



## Western Classical Music versus Chinese Traditional Music: the Ideological Battle in Chinese Preschool Education.

Jun Zhao<sup>1</sup>, Marianne Zhao<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1-2</sup>Music Academy, Dalian Art College, China.

### Abstract

This paper compares Western classical music versus Chinese traditional music in Chinese preschool education. It will also indicate what students think about traditional Chinese music and Western classical music and how they value traditions in academic Chinese music. A sociological survey, a statistical analysis, and a content analysis of relevant scientific papers were also used. The technique was put in place as a result of a scientific experiment. A survey of kindergarten students was carried out with three groups of 25 people each (the general sample consisted of 75 respondents). The tool Neural Designer, which is often used in neuroscience research, was employed. Children's surveys are part of the data and resources collected for the project. Interest in Chinese musical history and Western classical music expanded greatly for both experimental groups. Following the trial sessions, participants' interest in Chinese traditional music improved.

**Keywords:** *Chinese Preschool Education, Music, Chinese traditional music, Western Classical Music.*

**ARTICLE INFO:** Received: 18.07.2026 Accepted: 20.07.2026 Published: 26.08.2026

## Introduction

---

Music can instill pride in a person's nation and culture. Even though it is a cliché, people are undoubtedly one of the most beautiful things in the world. Along with language, music has a plethora of national and regional traits. Both Chinese and Western music should be studied in professional and non-professional music schools since both are significant academic disciplines. Jixi's study and teaching encountered difficulties because her historical material included Chinese and Western music. If you read this article, you will learn about the Chinese and Western musical traditions and how they vary. To have a modern educational system, we must research and investigate Chinese and Western notions of music education in preschool education.

### Background.

#### *Importance of Music to Children's Development*

Music is a vital part of every child's life, whether at home or school, and they are exposed to music via media (movies and the internet), entertainment, and popular culture. Why should it be taught or used? People generally believe that music education is an excellent approach for children to learn about themselves. It's also an excellent method to link home, school, and society (Mills, 2005). Children of many ethnicities may produce music independently or as part of a group (Elliott, 1995). Consider the following to demonstrate the importance of music in the lives of children:

Music is a means of expressing and transmitting cultural identities and values (Green, 2011). Music is an excellent tool for teaching children about themselves and their surroundings. It enables students to learn about their own culture while also connecting with individuals from different cultures (Wade, 2013). When children create music, they are joyful and proud of themselves (Tang, 2016).

Musical instruments may assist a youngster in learning about the world and how to be a good friend and person (Marsh, 2011). Children engage in musical activities to develop self-control, responsibility, and



a variety of Taoist prayers. While listening to Western symphonic music played by Chinese musicians schooled in Germany, Empress Dowager Cixi ate a turnip.

Western classical music was first performed outside of the Imperial court. In the late 1800s, military and municipal bands presented Western classical music to the general audience. Shanghai became the first Chinese city to have a full orchestra in 1919. It used to cater mostly to Western tourists, but it also serves Chinese visitors. The Shanghai Conservatory of Music was the country's first Western-style music school. It all started in 1927. As a consequence of the city's diverse mix, Chinese classical music blossomed in Shanghai.

People in China were captivated by Western music because of the New Culture Movement, which saw musicians return to China in the early 1900s after studying in Europe or the United States and use Western notation systems in their compositions. The symphony orchestras of most major cities played in concert venues and on the radio. Western music, notably that from the United States, strongly affected popular music in the 1940s. Traditional music was turned into revolutionary songs in Communist-controlled territory after the 1942 Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art. This was done to raise awareness of the party's ideals among rural residents.

Foreign music was first permitted in China during the Mao era, but it had to follow strict ideological rules. Following that, propagandists took over the government, and it was all but forgotten (See music in the Communist Era). Classical music culture resurfaced after Mao's death and Jiang Qing's incarceration. When the Central Conservatory reopened in 1978, 18,000 people sought 100 spots, but only 100 were chosen. Tan Dun, Chen Yi, Zhou Long, Chen Qigang, and Guo Wenjung were among the Chinese composers who helped establish the acoustic palette of modern classical music. Tan Dun, Chen Yi, and Zhou Long traveled to New York City. Chen Qigang visited Paris to expand his understanding of modern music.

During the 20th century, China started to use Western systems like orff, Kodaly, and Western classical music in preschool education to follow modern methods and international trends. In recent years, the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Xi Jinping, promoted the Chinese Dream of Great Rejuvenation and influenced Chinese preschool education. Kindergartens started to use their traditional music to nurture kids, for example, music from ancient Chinese instruments, like Guzheng, Zhudi, Confucious music, and Taoist music.

### Research Value in China

In China, early childhood education has made great progress, and a growing number of children are now enrolled in kindergarten (Feng, 2017). 1. According to China's National Bulletin on Education Development, the number of kindergarten-aged children surged significantly in the 1990s and has since continued to rise. Simultaneously, there is a growth in demand for kindergartens, leading to new kindergartens' development. As shown in Figure 2, the number of kindergartens has increased over the last decade (2010-2019; there is no data for 2020). (see 1.3.3).

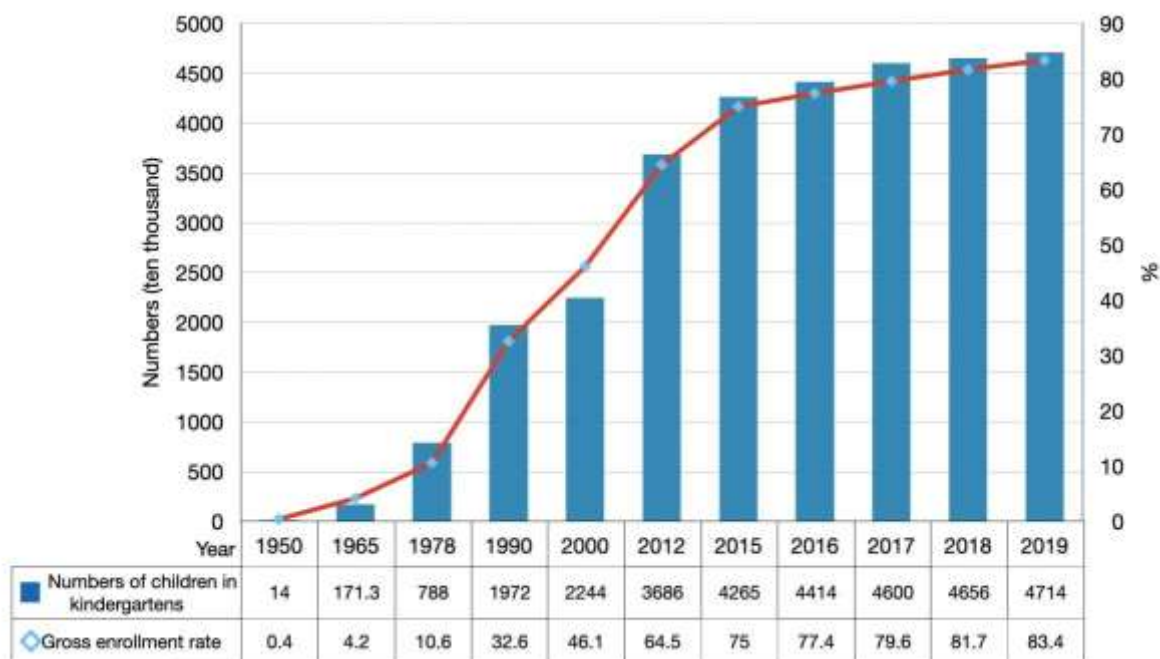


Figure 1. The number of children in kindergartens (Adapted from the Ministry of Education, 2019).

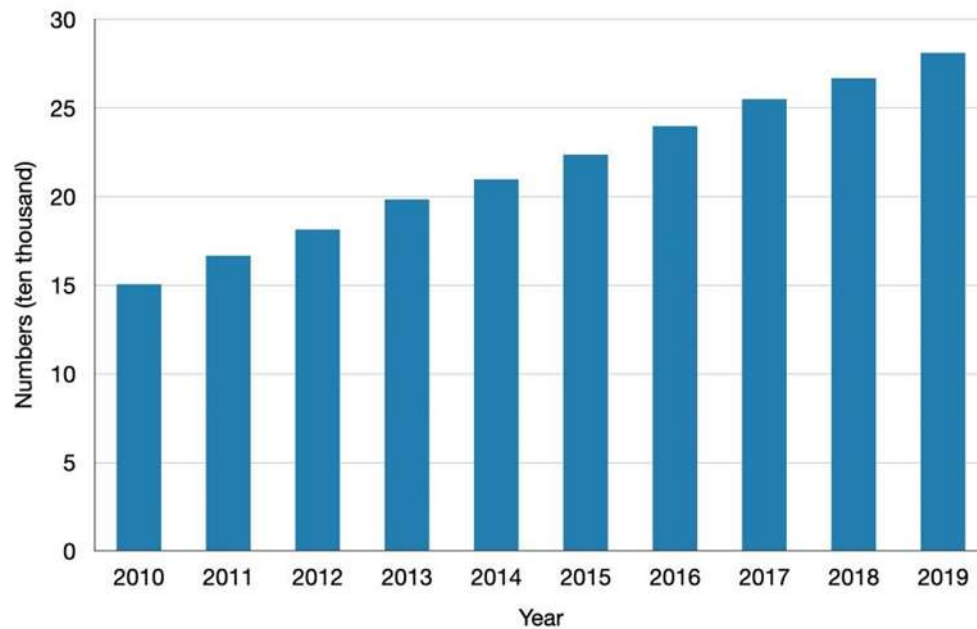


Figure 2. The number of kindergartens from 2010 to 2019 (Adapted from the Ministry of Education, 2010-2019).

Children's music classes are becoming increasingly popular as the emphasis shifts to early childhood education (Sun & Rao, 2017). Government-funded public kindergartens have extremely rigorous guidelines regarding how much music they may play and how many different musical styles they can utilize. During my investigation, I discovered that certain private kindergartens (non-government supported) are ready to provide specialist music programs such as Orff, piano, or dance to attract more children. Even though music education has advanced significantly since kindergartens made it a required curriculum topic in 2001, there may still be some concerns with how children are taught music in kindergartens. One of the concerns individuals have is how they are educated (Wang, 2016; Kong, 2019; Liao, 2019).

## Chinese Cultural Context

Confucian notions of harmony and hierarchy have long been influential in Chinese culture. Confucius' principles have also influenced the educational system, particularly how pupils regard their professors (Law & Ho, 2009; Zhu, 2009; Choy, 2017). Students, for example, are not permitted to quarrel with or criticize their professors in class since doing so would be considered rude, which would be detrimental to their academic performance. According to Confucius, learning should be for one's advantage, which means that learning should be vital to one's family, neighborhood, community, and nation (Choy, 2017, p. 33). Confucianism also promotes family honor, paying attention to and respecting other people's sentiments, and being modest, among other things (Zhu, 2009). Chinese parents must ensure that their children grow up and get an education (Chen-Hafteck, 2013).

Confucianism's principles should be appreciated and followed by young people. According to ChenHafteck (2013), Chinese parents are authoritarian and exercise control over their children. Furthermore, one may claim that parents do not pay enough attention to their children's feelings and needs. (Porter et al. (2005), even though parents and teachers are seen as more important than children, contend that they must nonetheless obey and respect their authority. Choy (2017) mentions "a collectivistic orientation and a significant power gap" as two characteristics of Chinese culture. In society and business, the person at the bottom always follows the one with more power. In China, education is heavily dependent on the Chinese government's influence (Ho & Law, 2006). The government wants to guarantee that teachers can oversee and manage their students to preserve the state's authority. In China, the government has planned and controlled many education components, making it impossible to change them (Yan, 2012). Control, on the other hand, maybe advantageous in certain communities. In 2001, the Ministry of Education set kindergarten curriculum requirements for kindergartens and teachers to follow

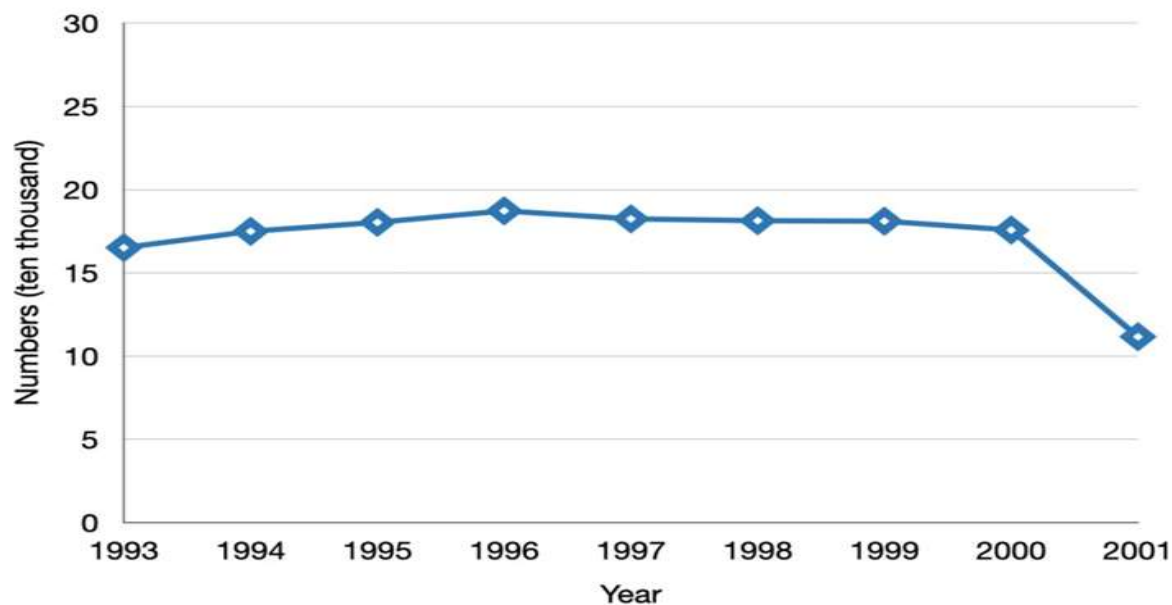
to guarantee that all children had an equal chance of succeeding. China places a high value on social cohesion and control, emphasizing the importance of education (Ho, 2003).

### **History of Early Childhood Education in China**

In China, children are not compelled to attend school until they are eight. Early childhood education, sometimes known as preschool education, is available to children between 0 and 6. The government encourages formal (public) early childhood education for children aged 3 to 6. The phrases "preschools" and "kindergartens" are synonymous. Classrooms for 3 to 4-year-olds have a maximum of 25 students, classes for 4 to 5-year-olds have a maximum of 30 students, classes for 5 to 6-year-olds have a maximum of 35 students, and classes for mixed ages have a maximum of 30 students (Ministry of Education, 2016). When the Ministry of Education issued this in 2016, several private kindergartens provided supplementary activities for children aged zero to two. According to Zhu (2009), there was a nine-year obligatory school system for students aged 6 to 15, but it did not include early childhood education. The number of kindergartens in the United States doubled between 1993 and 2001. Many Chinese kindergartens were run by state-owned enterprises and served as a social safety net for workers. They were not for profit because of the planned economy (Feng, 2017). In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Chinese government began to reform the administration of state-owned firms. Because many state-owned firms were suffering financial problems, the previous kindergarten structure had to be altered, resulting in the closure of certain institutions (Bo, Xiong, & Wang, 2012). As a consequence of bad demographic

data analysis and poor decision-making during this period, several community kindergartens were forced to shut down (Gao, 2010). Figure 3 shows a considerable decline in public kindergartens in 2001.

Figure 3. This is how many kindergartens changed in the early years, according to the Ministry of Education 1993-2001).



## Materials and Methods

The research approach includes analysis, synthesis, induction, and deduction. It also contains a collection of more specialized methodologies employed in the specific study, such as content analysis of scientific literature related to the research issue, sociological survey methodology, and statistical analysis methodology. The empirical data were examined using Neural Designer, a vital analytics tool. The research materials include the sources and data from student surveys. People like Li Shutong and Ma Xitsun, who authored significant and illustrative works, belong in the first category. This collection also includes symphonic compositions by Jiang Wenye, Ma Ke, Zhang Lu, Qu Wei, and San Tong. These pieces demonstrate how contemporary Chinese musical culture has advanced while retaining as many

musical and non-musical components of tradition as feasible. Folk melodies like "Jasmine," instrumental compositions like "Laobaban," musical theater like the Chinese opera "Mudantin," and traditional rituals like "Wear" are contrasted to all of the new works that came out during the period in this example.

The study's findings on kindergarten children are included in the second section of the material. The study was divided into 25 children, each receiving responses from 75 participants. Two of these groups participated in tests, while the third served as a control group. The poll aimed to discover why individuals wish to teach traditional Chinese academic music. Two questions in the survey enquire about the study subject. Understanding, self-improvement, and aesthetics are three factors that motivate children to enjoy music in preschool education. It was assessed on a 10-point scale, with a low of 1 to 3, an average of 4 to 6, and an outstanding of 7 to 10. Use the Neural Designer tool to calculate average scores for each of the survey's three categories.

## **Results**

Most children consider the influence of traditions on China's academic musical culture on an average basis, based on the criterion of selecting the lowest average "understanding" (Figure A).

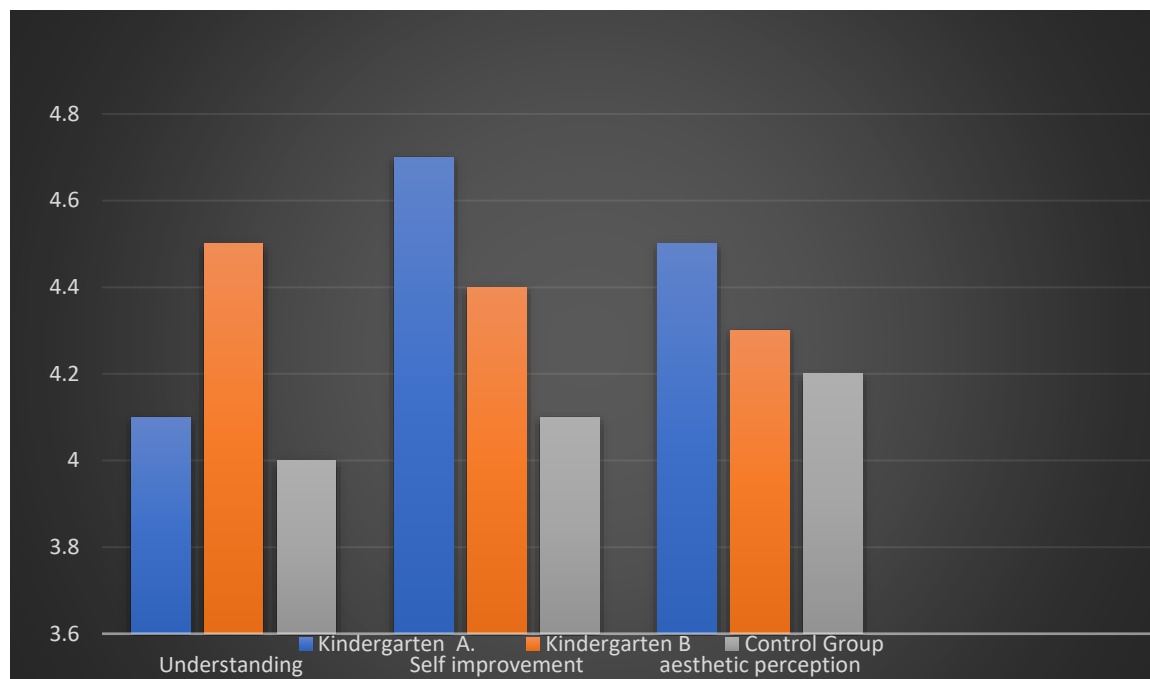


Figure A. After the practical courses, Kindergarten A evaluated the effect of traditions on China's present musical and intellectual culture (prepared by the author using the Neural Designe application in 10-point scale.)

As seen in Figure A, most children had no concept that classical performance attributes are still applicable to today's academic music.

48 of the 75 students (including the control group) replied to a survey by indicating they don't understand why learning about traditional Chinese music is crucial for understanding current Chinese music. After ten courses on traditional musical performance skills and comparing traditional and current Chinese academic music, students in two experimental groups saw a change in the situation. Despite the lack of training, the control group maintained its previous rankings in all three categories (Figure B).

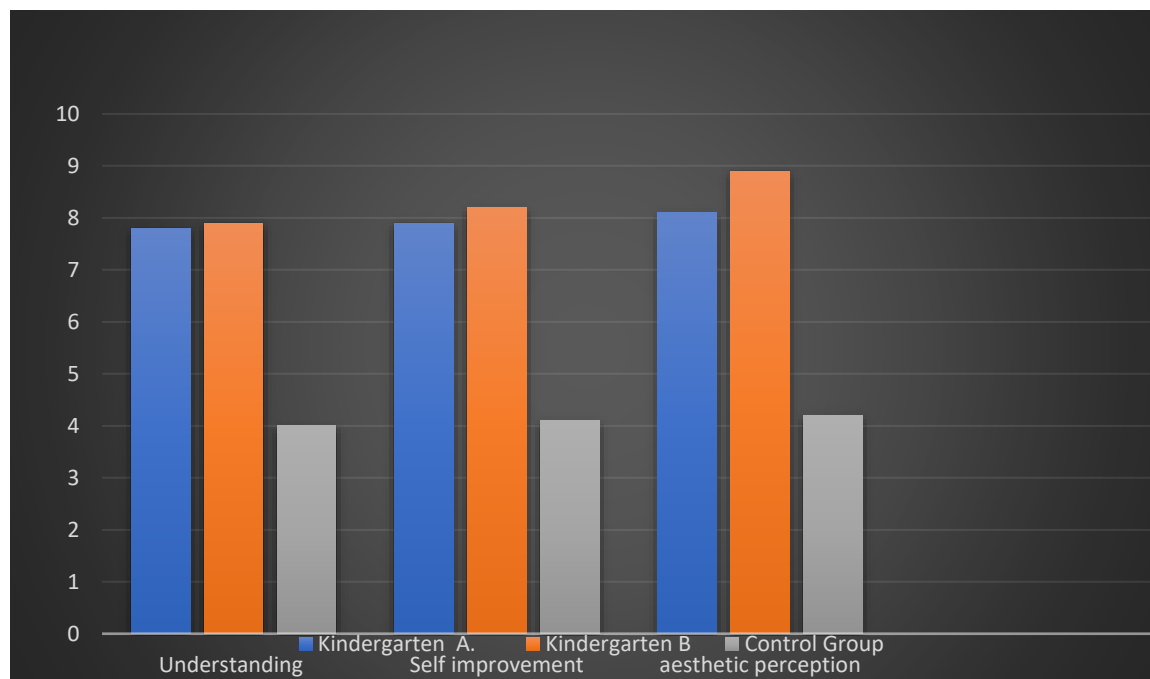


Figure B. After the experimental sessions, the effect of Chinese traditions on present musical and academic culture was assessed (compiled by the author using the Neural Designer program on a 10-point scale)

Following lectures comparing tradition and modernization in Chinese musical academic culture, all three metrics of student motivation increased in the experimental groups. This emphasizes the significance of educational activities in reinforcing Chinese academic traditions among today's children. Children in this kind of study must better understand musical culture's traditions and the aesthetic features of traditional music compared to current musical academic practice to enhance their performing skills.

## Discussion

Authors such as Xiaojuan Chen (2019), Xing Zhi (2018), and Yao Yijun (2020) have all validated it (2019). This work was written by Jiang Xiaojun, Zhang Boyu, J. L. Whitener, Feiqun Shu, and Feiqun Shu (2018), J. L. Whitener and Feiqun Shu (2018), Zhang Boyu, Jiang Xiaojun, and Feiqun Shu (2018), and J. L. Whitener and Feiqun Shu (2018). (2017). Bell Yung's (2019) and Chen Shuyun's (2019)

additions of Chinese traditional academic music samples reinforce our results. Allusions to Chinese musical traditions are frequently utilized to emphasize contemporary musicians to learn new skills.

Writers such as Joseph Wong (2020) and Kelly Pang (2021) corroborate this study's conclusions. They believe that current academic music in China represents a synthesis of traditional Chinese and classical Western musical traditions. Consequently, today's Chinese academic musicians can demonstrate their distinct musical styles (Lian, 2016).

WP Malm and SV Mezentseva validate these results on the quality of the performing arts at China's academic institutions after introducing the methodology of academic music in China.

Qiuping Jia and Sum Baer's (2020) theses concur on preserving historical performing approaches for a range of current academic instruments. However, these results must be supported by a more extensive effort to include traditional Chinese music in the university curriculum.

According to our findings, the use of traditional Chinese academic music to motivate students to learn is supported by recent studies by Bell Yung (2019) and Chen Shuyun (2019). (2019). To identify the new potential for today's artists, writers believe it's vital to look to Chinese musical traditions.

A fusion of traditional Chinese music and Western classical music may be found in China's current academic music, according to Joseph Wong (2020) and Kelly Pang (2021). It's clear from these two investigations that they're right. Chinese academic musicians may showcase their musical approaches (Lian, 2016, p.4).

Our conclusions concerning the quality of performing arts have been accepted by academics who have written about traditional academic music in China following a series of introductions. S.V. Mezentseva (2022) and W.P. Malm (2021) are only two examples (20180).

Qiuping Jin's (2020) and Sum Baer's thoughts agree with us (2020). For a wide variety of contemporary academic instruments, it's crucial to maintain historic performance approaches alive. Traditional Chinese music samples should be included in university courses to back up this study's findings.

### **The fundamental distinctions between Chinese and American educational ideals and philosophies.**

Forcible schooling is widespread in China (Zeng, 2006). There are benefits and drawbacks to having a solid foundation; Chinese students who are exposed to new things have a cower psychology, whereas American students have a lower level of innovative consciousness; this difference in the path that leads to the students is profound regardless of whether all courses of study include report writing, design, or the school's internal structure. When it comes to higher education, the structure is crisscrossed in the vertical and cross directions, corresponding to undergraduate and graduate courses, respectively (Zeng, 2006). The internal architecture of schools varies greatly. Higher vocational schools in the United States are more tightly packed longitudinally and transversely than their overseas equivalents. Despite this, colleges and universities in China are usually the same. Only horizontal cross-disciplinary collaboration and research institutions may be more beneficial to teaching than Fudan or Peking University's schools. After being admitted into college, it's not unusual for a Chinese high school student to be spat out into hundreds of departments and institutions. How can one develop one's creative ability in such a setting? Professional development is not the main focus for students at world-class research institutes.

### **The regional difference in education.**

Because of the variations in music education between China and Western countries, there are variances in regional, ethnic, and age music. When it comes to China's music education, the roots of Confucianism may be found in the two different conceptions promoted by China's two music education concepts. Confucianism, a two music for the mainstream education paradigm, has dominated Chinese music

teaching for the last two thousand years. Both the goal of musical and natural harmony and the quality of music teaching are distinct. ' Chinese and Western music are opposed because of the disparity between their philosophies and the distinctiveness of their musical styles. According to China, "a multipurpose song - an enormous smash; western for specialized music - distinctive" is what you get. A song may be used for various purposes since it respects the original work's style and values. If the production is only a "simple melody," a few tweaks might give the music a fresh perspective. "Special" songs are based on the idea of not imitating others and not repeating oneself. There are no other musical genres like Chinese or Western music.

Traditional Chinese music production incorporates the collective degree of oneness creation. A task's cohesiveness is meant by the word "collective," not a composer's behavior. Two degrees of oneness creation describe the composer, a singer, or a musician who wears a suit. Compressing music and performing simultaneously is more than just a job swap; it's an art form that often involves some pretty potent sex. Western music compositions (i.e., those created by Western professional composers) are distinctive, although there is a shortage of variety in their approaches. In Western music compositions, the artist's strong personality is evident, making them unique works of art. Composing and completing sheet music are two separate creative processes simultaneously.

### **The reason for the influence of western music on Chinese traditional music education**

Only on the motherland's and indigenous culture's soil can the interaction of foreign and indigenous cultures grow and give fruit. Finally, they are accepted and absorbed into indigenous culture (Guo, 2018) and accepted and integrated into new diets. Throughout the music learning process, Orff education must be a system that actively pushes students to explore and invent. Regarding the aforementioned educational goals, Chinese traditional music instruction remains inadequate. The following are some

drawbacks: educational materials are based on singing, educational techniques are focused on transmitting information and developing abilities, and classroom education is focused on teaching.

This kind of training is dull, both in educational purpose and instructional style, and it does not appeal to students. Students are often compelled to follow the school curriculum, which prevents them from fully participating in musical activities. This kind of instruction is very rigorous for learners to gain comprehensive musical knowledge and develop outstanding aesthetic sensitivities.

### **Western Classical music and Traditional Chinese Music in Preschool education in China**

A person's existence and education begin in earnest during the early childhood stages. A complete grasp of a child's physiological and psychological characteristics is essential for developing cognitive, linguistic, physiological, social, and emotional capacities in early childhood education. A child's art education would be incomplete if they did not get music instruction. Due to the Western classical music education technique, students can express themselves in the most natural way possible via singing, playing, and dancing (Feng, 2019). Education specialists have long been interested in teaching strategies that encourage students to become more involved in their studies and gain a sense of mastery over their subject matter, such as video games and other forms of interactive learning.

To better understand the effect of Western classical music education practices on Chinese music preschool education, the author explores and studies music early education institutions and kindergartens in China. Traditional Chinese music education methods and Western classical music education methodologies are radically opposed in many aspects of preschool education, such as teaching content and processes. There should be more points of convergence between the two. Children in China's early childhood education are increasingly benefiting from incorporating Western classical music, which offers a more diverse and creative learning environment. After observing the positive educational effects, many music instructors and education experts were interested in this research.

## Conclusion

Despite popular belief, the basis of Chinese and Western classical music has grown naturally throughout time. Even now, Western music education is appropriate and up to date. Several aspects of Western music education and the development of Chinese music education serve as critical references for Chinese music, not just in replicating the architecture of Western music but also in understanding its essence. Chinese and Western music education domains should collaborate and exchange information to benefit from each other's experiences.

Preschool music education is predicted to grow in resources, forms, and approaches. Using the technique of "letting a hundred flowers flourish, and a hundred schools of thought compete" over time, preschool music exercises exhibit varied cultural viewpoints. This method emphasizes a comprehensive examination of the subject rather than a single set teaching style, guaranteeing that music education for young children is always expanded and improved. Preschool music activities may be shifted away from academic instruction and toward developing children's character or personality, sociality, creativity, and spiritual or emotional imagination. As the great educator Kongzi put it, "to feel the will through poetry, to realize people's self-reliance through courtesy, and to cultivate the strongest personality through music" is an apt description of how various types of music education activities can help children develop their vision, initiative thinking, interpersonal communication, coordination and response-ability, team spirit, and initiative creativity.

Neither Confucianism nor collectivist traditions can be regarded as having an exclusive and undeniable influence on Chinese preschool childrens' musical self-concepts (Wang, 2013). China is changing, and Western ideals are growing more popular among the country's youth (Zhang and Shavitt, 2003). According to research, there are certain parallels between Western and Chinese students (in music) regarding learning techniques, motivation, and student-teacher interactions (Littlewood, 2000; Brand,

2001). Nonetheless, as this study demonstrates, musical self-concepts vary depending on the environment in which they are encountered.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

2026 Special Project of the Liaoning Research Institute for the Integrated Development of Culture, Sports, and Tourism on the "Five Golds" Construction: A Study on the Collaborative Construction Pathways and Value-Added Efficacy Mechanisms of "Golden Courses – Golden Teachers – Golden Majors" in Music Performance Programs Driven by Digitalization. (Project No. WJ009).

## References

- BAER, S. (2020). Chinese folk music as a factor of education (tradition and modernity). *The science, art. Culture*, n. 1, p. 58-66.
- BOYU, Z. (2017). Traditional Chinese Music in a Changing Contemporary Society: A Field Report of the Quantou Village Music Association, Baiyangdian Lake Region, Hebei Province. *Asian Music*, vol. 38, p. 1-43.
- Cao, G., & Li, D. (2017). Rigidity and flexibility: a comparative study of traditional Chinese and Western music from the perspective of complex information system theory. In *Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute Proceedings* (Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 683).
- Guo, S., Peng, K., Ding, R., Zhou, J., Liu, Y., He, Y., ... & Yao, D. (2021). Chinese and Western Musical Training Impacts the Circuit in Auditory and Reward Systems. *Frontiers in Neuroscience*, 920.
- Chen, C. H. (2016). The Comparison between Chinese and western music education. In *2016 International Conference on Education, Sports, Arts and Management Engineering* (pp. 977-980). Atlantis Press.
- Guo, S., Peng, K., Ding, R., Zhou, J., Liu, Y., He, Y., ... & Yao, D. (2021). Chinese and Western Musical Training Impacts the Circuit in Auditory and Reward Systems. *Frontiers in Neuroscience*, 920.
- CHEN, X. (2019). The Conception of the Contemporary Chinese Opera Music Score Database. *Journal of Contemporary Educational Research*, vol. 4(1), p. 95-99.
- Chen, P. (2011). The Path for Music Teachers' Professional Development. *Educ. Music* 11, 7–8.
- Ho, W., and Law, W. (2004). Values, music and education in China. *Music Educ. Res.* 6, 149–167.
- JIA, Q. (2020). Application of Chinese Traditional Musical Instruments. *Scientific and Social Research*, vol. 7, p. 6374.
- LEUNG, B.W. (2018). Traditional Music in the Modern World. In book: *Traditional music in the modern world: transmission, evolution, and challenges*, p.1-9.
- BOYU, Z. (2017). Traditional Chinese Music in a Changing Contemporary Society: A Field Report of the Quantou Village Music Association, Baiyangdian Lake Region, Hebei Province. *Asian music*, vol. 38, p. 1-43.
- LIAN, L. (2016). Chinese modern opera in the context of the influence of European traditions. *Bulletin of Tomsk State University. Culturology and art history*, n. 3, p. 1-9.
- Li, J. (2005). Mind or virtue. western and chinese beliefs about learning. *Curr. Dir. Psychol. Sci.* 14, 190–194. doi: 10.1111/j.0963-7214.2005.00362.x
- MALM, W.P. (2021). *Chinese music*. London. Routledge Publishing House, 544 p.

- MEZENTSEVA, S.V. (2018). Musical-computer technologies and modern composing techniques in the works of Chinese musicians (to the problem «East-West»). *The world of science, culture, education*, n. 1, p. 1-3.
- McInerney, D. M., Cheng, R. W., Mok, M. M. C., and Lam, A. K. H. (2012). Academic self-concept and learning strategies direction of effect on student academic achievement. *J. Adv. Acad.* 23, 249–269.
- SHUYUN, C. (2019). Piano Composition Chen and Do Ye: Toward a New Quality of Traditional Techniques in Contemporary Chinese Music. *Bulletin of Tomsk State University. Culturology and art history*, n. 35, p. 1-13.
- WEI, L.L. (2021). The role of music in the ethnic dance of China. *Humanitarian space*, n. 3, p. 281-289.
- WHITENER, J.L.; SHU, F. (2018). Sharing Global Music: An Introduction to the Music of China. *Music Educators Journal*, vol. 105(2), p. 18-27.
- XIN, X. (2018). Some questions of the specificity of the musical form in Chinese traditional music. *Bulletin of culture and arts*, n. 4, p. 133-139.
- YIJUN, Y. (2020). The pedagogy of chinese traditional music at the china conservatory of music, 244 p. ISBN: 2155-109X
- YUNG, B. (2019). Exploring Creativity in Traditional Music. *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, Vol. 51, P. 1-15.
- K'ung-fu Tzu (Confucius). (2008). *The Li Chi or book of rites, part II of II* (J. Legge, Trans.). Tampa, FL:Forgotten Books. (Original work published 1885)
- Zhang, L., Xie, S., Li, Y., Shu, H., & Zhang, Y. (2020). Perception of musical melody and rhythm as influenced by native language experience. *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*, 147(5), EL385-EL390.