is reflected in the field of music research, where researchers are often overly preoccupied with technical details and lack sufficient reflection on the nature and direction of research, thus limiting the advancement of music theory and the pace of innovation in art education [11].

Furthermore, the Chinese inclination towards intuition and the high value placed on experience and sensation has given rise to the distinctive teaching model of ‘master and disciple’ and ‘teaching by word of mouth’. This model has the advantage of being able to impart the essence and focus on perception but may also result in the consolidation of thinking patterns due to a lack of systematicity and precision. This, in turn, may impede the full release of students’ individuality and potential. However, a lack of systematicity and precision may also result in the consolidation of a particular mode of thinking, which could impede the full realization of students’ personalities and potential. Conversely, in the West, the emphasis on rigorous logical analysis and in-depth exploration has established a robust theoretical framework for the discipline of music, motivating individual researchers to delve into the underlying complexities of music, and resulting in significant academic advancements. However, an excess of detailed research may also impede an understanding of music’s holistic artistry and the interconnection between music and its cultural context [11].

5. Strategies for the Integration and Reference of Teaching Systems

As they have evolved separately, Chinese and Western music education have exhibited distinctive characteristics and advantages. However, they also face inherent shortcomings. These deficiencies not only reveal challenges in their respective education systems but also provide valuable opportunities for mutual learning and improvement. The Chinese approach to music education is typically teacher-centred, with students occupying a passive role in the acquisition of knowledge. This pedagogical approach may impede students’ capacity for initiative and creative thinking. To facilitate comprehensive student development, Chinese music education may benefit from

integrating elements of Western pedagogical approaches. These include emphasizing students' subjectivity, encouraging active participation in classroom discussions, and fostering understanding and creativity in music through interactive and inquiry-based learning [12]. Even though Western music education encourages student participation, the quality resources are concentrated in the top conservatories and private schools, while public schools and schools in less economically developed areas face a lack of resources. This has resulted in unequal opportunities in music education. In contrast, China has accumulated experience and strategies to promote a balanced distribution of educational resources through the establishment of independent music faculties during the period of university expansion. By providing precise policy guidance and flexible resource allocation, the Chinese government has ensured the fairness of music education, thereby enabling a greater number of students to benefit from quality music education resources. The experience of the Chinese side in optimizing the allocation of education resources and increasing support for less economically developed regions and public schools through the formulation of fair and reasonable education policies can inform the development of more effective strategies for music education in the West. Such measures will help promote the comprehensive popularization and balanced development of music education, ensuring that all students have equal opportunities in music learning [13].

Regarding pedagogical approaches in music education, it is imperative to espouse the tenet of eclecticism. This entails a seamless integration of exemplary traditional Chinese music pedagogical techniques with cutting-edge Western methodologies. Furthermore, a human-centric approach to instruction is essential, whereby students are taught by their aptitudes. The implementation of flexible and diversified teaching methods can stimulate students' interest in learning, inspire their creativity and imagination, and facilitate the integration of various musical activities, including vocal music, instrumental performance, sight-singing and ear-training, music creation, work appreciation, and music games. This approach allows for the interpenetration and complementarity of these activities, thereby enabling the integration of aesthetic and moral education throughout the curriculum. We advocate the teaching concept of 'multiple and equal emphases', actively developing the extended curriculum, utilizing the Internet classroom and other resources, and reinforcing practical teaching activities, intending to provide students with a rich learning experience. Concurrently, the objective is to achieve a high level of interaction in the teaching process, which will facilitate active communication between teachers and students, students and teachers, and students and

social practice. This will encourage students to engage in their learning, develop their personalities through active exploration and self-discovery, and move from a position of passive acceptance to a more active desire to learn [14]. Concerning the content of music education, it would be beneficial for China and the West to collaborate. It would be beneficial for the Chinese side to reinforce the instruction of Western music theories, such as harmony and polyphony, to deepen students' comprehension of musical structure. Concurrently, this would facilitate the expansion of their knowledge and interest in Western music styles. Conversely, the West could introduce distinctive Chinese music theories, such as the pentatonic scale, to enrich the curriculum and foster cross-cultural musical exchanges and understanding. This would contribute to the establishment of a comprehensive and inclusive music education system. To achieve this objective, China and the West must reinforce their collaboration and work together to develop or revise music teaching materials. These teaching materials should integrate the musical works, music theories, and teaching methods of both sides comprehensively, showcasing the distinctive characteristics of each while reflecting the integration and mutual influence between them. Through such teaching materials, students can naturally engage with the musical essence of different cultures as part of their studies, thereby promoting in-depth exchanges and integration of Chinese and Western musical cultures.

6. Conclusion

This study has undertaken a comprehensive comparison and analysis of the Chinese and Western music classroom systems. The study primarily focused on examining the content of the education and teaching systems and teaching methods in China and the West. It also investigated the underlying reasons for the emergence of these differences, which can be attributed to the distinct cultural backgrounds and worldview thinking styles of China and the West. Furthermore, it proposed concrete avenues for integration and mutual learning between the two systems. Specific pathways can be identified from the comparison of the two teaching systems. For example, China has adopted open education from the West, which has resulted in students becoming active participants in their learning, rather than passive recipients of information. This approach has also led to an enhancement in students' creative thinking and learning enthusiasm. The West has adopted a model of music education from China that ensures universal and balanced development of musical skills, thereby guaranteeing all students equal access to musical learning. Concerning the methodology of learning, there is

the possibility of referring to each other's curriculum content to achieve the objective of maintaining our own traditional culture while simultaneously extending the musical culture of other regions. Both parties in the classroom setting may employ a flexible approach to utilizing online resources and integrating technology to enhance the learning experience. In terms of content, the two systems can be integrated to create new music teaching materials, thus achieving a mutually beneficial situation and facilitating common innovation and progress.

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