

Pedagogy of Chinese Traditional Music

—Take the China Conservatory of Music For Example

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Synopsis: The 55 ethnic minority groups and the Han majority within China make up the Chinese nationality known as *Zhonghua Minzu*. China is filled with a long history as well as abundant traditional music resources. Located in the capital city Beijing, the China Conservatory is the only higher education institution that has a great many well-known education specialists who have been involved in national music education. In the frame of three mutually related teaching periods, namely, “Basis of Chinese Traditional Music”, “Chinese Traditional Music Morphology”, and “Monographic Study of Chinese Traditional Music”, the traditional music pedagogy of China Conservatory gives priority to the foundation and emphasis on practice. Meanwhile, a pattern of three-dimensional and customary teaching methods are carried out in class. After an exploring process of practicing and summarizing by decades through several generations, we have formed a set of Chinese traditional music teaching methods that has the following three characteristics: simple but profound, step-by-step, and distinctly-featured.

Key Words: Chinese Traditional Music

Level-based Way of Teaching

The China Conservatory of Music is the only higher music learning institution that focuses on traditional music education. The core curriculum at the Conservatory is “Chinese Traditional Music Theory”.

This curriculum is framed by three mutually related teaching periods: the basis of Chinese Traditional Music, the Chinese Traditional Music morphology, and the monographic study of Chinese Traditional Music. These three periods are geared to the needs of different levels, ranging from affiliated middle

school students to undergraduates, graduates, and Ph.D. students. This curriculum not only focuses on the groundwork but also on the importance of practice, which together form the teaching mode of Chinese traditional music theory. To be more specific, this achievement demands painstaking efforts of all the senior experts and present scholars in this field.

I. Development Snapshot

A. Newly Established Period: from “Chinese Folk Music” to “Introduction to Chinese Folk Music”

This curriculum originated from the Lu-Xun Art Academy and the Chinese Folk Music Association in the 1940s. The core of the association was two well-known musicologists: An-Bo and Ma-Ke, who were also pioneers of this curriculum. In 1964, China's then Premier Zhou-Enlai personally instructed the establishment of the China Conservatory of Music. An-Bo and Ma-Ke were both appointed first leaders of the Conservatory by the State Council. At that time, the curriculum was called “Chinese folk music”. In the early 1950-1960s, China's first generation of folk music theorists compiled the textbooks in succession which was later promoted to the whole nation. After the textbook *“Introduction to Chinese Folk Music”* (People's Music Publishing House, 1963) was published, this curriculum was officially entitled “Introduction to Chinese folk music”.

B. Explorative Period: from “Introduction to Chinese Folk Music” to “Introduction to Chinese Traditional Music”

Around the 1970s, the China Conservatory of Music stopped schooling because of the unprecedented Cultural Revolution. Later on, as the national political situation improved in early 1980s (1980, to be specific), the Conservatory returned back to normal. During this period, many famous experts and scholars began a new round of exploration based on the distribution of Chinese regional music culture with great academic enthusiasm.

“The Introduction to Chinese Traditional Music” was just the product of this period which played a leading role nationwide.

C. Mature Period: setting up “Chinese Traditional Music Theory Education System”

Since 21st century, and especially in the 1990s, this curriculum has been revised on three levels of the teaching content according to the new instructions and demands.

1. The Basis of Chinese Traditional Music

This level is relatively basic which caters to both lower-grade undergraduates of the musicology major and students of other majors as well. Based on different genres, this level mainly includes the following parts: “The Han Folk Songs”, “The Minority Folk Songs”, “The Chinese Story-Singing Songs”, “The Chinese Operas” and “The Chinese Instrumental Music”. The front-line teachers are all young and middle-aged.

2. The Chinese Traditional Music Morphology

This is a research-oriented level which is designed for musicology postgraduates and undergraduates of higher-grade, composition undergraduates of higher-grade, and other master students as well. This level focuses on the interior rules and features of Chinese Traditional Music. The examples are as follows: “Analysis of Stylization And Non-Stylization”, “Chinese Traditional Sound Timbre”, “Chinese Musical Form”, “Chinese Traditional Music Theory”, “Chinese Polyphonic Folk Songs”, “Embellishing Method of Chinese Opera Singing”, “Imitation on Chinese Opera” and so on. The front-line teachers are all senior experts and middle-aged teachers.

3. The Monographic Study of Chinese Traditional Music

This level is very tentative and explorative. Here are some examples: “Uyghur Muqam”, “Kam Grand Choir”, “On Tune”, “Bangzi Tune”, “Xipi Tone”, “Theory and Practice of Chinese Traditional Music Classification”, “Northwestern Chinese Traditional Music”, “Traditional Music of Fujian”, “On

Gongche Notation Sightsinging”, “Chinese Opera Imitation Training for Composition Students” and so on. Instructors for this level are expected to be senior experts from the China Conservatory and middle-aged teachers with rich experience and achievement. Meanwhile, other leading experts in this field are also very welcome.

II. Detailed Achievements

A. Teaching System Reform

1. System Establishment and Reform Innovation—this is the core curriculum of all which has been framed by three related teaching periods: Introduction, Morphology, and Monograph. This curriculum not only focuses on the groundwork but also emphasizes the importance of practice which forms the teaching mode of Chinese traditional music theory. With such reasonable allocation, the sustainable potential will certainly be of great possibility.

2. Individualization and Complementation—given different teaching tasks of undergraduate and postgraduate, three types of courses which greatly meet the demands of “resources sharing” have been set up in order to teach students in accordance of their aptitude.

3. Scheduled and Level-based—this curriculum has formed a trapezoidal teaching structure of “Preparation—Basic—Upgrade—Innovation”. And the specifics are as follows:

- For affiliated middle school students, we offer the preparational course of Chinese traditional music which focuses on guiding students’ interests.

- For undergraduate students, we offer the basic of Chinese traditional music which focuses on knowledge accumulation.

-Freshman: “Han Folk Songs” and “Chinese Story-Singing Songs”

-Sophomore: “Chinese Operas” and “Chinese Instrumental Music”

-Junior: “Minority Folk Songs” and “Fieldwork”

- For postgraduate students: we offer Chinese traditional music morphology which emphasizes on cultivating students’ research abilities. Here, we

offer classes like:

“Morphology Analysis of The Han Folk Songs”, “Morphology Analysis of The Minority Folk Songs”, “Morphology Analysis of The Chinese Story-singing Songs”, “Morphology Analysis of The Chinese Operas”, “Morphology analysis of The Chinese Instrumental Music”, “Literature of Chinese Traditional Music”, “Classical Literature of Chinese Traditional Vocal Music”, “Past and Present of Chinese Traditional Music Research”, “Studies of Gongche Notation”, and “Traditional Performing Arts and Sound Embellishing Research”.

- For doctoral students: we offer monographic studies that can encourage students to concentrate on the academic forefront. References are as follows:

“Philology”, “On Tune”, “Uyghur Muqam”, “Kam Grand Choir”, “Theory and Practice of Chinese Traditional Music Classification”, “Northwestern Chinese Traditional Music”, “Nanyin Music of Fujian”, “On Gongche Notation Sightsinging”, “Chinese Opera Imitation Training for Composition Students”, “Sound Embellishing Research and Inspiration of Chinese Traditional Vocal Music” and so on.

B. Teaching Method Reform

1. Advanced Science and Technology—the course is mainly presented via the multimedia-based courseware as well as Internet resources, at the same time, the Chinese folk music database is also part of our teaching method. Additionally, all teachers have their own videotapes of fieldwork memoir.

2. Scientific Research and Innovative Theory—we accomplished a number of major research projects, such as “Protection and Developmental Research of Chinese Minority Music Resources” and “Literature of Chinese Music Theory in The 20th Century”. Our current projects include “Heritage of Nisu Culture—Fieldwork of Hua Yaoyi Ritual Music” and “The Mekong River—Transboundary Music Culture Memoir”. The teaching team of this

curriculum has made great achievements of theoretical innovation and scientific research.

3. Practice Priority—this curriculum is compulsory for all conservatory students which emphasizes on the original taste of singing and listening. Meanwhile, we also offer two additional classes: Gu-Qin and Kun-Qu in order to better students understanding of the ancient traditional culture. Besides, we also pay attention to the fieldwork practice:

(1). Teamwork Fieldwork. Every year, teachers and students of Musicology Department do fieldwork across the whole country, extending from the Folk Village in Hubei Province, Southwestern Chinese Minority Regions, Yangtse River Delta area, Hequ, Zuoquan, Yanbian, Urumqi and the Northeastern Provinces.

(2). Individual Fieldwork. Before students do their graduation thesis, they are required to do some fieldwork (2-6 months) under the help of their advisors.

(3). Folk Music into Classrooms. Every year, we invite different folk artists to do lectures for students in order to get them fully involved and gain better understanding of traditional music. Students are scored by their final research reports.

(4). Database at School Library. The China Conservatory library has very abundant database of Chinese traditional music culture. Statistics of the recent four years show that our records of different types of folk music have covered 18 provinces, 50 kinds of music from 16 nationalities. We have also invited hundreds of folk artists to perform at our conservatory and organize more than 60 relevant activities which can be a great complement to the class teaching.

(5). A Series of Successfully Held Activities. So far, we have successfully held the thematic teaching week of the “Uyghur Minority”, “Kam Grand Choir” and “Dai Minority”. Additionally, we had performances of “Zhuizi”, “Daxian”, “Traditional Music of Hezhe Minority”, “Er-ren-tai of Hequ Town”,

“Traditional Music of Lisu, Pumi, Dulong, and Nu Minorities in Yunan Province” and “Liaoge of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region”.

III. Conclusion

The pedagogy of Chinese traditional music has a tight bond with the conservatory’s education goal of “cultivating national music talents”.

The China Conservatory of Music has very rich advantages of education resources, teaching echelon, textbook materials and scientific research. As for teachers who are expected to be qualified, they must finish a full academic education in this field in person and are also required to have practical abilities in order to give paradigms by themselves. Because only in this way can we provide the pattern of three-dimensional and teaching method. We won’t hire those who simply repeat what textbook says. The fundamental teaching, practical teaching and characteristic teaching have formed a traditional music teaching model which focuses on the basis, practice and special features. At the same time, it integrates the features of Chinese music and gives priority to the combination of the theory and practice. Besides offering practical fieldwork chances, we also set up a course of fieldwork for senior students in order to better the systematic learning from theory to practice. Framed by three related teaching periods (Basis- Morphology- Monographic Studies) which are geared to the needs of different levels, ranging from affiliated middle school students to undergraduates, postgraduates, and Ph.D. students, the China Conservatory has set up a very sound foundation of Chinese music theory teaching system.