

## ESTABLISHMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF GENERAL MUSIC EDUCATION IN CHINA

Music as a Cultural Tradition. In ancient China, music was an essential part of life and was deeply tied to culture, religion, and rituals. Music was often used in ceremonies, festivals, and to honor the ancestors. Children learned music mainly by watching and listening to adults or through apprenticeships with skilled musicians. The education system in ancient China focused more on Confucian principles, which included learning to play traditional instruments, singing, and understanding the role of music in society. Music was seen as a way to teach moral values and discipline. Instruments like the guqin (a type of zither) and pipa (a four-stringed lute) were popular, and children would learn to play them by imitating their teachers or family members.

**The main part.** Classical Chinese Music Education in the Imperial Era. During the Tang and Song dynasties (618–1279), music education started to be more formalized, especially for children of the imperial family and scholars. Music became an important part of the "Six Arts" taught to the elite, which included rites, music, archery, horsemanship, calligraphy, and mathematics. In the imperial schools, children were trained in court music and classical Chinese instruments. There were music teachers who passed down knowledge about music theory, performance, and the art of composing songs. This period was the golden age of traditional Chinese music education, and the goal was to create well-rounded individuals who understood the importance of music in society [1].

Western Influence: The Beginning of Modern Music Education. Starting in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, China opened up to Western ideas, and European music began to influence Chinese music education. Western-style music schools and conservatories were established, and Western instruments like the piano, violin, and trumpet began to be introduced. During this period, China began adopting Western music education methods. For the first time, Chinese students were formally taught music theory, reading Western notation, and learning to play Western instruments.

The Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). During the Cultural Revolution, music education in China was heavily influenced by political ideology. Many traditional and Western music forms were seen as bourgeois or counter-revolutionary. As a result, classical music, especially Western music, was discouraged. Music education during this time focused on revolutionary songs that supported communist ideals. Many traditional music instruments and Western instruments were neglected, and formal music education suffered [2].

Post-Reform Era: Rebuilding and Expanding Music Education. After the Cultural Revolution ended in the late 1970s, China's music education system started to rebuild and modernize. Music schools were reopened, and the government invested in arts and culture. Western classical music began to make a strong comeback, and Chinese music education became more diverse, with an emphasis on both traditional Chinese music and Western music. New music curriculums were developed in schools across the country, teaching both Western and Chinese music theory, as well as the performance of various instruments, such as the piano, violin, and erhu. The 1980s and 1990s saw rapid growth in the number of conservatories and music institutions, and music education became an integral part of China's school curriculum [3].

The Current Situation of Music Education in China. Music education in China has undergone significant changes in recent years, encompassing curriculum design, teaching methods, and evaluation systems. These changes aim to foster students' musical abilities, creativity, and appreciation for diverse music styles.

Discussion on the Curriculum Design, Teaching Methods, and Evaluation System in Chinese Music Education

1. Curriculum Design. Elementary Schools. In elementary schools across China, music classes are typically held once a week. During these lessons, children are introduced to the basics of music, such as singing songs, playing simple instruments like drums, pianos, and flutes, and learning foundational music concepts, including reading notes and rhythms. Alongside these activities, students are exposed to traditional Chinese songs and simple Western melodies, fostering an early appreciation for both cultural heritage and international music. This balanced approach helps children develop an initial interest in music and lays the groundwork for future learning [4]. Middle and High Schools.

As students transition to middle and high school, music education becomes more advanced. The curriculum introduces deeper music theory, focusing on concepts like harmony and melody. Students also begin to explore more sophisticated instruments, such as the piano, violin, and guitar. Additionally, group activities like choir singing and small band performances are emphasized to teach students teamwork and collaborative performance skills. These activities not only enhance students' technical abilities but also promote a sense of unity and shared creativity within the classroom. University and Higher Education. For students pursuing higher education in music, particularly in specialized music schools, the curriculum becomes more focused and professional. University-level music programs delve into areas such as performance, composition, conducting, and music education. Students also study music history and theory at a deeper level, preparing them for careers as performers, composers, educators, or conductors. The comprehensive curriculum at this stage aims to refine students' technical expertise while fostering a holistic understanding of music [5].

2. Teaching Methods. Traditional Methods. Historically, music education in China relied heavily on traditional methods of instruction, where students learned by mimicking their teachers and practicing extensively. For instance, in piano lessons, teachers would demonstrate how to play a piece, and students were expected to replicate it precisely. This approach placed a strong emphasis on technical accuracy, ensuring that students mastered the correct way to play instruments and sing. Modern Teaching Approaches. With the evolution of education, modern teaching methods have gradually emerged in Chinese music classrooms. Teachers now integrate technology, such as computers, music apps, and videos, to make lessons more engaging and accessible. These tools not only simplify complex concepts but also provide students with diverse ways to explore music. Additionally, students are encouraged to compose their own pieces and experiment with innovative playing styles, nurturing their creativity and personal expression. Interactive Learning. Interactive and participatory learning has become a hallmark of today's music education in China. Modern music lessons focus on discussion, collaboration, and active involvement. For example, students often work together on group projects, such as analyzing musical pieces or creating original compositions. These activities foster critical thinking, teamwork, and a deeper emotional connection to music. By engaging in discussions and collaborative efforts, students gain a more well-rounded and enjoyable learning experience [6].

3. Evaluation System. Traditional Evaluation. Traditionally, the evaluation of students' music skills in China was based primarily on their ability to perform with technical precision. For instance, students were assessed on how accurately they could play a piece or sing a song. Teachers typically provided feedback on the technical aspects of their performance, such as note accuracy, rhythm, and dynamics [4].

In modern scholarship, there have been attempts to study Chinese music from a variety of angles. For example, Shen Lian Kang tried to analyze Chinese music from the chamber-vocal direction, Gudimova S.A. within the framework of the problem of studying ancient Chinese aesthetics indirectly touched upon the canonized genres of Chinese song culture, Fang Be studied the style aspects of the national instrumental tradition in the piano music of contemporary Chinese composers, Sun H. studied the evolution and development of song style in national vocal music, historical aspects of the development of Chinese vocal music analyzed by Gong Y., Sun Che studied the influence of religion on Chinese vocal music (Sun Ch., 2023). Sun Che studied the influence of religion on Chinese vocal music. Chen Ji in 2015 already gives an overview of comparative studies on the characteristic features of Chinese and Western music. But among the numerous studies concerning the problems of Chinese music, there are no works that answer the question of the main content of the transformation of Chinese traditional music into China's contemporary "New Music" under the influence of Western music.

Modern Chinese history dates back to the period of the Late Qing Dynasty in China (from 1840 to 1912). The First Opium War (1840) marked the beginning of the Late Qing Dynasty, the ruling power of the dynasty declined, and China began to transform from a sovereign country into a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society, losing its independent status and bringing the domestic subsistence economy into decline. The Second Opium War (1856–1860) further exacerbated the crisis of Qing rule.

At the end of the Qing dynasty, with the further deepening of Western capitalist invasion, the rural subsistence economy on which the feudal rulers had relied began to disintegrate. At the same time, with the opening of factories in China by foreign powers and the development of the Westernization movement, national capitalism emerged in China. Faced with internal and external pressures, all classes under the Qing dynasty also tried to resist. The peasant uprisings against foreign interference in the economy, domestic politics and culture that began at that time, later called

the Taiping Rebellion and the Ihetuan Rebellion, hit the Qing dynasty and the influence of Western powers hard. At the same time, the culture of the late Qing Dynasty also changed and began to delve into the study of Western traditions (Wang Yunqiu (Wang Yanqiu), 2009: 79).

Chinese traditional music in the late Qing dynasty.

Chinese traditional music has thousands of years of development. It experienced its golden flowering period during the Qing Dynasty. Recitative and opera were extremely popular during the Qing Dynasty. The origin of these genres goes back to the Chinese philosopher, Xunzi, the founder of neo-orthodox Confucianism. He emphasized the importance of etiquette and “neutralization” as criteria emphasizing the social and educational functions of music. Representatives of Taoism Lao Tzu and Zhuang Tzu then also put forward an aesthetic criterion of a propagandistic nature. Music developed from the philosophy of Confucianism and Taoism had a great influence on Chinese traditional musical aesthetics.

Confucius himself wanted to use music as a tool for education, for the benefit of the state. In terms of aesthetics, he put forward the principle of “乐而不淫 · 哀而不伤” (Happiness is not subject to will and sadness is not regrettable), and also put forward the idea of “Jienle” (promoting fine music and rejecting folk music).

In the late Qing Dynasty, China's musical trends such as folk music, recitative, opera and instrumental music were particularly developed.

Folk song is a form of song sung in an improvisation style. It has always been the primary form of expression of personal emotions and experiences for all walks of life. Folk songs achieved unprecedented development during the Qing Dynasty. Their content is very colorful: one can find songs about sorrow, cruelty, condemnation of exploiters, peasants' attitudes toward peasant uprisings, reflections on labor and life, praise for sincere love, people's resistance, feudal rites, traditional marriages, etc. These folk songs truly reflect the depth, breadth and diversity of human life.

Recitative is an important category of national art in China, which not only includes the richness of folk music, but also has important research significance for linguistics, ethnology and cultural studies. The origins of recitative are attributed to the period of the life of the Warring Kingdoms thinker Xun Zi, but much of the art of recitative developed and flourished during the Ming and Qing dynasties.

Opera music: in the late Qing dynasty, many local operas were based on folk song and dance music as well as recitative. Chinese opera music developed widely and rapidly throughout the country, indicating that it had fully reached its maturity and era of prosperity during the Qing Dynasty.

Instrumental music: the Ming and Qing dynasties were the golden period of the development of Chinese national instrumental music. The development of opera led to the improvement of the art of instrumental music in terms of scale, quality and craftsmanship. At this time, a variety of instrumental music ensembles were widespread among the people.

The simultaneous development of these several musical trends indicates that the Qing Dynasty provided the most favorable circumstances for China's musical culture.

Comprehensive Evaluation. In recent years, a more holistic evaluation system has been adopted, reflecting the broader goals of modern music education. Today, teachers assess not only technical skills but also creativity, teamwork, and emotional expression. For instance, students may be evaluated based on their ability to perform in concerts, compose original music, or collaborate effectively in group settings. This shift acknowledges the importance of fostering well-rounded musicians who can think critically and express themselves.

Focus on Overall Development. The contemporary evaluation system places a strong emphasis on students' overall development. Beyond technical proficiency, teachers consider how students engage with music emotionally and intellectually. For example, students might be encouraged to reflect on how different types of music make them feel or analyze the cultural significance of a particular piece. Group activities are also emphasized, as they reveal how well students collaborate and communicate with their peers. By focusing on these broader aspects, the evaluation system supports the cultivation of not only skilled musicians but also individuals with a deep appreciation for the art of music [6].

Music education in China has made significant progress in recent years, evolving from a traditional skill-focused approach to a more comprehensive and dynamic system. With enriched curricula, innovative teaching methods, and holistic evaluation practices, Chinese schools are fostering students' technical abilities, creativity, and emotional connection to music. These developments ensure that students are not only competent performers but also culturally aware and creative thinkers, prepared to engage with

the diverse world of music. Further improvements, such as integrating more global music styles and expanding access to modern resources, can continue to enhance the future of music education in China.

**Challenges and Problems in Music Education in China.**

China's music education system has made remarkable progress in recent years, but it still faces several challenges that hinder its ability to cultivate well-rounded musicians with global perspectives. These challenges range from structural issues in curriculum design to cultural and methodological barriers that limit students' exposure to diverse music traditions.

Lack of a Complete European Music System, one major challenge in Chinese music education is the incomplete adoption of the European music education system. While Western music has been incorporated to some extent, it lacks the depth and structure found in European systems. For example, in many Chinese schools, core subjects like music theory, music history, and harmony are either taught superficially or completely absent from the curriculum. This limited approach makes it difficult for students to fully understand and analyze the complexities of European classical music, leaving significant gaps in their musical knowledge.

**Conclusion.** Additionally, the lack of emphasis on technique training further exacerbates this issue. In European music education, students are trained rigorously in technical skills, particularly in mastering Western instruments like the piano, violin, and flute. This focus allows them to develop the precision and artistry required to perform at an international level. In contrast, Chinese music education continues to prioritize traditional instruments and music, with relatively few opportunities for students to receive systematic training in Western instruments. As a result, many students struggle to achieve the technical proficiency needed to compete in global music arenas.

While Chinese music education has made significant strides, these challenges highlight areas that require urgent attention. Addressing the incomplete adoption of the European music system, rebalancing the curriculum to include diverse musical traditions, and bridging cultural gaps are critical steps in enriching students' musical experiences. By overcoming these barriers, Chinese music education can nurture not only technically skilled musicians but also creative and culturally aware individuals ready to engage with music on a global stage.

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## **INTEGRATING EUROPEAN SINGING TRADITIONS INTO CHINESE VOCAL EDUCATION**

Vocal music education in China has made significant development in recent years, forming a multi-level and multi-disciplinary education system.

China's higher education institutions have a relatively perfect vocal education system, and many music colleges and art schools have vocal music specialties, which have nurtured a large number of excellent vocal talents. The content of vocal education covers various styles such as classical vocal