

# The Teaching of Traditional Chinese Instrumental Music Theory In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and Its Future Development

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## I. The Establishment and Development of Teaching of Traditional Chinese Instrumental Music Theory in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

### i. Growing out of nothing (1940s -1950s)

During the period of National Conservatory at Qing Mu Guan in 1940s, Mr. Yang Yinliu delivered a series of lectures on History of Chinese Ancient Music and Traditional Chinese Instrumental Music Theory. These teaching activities can be regarded as the beginning of the establishment of traditional Chinese instrumental music theory.

In 1950s, Mr. Yang Yinliu offered lectures of special topics on *guqin* music, *Shifangu*, *Shifanluogu* at the Central Conservatory of Music. Mr. Wang Shu from the Composition Department and Mr. Ding Dang from the Department of Traditional Chinese Music also gave lectures on the study of traditional Chinese instrumental music. These lectures, as a pioneering effort, provided teaching materials and experience for subsequent lectures on traditional Chinese instrumental music theory at music schools.

### ii. Initial stage of the system (1960s-1980s)

During this period, courses of *Introduction to Traditional Chinese Music* or *Introduction to Traditional Chinese Instrumental Music* were offered at the conservatories in China, based on the following 5 main textbooks:

1. *Introduction to traditional Chinese music* compiled by Institute of Chinese Music Studies affiliated to the Central Conservatory of Music [1]

For the first time in China, the textbook classifies traditional Chinese instrumental ensembles into 5 categories of percussion ensemble; wind ensemble; string instruments ensemble; string and wind ensemble; and string, wind and percussion ensemble depending on the characteristics of their presentation. This classification method has exerted important influence on classifying traditional instrumental ensembles in the teaching of Chinese music across the country after 1960s.

2. Professor Gao Houyong from Nanjing Academy of Arts offered a course on *Introduction to Chinese Instrumental Music* at Central Conservatory of Music and China Conservatory of Music in 1964 [2].

3. Professor Li Minxiong offered the course of *Introduction to Chinese Instrumental Music* at Shanghai Conservatory of Music in 1960s [3].

4. Professor Ye Dong offered the course of *Genres and Forms of Chinese Instrumental Music* at Shanghai Conservatory of Music in 1970s [4].

5. Professor Yuan Jingfang offered the course of *Traditional Chinese Instrumental Music* at the Central Conservatory of Music in 1970s [5].

The *Introduction to Traditional Chinese Music* (1964) should be regarded as the beginning of establishing the theory-teaching system for traditional Chinese instrumental music, and the *Introduction to Traditional Chinese Instrumental Music* (Gao Houyong, 1981), *Traditional Chinese Instrumental Music* (Yuan Jingfang, 1987) and *Introduction to Traditional Chinese Instrumental Music* (Li Mingxiong, 1997) as a symbol of the completion of the establishment.

### iii. Innovation and development (1990s)

1. Publication of *Compilation of Traditional Chinese Instrumental Music* – a national key project of arts research

When it comes to the development of theory-teaching for traditional Chinese instrumental music at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the project of publishing *Compilation of Traditional Chinese Instrumental Music* should be mentioned first. The Ministry of Culture of China and Chinese Musicians' Association jointly launched comprehensive and systematic collection and sorting of traditional Chinese instrumental music in 1979. The publication of the *Compilation of Traditional Chinese Instrumental Music* was recognized as a National Key Project of Arts Research in 1983.

The *Compilation of Traditional Chinese Instrumental Music* includes 38 volumes, of which volumes by province started coming out in 1990s and 20 volumes have been published by the end of 2006 [6].

These volumes contain hundred of musical genres and over 6000 pieces of music, including more than 200 divertissements. Many musical genres are collected and sorted in a quite complete manner for the first time in history [7]. More than 10,000 scholars and folk musicians participated in the project, with a large number of heritages of traditional instrumental music having been saved and preserved. This project of “the great wall of culture” lasted more than 20 years and has brought up a batch of professionals in the study of folk music and provided valuable and important firsthand materials for teaching and researching traditional Chinese instrumental music theory, laying solid foundations for the establishment of Studies of Musical Genres at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

2. Progress and breakthrough in theoretical research

In addition to the publication of *Compilation of Traditional Chinese Instrumental Music*, considerable progress was made in the writing of monographs and theses on traditional Chinese instrumental music theory 1980s and 1990s. Representative works include *Elementary Introduction to the Artistic Tradition of Xi'an Drum Music* (by Li Shigen), *A Preliminary Research on Nanyin in Fujian* (by Wang Yaohua and Liu Chunshu), *A Study on the Drum and Wind Music of Northeast China* (by Li Laizhang), *A Probe of Fujian Nanyin*, *A*

*Masterpiece throughout the Age*: (by Sun Xingqun) and *Studies of the Jing Music of Chinese Buddhism* (by Yuan Jingfang) [8].

These works and more than a hundred of other academic theses cover a wide range of subjects on such areas as the Study of Instrumental Music, Study of Yue (Chinese Music), Study of Yuepu (Chinese Tablature), Study of Temperament, Aesthetics of Music, in addition to thorough and comprehensive studies on different genres of traditional Chinese instrumental music. These achievements undoubtedly have high academic value in the development of traditional Chinese instrumental music theory and the establishment of the discipline of Study of Musical Genres at music schools in China.

### 3. Development of basic theory of the Study of Musical Genres

Musical Genre, as a historical and cultural phenomenon of society, is an important category of traditional Chinese music. Since 1950s, scholars have been paying greater attention to the value and position of musical genres in traditional Chinese music, with a host of study reports on music genres and theses on tablature collection and sorting published. It is the development of the Study of Music Genres that guides the research of musical genres as a discipline to a new and higher level of theoretical study [9].

“*Study of Musical Genres* is the first theoretical work of China to study traditional Chinese musical genres from the theoretical point of view, which lays foundations for addressing basic theoretical issues in the study of traditional Chinese musical genres. It has opened up a new field for systematic study of theories of musical genres, which not only raises the study of theories of traditional Chinese musical genres to a higher level but also has important academic value and realistic social significance” [10].

Generally speaking, the teaching of traditional Chinese instrumental music theory saw fast and fruitful development in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a process of developing from sporadic lectures to an initial system of studies and from general study to the level of academic study as a discipline.

## II. The trend and considerations of the theory-teaching of traditional Chinese instrumental music in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

### i. modern science and technology, new teaching approaches

Professor Wei Yu, an academican of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, wrote in *How information technology changes education*: “new information technology provides what anyone needs to learn anywhere at any time, which will result in fundamental changes and leaps in education. Open university will gradually replace traditional enclosed university. Information facilities in university will contribute to remarkable improvement of education quality.” [11]

Along with the rapid development of information technology, historic changes will take place in social education. These changes need not only to be guided by strategic ideas and theories, but also need to break through the obstacle of various conceptions and systems in practice to

achieve innovative development. Firstly, important changes will be brought to the social consciousness of people and teaching concepts. The wide use of multimedia in teaching makes it much easier to acquire and retain information at a lower cost. “30 years ago, it would need 14 years to increase the amount of knowledge to be acquired by 100% and in 2002, it was shortened to 7 years. It is expected in 30 years, the time would be further shortened to only one year’ [11]. With this trend, the demand of students for developing their own independent personality, which is reflected by the teaching concept of “study on students’ own initiative”, will pose a major challenge to the traditional concept of “teacher-centered cramming teaching”. Online education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will exert important influence on the development of China’s music education system. This influence will undoubtedly affect all the curricula, which will become an important trend in the development of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## ii. Updating teaching concepts and placing students at the center of teaching

Along with the development of science and cyber technology of the world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, teaching materials on the Web will be gradually adopted in the main school teaching activities. It reflects the change and breakthrough of traditional teaching concepts and approaches. On-the-web education, a new teaching approach which is more personalized and free from the limitation of time and space, places students at the center of teaching activities, who select the subject of study under the guidance of teachers. Inquisitive study with students at the center is a focus of current education reform. Teachers’ guidance is key to ensuring the improvement of the quality of inquisitive education. This approach can better inspire and develop students’ independent thinking, thirst for knowledge and creativity.

With the teaching concept of centering on students, revolutionary changes will certainly take place in the content, means and administration of teaching activities to reflect the development of students’ self-selection of the subject and personalized study and to inspire and develop their independent thinking and thirst for knowledge. It will give full play to the characteristics of modern science and technology and of on-the-Web education and make multi-level arrangements in the content of the same course. Improvement of the curricula knowledge-wise will also accommodate the requirement of students for personalized study, which will be acceptable to students and achieve good results.

## iii. Consolidating and sharing teaching resources to improve teaching quality

On-the-Web education will change the state of schools characterized by individualized teaching practice and consolidate and the nationwide high-quality teaching resources to be shared by all, which is key to improving the teaching quality of our school and of all the schools across the country. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century which sees highly developed science and technology, on-the-Web education can present researchers and students with the best curricula and the latest achievements of frontier researches of the best professors of China and the rest of the world at the fastest speed. Collaboration in relevant fields between prestigious schools will develop high-standard curricula for different academic degrees to meet the requirements of different levels of study and enrich the teaching activities of various schools. To consolidate the teaching resources for sharing by all by means of information technology will not only optimize the teaching of theoretical courses at our school and improve the teaching quality at

other schools, but also provide positive support and thrust to the teaching of general knowledge of music at universities throughout the country.

Following with interest the latest developments of information technology, enhancing the understanding of the law of education and strengthening scientific study of changes in education is not only required for reforming a certain theoretical course, but also a need for the change and development of the overall educational system of society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which ensures maintaining the foresightedness of theory teaching at music schools in rapid development. With these efforts, the teaching of musical theory will be fundamentally reformed, innovated and advanced in China.

## References

- Wei Yu. pp. 7-9, *Study of Open Education*, No. 6, December 2006  
Sang Xinmin. pp. 4-6, *Study of Open Education*, No. 6, December 2006

## Note

1. *Introduction to Chinese Folk Music*, ed. Institute of Chinese Music affiliated to the Central Conservatory of Music. Textbook (trial edition) of the Central Conservatory of Music, pub.1964.3, Music Press.
2. Gao Houyong. *Introduction to the Chinese Instrumental Music*, Jiang Su People's Publishing House, 1981. 6. The classification of this book is almost the same as above mentioned *Introduction to the Chinese Folk Music*, the five categories include wind and percussion music, string and wind music, wind music, string music and drum and gong music, and related to 17 musical genres.
3. Li Minxiong. *Introduction to Chinese Instrumental Music*, Shanghai Music Publishing House, 1997, 12. This textbook classifies folk instrumental music ensemble into two types of string and wind music, wind and percussion music, and relates to 8 musical genres.
4. Ye Dong. *The Genres and Form of Chinese Instrumental music*, Shanghai Art Publishing House, 1983, 2. The book classifies folk instrumental ensemble in two types of wind and percussion ensemble, string and wind ensemble, and relates to 19 musical genres.
5. Yuan Jingfang. *Chinese Instrumental Music*, People's Music Press, 1987, 3. This textbook firstly divided the Chinese instrumental music into two parts of solo music and ensemble music. Solo music part mainly dealt with solo music for more than 10 instruments, such as *di*, *erhu*, *zheng*, *pipa*, *qin* and so on. The ensemble part classified into 5 categories of string music genre, string and wind music genre, wind music genre, percussion and wind music genre, percussion music genre, and related to 19 music genres.
6. Shaanxi Volume Chief Editor: Liu Hengzhi, People's Music Press, 1992, 12  
Shanghai Volume Chief Editor: Li Minxiong, People's Music Press, 1992,  
Hubei volume Chief Editor: Shi Xinmin, China ISBN Center, 1994  
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 Beijing volume Chief Editor: Lu Su, China ISBN Center, 2003  
 Guizhou volume Chief Editor: Yang Fanggang, China ISBN Center, 2006  
 Guangdong volume Chief Editor: Cai Shiyong, China ISBN Center, 2006

7. Such as the wind music in Shaanxi, Gansu, Ningxia, Henan, Shanxi and Hebei. The wind and percussion music and string music in Zhejiang, Hubei, Hunan. The Lusheng music in Guizhou and so on.

8. Li Shigen. *Elementary Introduction to Artistic Tradition of Xian Drum Music (I)*, Shaanxi Branch of Chinese Musicians' Association, printed by Shaanxi Cultural Bureau, 1981. *Elementary Introduction to Artistic Tradition of Xian Drum Music (II)*, printed by Division of Research for Yanyue in Tang Dynasty attached to Shaanxi Culture Centre, 1981.

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Li Laizhang. *A Study on Drum and Wind Music in Northeast*, Jilin Literary History Press, 1994.

Sun Xingqun. *A Probe on the Swan Song: Fujian Nanyin*, Haixia Art & Literature Publishing House, 1996

Yuan Jingfang. *The Study on Jing Music in Chinese Buddhist Music*, Taipei, Tzu Chi Culture Press, 1997

9. Professor Yuan Jingfang put forward the conception of musical genres in 1988 and offered the course of *Fundamentals of Studies of Musical Genres* for graduate students in the Central Conservatory of Music at the same year. This course has approved by Ministry of Education as a research project for doctoral Program of Higher Education in Philosophy and social science in China and a trial project for educational reform in Beijing Institutions of Higher Learning in 1997. After teaching and research for many years, the book "*Studies of Musical Genres*" completed and published by Beijing Huale Publishing House in 1999.

10. Quoted from the final assessment report to the project of "Studies of Musical Genres", which is the research project for doctoral Program of Higher Education in Philosophy and social science in China.

11. Wei Yu. pp. 7-9, *Study of Open Education*, 2006, December. No. 6.

