

# An approach to Chinese-English bilingual music education

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## Abstract

Music departments in Chinese universities incorporate Western musicology and instruments as part of their undergraduate or graduate courses (or both). However, many of these students may have had limited exposure to Western classical music and English, as a medium of communication. Furthermore, these courses are predominantly offered in Chinese. This article suggests that only a bilingual approach to teaching can help these students participate in global music making and research. In this way, the language and cultural divide which exists between Chinese mainland students and the West can be narrowed to facilitate cross-cultural learning.

**Key words:** higher music education in China, bilingual education in China

*Victorian Journal of Music Education* 2014:1, 11-16

Today, bilingual education in China is a necessity rather than an option. The onset of globalization has led to the rise of world renowned classical music performers emerging from the ranks of the millions of students now studying Western classical music in China. Although the curriculum and language of Western musicology and music performance in Chinese higher music institutions is based on European music theory, history and pedagogy, Chinese as the instructional language, bears little or no resemblance to the universal language of music. In addition, many Chinese music students (at least in central China) seem to have had limited contact with both Western classical music and English as a functional language outside the classroom. Both factors put Chinese students in mainland China wishing to learn and perform Western classical music overseas or who are currently studying with foreign music teachers, at a distinct disadvantage. Only a bilingual approach to music education, which has the dual role of teaching both music and English, can bridge and extend their knowledge of music beyond Chinese language centred instruction.

## The Influence of the West on Chinese Music Education

China's fascination and engagement with Western classical music is not a recent phenomenon. When China moved from the imperial examination system to that of public and normal schools for the general population after 1906, the Qing Government included music as a subject taught in schools and higher institutions. China began to look towards the music education systems of France, Germany and Japan in the creation of music and song classes. At the same time during the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Chinese music students who studied Western music in foreign countries, returned to China to create patriotic songs for educational purposes (Gong, 2010, p. 63). Gong claims that the first teachers college to set up classes in music was the Shanghai Longmen Normal School in 1904, which set up song and music classes for two hours each week.

Other higher institutions of music followed in due course. The Shanghai National Conservatory of Music, which is the forerunner of today's highly

esteemed Shanghai Conservatory of Music, was founded in 1927. Its teaching methodology was originally based on the Leipzig Conservatory of Music. The prestigious China Central Conservatory of Music (CCOM) was established later in 1950 through the merger of a number of music institutions. Most of the early Chinese music/piano educators at the CCOM were trained abroad. Russian pianists were also invited to teach at both the CCOM and the Shanghai Conservatory between 1930 and 1960, which helped to establish a Russian-style of playing in these higher institutions (Lin, 2002, pp. 1-2).

This cultural exchange resulting from foreign music professionals visiting or working in China and Chinese music students studying abroad continues until this day in full force. The Shanghai Conservatory and the CCOM invite world class musicians to their campuses and have exchange programs with other leading music institutions around the world. In addition, it has been noted for a number of years, that there has been a high representation of Chinese and Korean music students in music departments in the United States of America (US). Many of these students study the piano (Cho, 2013, p. 2).

## Western Classical Music and Chinese Musical Terminology

Despite Western influences on music pedagogy in China and the study of Western classical music performance, musicology and theory by Chinese both inside and outside of China, the language of music in China is predominantly in Chinese. The international language of music, however, has its roots in Italian, French, German and English. See Table 1.

The Chinese have taken musical terms from these languages and have ingeniously assimilated them into their language. Kui Zhi describes five ways in which the Chinese loan or borrow English words into their language (Kui, 2011, p. 101). Of these five methods, three are directly relevant to the music terminology used in China: transliteration, free translation and footnoted translation.

Transliteration is used for composers' names. See Table 2.

Transliteration, however, often becomes 'transcription', which is more loosely modelled to the target language. The names of the composers listed in Table 3 require a musical ear and some imagination on the part of the English speaker to comprehend.

Table 1: Music as an international language.

Musical Term	Derivation	Meaning
Forte (f)	Italian	To play loudly
Main Droite (M.d.)	French	To use the right hand
Lied	German	Song (specifically the songs of Schumann and Schubert in classical music)
Sonata	Italian (from the verb 'sonare' to sound).	A composition for one or two instruments in one, three or four movements.
Movement	English	A piece of music which forms part of an extended composition.

Table 2: Some composers' names transliterated into Chinese.

Chinese	Pinyin	English
巴赫	Bāhè	Bach
莫扎特	Mòzhātè	Mozart
贝多芬	Bèiduōfēn	Beethoven

Free translation is used to describe Western musical genres and form. The English meaning remains the same, but the pronunciation has no relationship to the original words. See Table 4.

Similarly, instrument names in Chinese are freely translated according to their meaning and not the phonetic sounds of the original words. See table 5.

'Footnoted translation' refers to the use of a combination of phonetically spelt English and Chinese, which is added like a 'footnote' to aid meaning. See Table 6.

Here 'ballet' and 'mazurka' are spelt phonetically in Chinese. 'Wu' (舞) or 'dance' is added to clarify that they are a type of dance. 'Qu' (曲) means 'piece' or 'song'. As an attachment to 'Mazurka wu' (玛祖卡舞), the addition of 'qu' suggests that it is an original

piece of music or a composition for an instrument and not purely traditional dance music.

Italian musical terms used to express articulation, tempo and dynamics are usually not translated into Chinese on Western music scores, although freely translated terms in Chinese exist for them. Students therefore often need verbal translations to understand what performance technique or speed is required. See Table 7.

### Bilingual Education and the Teaching of Music in English in China

It stands to reason, that if the language of music in China is Chinese, some form of bilingual education is necessary in order to bridge the language

Table 3: Composer's names transcribed into Chinese.

Chinese	Pinyin	English
肖邦	Xiào bāng	Chopin
施特劳斯	Sītèlǎosī	Strauss
柴可夫斯基	Cháikéfūsjī	Tchaikovsky

Table 4: Western musical genres and form freely translated into Chinese.

Chinese	Pinyin	English
奏鸣曲	zòumíngqǔ	sonata
协奏曲	xiézuòqǔ	concerto
交响曲	jiāoxiǎngqǔ	symphony

Table 5: Common instrument names in Chinese.

Chinese	Pinyin	English
钢琴	gāngqín	piano
长笛	chángdí	flute
小提琴	xiǎotíqín	violin

Table 6: Combination words to express musical genre.

Chinese	Pinyin	English
芭蕾舞	bālěiwǔ	ballet
玛祖卡舞曲	mǎzǔkǎwǔqǔ	mazurka

Table 7: Some common Italian musical terms freely translated into Chinese.

Italian	Chinese	Pinyin	Literal English Translation
Piano (p)	弱奏	ruòzòu	weak play
Andante	行板	xíngbǎn	walking pace
Staccato	断奏	duànzòu	disconnected play

gap between the national and international language of music, using English as the medium of communication. This problem is compounded, however, by the low level of English proficiency in China, especially outside major cities. Si (2014, p. 51) observes that in Chinese universities, large English classes, a shortage of English teachers and traditional teaching methods have resulted in students poorly skilled in English.

Bilingual education itself can be generally defined as the use of two languages as the media of teaching (Brisk, 2005, p. 8). In China, it is a unique form of instruction which differs from bilingual language programs in other parts of the world. In the US, for example, one of the primary aims of bilingual education is to assimilate minority language students into mainstream education (Hu, 2008). In China, it is seen as an instructional language in order to internationalize students (Liu, Dai, 2012, p. 61). Hu (2008, p. 200), in his discourse on bilingual education, identifies four types of bilingual instruction in China. Types A and B refer to the teacher who speaks predominantly in Chinese, but who uses English for classroom management and to translate certain theoretical concepts. Type C applies to the teacher who primarily speaks in English, but who uses Chinese for explication of difficult concepts or to translate foreign words. Type D refers to the exclusive use of English in the classroom. Foreign English teachers to China or Chinese highly fluent in English may teach or be required to teach in this manner.

When teaching music performance and musicology in China, the kind of bilingual teaching described in type C, aids both communication and the internationalization of students. Students can become accustomed to English as an instructional

language and relate what they hear and learn back to Chinese through demonstration in music performance or with the aid of translations in musicology lectures. Types A and B would only reinforce the national language of music. In addition, explanations of musical concepts in English would only confuse students whose English is poor. The type D method of instruction is therefore also unsuitable for students who cannot communicate properly in English.

### Teaching Piano in a Chinese University

A piano teacher working in the music department of Hunan University or Humanities, Science and Technology (HUHST) may be required to teach either piano majors or non-majors (or both) for about 16 weeks each semester. There are two semesters in one academic year running from September to July of the following year. The aim of the major course is to train pianists to their full potential in solo repertoire. These students receive a 45 minute lesson of private tuition a week for the entirety of their course. Non-majors, however, are grouped in a digital piano laboratory and receive a 90 minute class each week in their first to third years. Class numbers in such groups vary (there may be as few as seven and as many as twenty students learning together). In these classes, the students work at an even pace through graded piano tutor books.

Piano tutor books and piano music in China as a whole, translate titles and composers names into Chinese, while notation, articulation, tempo and dynamics are preserved in their original form. Chinese students, however, are often unfamiliar with these performance directions or the necessary

performance technique and interpretation. This requires demonstration on the part of the teacher, together with verbal explanations, to make the meaning clear. In bilingual teaching, such verbal explanations and directions often need to be given in both Chinese and simple English, to consolidate understanding. Rhythm and counting, on the contrary, are easily understood by students in English without the aid of Chinese. For example, students are able to relate counting in a piece of music in quadruple time in English, in exactly the same way as if the teacher counted them to start in Chinese.

Students are given homework each week and are expected to study independently to learn the pieces, much as they are required to do so in Western countries. At the end of each 6 month semester, students are examined by their teacher, or a group of teachers, on their performance of one or more pieces.

### Teaching Music History in a Chinese University

Western music history classes at HUHST are given to third year music students for a 45 or 90 minute period each week for at least 18 weeks each semester. In these classes, a Chinese music lecturer might write up musical facts about an era for a whole lesson on a blackboard, while students quickly copy down the notes. Students will also refer to a textbook in Chinese, which provides little or no reference to the original languages and a few musical examples.

Ideally within such an academic subject, bilingual music education would assist to internationalize students through the use of English as the teaching medium, while providing Chinese translations of music terminology to aid understanding. To this end, students' learning outcomes can be increased by the use of a bilingual textbook. Such a textbook should provide information about composers and their music within a specific era in English, with recourse to Chinese translations of difficult or specific

terminology. Furthermore, this textbook should also function as a workbook in providing multiple choice questions, comprehension exercises, word searches and even crosswords to aid students in learning and pronouncing musical facts and terminology. Although multiple choice questions are a common means to test student knowledge in China, word searches and crosswords are an entirely novel learning and memorization tool for Chinese students. The aim here is to create independent learning opportunities for students who are accustomed to a passive way of learning in a teacher-centred classroom (Si, 2014). Currently, there is no such bilingual music textbook on the market, so it resides with the teacher to create such a reference book for students.

### Aural Listening Examples

A bilingual textbook for Chinese students should also contain listening examples of the most popular or characteristic pieces of an era or composer. The goal here is to introduce music of another era to students more accustomed to Chinese folk and popular music. Well-known works by major composers such as Mozart, Beethoven and Brahms, however, tend to be instantly recognized. Wagner is only known by his wedding march and Tchaikovsky by his ballet music. Dvorák is unheard of, although the second movement of his 'New World' Symphony is often found in beginner piano and other tutor books.

Furthermore, it cannot be assumed that non-piano majors can distinguish aurally between the piano music of Liszt and Chopin. Recognizing the difference between an early and late Beethoven piano sonata may also prove to be difficult for some students, without prior instruction or listening examples. Listening exercises should therefore not only introduce the distinctive works of an era or composer, but aid aural recognition of musical style. Works of a composer can be contrasted over different periods and works by different composers in the same musical genre and period compared for their similarities, conservative and progressive traits.

## The Use of Visual Images

The visual aspect of a musicology lesson is extremely important to help bridge the language barrier between Chinese and English and to maintain interest. To this end, video footage of great performers of the past, world famous Chinese performers and performances by young musicians are an inspiration and engage students' attention more than simply a recording.

Students also benefit from seeing and learning interesting life facts about the men and women who created the music of an era. Chinese information sites (such as Chinese Wikipedia or 'Wéiji Bāikē') may have condensed or limited information and only one portrait of a composer. Students can feel more familiar with a composer and their music if they can view photographs spanning a composer's life (including family portraits), any photos of birth houses and residences, original musical instruments played, concert halls associated with the composer, grave sites and monuments. Furthermore, the visual aspect of a lesson also aids comprehension of the verbal descriptions. Students will begin to lose concentration if the teacher speaks at length in English, especially if the point is not visually supported. Additionally, the music lecturer may also need to provide Chinese translations where the point of showing the image is not clear to students of limited English vocabulary.

## Conclusion

It cannot be understated that only a bilingual approach to higher music education in China can enable students to interact with foreign teachers and to participate in global music making. This is essential due to the wide language differences between Chinese and the international language

of music, which has evolved from a number of countries over the centuries. A bilingual approach, however, should not only be used to extend language ability, but also introduce a wider repertory of Western classical music to students and further improve their performance skills. The music educator in China must therefore bridge previous study in the Chinese language to music education which is student-centred and universal. In this way, students can still refer to Chinese textbooks and tutor books, but at the same time, profit in learning music from a Western perspective.

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