

Development of Chinese Children's Folk Music

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Abstract

Looking back on the history of the development of children's songs in China over the past one hundred years, it is easy to see that popular culture is a product of the times, and children's songs have developed and changed precisely with the times. The unique characteristics of the times and the rich atmosphere of life are the source of the vitality of children's songs. The organic combination of various ways of music creation can enable Chinese children's songs to maintain their national status without losing the characteristics of the times, which is a new trend in the creation of children's songs. Looking to the future, children's songs will surely provide richer spiritual food for children's path of growth. Integrating children's music can effectively enhance children's musical sensitivity in music education. By listening to music, children can deeply understand the emotions that the author needs to express. It also enriches children's imagination and enables them to experience the emotions expressed in Chinese folk music.

Keywords: Development; Chinese; Children; Folk Music

Introduction

As China's economy skyrockets and the standard of living significantly improves, there has been a fundamental shift in the demand and expectations for early childhood education. The growing emphasis on high-quality preschool education among families reflects a societal reevaluation of the value of early education. In response to this societal transformation, the Chinese government has increased its investment in the education sector, especially in preschool education, reaching unprecedented levels of attention and support. The release of the "National Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020)" aims not only to promote and enhance the quality of preschool education but also to ensure that every child has access to fair and quality early education services, laying a solid policy and financial foundation for the development of the preschool education specialty (Gao, 2018).

Amid the renewal of educational philosophies and the elevation of societal awareness, the public has begun to recognize the critical role of preschool education in children's physical and mental development, habit formation, and character shaping. Preschool education is not only crucial for the individual growth journey of children but also relates to the future of the nation and the overall progress of society. Thus, cultivating talents in the preschool education field has become a top priority in the educational sector.

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To meet the rapid development of preschool education, universities and vocational colleges across China have established preschool education programs, aiming to train teachers equipped with professional knowledge and skills. The content and methods of teaching are continuously innovating, incorporating STEAM education concepts, implementing special arts and sports activities, and strengthening children's mental health education, striving to cultivate high-quality preschool education talents who can meet the needs of contemporary society.

In this context, piano courses, as one of the core courses in the preschool education specialty, hold an indispensable position. Piano teaching not only enhances children's musical literacy but also has a profound positive impact on their emotional, cognitive, and social abilities. Zhengzhou Vocational College actively leads this trend by integrating Chinese national music into piano accompaniment teaching, enriching the music teaching content and opening new pathways for the inheritance and promotion of China's excellent traditional culture. This innovative teaching practice aims to improve students' comprehensive quality and practical ability, while also inspiring their sense of pride and belonging to the national culture, injecting new vitality into the innovation and development of preschool education (Huang, 2017).

Against the backdrop of China's rich cultural heritage, music education occupies an extremely important position, reflecting the soul and essence of its rich history and diverse traditions. The development of a teaching guide for Chinese national music piano accompaniment in the preschool education specialty is a pioneering effort aimed at combining music education with cultural enrichment. As traditional Chinese music, with its unique melodies and rich historical context, gradually becomes overshadowed by the influx of Western music, there emerges a pressing need to protect this invaluable cultural asset and reintroduce it to the younger generations. This research aims to address this gap by developing a structured curriculum that not only imparts musical skills but also deepens preschool education students' understanding and appreciation of Chinese national music. The research significant were cultural Inheritance and Innovation: This research emphasizes the importance of preserving China's national music heritage by incorporating it into the educational framework of vocational colleges. Developing a specialized teaching guide for piano accompaniment of Chinese national music contributes to the revitalization of traditional music in modern educational settings, promoting cultural continuity and innovation. Enhancing Educational Quality: Introducing Chinese national music into preschool education programs enriches the curriculum, providing students with a more diverse and comprehensive learning experience. This approach not only improves the quality of music education but also fosters a deeper cultural understanding and respect among future educators, enhancing their ability to pass on this knowledge to the next generation. Promoting Students' Comprehensive Development: Learning Chinese national music not only enhances students' artistic cultivation but also promotes their emotional, social, and cognitive development through music learning. Responding to Educational Reform: The project aligns with current educational reforms advocating for a holistic and diversified curriculum. By introducing a comprehensive guide for teaching Chinese national music, it supports the shift towards more innovative and culturally inclusive educational practices in vocational colleges specializing in preschool education (Li, 2019).

Development of Chinese Children's Folk Music

In China, Chinese children's folk music is referred to as "children's songs". Children's songs are songs that reflect children's lives and meet their aesthetic interests. Children's songs have simple and easy-to-understand lyrics, bright and lively rhythms, catchy melodies, short and concise structures, and vivid musical images. Excellent children's songs can cultivate children's sentiment and have a subtle influence on children's growth. The century-long development of children's songs in China can be traced back to the music songs of the school at the beginning of the 20th century; the creation of children's songs tends to be more localised after the May Fourth Movement, and Chinese folk music is used in children's songs in large quantities; since the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, children's songs have been endowed with heavy political colours and a sense of historical mission; after the founding of New China, the development and creation of China's children's songs stepped into the period of prosperity; and in the period of the Cultural Revolution. After the founding of New China, the development and creation of children's songs stepped into a period of prosperity; and during the Cultural Revolution, the creation of children's songs in China entered into a stage of depression; it was only after the reform and opening up in 1978 that the creation of children's songs was revived (Zhao, 2018).

The Period of School Songs - The Sprouting of Children's Songs

Schoolhouse musical songs refer to the singing culture that emerged with the establishment of new-style schoolhouses in the early 20th century, generally referring to the music classes offered in schoolhouses or the songs composed for schoolhouse singing. As a new variety in Chinese music history, the emergence of schoolhouse music songs not only had a profound internal cause of social change, but also was significantly influenced by foreign cultures. It played a catalytic role in the enlightenment of school music and in China's journey towards a modernised society. The music songs of the school covered a rich content of scientific and democratic ideas, women's rights ideas, patriotic ideas of enriching the country, strengthening the army and resisting foreign invasions, etc. The style of the music songs showed an obvious characteristic of "foreign accent and foreign tone". The main representatives of this period are Shen Xinguong, Li Shutong, Zeng Zhi, Ke Zheng, Xin Han and so on, and their representative works include "The First Men's Ambition", "Bamboo Horses", "Boat Race", "The Yellow River", "Farewell", "Spring Journey", and "Song of the Motherland", and so on (Tang, 2019).

Shen Xinguong (1870-1947) was a music educator, formerly known as Shen Qinghong, with the pen name Xinghong. He devoted his whole life to music education. During his study in Japan, he organised Chinese students to set up a "Music Seminar", specially hiring Japanese musicians as teachers to study the creation of Chinese musical songs, which was the first of its kind in China to organise modern music seminars. One of the earliest musical songs in the history of modern music in China, "The First Boy with a High Ambition", was Shen Xinguong's first composition at that time. This song was later widely sung in China (initially called "Gymnastics - Soldier's Gymnastics"). Shen Xinguong was the earliest music teacher in the early period of music education in modern Chinese common schools, and he composed more than 180 music songs in his life. Most of them were tunes of foreign songs, and a few of them were lyrics or special compositions of traditional Chinese folk songs. From 1904, he successively edited and published "School Singing Collection" (3

collections), "Re-edited School Singing Collection" (6 collections, 1911), and "Republic of China Singing Collection" (4 collections, 1912), and in 1937, he revised and compiled and published "Singing Collection of Heart Workers" with a selection of 82 songs. In addition, he also translated, edited and published the book Singing Teaching Method for Elementary Schools. Shen Xinguo's music songs have a wide range of subjects: there are "The Yellow River", "Song from the Army" and "Patriotism" which express the spirit of patriotism; there are "The Revolutionary Army" and "Beautiful China" which directly advocate the National Revolution and glorify the Republican New Deal; and there are "Women's Songs", "The Telegraph" and "Textile" which advocate the equality of rights between men and women and attach importance to science. Most of the songs he composed were children's songs. As he had been a teacher for a long time, he had a deeper observation and understanding of children's psychological characteristics and singing requirements, and thus was good at describing some of the things that children came into contact with in their lives, which made them feel close to each other. He was also the earliest author to use vernacular language to write lyrics, which were shallow but not vulgar, simple and easy to understand. He paid more attention to the vividness of the musical language and children's characteristics in the tunes he chose. For example, the songs he composed, such as "Gymnastics - Soldier Gymnastics", "Boat Racing", "Bamboo Horse" and "Blacksmith", were widely circulated among students. The music songs composed by him also include: "Yellow River", "Revolution Must First Revolutionise People's Heart", "Soldier's Gun", "Lotus Catching Song", "Song of Im Yu Zither Society", and "Dropout Mourning Song", etc. 6 songs, and "Yellow River" has the greatest influence, which expresses the author's sincere feelings towards the motherland, and the preface to Huang Yi's "Heart of the Worker Singing Collection" highly evaluates this song and thinks that this song is "very strong and generous, appropriate to the spirit of the lyrics, the spirit of the country and the spirit of the country. The spirit of the lyrics is appropriate, and there are not many school songs made by Chinese people that have this kind of spirit. The songs compiled by Shen Xinguo were concise and clear, rich in themes, and became the first outstanding author to write lyrics in dialect, making outstanding contributions to the school music and song movement. Most of Shim Hsing-gu's songs are good at describing things that children and young people can easily come into contact with in their daily lives, which makes his songs unique among the excellent school music and song works that are characterised by "friendliness and friendliness".

The Period of the May Fourth Movement - The Initial Development of Children's Songs

The May Fourth Movement, as the most thorough anti-imperialist and anti-feudal patriotic movement in Chinese history, and also as a great cultural movement, not only dealt a heavy blow to the rule of imperialism and feudalism in China, but also emancipated the minds of the Chinese people. Children's literature developed during the May Fourth Movement, leading children's songwriting into a new historical stage. Composers had the initiative to choose their own national music as tunes, changing the "old wine in new bottles" mode of composition in the school music period, which was loved by children and teenagers. Representatives of this period include Lai Jinhui, Xiao Youmei, Huang Zi, Zhao Yuanren, etc., and their representative works include The Sparrow and the Child, The Little Painter, Night of the Moon, Poor Chouxiang, Trekking for Plum Blossoms, Words of the West Wind, and The Firmament.

Lai Kam Fai (5 September 1891 - 15 February 1967), born in Xiangtan, Hunan Province, graduated from Changsha Higher Teachers' Training School, was the father of modern Chinese songs and dances, a writer of children's songs and dances, and a founder of Chinese popular music. He is one of the "Eight Stallions of the Li Family". He learnt guqin and plucked instruments since childhood. He was deeply influenced by the folk music of his hometown and the theatre music of Hunan Opera, Flower Drum Opera and Han Opera, which were popular in his hometown. He was a pioneer of children's song and dance music in China and still is today. Lai Jinhui believed that the starting point of a national language should be singing, an idea of great significance in the world of education (Shen, 2001).

The war period - further development of children's songs

Since the Anti-Japanese War, the development of Chinese children's songs has entered a new stage. Under the background of anti-Japanese salvation, children's songs have been endowed with strong political colours and a sense of historical mission, and have been closely integrated with political life, which has made children's songs of this period have a very high popularity and rate of popularity, and have strong epochal characteristics such as realism, ideology and revolution. It reflects the optimistic spirit of the Chinese people who are brave and intrepid, tenacious and unyielding, and the music is distinctive and lively, highly contagious, and plays an inspiring role in awakening the people. Representatives of the Anti-Japanese War period include Nie Er, Xian Xinghai, Mai Xin, etc. The main works include "Newspaper Selling Song", "Horses Are Really Good", "Fear of Non-Resistance", "Sour Jujubes and Thorns", "Children's Whistle", and "Singing of Two Little Boys Setting Free the Cowboys".

Nie Er (1912-1935), formerly known as Nie Shouxin (聂守信), with the character Ziyi (子义), was a native of Yuxi, Yunnan Province, and a composer. Most of Nie Er's works reflect the spirit of the times and are strongly coloured by revolutionary realism. Nie Er was the composer of the national anthem of the People's Republic of China, the March of the Volunteers. His representative works include "March of the Volunteers", "Song of the Great Road", "Dock Workers", "New Woman", "Graduation Song", "Song of Flying Flowers", "Songstress Under the Iron Hoof", "Song of Selling Newspapers", "Song of the Plum Maiden", and so on. As a pioneer of the proletarian revolution, Nie Er incorporated this spirit into the creation of children's songs, which was of incomparable significance to children's education during the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression. His compositions inspired children's patriotism in distinctive forms, and the encounters of the newspaper boy in the Newspaper Selling Song were created by Nie Er from a story of his own experience (Qian, 2017).

The Founding of New China - The Prosperity and Development of Children's Songs

On 1 October 1949, the People's Republic of China was founded. The democratic and enlightened policies greatly encouraged the people and provided a favourable social environment for the development of songs. Chinese songwriting entered a golden age. Professional composers devoted themselves to the creation of children's songs with great enthusiasm, providing rich spiritual food for the growth of children and youth. During this period, the colourful life of children and teenagers born in the new China and growing up under the red flag became the main content of children's songs. Compared with the previous

period, the children's songs created during this period were more distinctive and positive, and the lively and optimistic children's and teenagers' songs deeply infected people from generation to generation, and became the symbol of an era. The main representatives of this period are Qu Xixian, Li Qun, Pan Zhensheng, Zheng Lucheng, Send Ming, Liu Chih, Zhang Wenzhang, etc., and their masterpieces include Let's Swing the Oars, Our Fields, Listening to Mother Talking about the Past, Happy Holidays, How Happy We Are, Little Swallows, The Most Glorious of All Labour, and We Are the Successor of Communism (Wu, 2016).

The period of the Cultural Revolution - the depression of children's songs

Between 1966 and 1976, a period of ten years of civil strife in China, the Cultural Revolution severely stifled the creativity of artists and devastated the stage of literature and art. Songs with the distinctive colours of the Cultural Revolution were all over the place, while the outstanding lyric songs since the founding of the country were banned, and "high, fast, loud and hard" songs with political labels and slogans became the mainstay of the singing scene. Under the influence of leftist ideology and cultural authoritarianism, the creation of children's and young people's songs in China entered a period of depression. Typical works of this period include "I Love Tiananmen Square", "The Train Runs Towards Shaoshan", "Planting Pumpkins Under Jinggang Mountain", "Red Star Song", "Little Pine Tree" and so on. The children's songs of this period were more obviously politically orientated than before, with a single compositional technique and a regular and constrained melody becoming the main features, symmetrical structure, square layout, clear theme, single tone, and obvious contrast between fast, slow and fast rhythms, which were suitable for the masses to sing (Wang, 2020).

Conclusion

Integrating Chinese folk music into the music curriculum for young children enables them to fully realise the characteristics of traditional Chinese music. Different methods such as simple body rhythms and direct verbal expressions are used to experience the unique rhythms and melodies in Chinese folk music, thus enriching their inner activities, improving their aesthetic level, and enhancing students' experience of different music. In addition, the introduction of traditional Chinese music into the teaching of early childhood music classes is an important and significant concept. Kindergartens should appropriately incorporate the teaching of traditional Chinese music from the local culture, so that children can experience the richness and diversity of traditional music in a series of musical activities, enhance their sense of identity with ethnic music, and infect children with Chinese ethnic music from an early age, so that they can experience the charm of ethnic music.

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