MARC-ANTOINE CAMP |
XAVIER BOUVIER |
SUSE PETERSEN |
ANNATINA KULL (EDS.)

MUSICAL TALENT AND ITS PROMOTION IN CHINESE AND WESTERN WORLDS

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Marc-Antoine Camp, Xavier Bouvier, Suse Petersen,
Annatina Kull (Eds.)

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Content

Introduction

Differences in Musical Talent and its Development

Marc-Antoine Camp

Highly musically gifted people, who are characterised by accelerated learning (Olbertz, 2009; McPherson, 2022, pp. 41–43), have always held great fascination. Exceptional musicians, such as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Franz Liszt, or Yehudi Menuhin, received attention early on as child prodigies. Even nowadays, in different social and musical constellations, the admiration for talents continues. The staged discovery of vocal talent in the recent competition format of casting shows (Müllensiefen et al., 2005) attracts a huge audience – in Mainland China, for example, these shows currently fill half the time of variety shows on television, and are connected to lively social media traffic (Liu, 2020, p. 535). People with "talent", as the term's etymology as a measure of weight and currency reveals, are ascribed value. In many places, the appreciation of musical talent is reflected in the state's engagement in the promotion of musical talents, managed by music education professionals and institutions, music managers and companies in the music industry.

This anthology presents contributions on various aspects of musical talent development, with the aim of addressing comparatively a wide range of questions concerning music education. It is the result of a conference that was conducted online between 7 and 9 December 2020 as part of the research project "SwisSino Musical Talent Study" at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts (Marc-Antoine Camp, Annatina Kull, Suse Petersen) and the Haute École de Musique de Genève (Xavier Bouvier, Huaqi Li), which ran from 2017 to 2021 and was funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (https://data.snf.ch/grants/grant/169711). This project, initiated after a preliminary project (Petersen & Camp, 2016) and several exchanges with Chinese institutions, centred on conceptions of talent development in the realm of glocalised art music of European tradition in places of distinctive educational and cultural traditions, with a focus on China's eastern regions and Switzerland. It considered the perspectives of music students (through music-related biographies and self-concept inquiries) and institutions of musical talent promotion (by outlining educational opportunities and the expertise of key persons). Several meetings and workshops were conducted during the project, in which researchers shared their in-depth expertise of music educational approaches in China and in the West. At the final conference in 2020, the project themes were expanded for further contextualisation of the findings. Thus, in addition to the results from the Lucerne and Geneva projects and based on the conference contributions, this anthology contains articles covering a broad spectrum of talent development topics. They are written by researchers with different disciplinary and institutional backgrounds: David Yun Dai (University at Albany, State University of New York), Eugénie Grenier Borel (Geneva Conservatory), Ruth Hayhoe (University of Toronto), Andreas Heye (University of

Bielefeld), Ellen Stabell (Norwegian Academy of Music), Tianshu Wang (Capital University's Conservatory of Music, Ohio), and Yanyi Yang (Shanghai Conservatory of Music).

The complexity of interplay

The widespread fascination with extraordinary musical achievements, but also a critical view on talent development – whether related to music-making or to other realms of learning and expertise – were starting points for this book. One of the reasons for the fascination may be the fact that "talent" – musical or otherwise – remains largely a black box. Talent has often been framed as a divine "gift" or, in Mandarin, a "celestial ability" (天才, *tiāncái*). Meanwhile, psychological models that provide the theoretical framework for measuring and explaining talent development have been criticised for neglecting the complex interactions between influencing factors and for applying a "mechanistic approach" (Ziegler & Phillipson, 2012a, p. 5). This complexity becomes clear in the reference to "chance" in the most widespread model for talent development, Gagné's "Differentiating Model of Giftedness and Talent" (Gagné's 2021; for the music domain see Gagné & McPherson, 2016, pp. 9–10): "chance" refers to the humanly uncontrollable interaction of inherited and environmental factors for talent developments (McPherson et al., 2022, p. 44). In the field of music these environmental factors include financial and professional resources to develop "musical aptitude" (based on mental and physical abilities, also called "gifts") into "competencies" (musical knowledge and skills) and finally into an "expertise" (characterised by high musical performances) (for terminology, see McPherson et al., 2022, pp. 32–35).

In an effort to identify talents as early as possible, various musicality tests have been developed in the last hundred years. However, their value for predicting successful trajectories has been questioned on various occasions (as by Gembris, 2010, pp. 51–52, or Müllensiefen et al., 2022, p. 84). Today it is considered questionable whether "psychological variables, assessed at an early age, enjoy long-term predictive power for the development of musical talent" (Müllensiefen et al., 2022, p. 89), since such variables are only defined as predictors retroactively, once performance has been shown, whereas their influence during a developmental path is not known (cf. Labonde & Müllensiefen, 2022, p. 1068). The unreliability of musicality tests may also be one of the reasons for the observation of so-called "underachievers" and "overachievers" who do not perform as expected due to such predictors.

The comprehensive explanatory claim of the expertise approach in talent development (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Römer, 1993), which has met with great resonance, has also been critically examined in the field of talent research in the past years. In its first modelling, the expertise approach proclaimed a minimum of practice time ("deliberate practice") over several years as the key factor for high performance. This argument is problematic in that the conclusions of expertise research are based on vague retrospective time estimates of deliberate practice without considering factors that influence practice itself – conditions, motivation, and quality (Gembris, 2010, pp. 55–57, 67). It has also

been shown that, statistically, practice time only partially explains performance levels (Burgoyne et al., 2022, pp. 13–14; McPherson et al., 2022, pp. 44–46). With reference to general talent models, the age at which musical activities are taken up and the variety of possible music learning experiences also seem to have a considerable influence on talent development. Furthermore, intelligence – which can include working memory capacity and perceptual speed, as well as non-cognitive, emotional personality traits – and, above all, socialisation instances – especially parents, teachers, and institutions – are named as factors for talent development (Gembris, 2010; Burgoyne et al., 2022; McPherson et al., 2022). Undisputed is the fact that predisposition cannot be the sole factor; rather predisposition and environmental factors interact in talent development (Burgoyne et al., 2022). Thus, the nature-nurture relationship is no longer the cause of a fundamental debate, but the difficult challenge for researchers is still seen in how different development factors can be grasped in their interaction.

Recent talent research certainly recognises this complexity and emphasises the importance of environmental factors in talent development (Ziegler & Phillipson, 2012a; 2012b; Müller-Oppliger, 2014; Stamm, 2014). The same is true of talent research specifically in the domain of music (for an overview, see Kull, 2022), as shown by the Nuremberg Music-Ecological Approach (Ziegler et al., 2014) or the application of the Educational and Learning Capital Approach in music (Reutlinger et al., 2020). The need for long-term studies (e.g. Bastian & Koch, 2010; Gembris et al., 2020), which should ultimately reveal empirically supported predictors for talent development, is increasingly being fulfilled (e.g. Müllensiefen et al., 2022, pp. 84–85). A nuanced approach is being pursued within the framework of the LongGold project on musical development in adolescence, in which musical abilities are recorded in a manner more suited to the task than before. That project uses the Goldsmith Musical Sophistication Index, with added recourse to the TAD model ("Talent Development in Achievement Domains", Preckel et al., 2020), whereby different stages of talent development are distinguished and in each an increase in performance over a period of time is recorded empirically instead of measuring absolute performance (Labonde & Müllensiefen, 2022; Müllensiefen et al., 2022).

Comparing Chinese and Western worlds

A differentiated and broad view on talent development is also the aim of this anthology. The focus, however, is less on a contribution to the psychological determination of factors in musical talent development, and more on comparative perspectives from educational sociology, ethnomusicology, and music didactics. Due to cultural, educational, and linguistic differences between Western and Chinese worlds, but also the difficulty of minimising the influence of the cultural values of both the researchers and the participants on empirical data collection, the comparisons presented numerous challenges (Kull et al., 2019; Petersen, Camp, & Kull, 2023, pp. 3–4). Such challenges may again be a reason why few comparative studies have been conducted in musical talent research to date (for an overview with regard to Western and East Asian countries, see Kull, 2022, pp. 99–105;

also Brand et al., 2004, for an early comparative research perspective published in Chinese). In the present volume, three contributions are devoted to talent development from a comparative perspective between Switzerland and the People's Republic of China. Annatina Kull examines the conditions and reasons for young musicians' decision to study at a music university (music conservatoire), based on empirical data from interviews with students in a master's performance programme, and from the perspectives of Social Cognitive Career Theory and Self-Determination Theory. Huaqi Li explores commonalities and culturally influenced differences in music didactics in higher education, relying on data collected at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing and the Haute École de Musique in Geneva. The subject of Suse Petersen's contribution – the result of a quantitative analysis of several hundred data sets – is differences and similarities between university music students in Switzerland and China (Mainland and Taiwan) with respect to: views on musical talent conceptions and the importance placed on discipline, practice, and innate aptitude for talent development; musical preferences; and the influence of music and musical styles on their character. A comparative view beyond Switzerland and China is offered by Ellen M. Stabell with her exemplary analysis of junior departments of higher music education institutions, using a sociocultural theoretical framework to analyse the social contexts, institutional value systems, and learning cultures of students in Norway and England (cf. Kingsbury, 1988; Nettl, 1995).

For comparisons it is fundamental to consider the educational and political frameworks within which musical talent exists. Both Switzerland and the People's Republic of China – the countries to which most of the contributions in this volume pertain – have gradually developed state policies towards the support and promotion of musical talent, but on differing social and cultural bases and with distinct approaches.

In Switzerland, major changes in music education towards developing a legally supported national system took place following the countrywide establishment of music schools in the second half of the 20th century. In 2012, music education and the promotion of talent – in addition to but separate from school music and the general promotion of musical learning – was anchored in the Swiss Federal Constitution in its own legal article (see Art. 67a, Swiss Confederation, 2022/1999). The process of implementing this constitutional article was significantly shaped by civil society in the music sector. In particular, the Association of Swiss Music Schools (Verband Musikschulen Schweiz VMS) and the Conference of Swiss Universities of Music (Konferenz der Musikhochschulen Schweiz KMHS) actively engaged in the implementation, participated in a working group set up by the federal government (Swiss Confederation, BAK, 2013), developed a strategic guideline for the promotion of talent (VMS & KMHS, 2017), and defined common requirements for a pre-college offer (preparatory courses for entry to a music university) (VMS & KMHS, 2019). A survey among music schools (VMS, 2018) provided a nationwide overview of talent development for which there was little centralised steerage due to Switzerland's federal political structure. Talent development was correspondingly diverse, particularly with regard to the legal anchoring and institutionalisation of musical talent promotion. In terms of scope, however, the instruments common in talent development programmes were widely used: Almost all music schools over the

whole country offered extended or more frequent one-to-one tuition for talented children and adolescents; there were opportunities for ensemble playing (orchestra, big band, choir, chamber music, band, improvisation); about half of the music schools facilitated course attendance in music theory (including analysis and ear training); and a third had courses in music history and stage skills. Moreover, many of the talented young people were encouraged by teachers to participate in performances and competitions (cf. VMS, 2020, p. 25). Promotion, according to the survey, was usually based on entrance exams and regular performance reviews and financed more or less in equal parts by parents and the public sector.

The picture painted by these data has, however, already changed due to the aforementioned strengthening of musical talent education. The Confederation, which had previously only supported national music structures, competitions, and festivals (based on Art. 12 Swiss Confederation, 2022/2009), has now taken on a coordinating role in the promotion of musical talent, and in 2022 granted the cantons (federated states) start-up funding to set up or – if existing – further develop promotion programmes. From 2023, the Confederation supports up to 1.500 talented children and young people with special musical potential (Swiss Confederation, EDI, 2022; Swiss Confederation, BAK, 2022a; 2022b), corresponding to between 0.1 and 0.2% of children and young people in Switzerland. In the process of implementing this talent promotion, however, a latent tension in principles has emerged: on the one hand, opportunities were believed to be best placed at local music schools, i.e. in the social environment of the young musicians and suited to their individual needs and general education school requirements; on the other hand, there was the view that talent promotion should be regionally centralised in cooperation with music universities with their performance-enhancing environment, in which a larger number of talented musicians are in contact with each other and can take advantage of a wide range of offerings. The framework and the evaluation guidelines for talent promotion in Switzerland (Swiss Confederation, BAK, 2022a, 2022b) partially took this tension into account, provided only minimum requirements for the promotion programmes and thus enables different institutional organisations to promote talent. The guidelines are specified for four levels – including pre-college at music universities – and for three musical style areas ("[European] classical music and wind music", "jazz, pop, rock and current music", "traditional music"). The funding via cantonal programmes, which can be designed differently, allows some room for individual needs and varying development paths of talented young musicians.

In the People's Republic of China, the situation of music education is different. In contrast to countries such as Switzerland (VMS, 2020) and other European countries (for example, Hofecker & Hahn, 2016 for Austria, or Rønningen, 2017 for Norway), there is no nationwide network of state-supported local music schools, but rather a diverse market for private music lessons (Zhang, 2020; Liu & Bray, 2022). At the same time, musical talent development takes place through state-managed and -controlled institutions, which, despite the country's centralised political system, are not uniform, but are strongly influenced by provincial and city authorities. Institutionalised music education is dominated by art music and a university system of European tradition, whereas jazz

and world music have received only limited room in curricula. This is especially true for the economically developed eastern regions of the country, where Han-Chinese constitute the majority of the population, but the impact of Western music and Western-style music training programmes can be felt throughout China, even in remote regions such as Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia.

After the Cultural Revolution, particular importance was given to the specialised secondary schools of the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing and the Shanghai Conservatory, which integrate music and general education (Reimer, 1989, p. 37). Eugénie Grenier Borel's ethnography-based contribution in this volume provides an insight into the Shanghai Conservatory and the Western musical concepts present there, where features of teaching "classical music" are accentuated in comparison to certain Western music universities. Yanyi Yang's chapter deals with the history and recent developments of music universities in the People's Republic of China, focusing on the "Big Three" music institutions of higher education: Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, Shanghai Conservatory of Music, and China Conservatory of Music in Beijing. As with the numerous newly founded music departments at multidisciplinary universities and at normal universities, the training programmes at music universities have become more strongly oriented towards high generic competencies for diverse professional fields, considering demands from a culturally diverse society (see also, for example, Gao, 2019) and the creative industries (Duan, 2021). Xavier Bouvier gives further insights into the dynamic educational system and musical talent promotion in the People's Republic of China and shows that musical education has generally been strengthened in recent years (cf. the meta-analyses of music education literature in China in recent years by Yang & Welch, 2023 and Yang et al., 2021).

Empirical research on the development of musically talented individuals – referred to as "supernormal children" – seems minimal in Mainland China in proportion to the huge absolute number of current students at music universities (Zhang, 2017, p. 10, cf. Wu, 2005, pp. 235–236). Noticeable in existing research on general and musical talent development is the reference to cultural values connected to Confucianism and its actualisations for political purposes (cf. Yang, 2003, pp. 11–12; Kouwenhoven, 2016; Xu & Yang, 2021). Importance is placed on practice over "creativity" (cf. Zhang, 2017, p. 6; Tam et al., 2023) and – similar to the expertise approach mentioned above – an emphasis on the "nurture" over "nature" component (Wu, 2005, p. 235). The focus is on "earth-like talents" (地才, *dìcái*), which denote "high achievers through much effort, diligence and perseverance" as opposed to "heaven-like talents" (天才, *tiāncái*) (Zhang, 2017, p. 4). However, this Confucian narrative should be put into perspective as a key differentiator of education, including music talent education, in Chinese worlds as compared to the West. On the one hand, to avoid essentialist attributions, social heterogeneity and diversity in values must be assumed. Particularly, the influence of the Daoist traditions in China, which is in tension with Confucianism, should not be neglected, as Ruth Hayhoe points out in her wide-ranging article on cultural history, comparative arts studies, and education in this volume. Moreover, parallels can be drawn between Confucianism and Western educational traditions depending on the emphasis on certain elements (cf. for

example Tan, 2016). Finally, different educational traditions and value systems are also being combined, and there is increasing exchange between Chinese and Western worlds, as David Yun Dai and Tianshu Wang suggest in their contribution to this volume with reference to the pianists Lang Lang, Yuja Wang, and Haochen Zhang.

The pressures on young people in their musical development are likely to be particularly high in view of the large number of graduates in relation to market demand and within an accentuated Confucianist value framework, as pointed out in the research literature: "Thus, children are nurtured to be 'gifted' in the belief that even children with inferior innate intellectual abilities can achieve the same skills and expertise as gifted individuals – or, as the saying goes, 'Diligence can supplement inadequacy (勤能补拙)'" (Zhang, 2017, p. 5). Such an attitude is accompanied by the risk of mental and physical overload and musicians' health hazards, which has received renewed attention in recent music education literature (cf. López-Íñiguez & McPherson, 2023; for the People's Republic of China with the seemingly few contributions to the health of musically talented people, see, Hao, 2021). This important topic has also found its way into the present volume, with respect to musical training in Western contexts: Based on qualitatively and quantitatively collected data, Andreas Heye uncovers how young talented musicians in Germany deal with the high demands and the responsibility imposed on them by general and musical educational institutions (see also Grabow et al., 2022).

Inclusive talent promotion

The weight of Confucianism in Chinese educational practices points to the importance of considering cultural value frameworks in the research on talent development. Furthermore, value frameworks influence perspectives in talent research (cf. Persson, 2012). Thus, the focus of musical talent studies to date has been largely on institutionalised education in the field of art music of European tradition and musical styles committed to its aesthetic and performative norms. However, this overlooks the broad variety of music and performance profiles (Gembris, 2010, pp. 50–52), their different cultural embeddedness, highlighting the need to actively address diversity in musical talent policy. What remains unconsidered are the differences in musical socialisations and developments in musical cultures as presented in ethnomusicological literature (e.g. Berliner, 1994; Rice, 2003; Schippers, 2010; cf. Buren et al., 2021). These are mostly "'learned but not taught' in a process that might be called aural-visual-tactile" (Rice, 2003, p. 77) – and should certainly be viewed critically in terms of their respective norms of access to talent promotion. The Goldsmiths Musical Sophistication Index tests, developed in connection with the TAD approach mentioned above, attempt to counteract this problem (Labonde & Müllensiefen, 2022) and were applied in a cross-cultural setting (Lin et al., 2021; Li et al., 2023). Likewise, institutional talent education in many places already includes a broader range of musical styles than before, such as in the above-described developments in talent promotion in Switzerland, with the newly-defined categories "classical, wind music", "jazz, pop, rock, current music" and "traditional music".

The diversity and social construction of musical talent (McPherson, 2022, p. 32) remains a central challenge for talent education and related empirical research. Conceptions of talent, funding programmes, and (media interlinked) competition formats with their respective selection mechanisms simultaneously mirror and produce social values and may even serve as models for notions of excellence in non-musical areas of education and in everyday life. Accordingly, talent education can raise the value of certain musics and exclude persons who do not meet the negotiated aesthetic and social norms. Therefore, an equal opportunity and inclusive talent education that allows for cultural diversity requires a very broad promotion of music in education (Gembris, 2010, pp. 46–49; Bailer & Pecher-Havers, 2021, p. 7). For musical talent research, it seems essential to combine music didactics, ethnomusicological, educational sociological, and psychological approaches, as well as a focus on the interactions of talented individuals with their environment – particularly with parents, teachers, peers, and institutions –, as has been stressed for non-music-specific talent research (Ziegler & Phillipson, 2012a, 2012b; cf. Müller-Oppliger, 2014). Comparative cultural perspectives, as undertaken by the authors in this volume, can strengthen an inclusive talent education insofar as they contribute to making norms explicit and negotiable.

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Marc-Antoine Camp

is head of research in music education at Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts. He received his PhD at the University of Zurich after studies in historical musicology, ethnomusicology, and anthropology. At the University of Zurich he worked at the Archives of Ethnomusicology, and since 2008 he has been a researcher at Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts. His research and publications focus on music education, the transmission of musical knowledge, and the concept of intangible cultural heritage in Switzerland, Brazil, and China.

The Arts and Music in Chinese Learning Traditions

Towards Greater Reciprocity through Cultural Understanding

Ruth Hayhoe

Abstract

As a scholar of comparative education my focus has been on the development of China's modern universities. My most influential book, *China's Universities 1895–1995: A Century of Cultural Conflict* (1996), looked at Chinese learning patterns that came into conflict with the French, German, American, and Soviet/Russian patterns adopted from the West. I found the architecture on Chinese campuses a helpful way of understanding these conflicts. Universities in the West are often seen as ivory towers dedicated to the advancement of knowledge for its own sake and protected from government interference by a charter that ensures autonomy and academic freedom. By contrast the Chinese academy is seen as being responsible for the state and its scholars enjoy intellectual authority and self-mastery, as they seek to advance knowledge through action for the public good. While the ivory tower rises above its surroundings, the low curved roofs of Chinese classical buildings express a sense of harmony with the natural environment.

Language differences are also significant. The Chinese language brings learners closer to the arts than alphabetic languages. The brush strokes needed to write Chinese characters are an exercise in watercolor painting while the tonal structure of the language requires a kind of musical understanding which is quite distinctive from speech in European languages. The chapter also discusses the work of Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner, whose theory of "multiple intelligences" was developed at time when he made frequent visits to China to observe music education there. In addition, it draws on research into music in classical Chinese society and raises some fundamental questions around the purpose of music education.

Keywords

reciprocity, core values, calligraphy, tonal speech, creativity, discipline

This chapter elaborates on some core elements in Chinese learning traditions that may illuminate differences from the Western world and areas where the deepening of mutual cultural understanding between Chinese and Western worlds can be enriching to both sides.[1] I begin with the university, which has been a focus of my research for a long time,

1 It was an honour to present this chapter at the Symposium on "Musical talent and its promotion in Chinese and Western worlds", held in Lucerne in early December of 2020. I had been deeply touched by several earlier meetings with Professor Xavier Bouvier of the Haute École de Musique in Geneva. His interest in introducing Chinese music to Europe, his many visits to China and commitment to learning

and highlight the differences both in views of knowledge and institutional patterns which led to conflict over the 20th century. The architecture on Chinese campuses illustrates the possibilities of reciprocity, as well as the reasons for conflict. Secondly, I move to the nature of the Chinese language and the art of calligraphy, which ensure that children gain a fundamental understanding of the arts in their earliest years of education. The Chinese word for "culture" *wénhuà* (文化) means "to be transformed" (*huà*) "by writing" (*wén*). While writing involves the use of the brush in ways that are parallel to traditional watercolour painting, speech involves the mastery of complex tonal structures that may lay an early foundation for musical understanding. In the third part of the chapter, I share insights from Howard Gardner, whose theory of "multiple intelligences" has had a major influence on educational research and was developed during a period when he was spending considerable time observing musical education in China (Gardner, 1989). Finally, in the fourth part, I look briefly at music in China's classical tradition and raise some questions that may be of interest on both the Chinese and European sides.

Higher education in Europe and China

I began my research on Chinese universities in the early 1980s when China was re-opening after the Cultural Revolution. I felt it was important to understand at a cultural level the deep differences in ideas of knowledge and institutional patterns between China and Europe, so that the conflicts which emerged in the development of China's modern universities over the 20th century could be avoided in future. I hoped for a true reciprocity, whereby both sides could be enriched by learning from the other! The core values of the European university were autonomy and academic freedom, from its emergence in the 11–12th centuries CE. By contrast, the Chinese university had an earlier history, going back to the 6th century CE. I came to define its core values as self mastery (自主, *zìzhǔ*) and intellectual authority (學術權威, *xuéshù quánwēi*) for the official university, the *guózǐjiàn* (國子監), which administered the imperial examination system. Those who passed the examination became scholar-officials and were appointed to positions at various levels of the imperial bureaucracy (Hayhoe, 1996). One European visitor made the following comment when he visited China in 1838: "The whole of China may be said to resemble one vast university which is governed by the scholars who have been educated within its walls" (Têng, 1942, p. 290). Over time there arose academies or *shūyuàn* (書院), influenced by Indian monastic universities whose core value might be defined as intellectual freedom (思想自由, *sīxiǎng zìyóu*). These opposite versions of the Chinese university remained in a creative tension from the late Tang dynasty to the 19th century. This tension might be seen as a dialectic without synthesis, that has given a remarkable flexibility to Chinese traditional scholarship (Hayhoe, 2019b).

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the Chinese language showed a concern for reciprocity that coincides with my lifelong efforts to bring an understanding of Chinese education to the Western world. Although my knowledge of music and music education is limited, I could not resist the invitation to reflect on how Chinese learning traditions support musical talent development.

The affiliation of scholarship with the state in the official university has often been viewed from the West as evidence that autonomy and academic freedom are not possible in China, yet scholar-officials had an authority whereby they were expected to criticise the emperor if he did not follow the mandate of Heaven. There are many examples of those who made the ultimate sacrifice and were exiled to remote regions as a result of their courageous protest. Wang Yangming (1472–1529) is a remarkable case. In exile he developed Ming neo-Confucianism, a philosophy of the heart (心學, *xīnxué*), which served as the foundation of progressive education in East Asia. It was seen by Chinese scholars who studied at Teachers College of Columbia University at the beginning of the century as a much earlier and deeper version of Dewey's ideas of knowledge and action, with action seen as the necessary basis for knowledge! In the 1950s, Ma Yinchu, President of Peking University, spoke out against Mao Zedong's population policy and was punished by an exile that lasted for twenty-two years. His comment before leaving gives profound insight into the Chinese view of how knowledge must be demonstrated: "After writing articles, one should be brave enough to correct mistakes, but one must adhere to the truth and bear all consequences, even if they are disadvantageous to one's private interests or his life. I do not teach and have no direct contact with students. But I always want to educate them by means of action" (Boorman, 1968, p. 488).

While the imperial examination system became fully established in the 6th century CE, another set of higher institutions emerged, that drew on the patterns of Buddhist monasteries introduced from India, as noted above (Hayhoe, 2019b). *Shūyuàn* were located in remote areas in the countryside and provided a place where scholars out of favour with the imperial bureaucracy, or not desiring an official career, could gather for studies that were more wide-ranging than the official Confucian texts used in the examinations. Here there was intellectual freedom and a remarkable local independence, in that the Indian monastic pattern of land ownership and rental to local farmers meant they had no need for financial support from the imperial government. While these institutions did not have the protection of a legal charter, as did the European universities, they enjoyed considerable freedom, and were in a position to criticise the corruption that crept into the imperial examination system, thus providing a balance.

The view of knowledge that lay behind both institutions was one that integrated the classics, history, philosophy, and the arts, as evident in this depiction of the epistemological pathway: "The Classics express the Way in words, history in deeds, while philosophers and literary artists illustrate various other aspects of the Way" (Luk, 1997, p. 486). Humanistic knowledge was thus integrated, while applied fields such as engineering, agriculture, and medicine were subordinate to it. Action for the public good was the key way in which knowledge was to be demonstrated. By contrast, in the European tradition there was a hierarchy of knowledge in the curriculum, with theology at the top, then law and medicine, finally philosophy and arts at the bottom. Knowledge was demonstrated through logical debate, then much later empirical scientific testing, but the university's autonomy meant less emphasis was given to knowledge being demonstrated in action.

These fundamental differences in the views of knowledge and the institutional patterns of higher education led to deep conflicts when European models were introduced

to China in the early 20th century as modern universities were established. Over time, however, the conflicts were resolved and by the time of the Sino-Japanese war and the 2nd World War, a modern university model had emerged in China which integrated values of autonomy and academic freedom with those of self-mastery, intellectual authority, and intellectual freedom. The South West Associated University established in Kunming during the Japanese occupation of Eastern China produced two scientists later to win Nobel prizes and supported research in a range of areas that was extremely valuable in China's economic and social development (Israel, 1998).

Then the successful Communist Revolution of 1949 led to one Western model of the university being imposed by Soviet experts. The Soviet model brought back a hierarchy of highly specialised knowledge patterns and a top-down control of the whole country according to a mechanistically laid out macro plan for the nation. This version of the modern university led to deep-rooted conflict that finally resulted in the eruption of the cultural revolution in 1966 and the closing down of Chinese higher education for nearly a decade of destructive conflict.

These patterns over the 20th century can be seen in the architecture of Chinese campuses. There was a remarkable adaptation of European features that harmonised with Chinese traditions between 1911 and 1949. On Western campuses university buildings are often relatively high, and the predominant image is that of the ivory tower that rises above the mundane world and offers deeper and longer-term perspectives of knowledge, based on theory and logical debate. By contrast, on Chinese campuses university buildings are often no more than two or three stories high and have beautifully curved roofs which express the connection between knowledge and action, the university and its environment, scholarship and the public good.[2] In many of the campuses built in the 1920s and 1930s one can see such European features as Grecian style pillars and arches, dormer windows and clock towers accommodated within a Chinese frame or gestalt. It was only when the Soviet experts imposed one unified model of the university as a highly stratified institution with hundreds of narrowly defined specialisations that the earlier reciprocity and integration became impossible. The main administration building of Tsinghua University, a top engineering university that educated many of China's current leaders, expresses this vividly. I believe it was this cultural conflict that lay behind the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution at an even deeper level than the more obvious geo-political conflict and intra-Party struggle on the surface.

What does this all mean for music and music education in the university? My sense is that European classical music was nurtured by an elite of princes and leaders who sponsored the great composers, and it was appreciated largely by the educated classes. Chinese music, by contrast, was integrated within the classical tradition, especially the rites, that were expressed in daily life at every level, from the imperial academies to the provincial

2 One of the Chinese guest researchers at the conference noted that some Chinese universities were built on royal palace gardens and used buildings from the classical period, also that China's construction technology in the early modern period was insufficient for building tall buildings. At the same time other scholars have noted the purposeful creation of classical style buildings on new campuses, notable in the case of some of the early Christian universities (see Dong, 2023).

and local level ceremonial halls, and the local *shūyuàn*, an essential part of the ritual respect for ancestors and connection to the extended family and the natural environment.

Arts and the Chinese language

Let me turn now to the Chinese language and its writing system. We are all aware of the nature of Chinese characters, the fact that they were developed in a very early period as evidenced in the tradition of oracle bones in the late Shang dynasty (12th century BCE), and that they number in the thousands. This is a striking contrast with the alphabetic languages of the Western world, based on the articulation of sounds as against images that convey both meaning and sound. Chinese writing is done with brush strokes, and there is a tremendous discipline involved for young children, both in memorising a large number of characters and in handling the brush to write them. There are many styles of calligraphy, expressing different approaches to writing, from the formal "clerical" script to the informal "cursive" script. In their language learning from an early age, children thus master the basic techniques of water colour painting, which are similar to those of calligraphy. If this sounds like an extreme form of discipline and conformity to established cultural patterns, it was balanced by the opposing tendencies of Confucian and Daoist philosophy, which can be seen in the following set of couplets from the *Analects* (2.8) and the *Doctrine of the Mean* (13.1):

> Like the delicate carving of ivory, the way is learned.
> Like the cutting and polishing of jade, the self is cultivated.
> (如切如磋者道學也 如琢如磨者自修也)
>
> The Book of Odes says: The axman is cutting the poplar tree.
> In fact, it is not far away. The ax handle he holds is made of poplar.
> He simply needs to drop his eye. Why should he think it is far away?
> (詩曰：伐柯伐柯其則不遠 執柯以伐柯 睨而視之 猶以為遠)[3]

On the Confucian side is a commitment to a rigorous discipline of learning, similar to that of a craftsperson seeking perfection in the exercise of their craft. This is balanced on the Daoist side by the sudden and deep insight that comes when one lets go of this rigorous discipline and is able to look down and see what is already in one's hand!

This set of couplets came to my attention when I was serving as a young "foreign expert" at Fudan University in the early 1980s, and I was able to attend classes in Chinese philosophy (Hayhoe, 2019a). In the Chinese New Year of 1982, I was privileged to be taken to meet a well-known Chinese calligrapher, Ren Zheng, and I asked him to write these couplets for me. He used clerical script (隸書, *lìshū*) for the first and cursive script (草書,

3 I have used my own translation for these texts, but English translations can be found online (Lau, 1992; Eno, 2016).

cǎoshū) for the second. Through this means he highlighted the contrast between discipline and freedom, a contrast I see as parallel to that between the official academy (國子監, *guózǐjiàn*) and local academy (書院, *shūyuàn*) in Chinese higher education, which has been described in the first section of this chapter. In learning to write, children experience rigorous discipline from an early age, but are also nurtured in an awareness that can open their minds to new ideas coming from within the self or from the world of nature.

This makes it clear that children's learning of art in China is not merely a matter of scrupulous copying of the patterns and models given to them, as the common stereotype of Chinese learning in the West often suggests. Rather it is a balancing of rigorous discipline and openness to the new and different. What does this mean for music and music education in China? This was a question addressed by psychologist Howard Gardner, when he spent three years observing music classes in China and was able to move beyond the Western stereotype and see the kind of balance that arose from these opposites. The third section of this chapter introduces Gardner's observations. First, however, I turn to the tonal structure of spoken Chinese.

When I moved to Hong Kong at the age of 21, the first challenge I faced was learning the local dialect of Cantonese, along with written Chinese. While the writing fascinated me, and I believe drew me into a lifelong commitment to the study of Chinese education, the speech was even more challenging – seven distinctive voice tones in Cantonese, compared to the four that are used in Mandarin (or 普通話, *pǔtōnghuà*). My Cantonese teacher was ambitious and determined to train me in speaking such that within a year I would not be recognized as a "foreigner" on the telephone but would sound like a local. It meant repeating sentences as many as ten times, until I got the tonal structure and flow correct. I remember feeling as if my voice had been put into a vice, and I could no longer communicate feelings in the way I had been used to with English or other Western languages. Over time, however, the tonal structure and flow became more and more instinctive through extensive immersion both in the local family where I lived and the school where I taught. Then I came to realise that there was actually room for modifications within the parameters of each tone, and thus even more nuanced expression of feelings through modulation of the tones in this spoken language. If one made an error and got a tone wrong, it was usually no problem, but there were times when it could lead to a totally different meaning.

At this point I cannot resist telling a story, told me by my elderly cousin, who ran a mission school for underprivileged children in Hong Kong. On one occasion, she was giving the children a Bible lesson from one of the Gospels, where the figure of Satan appeared. With some emphasis she made the point that "the Devil wants to harm people", and was met by a howl of laughter from the children. It turned out her imperfect Cantonese had produced the phrase, "Now the Devil is a Shanghai man", by a simple reversal of the high rising and low steady tones of *Shang* and *Hai*. She found this as amusing as did the children, and it was she herself who told me the story (Hayhoe, 2004, p. 41).

Whether they first learn *pǔtōnghuà*, with its four voice tones, or one of the hundreds of other local dialects of Chinese, children do have to learn the tonal structure of speech from a very early age. This brings us to the interesting question of what this may mean

for music and musical education. Is this the reason for observations that I have heard from teachers of music, that Chinese students tend to be closer to perfect pitch than their Western counterparts? When I told this story at the conference, several musical experts commented that perfect pitch is not necessarily a positive thing for the learning of music or musical performance. Nevertheless, there is some evidence that the learning of a tonal language does contribute to pitch processing in music (Zhang, 2019). Another point raised by a senior scholar of Chinese music was that Chinese tonal language has shaped the melodic flow of many types of Chinese music, with tonal inflections negotiated with emotional inflections.[4]

Reflections from a cognitive psychologist on music and arts education in China

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Howard Gardner, a psychologist affiliated with Harvard University, turned his attention in a very special way to music education. His parents were German-Jewish and had escaped the Holocaust by moving to the United States in 1938, where he was born in 1943. As a teenager he took piano lessons under a serious master, spending three hours a day in practice with the possibility of developing into a concert pianist. However, one of his first independent decisions was to give up the demands of this intense discipline for a broader education that led him to become a cognitive psychologist, while still keeping the piano as a first love. He thus gradually became drawn into an interest in education in music and the arts.

Gardner came to see that "we in the West esteem too narrow a band of capacities – a certain form of logical-rational thought, which grew out of the Greco-Roman heritage and has dominated our schooling and dictated the form and content of our standardized tests" (Gardner, 1989, p. 110). His theory of "multiple intelligences" has been widely influential in educational thought, with seven intelligences identified: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. "There is no such thing as intelligence, which can be measured early in life and assumed to develop similarly across cultures," he concluded; "instead, there are various frames of mind, and none can be understood without reference to the culture in which it is supported or thwarted. […] each culture evolves over history its own view of human nature, growth, potential and limitations; these can be ferreted out only through sensitive observations over a long period and may well prove incommensurate with one another. There may be as many views and realizations of human potential as there are discrete societies in the world" (Gardner, 1989, pp. 118–119).

Gardner worked within Project Zero at Harvard University throughout the 1980s and 1990s. It had been established at Harvard in 1967 and focused on exploring creativity and cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural thinking, also exploring sustainable ways to

4 This comment came from Professor Frank Kouwenhoven of the University of Leiden in the Netherlands, November 2023.

support them across multiple and diverse contexts. China was the main context Gardner chose for his focus at that time. This involved multiple visits to different parts of the country, sometimes staying for periods of several months, and observing education in the arts with particular attention given to music. He explained that his own Jewish heritage gave him a special appreciation of Chinese culture, as he felt Chinese people were very reminiscent of the Jews, with significant parallels in their long continuing cultures. Some of the similarities he identified were "a passion for scholarship, respect for old age, a gentle and irreverent sense of humor, a well-developed sense of guilt about one's misdeeds and a willingness to step back and think in terms of the long haul" (Gardner, 1989, p. 137).

It took Gardner some time to recognise the possibilities of creativity in Chinese music education, as all he could see in the early years was a rigorous discipline and tendency to conformity through its imposition. He was deeply impressed by the remarkable performances of very young children, but questioned whether there was any possibility for self-expression or creativity. The five perspectives he first identified were as follows:

1. Life should unfold like a performance with carefully delineated roles.
2. All art should be beautiful and should lead to good (moral) behaviour.
3. Control is essential and must emanate from the top.
4. Education should take place by continual careful shaping and molding.
5. Basic skills are fundamental and must precede any efforts to encourage creativity. (Gardner, 1989, p. 257)

Gradually, however, Gardner got deeper insights into Chinese ways of learning and came to see that innovation emerged at a distinctly evolutionary pace over centuries rather than decades in this ancient culture. Compared to the West, there is a virtual reversal of priorities, he came to feel, "the young Westerner making her boldest departures first and then gradually re-integrating herself into the tradition; and the young Chinese being almost inseparable from the tradition, but, over time, possibly evolving to a point as deviant as the one initially staked out by the innovative Westerner" (Gardner, 1989, p. 282).

Gardner was particularly moved by what he defined as "the musical aspects of calligraphy, the rhythm, the texture, the motion" (Gardner, 1989, p. 182), which he felt evoked the same forms of feeling as experienced in music: "Just as calligraphy contains the sources of China's art and aesthetics, calligraphic training holds the key to training across the arts. For centuries, strict procedures have been devised for producing the various Chinese characters: how to apply the ink; how to hold the brush; how to move the brush, dancelike across the paper, how to follow through, re-ink the brush and apply the seal; how to achieve a harmonious compositional structure, and the like. […] it is the pedagogical procedure […] that underlies every discipline and craft and discipline, from dance to martial arts to mathematics" (Gardner, 1989, p. 179).

Gardner's conclusion, after years of observation and participation in music education in China, was to emphasise reciprocity and how much each side could learn from the other, through deep-level cross-cultural communication. He expressed the transformation of his own thinking through his decade-long China experiences in the following way: "I had to reconcile my attraction to creativity-centered education with my recognition of the importance of basic skills, my deep commitment to pluralism in education with

my renewed respect for the need to cultivate certain common cultural concepts, texts and objects, my view of early childhood as a time of maximum freedom for exploration with the script of a tightly programmed early childhood that yields spectacular performances and may yet allow for later creative expression" (Gardner, 1989, p. 315).

It is not possible for me to make a judgement on these observations of music education in China and the Western world, but it was most interesting to hear the views of scholars of music in the European and Chinese contexts at the symposium.[5] Different perspectives were presented on such issues as whether discipline and the mastery of necessary skills should be emphasised first and creativity allowed to emerge later in music education, or there should be an early emphasis on creative expression. There was also some discussion of the moral aspects of music education and whether music should be an instrument of moral transformation, as in China's classical tradition, or should rather be an expression of intellect, the sense of beauty, and feelings, with no particular moral or social responsibility.

In the final section of this chapter, I turn to a few articles which deal with music in China's classical tradition, in order to raise some further questions around the issue of reciprocity and mutual learning across cultures.

Music in China's classical tradition

Only five of the six classics thought to have been collated by Confucius in the 5th century BCE have survived, and the missing one is the Classic of Music (樂經, *yuèjīng*). One scholar has suggested that it was included in the Classic of Rites (禮經, *lǐjīng*) and notes that the "earliest lists of key areas of learning included music as a considerable cultural good and absolutely vital part of a proper education" (Brindley, 2017, p. 248). She went on to note how often Confucius referred to the Classic of Odes (詩經, *shījīng*) in his teaching, "thereby invoking a shared traditional musical repertoire that lends meaning to their actions and thoughts" (Brindley, 2017, p. 261). This is clear in one significant passage of the *Analects* (8.8) where Confucius makes the following comment: "I find inspiration by intoning the songs, I learn where to stand from observing ritual propriety and I find fulfillment in playing music". She concluded that music held a special place for Confucius in self-cultivation and in elevating one's spirit. Its moral role was thus unquestioned.

This brings us to one of the core questions regarding reciprocity in music education between China and Europe. A fascinating article in the *Philosophy of Music Education Review* by Tan & Lu, scholars at Singapore's National Institute of Education, focuses on one of the most ancient of China's musical instruments, the *gǔqín* (古琴) and suggests how music goes much deeper than words and is, in fact, the "heart-mind" of the musician. They suggest that playing the *gǔqín* stems from the depths of one's inner self, which must be ethically good.

5 For a rather different perspective than that of Gardner on Chinese music education, readers are encouraged to consult Kouwenhoven, Chen, & Rees (2016).

They go on to comment that "the art of 'seeing one's inner self' (見性, *jiànxìng*) through the *gǔqín* can be seen in Chinese paintings that depict musicians playing the *gǔqín* in the woods, by the rivers, by the cliffs and in the wilderness […] in the midst of great social and political turmoil throughout Chinese history, hermits who were enlightened to cease striving and fighting took to the *gǔqín* to search for truth and express ethical messages through the instrument" (Tan & Lu, 2018, p. 143). The influence of the Daoist philosopher Lao Zi could also be seen, with an emphasis on simplicity and harmony (Tan & Lu, 2018, p. 144).

In highlighting the stages of learning the *gǔqín* – searching for truth, for a harmonious mean, and for silence and simplicity – the final stage is seen as ethical awakening, moral truths that are communicated without words. This is parallel to Confucius' famous search for sagehood, from setting his heart on learning at 15, establishing himself in society at 30, becoming free of doubts at 40, understanding Heaven's mandate at 50, and having his ear attuned at 60. Only at 70, could he "follow his heart's desires without overstepping the boundary of propriety" (*Analects*, 2.4). In other words, his heart and mind were by then entirely in accord with Heaven.

In a response to this piece, also published in the *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, Chiao-Wei Liu, a scholar at Teachers College, Columbia University, points out that it may be critical to "create space that allows students to interact with these moral stories on their own terms" (Liu, 2018, p. 201). She notes the different views about the role of music in society in China's philosophical traditions and suggests that it would be important to know more about how these different ideas came into contact with one another in the development of *gǔqín* music. Daoism viewed music as an extension of feelings and emotions and was against the use of music in politics, while Confucianism advocated the use of music in educating people to adhere to established social and political conventions.

Liu emphasised the importance of fostering intercultural understanding and placing different music traditions in their socio-political context. She went on to say that it is critical for music teachers to recognise the changing dynamics of these cultures, such that students come into contact with classical and emerging music styles and develop a sense of self and others through music. She concluded with a fascinating quote from the radical Daoist philosopher Zhuang Zi: "Words exist because of meaning; once you've gotten the meaning, you can forget the words" (Liu, 2018, p. 202). If we substitute words with "mu~~ɬ~~sic tradition", then such meanings as the search for truth, harmony, ethical awakening, or sage-hood can be forgotten, she suggests.

I bring this chapter to a close at this point, leaving readers some questions to puzzle over. I have always advocated puzzling as a creative way of learning, and I hope some of the questions raised about Chinese learning patterns and how they are interpreted in the West will leave the reader with something to puzzle over.

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Ruth Hayhoe

is a professor at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. Her professional engagements in Asia included foreign expert at Fudan University (1980–1982), Head of the Cultural Section of the Canadian Embassy in Beijing (1989–1991), Visiting Professor at Nagoya University (1996), and Director of the Hong Kong Institute of Education, now the Education University of Hong Kong (1997–2002). Recent books include *Portraits of 21st Century Chinese Universities: In the Move to Mass*

Higher Education (2011), *China Through the Lens of Comparative Education* (2015), *Canadian Universities in China's Transformation: An Untold Story* (2016), *Comparative and International Education: Issues for Teachers* (2017), and *Religion and Education: Comparative and International Perspectives* (2018). She was awarded the Silver Bauhinia Star by the Hong Kong SAR Government and the title of *Commandeur dans l'ordre des Palmes académiques* by the Government of France in 2002. She also holds honorary doctorates from the Hong Kong Institute of Education (2002), the Open University of Hong Kong (2015), and Victoria University (2019).

Available Learning Trajectories in Three Talent Development Programmes in Norway and England

Ellen M. Stabell

Abstract

The article discusses how learning trajectories are made available and legitimate in three talent development programmes for young classical musicians up to the age of 19 years. Two programmes are located in Norway and one in England. A classical musical trajectory often starts in early childhood. By the time students enter higher education, they are already skilled performers and several have started a professional career alongside their studies. The years leading up to higher education are therefore of great importance for whether a classical performance career is within reach and for the motivation of young aspiring performers. What kinds of careers are presented to the students as legitimate and valuable in programmes at the pre-college level? Building on material from a qualitative case-study of string players in three talent development programmes in Norway and England, this paper will explore central learning trajectories and the cultural values and assumptions that underpin these trajectories and make them legitimate. Theoretically, the study draws on sociocultural theory of learning, seeing learning as embedded in and enabled by a social context (Wenger, 1998). Furthermore, Bourdieu's theoretical framework is used to understand differences and hierarchies within the talent development programmes, shaping students' "sense of limits" (Bourdieu, 1977). The findings point to a learning culture characterised by specialisation, dedication, and hierarchy, promoting the soloist and orchestra musician trajectory. However, there is evidence suggesting that the English programme's more versatile structure offers a broader range of career trajectories compared to the two Norwegian programmes, affecting the students' musical aspirations.

Keywords

Norway, England, musical talent development programmes, learning cultures

The years before a student enters higher music education are of great importance for the development of musical and technical competencies as well as for a student's motivation to pursue a career in music. Moreover, it is a crucial period for developing one's musical identity and an understanding of which career options that are attainable. The musical trajectory starts early for those who later go on to have successful classical performance careers, and it is likely that the values and assumptions they encounter in these formative years before higher education will have an impact on both career ambitions and career satisfaction. Recently, there has been a change in higher music education to focus more on entrepreneurial skills and on how one can best prepare students for the rapidly chang-

ing music market (Beckman, 2005; Bennett, 2016). There are fewer permanent positions than before, more music graduates, and therefore, more musicians will be self-employed, taking on portfolio careers that require versatility and flexibility as well as knowledge about marketing (Bennett, 2016). Helena Gaunt and colleagues (2021) have even called for a "paradigm shift" in higher music education, where musicians and institutions need to engage with societal needs to a much larger extent than previously, where musicians should be empowered to act as "makers in society" (Gaunt et al., 2021, p. 9). These discussions are, however, not yet as prominent in the pre-college field of talent development programmes that prepare students for higher music education. In this paper, I explore the learning trajectories available to students in three different talent development programmes for young musicians up to the age of 19 years, and discuss how these trajectories are negotiated and made visible. The three talent development programmes are all junior departments of higher music education institutions. Applying Wenger's understanding of learning trajectories and Bourdieu's understanding of a field as hierarchically organised, I will address the following two research questions.

(1) What learning trajectories are considered legitimate for students inside talent development programmes organised by higher music education institutions?
(2) What cultural assumptions and values contribute to shaping these learning trajectories?

Previous research

Research on musical expertise and talent development have largely focused on individual characteristics, such as quantity of practice, number of teachers, and family support (see e.g. Ericsson et al., 1993; Manturzewska, 1990; Sosniak, 1985). The amount of practice a classical musician has accumulated over the years is considered by many scholars to be the strongest predictor of the expertise level achieved (Ericsson et al., 1993; Jørgensen, 2002; Sloboda et al., 1996). Furthermore, there is extensive evidence that family support is crucial, including emotional, financial, and practical support, such as paying for lessons and instruments, driving to lessons, courses and competitions, and offering emotional support and motivating the child when needed (Davidson et al., 1996; McPherson, 2009; Sosniak, 1985). There are also studies on the importance of the teacher and the quality of the teacher-student relationship for a musician's development (Creech & Hallam, 2003; Gruber et al., 2008). Furthermore, in recent years, there has been a focus on the psychological factors contributing to excellence, such as determination, goals, self-belief, and versatility (Abbott & Collins, 2004; Macnamara, Holmes, & Collins, 2006).

Sociological perspectives, investigating the interplay between young musicians and the programme and learning contexts they belong to have gotten less scholarly attention. What assumptions and values characterise music talent programmes? Which pictures of success are made legitimate for young musicians? While there is little research highlighting such questions in relation to pre-college music programmes, there exist some studies on the cultural aspects of higher music education institutions. Rosie Perkins' study of a

UK conservatoire (2011) revealed learning cultures characterised by specialism, social networking, musical hierarchies, and vocational position taking. Monika Nerland (2004) explored the range of subject positions made available to students in different instrumental studios within a Norwegian higher music education institution. She pointed to how certain kinds of knowledge were promoted, while other types of knowledge were hidden or less valued, and how this varied between the different teachers she observed. Heather Landes (2008), in her study of students in one conservatoire and one university school of music in America, found that conservatoire students were more likely to aim for permanent orchestra positions while the university students to a larger extent pictured versatile portfolio music careers. The interplay between formal and informal learning situations was addressed by Magnus Dahlberg (2013) in his study of how Norwegian music students construct individual learning trajectories across contexts by drawing on learning resources available inside and outside the institution. As the programmes studied for this article are organised by higher music education, it is likely that they will share characteristics with what is described in these previous studies of higher music education.

Theoretical framework

The study builds on a sociocultural theoretical framework, emphasising the socially constructed nature of both talent development programmes and the learning cultures within them. I draw in particular on situated learning theory to understand how learning processes are part of an ongoing negotiation in a mutually constitutive interrelationship between the social world and the individuals belonging to it (Wenger, 1998). The concept of learning trajectories (Dahlberg, 2013; Wenger, 1998) is used to explore how the young musicians engage in meaningful musical activities outside and inside the programmes. Wenger (1998) defines such learning trajectories as providing:

> […] a context in which to determine what, among all the things that are potentially significant, actually becomes significant learning. A sense of trajectory gives us ways of sorting out what matters and what does not, what contributes to our identity and what remains marginal (Wenger, 1998, p. 155).

Thus, a sense of being on a certain trajectory gives meaning to what we currently do, by looking back at where we have come from and looking ahead to what we aspire to do. What we dream of can also be seen as a reflection of our current self-concept. "Paradigmatic trajectories", or institutionalised trajectories of what a successful trajectory inside a community can look like, are, according to Wenger (1998, p. 165), "the most influential factor shaping the learning of newcomers". These are constructed through "living testimonies of what is possible, expected, desirable" (1998, p. 156) within a social context. These living testimonies can be quite powerful stories, giving energy to a student's construction of a learning trajectory. As noted by Dahlberg (2013), there are, however, certain constraining factors to what learning trajectories a learner *can* construct, as con-

struction draws on available resources in the social context. Furthermore, when adding Bourdieu's understanding of a field as always being hierarchically organised (Bourdieu, 1977), not all trajectories will be available on the same terms to all agents in a given social field. As Perkins points out:

> The issue of power [in a conservatoire] is one that cannot be overlooked; it is not sufficient simply to view learning as embedded in a social context, rather it is enabled or disabled by this context (Perkins, 2011, p. 36).

Belonging to a field implies that one accepts the rules of the game or its fundamental premise that the game is worth being played, "that its stakes are important […] and worth pursuing" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 116). This acceptance is a gradual, non-verbal process. When young people are introduced to the field of classical music training at an early age, they are likely to develop a habitus that involves such a tacit understanding and acceptance of that which is taken-for-granted and valued in the field. Furthermore, habitus includes a demarcation of choices available, or a "sense of limits" and "sense of reality" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 164), as "[A]gents shape their aspirations according to concrete indices of the accessible and the inaccessible, of what is and is not 'for us'" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 64). This sense of limits, shaped by an ongoing interplay between personal perceptions of one's capabilities and what one believes to be within reach, will influence what students in talent programmes aspire to and dream of. On the other hand, how their expertise is assessed by teachers and leaders in the programme, might also affect which positions and learning opportunities they get access to.

Method

The study was designed as an explorative qualitative, instrumental case-study of string students and teachers in three talent development programmes, one in England and two in Norway[1]. All three programmes were junior conservatoires, meaning that they were junior departments of institutions for higher music education. Empirical data were gathered using four sources: *observations* of instrumental lessons, concerts, theory lessons, and orchestra rehearsals, *informal conversations* during fieldwork, *semi-structured individual interviews* with six teachers and 16 students, and studies of *available documents*. Through observations, I gained a direct access to how the sociomusical practices in the three junior conservatoires unfolded. The observations also offered common experiences that I could address with the informants later on. In the interviews, I aimed to "grasp the meaning persons, things, and relations hold for the informant" (Fog, 2004, p. 11, my translation). The interviews allowed me to gain knowledge beyond the boundaries of what can be observed, either because the information or topic was outside the physical boundaries of the

1 The data was gathered for the author's PhD thesis: *Being Talented – Becoming a Musician: A Qualitative Study of Learning Cultures in Three Junior Conservatoires* (Stabell, 2018).

talent programmes or because it did not come up during observed lessons or rehearsals. I found it particularly useful to interview students and teachers on the same topics and issues.

The three programmes

In all programmes, lessons were extra-curricular organised on Saturdays and sometimes also weekday evenings. Being part of these programmes did not lead to any formal degrees or qualifications, but still they aimed to provide students with the necessary competencies for passing auditions for higher music education. The programmes admitted new students based on competitive auditions where applicants performed a set of prepared pieces, scales, and etudes. The auditions also included a short interview concerning the applicant's motivation, career goals, dedication, and practice routines.

The first of the Norwegian programmes (NP1) focused on classical music and orchestral instruments as well as piano. The programme had about 70 students. The other Norwegian program (NP2) offered specialised training in various genres and had about 70 students. In both Norwegian programmes students were mainly between 13 and 19 years old, although younger students were occasionally admitted. The English programme (EP) had about 240 students, spread across all instruments and in various genres. Students were admitted from age 8 up to 19. All three programmes offered individual main instrument tuition, chamber music, orchestra, and music theory. In addition, the English programme had a range of elective courses in areas such as music production, composition, or jazz improvisation, something which were not found in the Norwegian ones. Furthermore, most students in the English programme received tuition on a second instrument compared to almost none in the Norwegian programmes.

String teachers and students

The participants from the programmes included three violin teachers, three cello teachers, and 16 of the teachers' students. Since previous studies have shown substantial differences between values and practices within various instrument groups (Gaunt, 2008), I chose to focus on string players, an instrument group that meets regularly in orchestra and chamber music, and therefore had arenas where ongoing negotiation of meaning could take place (Wenger, 1998). The teachers all had long experience with teaching talented young musicians and had been part of the programmes for several years. Anonymity was provided by selecting teachers who had a studio class with many students. The students were selected based on criteria of age (above 14 years), gender (to provide a balanced sample), and length of time at the programme (more than a year). All of those invited to participate in the study were willing to do so. The teachers included four women and two men, and the group of students included eight girls and eight boys between 14 and 18 years old.

Procedures

Ethical approval for gathering data from the Norwegian programmes was granted by the Data Protection Official for Research at the Norwegian Social Centre for Research Data (Sikt, previously called NSD). For the English programme, the Ethical Research Committee at the institution approved the project. I observed two or three instrumental lessons with each of the 16 students, I went to concerts where they played, as well as to orchestra rehearsals and music theory lessons that the students attended. I often had a chat with the student before and after the lesson, and occasionally the teacher addressed me during the lesson, although I tried to not initiate conversations. Following an observation guide, I kept field notes on a computer during lessons and rehearsals, and in a notebook when it was inappropriate to bring a computer, such as in concerts. Interviews were conducted with each teacher and student individually at a quiet place chosen by the interviewee after the observation period had ended. I then transcribed each interview and sent the interviewees the transcript for a member-check. In this process, some of the interviewees requested alterations, mostly to ensure anonymity.

Analysis

I analysed the material using the research software *Nvivo*, applying a thematic analysis, described by Braun and Clarke (2006) as "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data" (p. 79). I followed the steps described by Braun and Clarke: becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing them, and defining them. The analysis led to a number of main themes such as assumptions and beliefs about valuable activities, talent, hierarchy, students' future ambitions, and the teacher-student relationship.

Results I: Identified learning trajectories

Going back to the questions posed for this article, regarding which learning trajectories are made available to students and the cultural assumptions and values that contribute to shaping them, I will first discuss identified learning trajectories, and then the characteristics of the learning culture that construct these specific trajectories.

The soloist trajectory

The trajectory that stands out as particularly attractive in the talent development programmes is the one that leads to a soloist career. This can be described as the paradigmatic trajectory (Wenger, 1998) of the talent programmes, held up to students as the obvious

dream. One of the Norwegian students even stated that this was everyone's dream, even for those who said otherwise.

> Jacob: […] it's an inspiration to know that you're going to play with an orchestra. That is everyone's dream! Even though they might say that they're going to be orchestra musicians or something, of course, everyone is dreaming of playing with an orchestra (Interview, student, NP1).

Two of the other boys interviewed confirmed his statement: Christian who said he felt embarrassed to say he dreamt of becoming a soloist in public, and Benjamin who said the following about his musical dreams:

> Benjamin: [T]he dream is to sit in an orchestra and play really well, and it might be strange to say it, but it would be fun to become a soloist, but that is of course only a dream (Interview, student, NP2).

Still, several students did not find the soloist trajectory especially attractive, because of all the travelling, the assumed loneliness, and the lack of stability and financial security. Some also experienced performance anxiety to such an extent when doing solo concerts that they could not picture themselves having a satisfying solo career.

> Sarah: I don't know, one should get a little nervous, but not as nervous as I get, because that is a little destructive. I think one should look forward to playing concerts and not think that "now I'm here to impress", but rather that "I'm here to play, because I like it and I cannot live without it". Sometimes I feel like I'm not suited to becoming a musician (Interview, student, NP1).

For Sarah, this anxiety was so troublesome, that she found it hard to picture herself as a future musician at all.

The soloist trajectory's dominance in the talent programmes is visible in the organisation of the programme, seen in the auditions and exams, in the content and the requirements, as well as being promoted and applauded on the programmes' social media and webpages. When students apply, they audition with solo repertoire; in their exams they perform solo; and every year they are required to play solo concerts. Instrumental lessons take place in a one-to-one setting, mostly focusing on solo repertoire, and students regularly participate in competitions, where the first prize often is to perform as soloists with an orchestra (Stabell, 2018). That is not to say that other competencies are not valued or considered valid inside the programmes, but that the soloist position has a special and rather undisputed high position within the field of classical music performance, exemplified by a quote from Emily, a student in one of the Norwegian programmes.

> Interviewer: How do you find that being in the programme prepares you for a life as musician?
> Emily: Yes it does, but it's mostly as a soloist. Even though they focus on orchestra and everything, it seems like they focus mostly on soloist careers, and that's great as well of course (Interview, student, NP1).

The orchestra trajectory

A second attractive trajectory to students was the one leading towards a *permanent* position in an orchestra. While some considered this as a fall-back option to the solo career, others acknowledged that winning an orchestra audition would indeed be very attractive as well.

> Charlotte: My biggest dream would be to play in an orchestra. Not a soloist, but an orchestra musician. That's the dream […]. The best performance experiences I've ever had are from the orchestra, you sit there and everything just lifts and it's amazing (Interview, student, NP2).

Emily likewise specified that she did not want to travel the world as a soloist, because she preferred playing with others. Many of the student interviewees pointed to orchestra concerts as peak musical experiences and a source of their motivation to pursue a career as an orchestra musician. Furthermore, being an orchestra musician was something the students could picture themselves combining with a family in the future.

> Emily: They [Orchestra musicians] practiced at very family-friendly times, from 10 to 2 pm, I think. And then they could pick up their kids from school afterwards, and practice when it suited the family. And you have a permanent position, you won't get fired or anything, you can stay there until you retire or start working in the administration or something like that (Interview, student, NP1).

The portfolio trajectory

An alternative trajectory that two students in the English programme aimed for was the one leading towards a portfolio career, as described by Evelyn.

> Evelyn: I think the main thing for me is being a versatile musician, so not just going down one route, that's really important for me, […]. I'm just going to try as many things as possible, and then go down some route, and I'm not really sure what that is yet. Hopefully I'll find out (Interview, student, EP).

This resembles how Nicholas, also a student in the English programme, pictured his future:

> Nicholas: People say it's really hard to make money in music. It is, obviously, so I'm going to be doing a number of different activities probably. […] I have to try things out, I have to try out being a soloist, do some solo performances, I have to try playing in orchestras, do chamber music, and I'll probably teach as well, get a teaching diploma and take on some younger students, and then at the end of the day you can make a career out of just getting around. […]. So I'll be picking out lots of bits getting self-employed, a portfolio kind of career (Interview, student, EP).

While building a musical portfolio career for themselves apparently was a natural pathway for these two English students, teachers and students in the two Norwegian programmes described a freelance or portfolio career as an *undesirable trajectory*, due to the anticipated lack of financial security and the difficulties of combining it with family.

> Ann: Being a freelance must be terribly difficult. How long can you manage to do that? How long are you even attractive as one? Because I guess the orchestras will want new musicians, so I don't know how long you can be a freelance, and what do you do then? Perhaps you can do something with a music degree in other positions inside the culture industry, without performing, it's possible to find another vocation, but … (Interview, teacher, NP1).

Emily (student, NP1) confirmed this, saying that they often heard warnings from teachers who, for example in the middle of a rehearsal could tell the students to avoid becoming freelance musicians. Emily did not exactly know why they should avoid it, except the obvious lack of a steady income.

Regarding teaching as a future profession, the English students considered this as one amongst other possible ways to make a living as a musician. In the Norwegian programmes, some students could picture themselves teaching in the future, but many tended to frame teaching as an undesirable trajectory. Christine, one of the Norwegian students, stated this very clearly:

> Christine: My biggest fear is, it happens to so many, they play wonderfully, excellent, and then they get pregnant and become a music teacher in the municipal schools of music[2] because they need the money. That's a complete disaster! (Interview, student, NP2).

As Wenger (1998) points out, possible trajectories are constructed through stories and testimonies of the actions and choices of those who have previously been part of the community. These possible trajectories can be both attractive and undesirable. For Christine, the teaching trajectory was one she would try to avoid, afraid to become another female instrumentalist who gave up playing in order to have a secure income. Although the study was not designed to explore gender differences in career ambitions, there was a tendency in the material that female students more often than the male took family and having children into consideration when describing their future dreams. As this quote exemplifies, which role models that are available for the young musicians are of great importance.

It is noticeable that students in the Norwegian programmes had a more rigid vision of legitimate musical careers compared to the students in the English programme who had a more fluid conception of how they could make a living as musicians in the future. Furthermore, while Norwegian students positioned future careers in a clear hierarchy, the English students described various career options in more neutral ways.

2 The Norwegian municipal schools of music and performing arts are found in every county in Norway. They offer instrumental and vocal lessons (as well as in other art forms) to children and young people at a relatively low cost and the schools are a significant future workplace for many music graduates.

The outbound trajectory

The learning trajectories described above lead towards a career in music. However, some students doubted whether they were suited to become musicians, whether they would be good enough to become musicians, or whether they even wanted to become musicians. Most teachers did not know whether their students wanted to become musicians or not; it was not a topic often addressed in lessons. Career pathways leading out of music were not among the visible learning trajectories in the talent development programmes, quite understandably. Still, the students are quite young, and even though the programmes aim to prepare them to study music at tertiary level, they are not obliged to do so, and many do indeed pursue other fields afterwards.

Two students at the English programme were particularly explicit about not wanting to study music afterwards; they were on an *outbound trajectory* (Wenger, 1998), that eventually would lead out of the programme and the field of specialised music education. These two expressed frustration in terms of how much practice the teachers expected of them, that they still had to perform solo concerts, and that they needed to attend activities such as the boys' choir. One even felt he wasted his teacher's time by continuing at the programme:

> Andrew: You have to put a lot of practice in, which has been quite frustrating for her [the teacher] I guess. I have benefitted a lot from it, but I think she feels she could have had other students and put them in my place (Interview, student, EP).

Although it is quite common for teachers to feel that their students are not practicing enough, and for students to feel bad for not finding enough time to practice, Andrew lacked the motivation to do anything about it; he was simply satisfied with the rather small amount of practice he currently undertook. The problem for him was the expectations from his teacher and the programme about attendance in music-related subjects such as theory, choir, and aural training.

Some of the Norwegian students were likewise not convinced that becoming a musician was what they would end up doing. Among the push-factors were severe performance anxiety (as with Sarah), wanting a more stable life and income, and the insecurity experienced by some regarding whether they would become good enough to earn a place in higher music education. Jack (student, NP2) found that becoming a musician meant you had to "de-prioritise other things, maybe even family life" and "being willing to practice consistently and perhaps never really taking time off", and he was not convinced that he wanted to live such a life. Benjamin (student, NP2) doubted he would become good enough, and thus, he worked hard to keep up his academic grades alongside preparing for the entrance auditions to higher music education. Benjamin's multiple career aims resulted in a heavy workload:

> Benjamin: After reading three hours of chemistry you're supposed to go down and practice Bruch, which you've played a thousand times before, and then I often find that it's better to get some sleep (Interview, student, NP2).

Results II: Identified characteristics of the learning culture

Using the lens of learning culture in line with Perkins (2011) and James and Biesta (2007), who both draw on sociocultural learning theory, as well as Bourdieu's analytical tools of field, capital, and habitus, I found a culture characterised by dedication, specialisation, and hierarchy where certain types of musical capital were in play. For this article, I will look into the specific characteristics of the learning culture that affected the negotiation of legitimate learning trajectories.

A culture of specialisation

At the core of a classical music education is the idea of an early specialisation and extensive practice as necessary to succeed (Ericsson et al., 1993). Perkins (2011) described the culture of a UK conservatoire as one privileging the development of specialised performers. In the talent programmes, this specialisation was evident in the repertoire played, in the formal requirement of annual solo performances, in the value placed on competitions, and above all, in the dominant ideal of the soloist as the image of success (Stabell, 2018).

In the instrumental lessons, the value of specialisation was visible in the ideal of perfection that teachers and students strived for, practicing a phrase repeatedly to get closer to an ideal sound quality, a perfect intonation, and a technical efficiency in their playing. This comment from a violin lesson exemplifies this goal:

> […] if you practice it 100 times absolutely correctly, that is what will happen in the concert because that's what you have practiced. We rehearse to succeed, not to fail (Fieldnote, quote from main instrument teacher, NP1).

The specialised culture is strengthened by the aim of preparing students for the entrance auditions to higher music education, where a highly specialised solo performance competence is required to get in.

This was particularly true for the Norwegian programmes. In the English programme, students were encouraged also to have lessons on a second instrument, and had the opportunity to do elective courses from the jazz programme, or in the electronic studio and choir. The fact that both jazz and classical students were located under the same roof also created a more versatile learning culture, compared to one of the Norwegian programmes, which had only classical tuition. This could also potentially lead to cross-genre collaboration and open up new possible learning trajectories to students, as was the case for one of the cello students in the English programme, who chose elective courses that could strengthen her competencies as a session musician.

A culture of dedication

Dedication to the music and to pursuing a musical career was something teachers expected of their students, and something students expected of themselves. The dedication students had towards the music was visible for example in how they expressed their dreams about the future. Jacob at one of the Norwegian programmes stated that his dream was "to make a living of doing music, no matter what. Whether it is as a chamber musician, orchestra musician, soloist, or all of it. That is my dream". Charlotte at the other Norwegian program said she dreamt about "performing, communicating music to an audience". Connection with an audience was also important to Benjamin:

> Benjamin: If everything goes the way I want it to, I'm still playing my instrument. I don't necessarily have to be educated as a musician, but I hope that I'm still involved with music, and that I'm still allowed to bring joy to others, get something back, and see that my playing can affect people, because that is really what I enjoy about playing (Interview, student, NP2).

Sarah, on the other hand, was concerned that she was not dedicated enough to become a musician. She described a proper musician as one who loves performances, who is interested in music theory and knows who-is-who in the musical world. She felt that she was none of these things and therefore, she concluded, not suited to become a musician. Similar ideas about the dedication required was also found in the quote from Jack in the previous section. Teachers, on their side, expressed frustration when they perceived that students were not dedicated to the music or to consistent, daily practice and they considered it a core task to awaken and encourage students' love for music as well as the joy of meticulous work:

> Sharon: If you're going to play virtuosic works, it's an incredibly laborious path, and we're talking about thousands upon thousands of repetitions where you go through the same phrase. To learn to enjoy that, it's a mission for me to inspire them to engage in that process (Interview, teacher, NP1).

A culture of hierarchy

Hierarchies of the talent programmes manifested themselves in assumptions about talent, in assumptions about success, and in the assumed value of comparing oneself with one's peers (Stabell, 2018). Furthermore, there was a hierarchy of future careers, as described above. One feature of talent programmes that is often lauded as positive, is the opportunity it gives students to compare themselves with other skilled and dedicated students.

> Ann: It is important that one plays together with people who are better than oneself, because then you hear the level all the time, and you know that "that is how good I can become one day" (Interview, teacher, NP1).

Teachers assumed that being in a high-achieving environment increased students' motivation to practice and perform better. Although this was true for many of the students interviewed, there were also students who experienced the constant comparison as stressful and even as a threat to their self-confidence.

> Sarah: It's easy to think "those are good, and those are not as good", and then you want to compare yourself and find out "how am I compared to her now?" And since the programme is so small, it's very easy to do that. I know who everybody is, and have known them for many years and seen how they have developed […] and if other people are making great progress, you have to make great progress as well. One just wants to be part of the race upwards (Interview, student, NP1).

Students in NP2 had a more relaxed relationship to hierarchy, although they also had a clear perception of who were the best musicians of their age group in their part of the country, and of their own place in the hierarchy. When the specialisation is narrower, the hierarchy is also often steeper. When becoming a soloist is the dream of nearly all students in a talent programme, as was the case in the Norwegian programmes, it is easy to make comparisons using the same criteria for oneself as for all the others. However, if many ideals for future careers exist alongside each other, as in the English programme, such comparisons do not make sense in the same way. This was the case for Evelyn, previously quoted above, who had other success criteria than what she perceived her fellow students had:

> Evelyn: […] because you get some musicians who say: "I want to be in a quartet", "I want to be an orchestra player", "I want to be a soloist", and it's shutting down a lot of options (Interview, student, EP).

Dreaming of becoming a versatile musician gave direction to Evelyn's activities inside the programme. She had vocal lessons and took electronic studio as elective courses. Outside the programme, she played in bands and did solo performances where she sang and played the cello. Therefore, she had other parameters beside how well she played the standard cello repertoire by which she could compare her competence with the other cellists at the school. This is a significant contrast to Sarah, who did not see any career choices besides becoming a soloist or an orchestra musician. Therefore, Sarah was also very concerned about how well she performed compared to her peers.

Discussion

The three programmes offered three main learning trajectories to their students: the *soloist trajectory*, the *orchestra trajectory*, and the *portfolio trajectory*. A fourth trajectory, not very visible, was an *outbound* trajectory, leading out of the professional music community. Students who knew they were not going to study music in higher education were posi-

tioned on the sidelines of the programme to a certain extent and experienced conflicts both with their teachers due to not practicing enough and with the programme due to spotty attendance and not being motivated to perform at the required number of solo concerts per year (Stabell, 2018). The performance trajectories of becoming a soloist or becoming an orchestra musician had a prominent place, with the soloist career identified as "everyone's dream" (student, NP1). Interestingly, students had various access to this trajectory – while all of them practiced the soloist repertoire, only a few had the opportunity to actually perform as soloist with an orchestra as these opportunities are rare and given to students based on auditions or previous achievements such as winning prizes.

From previous studies we know that most musicians go into portfolio careers after graduating from higher music education (see e.g. Bennett, 2016), Portfolio musicians are mostly self-employed, with careers comprised of various types of work, such as performing in various settings and genres, writing music, teaching music, producing music, or arranging music festivals. Even though this is a likely career, the students in the Norwegian programmes distanced themselves from it, and instead aimed towards permanent jobs in orchestras or becoming good enough to tour the world as a soloist. The students in the English programme, however, had a much more manifold view of their future career, and envisioned that they would play in various settings and genres, teach, compose, and do session work. This difference is striking, and should be further explored. Explanations can be found in that the English teachers I followed had a background themselves as portfolio musicians, or that the English programme offered education in more genres and disciplines compared to the Norwegian ones.

The programmes were performance-oriented and specialised in their nature, as one main aim was to prepare students for entrance to higher music education. However, specialisation can be seen to exist on a continuum from very narrow forms to more broad ones. A broad specialisation might seem like a contradiction in terms, but as argued in a previous article (Stabell & Jordhus-Lier, 2017), engaging with music from various angles can also represent a type of specialisation. The English program offered such a broader specialisation compared to that in the Norwegian programmes, visible in the students' musical ambitions and in the number of electives courses possible. This offered students more agency to choose in which musical direction they would like to specialise. However, this broadness was not evident in the main instrument lessons; the lessons observed in the English programme were in character similar to the ones observed in the Norwegian programmes. It did, however, seem like an openness in the programme still allowed for a higher degree of students' choice and more varied learning trajectories.

A narrow specialisation in the formative years of a musician's life involves certain dangers, I would argue. Both because it can be damaging to students' motivation and trigger performance anxiety (Haraldsen, 2019), as well as because a soloist position and even an orchestra position is likely unattainable for most students in talent programmes. The value system that prioritises these types of positions might result in students striving for a career that is unlikely to be realised, and not spending time preparing for a portfolio career that is achievable and possibly also more rewarding. Moreover, it can lead to students choosing to not pursue a musical career at all, either because they are not attracted

by a future as soloist or orchestra musician or because they consider this to be beyond their "sense of limits". Bennett and Bridgstock (2015), Helena Gaunt and colleagues (Gaunt et al., 2021), and Perkins (2011) are all examples of scholars who have recently argued that higher music education does not prepare music graduates sufficiently for the versatile future that awaits them upon graduation. López-Íñiguez and Bennett (2020) point to how important it is that students develop a deep understanding of the value of extending one's professional capabilities while Gaunt and colleagues (2021, p. 16) argue that "a paradigm shift is now needed to re-envision the conceptual foundations of HME higher music education". This change will not happen only by introducing new courses into a curriculum, it also requires a change in the cultural assumptions and values that underpin the learning cultures of specialised, classical music education. And if we want to see a change in higher music education, we should also consider ways to broaden pre-college music students' horizons and their conceptions of what being a musician might include.

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Ellen Mikalsen Stabell
is a lecturer in music education and didactics at the Norwegian Academy of Music, and was the head of CEMPE, the Norwegian Academy's centre for excellence in music performance education up until its closure in December 2023. Stabell holds a PhD in music education with a dissertation on learning cultures in junior conservatoires in Norway and England. She also has a master's degree in music education with a thesis on master classes and extensive experience working as a piano teacher. Her research interests include talent education, one-to-one tuition, higher music education, and communities of practice.

Young Talented Musicians under Pressure?

Empirical Findings of Chronic Stress among Highly Musically Gifted Adolescents in Germany

Andreas Heye

Abstract

In Germany, musically highly gifted adolescents have the possibility – after passing an admission exam – to study music at a music pre-college, which runs parallel to the attendance at a regular public school. These junior music students have to cope not only with this double liability to school and music university (often resulting in time pressure, schedule conflicts, etc.) but also with social stress concerning teachers, family members, or peers. Nevertheless, research on chronic stress of highly musically gifted adolescents is scarce. Therefore, an empirical cross-sectional study was carried out to identify chronic stressors of young talented musicians considering their social environment. Qualitative and quantitative data were selected from 22 junior music students (age range: 12–19 years; mean age: $M = 17$; gender distribution: female: $n = 12$) and from their family members such as parents ($n = 12$), siblings ($n = 7$), as well as instrumental music teacher ($n = 5$) and schoolteachers ($n = 1$). The general results show that junior music students manage an eleven-hour working day (school education and homework, plus deliberate practice) and struggle with bullying by schoolmates because of their dedication to classical music, their excellent music performances, and their outstanding school achievements. Parents are their most important social resource in coping with these stressors. In conclusion, junior students, on the one hand, show a high-stress level which is associated with physical and psychological problems. On the other hand, they receive strong support from their families. Interestingly, a few of the junior music students experience not only a high-stress level but also high experience of quality of life. The results are discussed with regard to the cooperation between schools and music pre-colleges, as well as preventive health strategies.

Keywords

musical talent, giftedness, chronic stress, family, social support, musical development, junior music student, dual education, music pre-college

This paper contains a selection of empirical findings from a study on the chronic stress of junior music students who studied at a music pre-college in Germany, which runs parallel to the attendance at a regular public school (Heye, 2019).[1] In the introduction,

1 Junior music students are defined as highly musically gifted adolescents who study music at a music pre-college after passing an admission exam. The selection of the findings is based on the topic of the symposium "Comparative Views on Musical Talent and its Promotion in Chinese and Western Worlds"

I will give a short overview concerning the promotion of young, highly gifted musicians in classical music in Germany and my motivation for conducting the present study. In the paragraph "theoretical background", I will give a short overview of research on the burdens of young, highly gifted musicians in general and explain the link to research in the field of sports science. Following, I will mention the aim of the study, and describe the method used, the materials, and the participants. In the results section, I will present the study's quantitative and qualitative findings, including the junior music students' perspectives on their problems in different dimensions of life, time pressure and social stress with schoolmates, and their family support. Additional findings concerning the view of family members, school teachers, and instrumental music teachers will be summarised. Finally, I will conclude by outlining different perspectives on possible prevention strategies for chronic stress.

Generally, pre-colleges in Germany offer early study programmes to support gifted children and adolescents who "have a high level of interest and performance in a particular subject or area, but whose school performance is at least good overall" (BMBF [Federal Ministry of Education and Research], 2017, p. 92, translated by the author). So, highly gifted children and adolescents are connected to two different educational institutions, the regular school on the one hand and the university on the other hand. These two educational systems are fundamentally different concerning their time and organisational structure. For example, school vacations clash with the lecture periods of the university, which can be challenging for all persons involved.

Music pre-colleges are linked to a music conservatory or music university and provide special study programmes, mainly in the field of classical music. After passing an admission exam, highly musically gifted adolescents become junior music students at the conservatory. These early study programmes differ from place to place, so that they cannot be compared easily. However, the programmes generally last several years (usually between two and three or four and six semesters) and promote a comprehensive education for becoming professional musicians. In more detail, these programmes are usually aimed at students from about twelve years of age on and include lessons on the student's main instrument and a second instrument, as well as accompanying subjects such as aural training, music theory, chamber music, choir, or improvisation. Additional seminars or workshops in musicology, music medicine, and musician health constitute important complementary training for young talented musicians on their way to becoming professional artists.

Although considered a privilege, junior music students have to cope with many physical and psychological demands (Gembris, 2017; Heye & Gembris, 2017). A multitude of requirements accompany the dual education programme. These include, among other things, coping with the performance-specific requirements of regular school and music pre-college. In addition, there is the challenge of organising and fulfilling scheduling obligations, such as homework, exams, concerts, competitions, rehearsals, practice, teaching

(December 7–9, 2020, Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts (School of Music) & Geneva Haute école de musique).

and seminar times, and concert tours. In more detail, during a semester, talented young musicians go to school from Monday to Friday and do their homework and practice their instrument after school by themselves. From Friday afternoon to Saturday or Sunday they also attend seminars at the music pre-college on a biweekly basis. In addition to that, young music students must meet (performance) requirements laid out by their direct reference person(s) – especially parents, instrumental music teachers, and schoolteachers. On the one hand, the central reference persons act as essential supporters and promoters, without whom such extensive early musical education would not be possible. On the other hand, in the perception of the young talented musicians, the reference persons themselves can be part of the multiple burdens, for example, if they place excessive demands on the young students. In short, these young people have to cope with a double liability of school and music university (often resulting in time pressure, schedule conflicts, etc.), as well as social stress concerning teachers, family members, or peers. Furthermore, junior music students are in a challenging developmental phase characterised by upheaval (puberty) and the transition from childhood to adulthood (adolescence), which cannot be ignored when surveying the chronic stress of musically gifted adolescents.

My focus on this particular group of people was led by a personal interest in how junior music students manage their everyday lives and how they cope with the sum of demands. When I was an adolescent, I did competitive sports and spent much free time training after school and during weekends and school vacations. To me, it was positive stress. Indeed, sport science was a vital reference field for developing my research in music. In the following study, I explore this question in more detail. The theoretical background will be outlined in the next paragraph.

Theoretical background[2]

The vast majority of research on talent in the field of systematic musicology is devoted either to the development of musically gifted children and adolescents in general or to highly performing young musicians in the classical field. This includes, for example, the studies of participants in the music competition *Jugend musiziert* (*Youth Making Music*). This annual music contest has existed for more than 50 years and is the largest and most important contest for young musicians in Germany. There is a considerable body of research on *Youth Making Music* participants (e.g. Bastian, 1987; 1989; 1991; 1997; Linzenkirchner & Eger-Harsch, 1995; Bastian & Koch, 2010; Gembris, Menze, & Heye, 2019; Gembris et al., 2020). In contrast to this, in the field of sports science, the issue of dual educational programmes and chronic stress of talented young athletes is discussed comprehensively (e.g. Richartz, 2010; Richartz & Brettschneider 1996). Research on chronic stress of musically gifted adolescents who did a dual educational programme is scarce (see Heye, 2019; Lessing, 2018). Most of the corresponding studies operationalise chronic stress in relation to the "transactional model of stress and coping" by Lazarus and

2 The article was submitted in 2019/2020 and more recent research could not be taken into account.

Folkman (1984). In this model, stress can occur by either positive (Eustress) or negative (Distress) factors depending on the individual stress perception. Whether or not people perceive negative stress is linked to their individual estimation of the challenging situation as well as to their coping strategies and resources.

Results from studies on talented young people in sports indicate that main stressors are social stress and isolation from family, while other stressors such as performance expectations (school and sport) play a minor part in stress perception. This evidence emphasises the importance of significant others and can be confirmed by a longitudinal study of young musicians (McPherson, Davidson, & Faulkner, 2012). The authors write: "Nothing has more significance for children's musical development than how other regulation around musical engagement aligns or misaligns with children's social, biological, and psychological experiences" (McPherson, Davidson, & Faulkner, 2012, p. 191).

Some empirical studies compare stress perception of talented young athletes with that of young musicians and conclude that both domains are largely comparable (Kaminski, Mayer, & Ruoff, 1984; Richartz & Brettschneider, 1996; Hemming, 2015). One main finding of these studies is that high performing children and adolescents in the fields of sport or music do not necessarily perceive more stress in comparison to people of the same age (control group).

In sum, the findings of sports science offer important starting points for the consideration of multiple stressors in the education of highly musically gifted adolescents, even though the transferability of the individual findings to junior music students must be critically questioned. For example, in the field of competitive sports, athletes need a dual educational programme because they know their careers are restricted by a natural physical ageing process. Professional musicians, in contrast, can continue to play music professionally up to old age.

The aim of the study was to systematically explore the everyday life situation of junior music students. Of interest was the individual stress perception of the adolescents and how they cope with chronic stressors such as homework and practicing and playing their instrument. Based on the findings of sports science, in regard to this research topic it is interesting to also survey important figures in junior music students' lives, such as family members, their schoolteachers, and their instrumental music teachers. In the present study, participants were examined using different research approaches. The research method and materials will be described in the next section.

Method and materials

The cross-sectional study combined qualitative and quantitative research methods (method triangulation). All participants were interviewed using a semi-structured guideline (duration: approximately 45 to 60 minutes). All interviews were recorded, fully transcribed, and analysed with content analyses (Kuckartz, 2014) using the Software MAXQDA (www.maxqda.com).

In addition, two standardised paper-pencil-questionnaires were used: First, the inventory for capturing the quality of life of children and adolescents (*Inventar zur Erfassung der Lebensqualität bei Kindern und Jugendlichen*, ILK, Mattejat & Remschmidt, 2006). This short questionnaire assesses possible problems in essential areas of life such as school, home, and leisure; possible conflicts with significant figures such as parents or peers; and also the children's physical and psychological well-being. In the present study, possible limitations in the quality of life are seen as indicators for stressors. Second, because of the importance of the parent-child relationship for the perception of and the ability to cope with stress, all junior music students evaluated the quality of their relationships to their mother and father using a standardised questionnaire (*Elternbildfragebogen für Kinder und Jugendliche*, Titze & Lehmkuhl, 2010).

Description of the sample

Overall, 47 participants took part in the main study[3]. Table 1 shows the distribution of all participants. The age of the junior music students ranged from 12 to 19 years (M = 16.8 years; SD = 1.74). About 55 percent were female (n = 12), 45 percent were male (n = 10). There were no gender differences regarding the age distribution (female: mean age = 16.6, SD = 1.88; male: mean age = 17, SD = 1.63). Except for two young students, all the young musicians (91%) attend an academic high school (*Gymnasium*).

Table 1: Sample composition

	SAMPLE – PARTICIPANTS	*n*
1.	junior music students	22
2.	parents of the junior music students	12
3.	siblings of the junior music students	7
4.	instrumental music teachers of the junior music students	5
5.	schoolteacher of the junior music students	1
	total (*n*)	47

All junior music students were recruited from the same music pre-college in Germany. Therefore, the requirements of the study programme were identical for all participants; the only differences concerned the main instrument they studied at the music pre-college (see table 2).

3 During a pilot study, three experts from different music pre-colleges were interviewed, asking them for challenges of the dual educational programme.

Table 2: Distribution of the main instrument by gender

		number of female junior students	number of male junior students	total
strings (n = 8)	violin	2	1	3
	viola	2	–	2
	cello	2	1	3
keys (n = 6)	piano	1	2	3
	organ	–	2	2
	accordion	–	1	1
winds (n = 5)	flute	2	–	2
	oboe	–	1	1
	recorder	–	1	1
	horn	1	–	1
vocals (n = 3)	vocals	2	1	3
total (N)		12	10	22

Concerning the family background of the junior music students, twelve parents from seven families participated in the study (fathers: n = 5; mothers: n = 7). The majority of the students have at least one brother or sister (68%, n = 15). The high level of education of the parents is remarkable: Most parents have a university degree or a doctorate degree. In all families, both parents are employed. All fathers work full-time; the mothers work full- or part-time. In two families, one parent is a music teacher and the other parent a professional musician, which is a surprisingly small percentage. In the personal life of all families, music plays an important role. Parents and siblings often play an instrument, listen to music in their free time, or attend concerts. In addition, it bears mentioning that the majority of junior music students have to commute longer distances from home to the music pre-college. Predominantly, parents took their children by car, sometimes several times a week.

In addition to the family members of the junior music students, five instrumental music teachers from the music pre-college and one schoolteacher from one regular school participated in this study. This group of participants are exclusively male and have many years of professional experience. The pre-college teachers' subjects are piano, horn, cello, and classical singing. The schoolteacher is a music teacher at an academic high school (*Gymnasium*).

Results

The following result section is divided into two parts. The first part will describe findings derived from the junior music students' perspective, beginning with the results of the inventory for capturing the quality of life, followed by some key findings derived from the interview. The results of the qualitative data give insights into the topics *time pressure*,

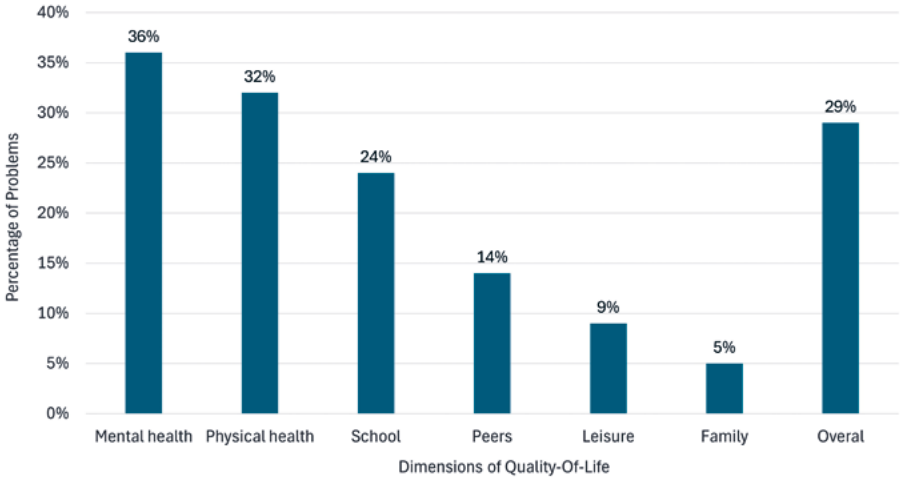

Figure 1: Frequencies of problems in different dimensions of Quality-Of-Life (junior music students; n = 22)

social stress but also *family support*. The second part presents findings from family members' and other significant figures' perspectives on different problems that arose because of the dual educational system.

To start with possible problems or burdens in everyday life of the junior music students, figure 1 illustrates the frequencies of problems in the different dimensions of life surveyed by the questionnaire about their quality of life. Around 60 per cent of adolescents have problems in at least one dimension of life.

The dimensions of mental and physical health are most frequently affected, and both correlate significantly (r = .512, p = .007). About one-fifth of the junior music students reported problems at school. The dimensions *peers* (other adolescents they meet in their leisure time), *leisure* (interest in leisure activities), and *family* are mentioned less frequently. Only one junior music student (5%) reported problems or conflicts with friends or family members (parents and siblings). All in all, nearly one third are dissatisfied with their actual life situation. In other words, six out of 22 music junior students (29%) feel impaired in their current life situation, but the remaining 15 students do not (71%).

Compared to the values of the standard sample (N = 9.327), which are reported in the quality-of-life questionnaire manual, there are significant differences (see Mattejat & Remschmidt, 2006). In relation to adolescents of the general population in Germany, junior music students feel significantly more frequently impaired in two out of seven dimensions of life: *Overall*[4] and *physical health*[5]. In contrast, junior music students feel

4 Adolescents of the general population in Germany (10%) versus junior music students (29%); t-test: t = 3.895; df = 20; p < .001.

5 Adolescents of the general population in Germany (14%) versus junior music students (21%); t-test: t = 3.272; df = 21; p = .004.

significantly less frequently impaired regarding the dimensions *family*[6] and *leisure*[7]. All other Quality-Of-Life dimensions did not show significant differences.

Concerning the time resources of the junior music students, during the interviews, participants emphasised that for them, time pressure is the main stressor. They reported a high imbalance between the number of requirements of the school and the music pre-college on the one hand, and their available time to manage all tasks on the other hand. Especially after long and exhausting school days, they found it quite impossible to finish their homework and deliberately practice their instrument for several hours. To provide a more concrete idea of the time pressure, participants did a self-assessment of the time disposition of a normal school day. Here, it does bear mentioning that these values are based on the self-evaluation of the junior music students and may be inaccurate.

Table 3 lists typically performance-oriented activities such as instructional time at school, homework, and instrumental practice time at home. On average, young talented musicians spend almost seven hours per day at school, do their homework in one hour, and practice their instrument 3.5 hours per day. Striking here are some min. and max. values. For example, in this sample, participants practice up to seven hours on their instrument, and some do not do any homework.

If all performance-oriented activities are summed up, talented young musicians manage an eleven-hour working day on average (M = 11, SD = 1.43). No significant differences were found in the variables age and gender. The interviews also showed that the high workload is accompanied by a negative effect on the regeneration and recovery periods. Young students pursue performance-oriented activities seven days a week. Especially on the weekends off, they try to compensate for their "practice deficit". This also includes preparation for concerts or music competitions. Presumably, the mental and physiological problems mentioned in the quality-of-life questionnaire are linked to the chronic time pressure young musical talents perceive.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of the amount of time per day for performance-oriented activities

amount of time per day (hours)	N	Min.	Max.	M	SD
time at school	21	5	10	6.7	1.23
homework	22	0	2.5	1.1	0.76
practice and playing the instrument	22	1	7	3,5	1.59
total amount of time per day	21	8.75	14	11	1.43

6 Adolescents of the general population in Germany (26%) versus junior music students (5%); t-test: t = -3.815; df = 21; p < .001.

7 Adolescents of the general population in Germany (40%) versus junior music students (9%); t-test: t = -3.941; df = 21; p < .001.

In more detail, the time of instrumental practice and playing differs depending on the instrument. Table 4 shows differences in practice time by instrument group. This can be explained by the different playing techniques of musical instruments in general. For example, wind instruments cannot be practiced and played as long as key and string instruments because of the tremendous physical effort involved. However, one main problem is the subjective feeling of never having enough time to practice.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics of daily practice time by instrument groups (hours)

instrument groups	N	Min.	Max.	M	SD
Strings	8	2.5	7.0	4.0	1.41
keys	6	1.0	7.0	3.8	2.16
winds	5	1.5	4.0	3.0	1.06
vocals	3	2.0	2.0	2.0	0

Social stress is another important issue. Talented young musicians are looking for acceptance for their passion for classical music and close relationships with peers. Even though social stress is considered typical for adolescence because 80 per cent of the everyday stressors of adolescents include a relationship component (Seiffge-Krenke, 2006), the burden and suffering due to this stressor are particularly highly reported by the adolescents in the present interview study. Talented young musicians reported exclusion and verbal attacks by classmates at school, related to their intensive involvement with music or their outstanding academic and musical achievements. For example, they are often excluded by their classmates because of their preference for classical music. In view of the fact that music preferences play an important role in adolescents' musical identity (e.g. Heye & Knigge, 2018), this is an important piece of empirical information. The participants' one-sided attention to their musical development has further social consequences: The main challenge for these young people is to maintain friendships. They report frequently having to cancel social events with friends and peers (e.g. birthday parties). Sometimes, friendships have also been broken by music because, at some point, their friends lose understanding for the rejections. This is a serious result in view of the great importance of peers for the development of young people.

In contrast, the participants emphasised the positive relationship to peers at the music pre-college, where they – perhaps unexpectedly – do not experience any competition between themselves and other junior music students. Fellow students are not linked to social stress, but rather function as social resources. Participants describe their fellow students as sparring partners or role models, and new friendships are found through joint musical activities. Against this backdrop, the social events that are offered as part of the early study programme, such as joint study trips, appeared to be important (also for social bonding). In particular, international junior music students from non-Western countries

see benefits in those activities because they offer a means of getting familiar with the languages and culture of the countries.

Compared to the stressors described above, family members, especially the junior music students' parents, are important supporters. The quantitative results of the inventory of the child-parent-relationship show that junior music students perceive an above-average positive parent-child relationship compared to young people of the general population. In the present sample, the index values for relationship quality to both parents are significantly higher.[8] So the above-average positive parent-child relationship in the present sample can be understood as a protective factor against multiple stressors. From the junior music students' point of view, their parents show a positive parenting style. In more detail, the data show that the dimension *autonomy* in the relationship between the junior music students and their parents is most pronounced. At the same time, the relationship dimension of *punishment* is significantly less pronounced than in the case of young people from the general population. In other words, most of the junior music students experience that their parents give them the freedom to make their own decisions without fear of being sanctioned for it. In only one case did the participant perceive high pressure from their parents.

In the following second part, results from the interviews with the parents, siblings, instrumental music teachers, and schoolteacher will be described. During the interview, these significant figures were asked to generally evaluate the everyday life situation of the junior music students in terms of possible stressors and, more specifically, the dual educational situation.

School teachers and instrumental music teachers pointed out a lack of cooperation between the regular school and the music pre-colleges. In their opinion, this is a general problem of the German school system. One main problem is that the school and vacation periods of a regular school do not correspond to the lecture times of the music pre-college. In addition, there are deficits in communication between the educational institutions. For example, compulsory courses offered by the school often overlap with those offered by the music pre-college. So junior music students inevitably miss courses and consequently perceive stress because they cannot participate in the course and may not pass the assessment. In the present study, on the one hand, instrumental music teachers of the music conservatory claim that regular school can be more flexibile – for example, junior music students may skip some lessons at school, so they can attend the seminar at the music pre-college. On the other hand, the schoolteachers argue that school education is more important than music pre-colleges and therefore the seminars at the music pre-colleges should be reduced.

Early study can only be realised if the family system works. Parents not only bear the financial costs of the study programme, instruments, sheet music, etc., but also provide transport services from their home to the university several times a week. Sometimes they are on the road with their children for several hours a day. This has considerable consequences for the leisure time of parents and siblings. Family life is primarily directed

8 Index value general population = 50 (norm); index value mothers = 56; index value fathers = 57.

towards the musically gifted child. This often makes siblings feel restricted because the parents cannot support another cost- or time-intensive hobby. Since the early study takes place predominantly on the weekends, there is little time for family activities. Parents reported that this holds potential for family conflicts.

Despite these challenges, overall, the parents emphasise that they consider the dual educational programme to be very valuable and that their children are learning something for life through early studies. Interestingly, the parents do not mention a musical career as the main motivation for their support. Paradoxically, they are very sceptical about a career as a professional musician, because in their opinion the career prospects in Germany are very difficult. Therefore, they insist that school-leaving qualifications must have priority over the early music studies. Good school grades are a prerequisite for them to support their children in the field of music. The pessimistic view of a musician's career is also explained by the high competition from abroad. Instrumental music teachers in particular complain that young music students in Germany do not have enough time for instrumental practice in addition to their school and extracurricular obligations. However, junior music students still hold on to their dream of becoming successful artists, even while bearing uncertainty as professional musicians in mind. Instrumental teachers feel responsible for their musical careers and take on the role of career advisers (see also the article by Ellen M. Stabell in this volume).

Conclusion and further perspectives

This study is one possible attempt to describe chronic stress in everyday life situations of talented young musicians. Even if general tendencies of individual stress perception and coping strategies can be derived, the findings cannot be generalised because of the limitation of the study (e.g. sample size). Further research is needed to prove these findings. In response to the data from all respondents, which revealed a high level of uncertainty regarding a possible career as a successful professional musician, a planned follow-up study will investigate which professions graduates of the music pre-college programme choose.

New perspectives could be gained by expanding the sample to get more reliable data about possible group differences such as gender, instrumental groups, or specific variables of the socio-economic background and resources of the families (e.g. income and parents' education). A scientific comparative cultural approach would also be of interest, especially with regard to the conference proceedings. The question of possible differences between talented young musicians from Germany and China in terms of the subjective stress perception of school and musical requirements would be a worthwhile avenue of research into the education structures of these countries. Likewise, the question of family expectations and support strategies would be a fruitful topic for comparative, cross-cultural study.

Regarding further promotion perspectives of junior music students, the present study offers two basic recommendations. First, optimising the cooperation agreements between the educational institutions, which has already been introduced at a few insti-

tutions in Germany. In this case, optimisation means early and binding agreements between the pre-colleges and the regular schools regarding attendance obligations as well as individual agreements regarding relief measures during periods of potentially high-stress, e.g. exams, preparation for concerts or music competitions. Second, the integration of a compulsory accompanying programme in early study programmes to support the young musicians' development, with special consideration of self-management and health (e.g. stress management). International students, especially from non-Western countries, would benefit from additional guidance to mitigate and overcome language and cultural barriers. Because of the positive cooperation between fellow students reported in this study, this support could be offered in the form of a tandem programme pairing international students with local peers.

In the context of all these group-based considerations, it remains vital to bear in mind that both the stressors and the resources for coping with the multiple requirements are closely linked to the individual life situation of each talented young musicians and their family. Therefore, a profound understanding of the stress situation can only be accomplished by systematically examining each case individually.

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Andreas Heye

studied music therapy at the University of Applied Sciences Heidelberg, Germany, and music psychology at Keele University (UK). In addition to his freelance work as a music therapist, he was a research assistant at the Institute for Research on Musical Ability (IBFM, Institut für Begabungsforschung in der Musik) at the University of Paderborn and completed his PhD thesis on the subject of chronic stress in highly musically gifted adolescents. He is currently a member of the departmental teaching staff at the Department of Art and Music Education and a staff member of the Music Education Research Centre at the University of Bielefeld. His research focuses on the musical development of adolescents, (musical) talent research, and the support of gifted young people.

Training Talents

Policies and Incentives for Music Education in China

Xavier Bouvier

Abstract
This article provides insights into the education system in the People's Republic of China and its extremely vital promotion of musical talent. It shows that music is highly valued as a form of cultural capital and that the acquisition of musical skills is accordingly of great importance in education. A historical discussion of education policy documents how political authorities at different political levels, music institutions, and families all react to constant changes and new tensions in the system of music education.

Keywords
China, educational politics, musical talent development

每个幼儿心里都有一颗美的种子。
There is a seed of beauty in the heart of each young child.[1]

China's present-day music education is a noteworthy part of the huge education system that provides instruction to the most populated country in the world. Following the 1978 *reform and opening-up* policies launched under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, Chinese education and its musical component witnessed decades of fast changes and continuous adaptations. Those adjustments aimed principally to lessen the significant societal tensions and institutional strains that had emerged at various phases of the country's development.

This article describes the Chinese music education system in some detail, with a special focus on the mechanisms devised for training talented young musicians. The successive developments that have arisen in the field since 1978 will be roughly analysed and put into the perspective of the concomitant societal changes.

From 1978 on, music education became one of the paramount "educational desires" (Kipnis 2011) of the Chinese population. The 1978 reopening of the Central Conservatory of Music (CCOM) best illustrates this aspiration, with 17.000 applicants taking entrance tests. Desire for music education was not limited to this specific post-cultural-revolution era: it has remained constant over the following decades.

1 Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (MOE). *Early Learning and Development Guidelines for Children Aged 3 to 6 Year*, September 2012, p. 43.

New or alternative paths to fulfil such music educational desire were provided progressively during the development and opening-up of the country: new conservatories, new music departments inside universities, new private institutions have been created, not to mention the extensive development of opportunities to study abroad.

This widespread educational desire can be seen as an important vector in a complex field where various tensions are at play and where private aspirations within families strongly resonate with the governmental strategies, both giving a high priority to education. In addition to those main drives, deep tensions can be seen between:

– *commonly accessible music education* versus *high profile education for the most talented*
– *private* and/or *public* educational offers
– *national* versus *international* positioning, focus, and objectives of music education
– *specialised* versus *holistic* approaches to talented music education
– *centralisation* in the main cities versus *dissemination* among regions

Many other tensions are worth mentioning, although they will not be analysed in this article:

– *family education* versus *school education*
– *work/homework overload* of children, a huge problem in East Asian countries[2]
– *Chinese culture* versus *international culture*

As for this last point, a heated discussion surfaced recently (2021–2022) about the proportion of *Chinese language* versus *foreign languages* (mainly English) in the school programmes.[3]

In the field of music, a similar tension exists between teaching *Chinese musical cultures* – in all their diversity – versus *international music* (somehow connected to western classical and/or global popular music). Those tensions can be comprehended by looking at the successive governmental policies regulating the system at the national, regional, and institutional levels. Such policies are an essential adjustment vehicle of the Chinese educational system. Sequential regulations are punctuated by five-year plans – the main driving wheel of the system – as well as longer term strategies.[4] The consecutive five-year or middle-long-term plans since the reform and opening-up of 1978 give useful insights into the prevalent issues, themes, and foci of each period in the construction of China's educational system.

The establishment of policies follows a five-step process: conducting surveys, drafting, experimenting, implementing, and expanding. It begins by a stakeholder survey involving a large and diverse sample of people: teachers, parents, researchers, local authorities, and communities. A draft produced by a team of researchers, practitioners, and administrators is sent to schools, teachers, and local authorities to solicit opinions on rel-

2 Recent policies aim at addressing this problem, such as the *Family Education Promotion Law* 家庭教育促进法 entered into force on January 1, 2022. Art. 22 (see also General Office of the CPC Central Committee, 2021): "The parents or other guardians of minors shall reasonably arrange the minors' time for study, rest, entertainment, and exercise; avoiding increasing the minors' study burden and preventing minors from becoming addicted to the internet."

3 Several proposals have been made to remove English as a core subject in compulsory education (see Liu, 2021).

4 Such as the National plan for medium and long-term education reform and development (MOE, 2010a).

evance and feasibility of the policy. A pilot implementation, limited to selected regions or institutions, provides feedback and allows for further amendments to the policy.[5] At each phase, from survey to implementation, the national, regional, and institutional bodies are deeply involved. At all levels, structures and individual members of the Communist Party of China play a leading role.

After these consultation, drafting, and experimentation phases, the policies are issued by the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and implemented in a top-down movement, beginning with the Ministry of Education (MOE), then by local authorities, and finally by each specific educational institution – namely, in the field of music: public schools, music schools, conservatories, and music departments inside universities or normal universities.

Description of Chinese educational system in music

Basic education in China includes pre-school education (usually three years), primary education (six years, usually starting at the age of six), and six years of secondary education divided in Junior (初中, *chūzhōng*) and Senior (高中, *gāozhōng*) secondary education.

At all stages, special programmes for gifted children in scientific or artistic domains – including talented young musicians – are available under various guises. Early talent is strongly valued, with the risk of over-appreciation of child prodigies – a point brought up not without a touch of humour by Zhang (2014):

> […] for example, some 3-year-old children can recite Three Hundred Tang Poems, 4-year-old children have reached a level equivalent to Grade 1 of primary school, 5-year-old children can recite pi as accurate as the last 1.000 decimals, 6-year-old children have got good skills in copying, and 7-year-old children have reached the Piano amateur level 8. (Zhang, 2014, p. 15, quoted in Dai, 2016, p. 1).[6]

From kindergarten to universities, an offering in music education is partly embedded into, and partly parallel to the general Chinese educational system.[7] Music education is available inside compulsory education, in specialised schools for talented young musicians, in after-school programmes, in private music schools, and through private lessons. As for higher education, music conservatories, along with music departments of univer-

5 To illustrate how wide-ranging those processes are, Reimers & Chung (2016, p. 90) describe the drawing of the 2001 Basic education curriculum reform: the initial survey involved 16.000 students and over 2.000 teachers across nine provinces (regions) in primary and lower secondary schools, as well as 14.000 students and 2.000 teachers across eleven provinces in upper secondary schools. Curricula for grades 1–9 and 10–12 were piloted before being extended nationwide.

6 See Guo (2017): *piano amateur level* is a reference to the examinations organised by the Music Examination Committee of the National Musicians Association (全国音乐家协会音乐考级委员). Alternative grading systems are propounded by the Central Conservatory of Music and by the Shanghai Conservatory of Music.

7 For an overview of the Chinese education system, see Jin (2017).

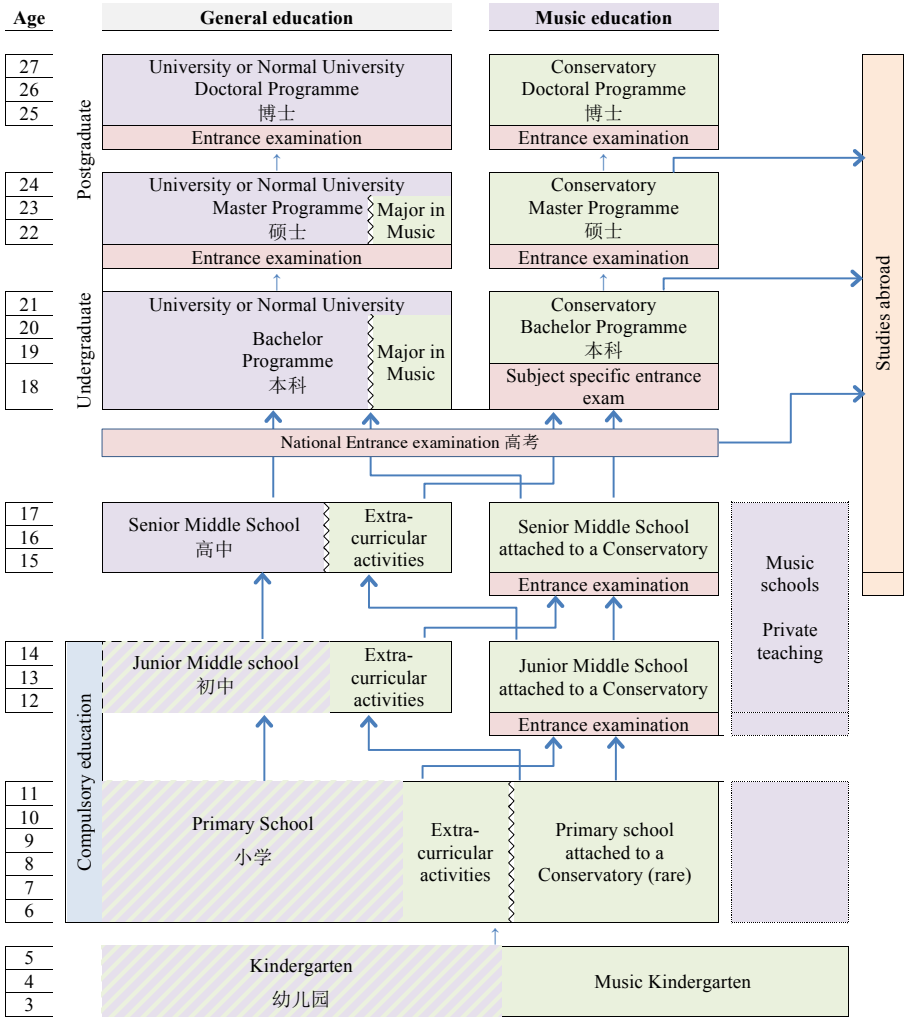

Figure 1: Chinese system of music education

sities and normal universities, offer graduate and postgraduate courses. Figure 1 gives an overview of the embedding of music education in the general educational system in China.

Early childhood education

Before compulsory education begins at age six, three stages of early childhood education are available: nurseries for 0–3 years old, kindergartens for 3–6 years old, and "pre-school classes" attached to primary schools for 5–6 years old.[8] Music and, additionally, dancing movements play an important role in early childhood programmes. According to governmental guidelines, those activities aim at "cultivating children to have a beautiful and kind heart, know how to cherish beautiful things, and be able to express and create beauty in their own way, so that children can live happily and grow up healthily" (MOE, 2012; State Council of PRC, 2015). The use of music for the development of general competences is underlined, and teachers are asked to "encourage young children to discover and experience the regularities of different patterns, experience spatial position and motion, enjoy listening to the music by the mean of exposing young children to appropriate musical works". Emphasis is put on "spontaneous expression and creation", developed though "encouraging children to observe and experience, by providing them with diverse materials", including selected musical works. The importance given in China to music education at those early years has strong historical and cultural roots[9], while being also fairly influenced by western early-childhood educational concepts.

To achieve the goals of a successful pre-school education, teachers must be appropriately trained. The State Council of the PRC (2010) emphasises the necessity of good training for preschool teachers.[10] The music curriculum of the teacher's training institutions[11] offers three related courses: "Music", "Musical Instrumental playing method", and "Basic course in playing and singing", amounting to 10.8% of the curriculum (Dai, 2016). As in many segments of the Chinese system of education, a pressure toward achievement in academic branches threatens the presence of artistic activities.

Kindergarten and preschool take various forms. Public kindergartens – governa ment-built or self-funded private enterprises – are supervised by the local education departments. Because they recruit only a limited number of children each year, they are supplemented by private institutions. Among them, high-key kindergartens frequently hire foreigners to provide an early bilingual environment for their students. Digital online/offline teaching is abundantly used and implemented at a high technical level.

8 For an examination of the policies in the field, see Zhu (2009).

9 For a developed reflection on borrowing in Chinese educational policies, see Tan (2016); on the history of ancient Chinese education, see Zhu (2015); on ancient Chinese music education, see Xiu (2011).

10 See also the relevant sections of the *Education Law of the People's Republic of China* (MOE, 1995) and the *National Medium and Long-term Programme for Education Reform (2010–2020)*.

11 Namely the departments and colleges of preschool education and special education in universities and normal universities.

Some kindergartens have a specific focus on music, such as the Shanghai Music Kindergarten (上海市音乐幼儿园). A few are attached to high profile higher music education institutions such as the Art Kindergarten Affiliated to the China Conservatory of Music (中国音乐学院附属艺术幼儿园), founded in 1993, which welcomes young musicians aged two to six.

Primary and secondary education

Compulsory education in China includes six years of primary school and three years of junior secondary school. At both levels, considerable effort is put into the acquisition of basic competences: 60% of the instruction time is dedicated to Chinese language and mathematics. Artistic activities and music education have been present in the curriculum from the very beginning of modern schools, in the last decades of the 19th century. This has been expanded to 10–11% in the 2022 compulsory curriculum (MOE, 2022, p. 9). Numerous schools offer extra-curricular activities, including music practice. This extracurricular offering is extended by regional public facilities such as Children's palaces (少年宫, *shàonián gōng*), private music schools, and private teachers.

At the level of junior secondary school, a dual system appears, split between secondary schools and secondary vocational schools (职业学校, *gōngyè xuéxiào*, literally: professional schools), the latter welcoming around 40% of all secondary education students.[12] Some professional schools are oriented toward music, especially in the domain of modern, popular music, such as the Shanghai Vocational School of Modern Music (上海市现代音乐职业学校).

While general primary schools and junior middle schools frequently offer a range of possibilities for their pupils to practice music, those possibilities are reduced in general senior middle schools. Moreover, the demanding programmes of general education at this level leave little time for extraneous study alongside the curriculum. Those who are not enrolled in the special programmes offered by the specialised middle schools struggle to maintain a musical activity.

School choice and locality

State schools in China are categorised into two types: regular schools and key schools.[13] The latter are a major target of parental choice because of the high transition rate of their students to the next level of schooling.[14] Key schools have priority in assignment of the best teachers and higher funds per students. Such key schools are to be found at all levels,

12 Statistical report on China's vocational education in 2018 (MOE, June 5, 2019).

13 The Chinese terminology (重点学校) conveys the double idea of "top quality schools" and "schools having a specialised focus".

14 *Suggestions on Running Some Key Middle Schools and Regular Schools* by the Ministry of Education from 1953 (quoted in Wu, 2014, p. 22).

from key kindergartens to key universities.[15] Key institutions are further categorised by their level of administration: district or county-level key schools, municipal, provincial, and national key schools. Schools at higher administrative levels enjoy the best reputation.

To give an example, the middle school affiliated to the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing (中央音乐学院下称附中) is a state-level key specialised middle school (国家级重点中等专业学校) established in 1957 directly under the MOE. It is one of many residential secondary schools in which specially selected students can receive a full general education while being trained in music performance, theory, and solfège. Some of those institutions affiliated to Conservatories are active from the primary level on, giving appropriate general and specific music training to gifted students from about age nine.

The entrance to junior and senior middle schools exemplifies the tensions between general accessibility of education versus access to the best institutions. Prior to 1986, the admission to key junior schools was determined by the entrance examination for junior middle schools (初中入学考试). To mitigate the strong filtering effect of this examination, the 1986 Compulsory Education Law of the PRC required all students in the compulsory education sector to be enrolled in their neighbourhood schools, curbing the possibility for the parents to choose a better, more remote, school. More recently, "model middle schools" (示范性普通高中, also translated as "demonstration middle schools") – including institutions specialised in music – reinstalled specific entrance exams, alleviating the effect of the 1986 regulation.

Senior middle schools

A vast majority of young adults continue their studies after compulsory education: the gross enrolment rate at the upper secondary level was 88.8% in 2018 (MOE, 2019).

From 1995, emphasis on holistic education was stepped up in senior middle schools (see State Education Commission of the PRC, 1995). "Model senior middle schools" were set up with the double mission of facilitating talent cultivation and serving as model institutions to promote the quality of middle school education using such holistic principles. In 2015, an efficient new encouragement policy was put in place, including the appraisal of artistic quality in the references of senior middle school and university entrance examinations. Three or more bonus points in senior middle school entrance examination were given to the students who passed Level 9 tests of artistic grading (MOE, 2015).[16]

Teenagers interested in pursuing a specialised education in music tend to converge at senior middle schools attached to conservatories. The choice of specialised elementary or secondary school may imply a significant change of domicile: children and teenagers leave their families to stay in residential schools, often situated hundreds of kilometres

15 Since the mid-1990s, key schools have obtained different denominations: "demonstration schools" (示范学校) for senior middle schools and "converted schools" (转制学校) for junior middle schools.

16 According to interviewees of the Swiss-Sino Musical Talent Project, such appraisal of artistic competences existed before this formalisation.

away from their place of origin. Alternatively, one of the parents, or the whole family, will accompany the child to their new place of residence.

Higher music education

The conservatories of music are highly respected institutions for the training of professional musicians, and for studying academic domains related to music, such as musicology, music theory, or music aesthetics. They offer a complete study programme, up to the PhD. Initially limited to the domains of musicology and music composition, doctoral studies are now also available in music education and instrumental music. Music departments inside universities complement this offering and have gained a strong reputation. Music departments inside normal universities display a high level of excellence in educating future music teachers.

Private schools

Private schools are available at all levels from preschool to postgraduate. Based on the source of funding, schools in China are officially classified into two major types: state schools, and *mínbàn* schools (民办, literally: "people-run" schools), the latter being further subdivided into two types, one claiming not to make a profit, the other expecting to have a reasonable return on investment. From 2010 on, policies have strongly favoured the development of this private offering (see State Council of the PRC, 2015; MOE, 2010b, section 43). At the higher education level, most private universities are run by, or attached to, an overseas institution, such as the Tianjin Juilliard School attached to its renowned eponymous mother institution in New York.

Extra-curricular activities

Wu Xiaoxin's informative book *School Choice in China: A Different Tale?* convincingly identifies a "rush for cultural capital" – a reference to the well-known concept of Bourdieu, where parents tend to send their child(ren) to extracurricular classes beyond what the rest of their classmates receive in the standard classroom experience: "Some engaged in these activities as early as the kindergarten period, learning mostly English, since these parents believed that the earlier one learns a language, the easier it is to acquire it" (Wu, 2014, p. 43).

> This rush is notable in domains such as music, where a strong specialised ability is the indispensable condition to access the best schools:
> The development of special talent students is also closely related to extracurricular classes. It is almost impossible to become a [special talent student] without outside help. The heavy dependence on extracurricular classes also implies a substantial financial investment in develo-

> ping a particular talent, especially if that talent is playing a musical instrument such as piano or violin. The cost of piano lessons is usually higher than lessons for English or mathematics (Wu, 2014, p. 93).

According to Wu, such private tutoring is now becoming available for children at an ever-younger age: age three or less.

After-school tutoring is an important aspect of middle schools, and the artistic level attained by extra-curricular activities is substantial. We attended in 2019 to a performance of dance and music ensembles at the middle school attached to Beijing University, a very impressive demonstration by all standards.

The Tsinghua University in Beijing, another leading institution of tertiary education, has an efficient system of attached schools, covering all levels from elementary to senior secondary, including an international school targeting foreign students. The schools have many art clubs such as a Chinese music orchestra, a choir, and painting and calligraphy clubs. The senior secondary school enrols students with artistic talent every year. The linkup design between this secondary school and the Tsinghua University offers students professional opportunities to study art as an extra-curricular activity, and to enter related art academies, such as the Academy of Arts and Design and the College of Architecture at Tsinghua University.

An overview of policies related to talent education

Talent detection and development was a constant priority of historical Imperial China, and even more so during the Republican Era. For centuries, talented individuals were recruited to serve the country, and this instrumentalisation took on a specific ideological colour upon the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, where the mission of education was defined as "to upgrade people's intellectual level and cultivate talents for national construction, to eliminate feudalist, comprador, fascist ideology, and develop the ideology of serving the people" (Common program of the Chinese People's Political conference [中国人民政治协商会议共同纲领], 1949, quoted by Reimers & Chung, 2016, p. 82).

Witnessing this period, the following mission statement for the conservatories was issued by the MOE in 1953, displaying an intriguing mix of ideological and curricular-architectural considerations:

> Cultivate the musical talents for the country, following the Marxist and Leninist theories, for an overall artistic achievement and good professional competences, and fully serve the people. Reduce the number of classes, reinforce the basis in music theory and sight-reading, piano, history of music, teaching of literary and artistic thoughts, and ameliorate progressively the admission criteria (Ding, 1987).

Have any such considerations from this era retained their relevance today – notably the idea that one's political identity should serve as a criterion for screening talent? After

the cultural revolution, from 1977 on, a strong shift in orientation, from ideological to manpower building for economic development, became apparent. Deng Xiaoping directed the country "to train talent, and to train hundreds of millions of quality labour force suitable for modernization construction and millions of specialized talents for all walks of life" (Before and after promulgation of the CPPCC's decision on education structural reform by Qili Hu, 2008, quoted by Reimers & Chung, 2016, p. 84).

This period saw the first special programmes for talent, established in 1978 at the University of Science and Technology for gifted adolescents aged 11 to 16, a programme specially endorsed by Deng Xiaoping. A research team on talented education was established at the Institute of Psychology of the Chinese Academy of Science. The 1985 National Conference on Education further recognised the importance of special education in the form of programmes for both gifted children and slow learners. Gifted children were allowed to skip grades.

From the late 1990s until today, in parallel to a constant preoccupation with economic growth, social harmony became another priority in a context of cultural diversification resulting from reform and opening up to the world. Education was to be oriented toward "modernization, the world, and the future".[17] A holistic approach to education became prominent, with soft skills such as "learn to be" and "learn to learn" increasingly present in the policies. "Quality education" became a catchword, as well as a form of advocacy for shifting from examination-oriented education toward quality-oriented education. Ethics and values considerations began progressively to take an important role.

In September 2015, during the elaboration of the 13th five-year plan, the State Council of the PRC issued an opinion paper on improving and strengthening art education at school, a wide-ranging reflection attesting to the governmental concerns and demands toward teaching institutions. The paper begins with a stern assessment of the situation: "[…] importance is put on exams at the expense of quality education, on a few pupils at the expense of many, on competition at the expense of popularisation, coping, occupancy; art programmes are still being halted" (State Council of the PRC, 2015).[18]

The lack of well-trained teachers is also emphasised. One section is dedicated to innovative art talent training models (创新艺术人才培养模式):

> Professional art schools should focus on meaningful content […] in line with the needs of the industry and the demands of the society, […] strengthen social responsibilities, pursue further the models for cooperative talent education […] insist on the double perfume of ethics and art (State Council of the PRC, 2015, section 9).

Cooperative talent education refers to linkup models between schools at different levels or between schools and the industry. The idea of a harmonious combination of ethics and art, spun into the metaphor of a double perfume, is a reference to a Hu Jintao 2011

17 Deng Xiaoping's inscription at Jingshan School in 1983, quoted by Reimers & Chung (2016, p. 86).

18 In the Chinese source: 重应试轻素养、重少数轻全体、重比赛轻普及，应付、挤占、停上美育课的现象仍然存在. See also the extensive 2018 policy paper on the *Construction of High-Level Undergraduate Education to Improve the Ability of Talent Cultivation* (MOE, 2018).

speech at the 9th National Congress of the Chinese Federation of Literary and Art Circle (Hu, 2011).

Institutions implementing those policies adhere to their general spirit, while emphasising individual aspects according to their respective institutional needs. As an example, the five-year plan (2016–2020) of the Central Conservatory in Beijing (CCOM, 2016) puts emphasis on potential improvements in their recruitment procedure. Those include the early detection of talented young people, using "music competitions, master classes, summer camps, teachers tours and other activities as a platform for the discovery of outstanding talent". To improve the recruitment exams, CCOM plans to "set up a scientific selection mechanism and enrolment management system using talent and professional level as core competences". Perceptibly, the institution aspires to a large degree of independence in dealing with the contents and modality of those entrance exams, striving for "a full autonomy in enrolment, explore enrolment mechanism on multiple criteria with CCOM characteristics". The specificities of artistic talent are emphasised. CCOM insists that the main discipline (such as instrumental performance) remain an important basis for admission, but in an adaptive way. Talented students are to be provided a "green channel", i.e. an easy way to advance their studies.

Enrolment of the most talented individuals is crucial for such institutions of higher education: some have to struggle with the fact that some of the best students from attached middle schools do not enter the conservatory but enrol directly in foreign universities.

Conclusion

The Chinese music education system displays an impressive vitality. Music remains a highly valued field of study, the dream of many families for their children, viewed as desirable acquisition of cultural capital. As we have seen, many tensions are in play inside the system, which displays nevertheless a remarkable power of adaptation and resilience, and the ability to reconcile the diverging concerns and points of view of each actor: families, institutions, local and national government.

The story is not over, and from what is known today of the nascent 14th five-year plan for 2021–2025, the movement of the last five-year plan toward a reappraisal of ethics and moral elements in education will be given a new impulse:

> Cultivation of ethics and morals has been noted as a fundamental task of educational development, underpinning the importance of beliefs, values, and attitudes […] cultivation of ethics and values will be applied as essential criteria for evaluation of school performance (Wang, 2020).

This resurgence of values and attitudes linked, in some discourses, to a return to, or reinvention of, Confucian values, may be symptomatic of persisting tensions between individual and collective demands. However, one must remember that in the Chinese world view, seemingly opposite or contrary forces may, in fact, be complementary.

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Xavier Bouvier

born in Geneva (Switzerland), was awarded a Prix de composition and a Diploma in Music Theory from the Geneva Music Conservatory. He studied mathematics at the Polytechnic University in Lausanne. At the Geneva Music Conservatory, he served successively as Professor for Counterpoint and Analysis, Head of the Library, and from 2001 onward, as Deputy Director. He served as Head of Studies of the 2009 renamed Geneva Haute école de musique (HEM), a school of the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland (HES-SO). Xavier Bouvier has been involved in musicology research projects, focusing mainly around 18th century French music theory and music aesthetics. More recently, he has been running research projects related to trans-cultural issues, primarily in relation to China and India, intercultural dimensions of the musical creative process, trans-cultural music theory, cultural borrowing, cultural cross-understanding, comparative music education and cultural diplomacy.

Development of Music Conservatories in China Since the Beginning of the 21st Century

Yanyi Yang

Abstract

Music conservatories as institutions for training professional musicians have a history of nearly one hundred years in China. Towards the beginning of the 21st century they underwent a considerable transformation, due to new government policies that drastically changed curricula and stipulated a major increase in the number of students accepted for enrolment. This article discusses the implementation of these higher education reforms and how they have tended to affect the music conservatories. Different opinions and perspectives on the reforms, as expressed by conservatory management and personnel, will also be presented.

Keywords

China, music conservatories, institutional development

The first independent music conservatory (not attached to a university) in China was established in 1927. It was based on European models. Over the course of nearly one hundred years, during which China witnessed a great many changes, twelve similar conservatories were founded. Independent music conservatories used to be viewed as "ivory towers" where highly talented musicians were trained. However, they functioned as such under sometimes challenging circumstances. Only after the turbulence of several wars and politically difficult times in the first three quarters of the 20th century did the music conservatories begin to witness a quieter era, which might well be termed their "golden age".

Highly talented young people received top-level training in these facilities and many eventually gained international recognition, among them Tan Dun, Lǜ Siqing, Huang Mengla, and others. At the beginning of the 21st century, music conservatories underwent a crucial change due to general reforms implemented in higher education across China. One major reform policy was to greatly increase the influx of young students. Essentially this gave the nation's conservatories a new face.

Reforms of music conservatories in the 21st century

Under the educational system of the past century, higher education in China was regarded as a realm of exploration and accumulation of profound knowledge, and only a small number of people had the chance to participate in it (Zhai, 2010). In the wake of the economic development following China's opening-up at the end of the last century, reform

policies in higher education were put on the agenda. The government proposed an expansion of opportunities for higher education in 1999. In the public document "Decision of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council on Deepening Education Reform and Promoting Education for All-Round Development", the following was pointed out: "We will actively expand higher education through various ways. By 2010, the enrolment rate should rise from 9% to 15%" (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 1999). Soon afterwards, in the 2001 "The Outline of the Tenth Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of the P.R. China" (National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China), it was stated that the development of education at all levels needed to be accelerated. For higher education, this was envisaged in terms of scale and as a result the scale of higher education expanded rapidly (Zhai, 2010).

According to the proposition of the government, many colleges with specialised single professional domains have been upgraded to the university level with more disciplines and faculties. At the same time, many universities have added more disciplines, including music colleges or music departments. According to Zheng Yinglie (2016), more than 2.000 such music colleges and departments have been founded since then.

In line with this development, the independent music conservatories – a term used in China referring to those conservatories not attached to a university – had to take similar steps. Soon after the colleges and universities had been expanded, the music conservatories began to follow suit. Their numbers of students went up to several times more than before, in some cases even tenfold (Zheng, 2016). Even the Central Conservatory of Music (CCOM), the Shanghai Conservatory of Music (SHCM), and the China Conservatory of Music (CCM) – the so-called "Big Three" – especially known for their training of elite musicians, started to increase enrolment. Before 1978, the average enrolment at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music was 60 undergraduate students per year in total. From 1978 to 1998, this number increased to 80 to 90 students (data according to oral sources at SHCM; these numbers were not formally published). In 2019, the number of students in the school rose to 2.440 (official website information of SHCM), including undergraduates, postgraduate, and doctoral students. The other two schools have similar student numbers. The growth of student numbers evidences the changes in the most direct and obvious way. Below are the most recently recorded numbers from 2023 (figure 1).

	Number of Students and Faculty Members in 2023				
School	Undergraduate Students	Masters Students	Doctoral Students	Total Students	Faculty Members
Central Conservatory of Music	1,474	642	197	2,313	583
Shanghai Conservatory of Music	1,976	777	205	2,958	515
China Conservatory of Music	1,584	493	149	2,226	409

Figure 1: Number of students in 2023 (information from websites of schools mentioned in the table)

Back to the beginning of the 21st Century, the goal of reform in higher education was not only to enrol more students, but also to accommodate an increasingly demanding economy. The rapid economic development in China raised the demands for specialists and for people with multiple skill sets (Zhai, 2010). This meant a need for more practically oriented disciplines in higher education. Up to this point, the independent music conservatories had focused mainly on the realms of musical performance and composition; the reforms, however, challenged these institutions to reconsider their methods and to broaden their educational goals in order to more adequately cope with the increased demands of the economy and society. Not only did they have to react quickly to the much bigger enrolment, but they also needed to establish application-oriented studies, cross-disciplines, and majors, all of which they had never done before.

Debating the orientation to application

Since the beginning of the reform in higher education, there have been debates and discussions among professional scholars and administrators regarding the balance between training highly qualified professional musicians and fostering application-oriented students. Professor Zhou Shibin of the Conservatory of Music of Capital Normal University wrote an article in 2007 to question the reform. Here are some of his critical lines:

> Professional music conservatories should take it as their duty to train high, excellent, and sophisticated talents. Thus, the enrolment scale should be different from other, non-music colleges. If we ignore this, the government should really reconsider the necessity of the existence of independent music conservatories. They can be incorporated instead into comprehensive universities (Zhou, 2007; translation by the author).
> Zhou stressed clearly the importance of some reflection on the ongoing reforms, if only in order to avoid blindly taking action (Zhou, 2007).
> Wang Yanyan comments on the transformation from a different perspective. In her article "On the Development of Professional Music Education in China", she maintains that music conservatories in China are facing challenges they have never had to cope with before (Wang, 2007):
>
> The training of a small group of professional musicians has some shortcomings, such as narrow social vision, limited knowledge, and only high professional skills. There was a time that all musicians could have a job in state-owned ensembles when they graduated from conservatories. With the development of the economy, there are more possibilities for musicians for living, but they have difficulty meeting the needs of our society (Wang, 2007; translation by the author).

According to Wang, broader fields of study would help music students to better fit into society.

There are also calls for a fairer balance between the two standpoints mentioned above. Yi Xin (2004) discusses an understanding for expanding enrolment and establishing new majors and disciplines in music conservatories:

> In recent years, with the development of the market economy, great changes have taken place in the fields of arts […] Traditional professions have been basically saturated. Some emerging industries and professional fields are in urgent need of qualified employees, such as management of culture and politics, music science and technology, music therapy, music editing in all kinds of communication media, and there is an equally urgent need for music teachers in all levels of schools, etc. […] (Yi, 2004; translation by the author).

At the same time, Yi Xin points out that expanding enrolment and adding disciplines and majors should not come at the expense of quality: "Quantity without quality is meaningless" (Yi, 2004). Yi proposes a reflection on the reforms as such.

Although the changes implemented in music conservatories received criticism, they continued to advance anyway. Within a relatively short time, all independent music conservatories became very large schools, including the "Big Three". The following table lists new disciplines and majors offered by the "Big Three" conservatories since 2000:

Figure 2 shows that all three conservatories have set up electronic music and arts management as new study domains. Among them, the Shanghai Conservatory of Music is the most innovative in expanding into new disciplines and majors (since the reform in higher education, the term "discipline" is used very frequently in colleges and universities). Besides the "Big Three", some of the other conservatories have gone even further in terms of changes. For example, the Sichuan Conservatory of Music has developed into a performing arts university, with colleges like Drama School, Dance School, School for Popular Music, and more. Furthermore, the number of students increased to 16.000 (official website information of SCCM, 2021).

The reforms implemented in the 21st century are also reflected in the adjusted curricula of the "Big Three", which are at present quite similar in their structure. The curriculum is divided into categories, such as major core courses, basic courses, general courses, and exercising (there are subtle differences regarding different schools). The credits of every group following a specific set of courses are different. Here is an example taken from the Piano Department of the Central Conservatory of Music:
As shown in figure 3, there are five types of courses. Core courses, basic courses, and artistic exercising for students in performing arts, general courses and military training, etc. are aimed at shaping the student's personality. The optional courses are offered for students to select at their own convenience and interest. Compared with the old-style curricula, which mainly listed required and selected courses, the structure of the curriculum today has more different layers and offers more varied opportunities.

The three major music conservatories have made considerable efforts to develop new curriculums. Among them, the China Conservatory of Music tends to be more liberal in managing students' degrees. Since 2002, time-limits on the duration of study have been implemented at CCM. The study time can be divided into two scalable stages. Undergra-

Schools	Discipline	Major
Shanghai Conservatory of Music	Music	Music
	Music Engineering	Music Design and Production
		Recording Technic
		Music Art and Technology
	Modern Musical Instruments Performance	Electronic Organ
		Classical Guitar
		Accordion
		Jazz Saxophone
		Pop Percussion
		Western Percussion
		Chinese percussion
		Jazz Piano
		Jazz Trumpet
		Jazz Trombone
		Jazz Electric Bass Guitar
		Jazz Guitar
		Organ
	Arts Management	Arts Management
	Digital Media Arts	Digital Media Arts
		Multimedia Design
		Music and Media
	Music Therapy	as major study field attached to Department for Music Education
Central Conservatory of Music	Music AI [artificial intelligence]and Information Technology	Music AI and Information Technology
		Electronic Music
		Music Acoustics and Recording
		Music Therapy
		Voice and Vocal Medicine
	Arts Management	Arts Management
China Conservatory of Music	Arts Management	Arts Management
	Electronic Music	Electronic Music

Figure 2: New disciplines and majors since 2002

Curriculum for Piano Major		
Compulsory Course	Core Courses 32 credits	Piano
		Chamber Music
		Vocal Coach and Piano Accompaniment
		Piano Pedagogy and Teaching Practice
	Basic Courses 36 credits	Western and Chinese Music History
		Introduction of Chinese Folk Music
		History of Piano Art
		Harmony
		Music Form and Analysis
		Polyphony
		Solfège
	General courses 34 credits	Introduction to Art
		English
		P.E.
		Ideological and Moral Cultivation and Legal Basis
		Principles of Marxism
		An Outline of Modern and Contemporary Chinese History
		Introduction to Maoism and Socialist Theoretical System with Chinese Characteristic
	Military training, Current Politics and Others 8 credits	Military Skill Training
		Current Affairs
		Career Development and Employment Guideline for College Students
		Mental Health of College Students
		Artistic Exercitation
	Artistic Exercitation 3credits	
Optional Course	24 credits	

Figure 3: Curriculum for Piano Major at the Central Conservatory of Music

duate students are allowed to take a gap for an internship after either two or four years of study and then go back to school to get their bachelor's degree. The total length of the undergraduate study can be extended up to eight years (Liu, 2017). In recent years, the three conservatories have all reinforced the importance of artistic practice by giving extra credits to students when they have rehearsals and performances. Obviously, all these measures – optimising courses, restructuring curricula, and implementing liberal study policy – are aimed at turning students into all-around musicians, rather than into merely technically adequate performers.

With the increase in the total number of students, a more practice-oriented curriculum needed to be set up. For instance, the Shanghai Conservatory of Music now reserves one week of time for undergraduate students to practice in their major fields of competence each semester. Students can earn extra credits for self-organised performance, community service, teaching experience, and more (Undergraduate Teaching Bulletin of SHCM, 2019). Among graduate students, there is a difference between Master of Arts (MA, non-performing fields) and Master of Fine Arts (MFA, performing fields) students. MA students need 56 hours of exercise during a three-year programme, while MFA students must accrue 224 hours (The Manual of the Administration & Program for Graduate Studies, SHCM, 2017). The expansion of departments and the bigger enrolment in turn requires conservatories to have more possibilities for organising different events for students. Zhang Jing from Wuhan Conservatory uses the institution's experience in music theatre production to highlight practice-orientated programmes as a good way to cultivate all-around students with comprehensive skills and strong abilities for innovation (Zhang, 2015). At the Wuhan Conservatory of Music, concerts with themes like "Modern Music", "Pop Music", "Concert for Youth", and "Nostalgic Concert" are organised by and for students as a way of learning by doing (Zhang, 2015).

Doctoral degree programmes and research

Since the beginning of the 21st century, independent music conservatories have not only expanded horizontally by establishing more study domains but also vertically, by setting up higher level degrees. Now, all of them offer master's degree programmes in performing and non-performing fields (MFA and MA). The Central Conservatory of Music, the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, and the China Conservatory of Music have all set up doctoral degree programmes, Doctor of Philosophy (PHD) and Doctor of Musical Arts (DMA). With this, the "Big Three" position themselves as universities with research capacity.

Professor Jia Daqun, the then director of the Graduate Programme at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, holds a similar outlook.

> Music conservatories in China have become comprehensive music and arts universities. They should not only be at a high level of training musicians, but also at a high level of theoretical studies and research programmes. It is extremely important to recognise this. It is of great

> significance to know how to keep their traditional professional areas and to expand majors and discipline territories. (Jia, 2012; translation by the author).

Among all the developments for becoming a comprehensive music conservatory, the establishment of the "He Luting High Research Institute" at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music in 2016 could be marked as a highlight. As a platform for multiple tasks, it aims to recruit the best experts, scholars, and talent young individuals at home and abroad, and to achieve the highest level. It will first build four centres: a Research Center for Composition and Promotion of Chinese Music, a China Music Performing Arts Research Center, a China Music Theory Research Center, and a Music Intangible Cultural Heritage Research Center, as well as a Compilation Database for Chinese Modern and Contemporary Composers and their works (Shang, 2006).

In 2017, the then dean of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, Lin Zaiyong, expressed his understanding of music conservatories in an interview:

> The quality of music conservatories depends not only on teaching standards and the number of study domains, but also on the degree of integration between disciplines and majors in a more comprehensive sense. Education of this level is in pursuit of the ultimate goal of art. (Wang & Guo, 2017; translation by the author).

The Shanghai Conservatory of Music is not the only institution that has made upgrades; the China Conservatory of Music is even more resolute in pushing innovation. Its current dean, Wang Liguang, declared the China Conservatory of Music to be a research university:

> The China Conservatory of Music has built a high-level research university model by establishing "five academies": our Chinese Music Theory Research Institute serves as a think tank that undertakes major theoretical research, paying attention to important propositions such as history and the future of China's music education system. The National Music School Research Institute focuses on historical inheritance and revival of Chinese traditional culture. The China Vocal Music Art Research Institute is a research platform for studying national vocal music as well as promoting Chinese instrumental music and composition. The Graduate School is an important part of the research and training of young scholars. The College of Education trains music teachers for Chinese society, especially for common people (Wang, 2020; translation by the author).

Compared to the Shanghai and China Conservatories of Music, the Central Conservatory of Music seems to be more cautious in this respect. The current dean Yu Feng has a broad view on what education should aim for. He once stated in an interview with China Central Television:

> What I'm thinking about is a big view on education, not only a major or a discipline. I had the experience of studying abroad and visiting some music conservatories in other countries.

> I think we are lacking in humanities subjects, compared to other countries (Yu, 2016; translation by the author).

The Central Conservatory of Music did not expand its study domains and majors to the same degree as the Shanghai Conservatory of Music did. Regardless of this, it is a pioneer among the independent music conservatories in terms of how it brings music and advanced technology together. A doctoral programme in "Music and AI" was established there in 2019, and the dean himself took the responsibility of acting as doctoral supervisor.

Independent music conservatories have adapted to include more comprehensive education in the past two decades. Doing research is becoming more important as well. This ongoing adjustment is evident in their efforts to align with the changing landscape. However, challenges persist under the new paradigm. In Ministry of Education's research project, *The Future Development of High-Level Music Talent Training in China* (2016) revealed mixed opinions. While most interviewees embraced the new school situation, some expressed strong concerns, emphasising the unique challenges faced by music institutions. Regardless, The Ministry of Education's guidance has led to the equal treatment of independent music conservatories and comprehensive universities. Two selected interviews shed light on these perspectives.

A piano professor, speaking anonymously, highlighted the challenges of aligning with the standardised model of comprehensive universities in terms of class schedules and teaching materials.

> Now, all aspects must adhere to the standards of comprehensive universities, including class schedules and teaching materials. Training professional performers is not one-size-fits-all process. Our success came from personalised, one-on-one teaching. A rigid class timetable isn't suitable for teaching performers; our work intensity varies based on students' needs. Unfortunately, the current school policy limits our enthusiasm for work. (Interview with the author, November 1, 2020. Translation by the author).

An administrative staff member at a prestigious music conservatory, also requesting anonymity, pointed out unequal budget allocation compared to universities.

> The Ministry of Education considers us a university when budgets are allocated. Music conservatories have unique needs and spending methods. In comparison to universities, we are smaller, making it challenging to compete in budget allocation based on student numbers. Additionally, we lack a scientific background for securing research funds. Independent funding and management are crucial for our sustainability. (Interview with the author, June 20, 2022. Translation by the author).

These perspectives raise concerns about the rationality of current school management practices. While immediate solutions to these issues are challenging, newly founded conservatories may consider establishing a different foundation and structure from the outset.

The above opinions show a questioning of the rationality of running schools in this manner. There is no quick solution to these problems for existing institutions. However, for newly founded conservatories it might be possible to establish different foundations and structures from the beginning.

Zhejiang Conservatory of Music took on the structure of a research university from its opening in 2016. There are twelve faculties, including the School of Dance, the Department of Drama, the Department of Music Engineering, the School of Humanities and Social Sciences (Marxist College), and an affiliated music school of continuing education colleges, entrepreneurship colleges, international education colleges, and so on. There are four scientific research platforms: the Institute of Higher Music Education, the Institute of Drama, the Institute of Musicology, and the Institute of Advanced Arts and Culture Management. In June 2021, the number of students was 2.751, of which 2.214 were undergraduate students and 537 graduate students (official website of ZCOM). The number of teaching staff is around 440. With this volume and structure, it made "new face" from the first day.

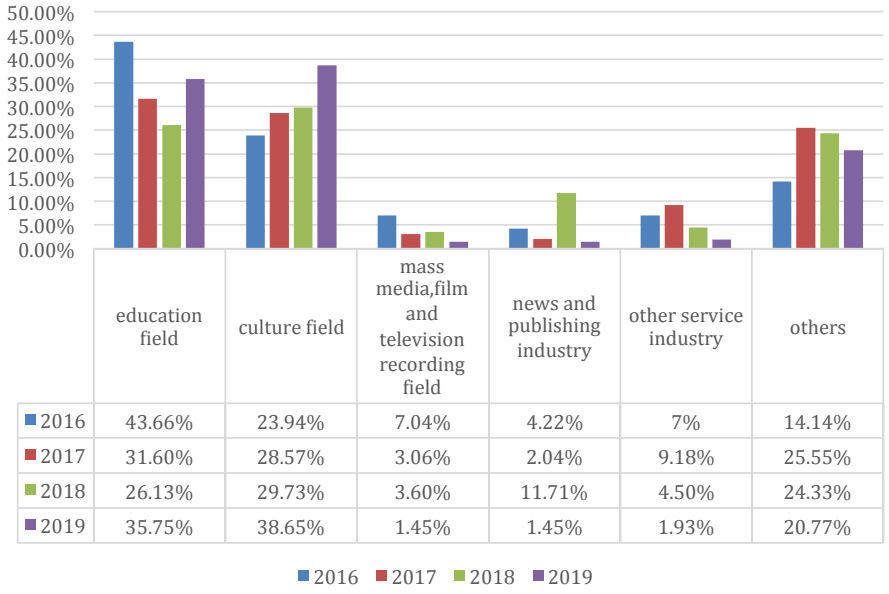
Employment situation of former students

As stated above, the purpose of the reforms was to provide more young people with access to higher education and to prepare them to work according to the needs of their society upon graduating. The Ministry of Education asks all the universities and colleges to report on the employment situation of the fresh graduates every year. For the government, it is important to collect these data in order to adjust their policies for higher education if necessary. Data are generally collected from June to November every year. The report usually includes several parts, concerning for example the employment situation of the graduates in general, the employment situation of graduates of different faculties and degrees, the situation of self-employment, and salary levels of the graduates. This article will discuss the employment situation of the fresh graduates only in a general manner, to provide an overview.

Figures 4, 5, and 6 show the employment situation of all degree-earning students of the "Big Three" from 2016 to 2019 (see Reports on the Employment quality in the references).

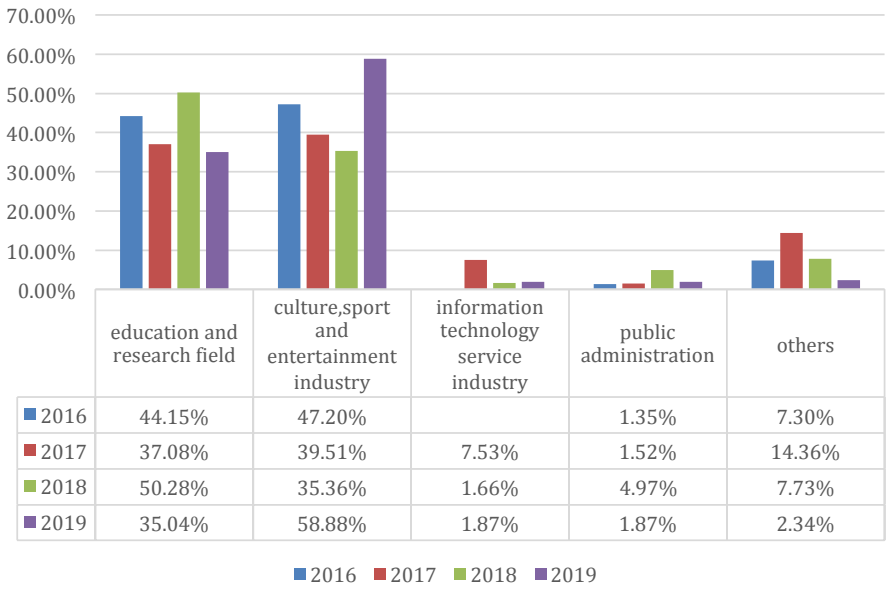
It is notable that in 2016, the field of education attracted the most students. In the following years, the percentage for education went down, and the category "others" climbed instead. It seems that the work interests of students have become broader.

Figure 5 indicates that despite a strong interest in the field of education, a higher percentage of students from the Central Conservatory of Music tended to gain employment in the culture and entertainment industry than did the students from the Shanghai Conservatory of Music shown in figure 4. As the category "culture, sport and entertainment industry" includes employment as a performer, graduate students from the Central Conservatory of Music appear more likely to find jobs in a performing field compared to students from the Shanghai Conservatory of Music.



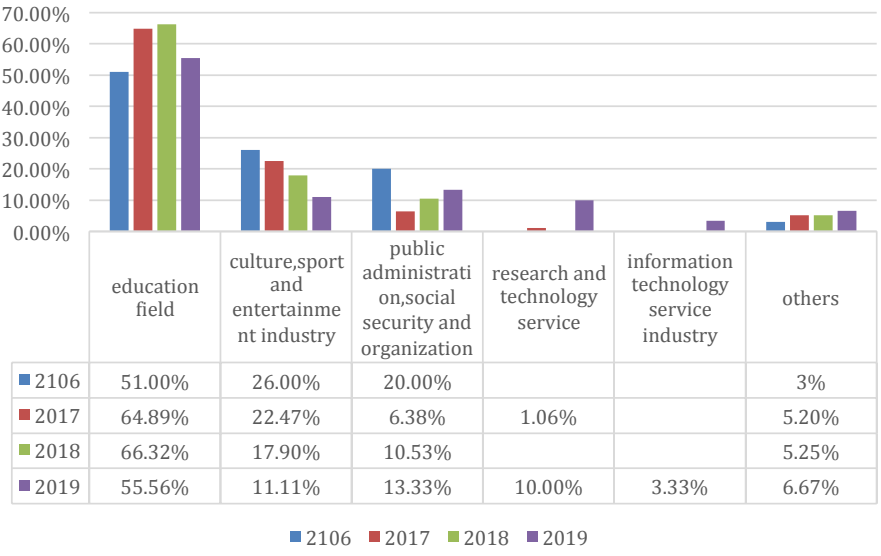
	education field	culture field	mass media,film and television recording field	news and publishing industry	other service industry	others
2016	43.66%	23.94%	7.04%	4.22%	7%	14.14%
2017	31.60%	28.57%	3.06%	2.04%	9.18%	25.55%
2018	26.13%	29.73%	3.60%	11.71%	4.50%	24.33%
2019	35.75%	38.65%	1.45%	1.45%	1.93%	20.77%

Figure 4: Employment situation of 2016 to 2019 graduates of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music



	education and research field	culture,sport and entertainment industry	information technology service industry	public administration	others
2016	44.15%	47.20%		1.35%	7.30%
2017	37.08%	39.51%	7.53%	1.52%	14.36%
2018	50.28%	35.36%	1.66%	4.97%	7.73%
2019	35.04%	58.88%	1.87%	1.87%	2.34%

Figure 5: Employment situation of 2016–2019 graduates of the Central Conservatory of Music



	education field	culture,sport and entertainment industry	public administration,social security and organization	research and technology service	information technology service industry	others
2106	51.00%	26.00%	20.00%			3%
2017	64.89%	22.47%	6.38%	1.06%		5.20%
2018	66.32%	17.90%	10.53%			5.25%
2019	55.56%	11.11%	13.33%	10.00%	3.33%	6.67%

Figure 6: Employment situation of 2016–2019 graduates of the China Conservatory of Music

Figure 6 shows the situation of the China Conservatory of Music. The highest percentage of 2016 to 2019 graduates work in the field of education is the highest; the lowest is in the culture and entertainment industry. The percentage in the "others" category is also very low. In 2016, 20% of graduates pursued jobs in the areas of public administration and social security and organisation, but the number dipped the following year and then rose slightly again.

The above three charts indicate that within four years, the employment of graduating students had spread into different professional areas. Education is the field to which the majority of music graduates migrated. This result is quite stable over the four years in question, and can likely be explained by the increasing demand for music education across broad segments of Chinese society, from small children to elderly people. Of students from the China Conservatory of Music, the highest percentage found employment in the field of education. Among students from the Central Conservatory of Music, the highest percentage of jobs was in the culture and entertainment industry. Students from the Shanghai Conservatory of Music were more balanced across all the domains of work than the other two conservatories. Furthermore, mass media, information technology, and public administration have also become choices for conservatory students. It bears mentioning that when graduates complete the survey, they are only allowed to choose one field. Thus, the collection of data still lacks precision. However, the range and variety of employment and its fluctuations over time are clearly evident.

Before the start of the 21st century, independent music conservatories hardly imagined their students would find work in any fields other than music performance. The

old principle "You will do what you were majoring at" has been discarded. Seemingly, new, cross-discipline, and application-oriented curricula are proving to be successful. This situation can be understood as a direct result of the college reforms.

Conclusion

Since the beginning of the 21st century, and within a timespan of merely twenty years, independent music conservatories in China have gone through an enormous transformation. The positive takeaway is that many more young people now have the chance to study at the formerly fairly exclusive music conservatories. There have always been worries that the reforms would cause lower quality, but it may be too early to pass judgment on this. While conventional ways of training musicians to a high standard are still in place, the development of new and interdisciplinary fields of study continues, at an ever-accelerating pace. In general, all independent music conservatories have found their own ways to adapt to the rapidly changing social, economic, and technological conditions. Full-fledged music universities are well underway.

Despite the great changes caused by the reforms, conventional ways of training talented young musicians persist, especially at the Shanghai and the Central Conservatories of Music. During the last few years, many young musicians have won significant prizes in prestigious international competitions: Liu Yongqiu from the Shanghai Conservatory of Music won the second prize at the 49th International Jeunesses Musicales Competition Belgrade in 2019; Ke Shu won the Grand Prix for composition in the 5th Madrid International Music Competition in 2020; French horn player Yun Zeng from the Central Conservatory of Music won the first prize of the brass group at the International Tchaikovsky Competition in 2019; Shuchen Liu from the Central Conservatory of Music won the second prize (first prize remained vacant) for viola at the International Anton Rubinstein Competition in 2021.

The reforms in higher education with their expanded enrolment, new faculties and disciplines, and adjusted curricula have brought more possibilities for music students. But determining just how to define and develop students' talents and how to provide different pathways for them still poses a major administrative challenge. Further restructuring and improvement of the curriculum might be necessary. The above-mentioned research project, *The Future Development of High-Level Music Talent Training in China* (China Ministry of Education, 2016) investigated the situation of disciplines, major settings, teaching, and research achievement in independent conservatories. Suggestions for further development are expected to be made by scholars and experts. Looking to the future, a new model of music conservatory is emerging. Evaluation of such a model is difficult at this relatively early stage, but it seems highly likely that more structured and balanced curricula will benefit music students.

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Yanyi Yang
studied music education both in China and in Germany. She is a professor at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, teaching courses in the fields of music education, music psychology, and music therapy, which are also her main areas of research. From 2007 to 2010, Yang led a major project about school music education funded by the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission. She is currently a key member of the research group of the Chinese National Ministry of Education. Dr Yang regularly participates in national and international conferences and publishes academic papers in China and abroad.

The Shanghai Conservatory of Music and the Reinforcement of Western Concepts

An Analysis of Verbal and Nonverbal Discourses About Talent

Eugénie Grenier Borel

Abstract

The Shanghai Conservatory of Music (SHCM) seeks to produce, at the end of a highly competitive training programme, international performers of "classical music" – that is, musicians talented enough to perform in international competitions. Accordingly, the SHCM aims to be a global institution, doing its utmost to "globalise" its students so that they are perfectly in step with the universally accepted standards of such competitions. Yet there are also features which are particular to the SHCM – and more generally to the "Chinese model" of conservatories. What I will attempt to show here is that some of these features are accentuations of standard features often found in European conservatoires of "classical music" and its teaching. This is particularly the case for the concepts that have long defined "classical music". Notions such as that of "musical work" – that is, notions belonging to a particular taxonomy within historically constructed musical practices in the West – play an important role in the discourse of my Chinese interlocutors. Moreover, these conceptual accentuations, as manifested by the interviewees, also seem to be reflected in the pedagogical organisation of the SHCM. They are part of a pedagogical process that emphasises much more explicitly than in the West the mastery of a know-how. These accentuations implicitly reveal what is valued in the training of performing musicians and point to the present-day differences in the perception of talent in China and Switzerland.

Comparative analysis can be found at two levels in this article: the first is a consideration of the different and common meanings derived from discourses on talent from an ethnomusicological perspective. The second level of analysis focuses on the transposition of the pedagogical model of conservatories from Europe to China, where, under the influence of intertwined social, political, and economic factors, it experienced a development around its own specific set of values. A comparison of the two systems thus provides an opportunity to better understand the correlation between certain factors and values. This research is based on observations made during several stays at the SHCM, together with many years of pedagogical experience in Switzerland, as well as on an analysis of the verbal and non-verbal discourses of students, teachers, and officials of the institution.

Keywords

musical talent, institutionalisation of classical music, Western and Chinese conservatories, anthropology of music

Introduction

It is a considerable challenge to analyse the perception and evaluation of the notion of talent in the globalised context of "classical music". This notion exists and evolves in the discourse and takes a substantial proportion of its meaning through the institutional methods established to evaluate musicians' talent. Its apprehension through a historiographical approach would make it possible to highlight how its perception and evaluation have been shaped in Europe, particularly since the 18th century, and the inseparable nature of its link with other concepts associated with "classical music", such as the central concept of "Werktreue",[1] the German term for a faithful interpretation of a musical work. Indeed, in our heuristic approach, without the prism of this concept, the understanding of the perception of musical talent in certain cultural contexts would lack a precious element. It is from this powerful concept that "the ideals related to notation, interpretation and reception are derived" (Goehr, 1992, p. 243). The ideal of interpretation – and thus the criteria of "talent" in the field of interpretation – are intimately linked to the way in which a (usually canonical) musical work is understood, more so because this understanding goes hand in hand with a particular decorum, a carefully codified staging in a specific space.

The interdependence of such aesthetic categories should be considered when analysing discourses on musical talent in the institution of conservatories, places of production of performances, and references where musical practices are perpetuated over generations. Without observing the institutionalisation of the practice of "classical music" in which these discourses take place, we would lose, as anthropologist Ingrid Le Gargasson points out, "a particularly fruitful entry for studying the dynamics at work in the constitution and definition of musical knowledge" (2020), of which aesthetic ideals are a part, as is the evolution, qualification, and appreciation of this knowledge within the community of musicians.

However, even though these heuristic "entries" relating to the notion of talent may be relevant to the topic in question, they must remain in the background in this present study. What we attempt to do in this volume, primarily, is to address the topic of talent as it is perceived and valued in our contemporary world and with a comparative perspective between two different geographical spheres: China and Switzerland.

Comparisons and dichotomies

The first stage of this research consisted of measuring the subjectivity of the discourse on talent through common meanings – those "automatic inferences that derive from our unconscious frameworks" (Lakoff, 2015, p. 12) – as they correspond to standard attri-

1 The philosopher Lydia Goehr (1992, pp. 243–287) explains in her essay "The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works" that the ideal of "Werktreue" has spread to all aspects of musical practice since 1800 with total regulatory force. The central conception of a musical work as a self-sufficient unit, expressive in its synthesised form and in its capacity to embrace the idea of a genius, is at the origin of the general submission of all associated concepts. Concepts and ideals related to notation, interpretation, and reception have acquired their meaning as subsidiary concepts to those of a work.

butions of talent with the insights provided by ethnomusicology. The plurality of these discourses conveyed in the world of conservatoires is therefore the starting point for the first focus. The second stage consisted of a comparative analysis – an essential tool in the anthropological approach – between conservatoires in two different geographical areas. The comparative approach allows us to better understand the differences that can exist between two different situations and to examine the multiple social, political, and economic factors that generate and transform the values produced in different places.

The choice of China and Switzerland as the basis for a comparison between discourses is justified in several respects. It succinctly captures the core elements of the debate with, on the one hand, China – its rise, and its market considered to be the foremost in the world, "the only remaining growth market" (Thibodeaux & Huang, 2016) in terms of consumption of this music – and, on the other hand, Switzerland, located on the continent where "classical music" first appeared and developed. In the "classical music" milieu, there is a growing confrontation, in terms of aesthetic practices and conceptions, between "Chinese" and "European" points of view, the latter represented here through the voices of Swiss or French musicians (many French musicians study at the conservatories of the Suisse Romande, the French speaking part of Switzerland). This can also be found in literature such as Etienne Barilier's *Piano Chinois*, in which two music critics argue about the talent (or lack thereof) of a Chinese pianist, deploying a range of culturalist arguments. The geographical choice thus reflects the two poles within the debates, where essentialist and universalist visions confront each other more than ever.

It goes without saying that the juxtaposition between China and the West, which is still too often assumed or reproduced in our reflections on China (Barabantseva, 2011, p. 184), is no longer truly a dichotomy in the context of a heuristic approach to differences or similarities in relation to a cultural object shared by the two poles. Moreover, a reflection on the notion of talent cannot be abstracted from an art world as defined, delimited, and globalised as that of "classical music". The comparative approach towards the notion of talent highlights the need for new ways of framing it, since it is developing in a globalised network but evolving in very different contexts.[2] For musicians in the world of "classical music", references from different types of media – teachers, guest performers, recordings, musical instruments – are what impact their ways of conceiving the practice of their art, rather than a "culture" that would inevitably "root" them in worlds that ignore each other.

The article is divided into three parts, and moves from general observations to more specific ones, leading to the proposal of a critical look at educational practices and their political choices when it comes to promoting "talent". The first part presents three model responses to the question of how to define talent, drawn from the common-sense discourses mentioned above. The second part seeks to go beyond these ready-made and widespread answers by analysing observations from my ethnographic research in both China and Switzerland. The central point of this second part is that many characteristics specific to the world of conservatories can be found at both the Shanghai Conservatory

2 The theoretical contribution of *Waves and Form*, by Basile Zimmerman (2015), examines the question of the circulation of cultural objects through phenomena of creation, dissipation, and conservation of forms. This theory is particularly suitable for objects related to music.

of Music and in Geneva but are sometimes amplified within the Chinese musical institution. The final section of the paper discusses an interview on the topic of the musician's relationship to the score. The notions expressed therein are not only frequently found in the discourses of my Chinese interlocutors, but also lead me to postulate a deeper difference in the conception of talent between the two geographical spaces.

My approach

My ethnographic research at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music (henceforth SHCM) between 2017 and 2018 aimed to understand how a process of globalisation in the field of "classical music" interpretation operates at a Chinese musical institution, which, in this case, happens to be the first conservatory established in China in 1927. I looked at discourses, representations, and clichés, knowing that this globalisation refers to a cultural object which, however international it may have become, has its origins in Europe. This process has been particularly interesting to examine in the Chinese context, where a form of globalisation is encouraged by an autocratic system that promotes nationalism, in particular through the training of "champions" who can represent the country on the international scene. My ethnographic investigation focused on a microcosm of some twenty actors on the SHCM side: professionals and students practicing "classical music"; and an equivalent number on the Swiss side: students from the Geneva and Neuchâtel Haute École de Musique.

It is through this analysis of discourses as well as field observations that my work can illustrate similarities and differences between the Chinese and Swiss systems in the field of "classical music" and its teaching. This approach allowed me to have a distance of observation from which I was able to understand conceptions and mechanisms operating in very different situations, one in China and the other in the West. Beyond the stereotypes of each of the systems identifiable in the discourses, I was able to reconstruct attitudes and practices: to identify, more generally, a part of what is, for the protagonists, obvious and implicit. This perspective, which is based, among other things, on the contrast established by my informants between two entities posed as mutually irreducible – China and the West – has helped me to better identify not only the categories behind the functioning of an institution such as the SHCM, but also those underlying that of a Swiss Conservatory of Music: the notions, practices, and values that constitute my own professional universe, being myself a piano teacher in one of the two Geneva Conservatories.

Talent Discourses

Before getting to the heart of the matter, a few words should be said about, on the one hand, the word "talent" and its use in the context of conservatories and, on the other hand, the criteria according to which we use this word.

In its most common sense, "talent" is synonymous with "ability", "aptitude", and, by extension, "success". However, when applied to musicians, the term implies a stronger

quality: an expression such as the "promotion of young talent" through specific programmes for the training of "talented" musicians refers, in concrete terms, to students who are particularly "gifted", or even exceptionally "gifted".[3] This ambivalence between gift and talent is reflected in the historical evolution of the use of the word. "Talent" is first a unit of weight and a form of money, the so-called "gold talent". However, as early as the 17th century, the word was used to designate an ability, a wealth, or a skill, indirectly implying a sense of success, whether material or not. This is an interesting aspect to emphasise for this study because, this notion is found in the corresponding Chinese term *cái* (才), if we take into consideration its various radicals.[4] *Cái* (才), in fact, can have two of them: on the one hand *cái* (材), having the connotation of "material", and *cái* (财) which means "wealth".[5] The ambiguity between the different meanings of the word would therefore be common to both linguistic spheres, which could mean that the notion of "talent" would have a shared dimension.

As for the criteria that would incite us to designate a "talented" musician, I will introduce my point with a musical example: the performance of Wu Younan, eleven years old, winner of his category at the 1st Sino-Swiss International Contemporary Competition for Young Pianists, where he performed Éclats, by the French-Swiss composer Michel Runtz.[6] After listening to the young pianist, we can likely agree on an appreciation of his performance: a very communicative performance, both personal and expressive, an inhabited one, which touches us particularly by its ability to transmit emotions. His pianistic realisation, of great clarity, serves his interpretation. In short, we would say that he is talented.

What seems to be the determining factor in our perception and feeling? A presence, a vivid manner of playing, a personality. The young pianist does not "act as if". Rather, he "is" by transmitting emotions to us. It is an ontological presence that acts as the guarantee of an expression understood as authentic.

The notion of "authenticity" here merits some clarification in the context of an analysis of the performance of musicians interpreting the "classical music" repertoire. According to my analysis, there are two types of authenticity to consider, which I will call "authenticity-sincerity" and "authenticity-transparency". Both are part of a dynamic interaction between performers and their audiences. The first can be described as the sincerity of the musician's emotional experience, which the audience attributes to him or her as soon as they themselves experience emotions that they feel correspond to those expressed – hence the idea of not performing "as if". The criterion of authenticity, in this situation, would therefore be the condition of correlation and sharing between the emotion expressed by the musician and that of the audience. The second type of authenticity, authenticity-transparency, has a historical dimension involving an almost naturalising

3 The use of the word "talent" alone would be worthy of a study of its historical and social contextualisation, according to the approach of Quentin Skinner described in his essay *Rhetorical and Conceptual Change* (1999).

4 I warmly thank Jean-François Billeter for highlighting a certain semantic correspondence between the term "talent" in Mandarin and in French.

5 Not to be confused with *tiāncái* (天才), which means "genius" in Chinese, literally "natural talent" (*tiān* meaning "sky", here means "natural", "spontaneous", "innate").

6 The recording of the performance is accessible at https://youtu.be/eNfXANsI34o.

vision of a given musical work. It can be attributed by the audience when they consider that the emotions, they experience correspond to those they believe to be in accordance with the composer's original intention, thus presupposing a principle of timeless emotions and therefore a conception that goes beyond simple historical accuracy. This second conception of authenticity of emotions – that are consubstantial with a given work – is central to the way "classical music" and its interpretation is thought of. For the "classical music" performers themselves, it is also a question of rediscovering the presence of what used to be.[7]

Such a perspective is likely to provide the basis for a universal agreement on what constitutes an indispensable quality of a talent assessment process, as long as the question of a certain conception of authenticity – which itself rests on implicit notions of individual "sincerity" and musical-historical fidelity – is envisaged as a universal value. However, even if my point of view as a Western musician has led me to consider such universality, it must be questioned.

Nevertheless, the analysis of the discourses and my observations will make it possible to measure the variations of this common base and to relativise notions such as authenticity and its opposite, imitation, within the framework of an appreciation of talent. My aim is to gain a better understanding of what is valued when attempting to define talent in China and Switzerland.

The first step in this research involved measuring the subjectivity of the discourse on talent. Challenging the possibility of establishing an objectively universal base, the nature and attributes of the object "talent" encourage a generally constructivist perspective based on the discursive uses of the word "talent" or references to the notion thereof. I therefore propose to first examine the common meanings – the preconceptions – as they correspond to the standard attributions of talent. There are three of them, and I have titled them as follows: cultural parameters of authenticity in discourses; the mystifying answer; practice, practice, practice!

Cultural parameters of authenticity in discourses

In the discourses of my Chinese and Swiss interlocutors, the question of authenticity is implicitly linked to talent. Their comments place a special emphasis on the interpretation of works of "classical music" and often attribute the authenticity of that interpretation to national cultural characteristics, some of which are considered to provide a more legitimate access to "classical music" – and which are only acquired *in situ*. Authenticity is delimited here by "a territorialised reification" (Yoshihara, 2008, p. 219). It would therefore seem that the idea of territorialised reification links certain characteristics of classical music with certain cultural traits, which implies that historical authenticity, i.e., the authenticity-transparency referred to above, would be considered less accessible to musicians who do not come

7 This vision, borrowed from philology (Cook, 2003, p. 205), functions in the manner of a "kind of family tree in which successive interpretations move vertically away from the composer's original vision" (Cook, 2003, p. 206).

from the culture of production. For some of my Shanghai interlocutors, being Chinese means having more difficulty accessing musical authenticity in interpretations of works by Beethoven or Liszt because of fundamental cultural differences.

Some European visiting professors to whom institutions such as the SHCM have assigned a role as facilitators for access to "classical music" echo this conception of cultural differences, speaking of the need for Chinese musicians to immerse themselves culturally in the European environment.[8] We could conclude from this essentialist discourse that the Chinese musicians face a fundamental disadvantage in the development of talent compared with Europeans. This would show that on the Chinese side, in discourses, talent implies a form of authenticity-transparency, the one referring to a correlation between the emotions felt by musicians and those judged to be in line with the composer's original intention during their performances.

These perceived differences are not necessarily accompanied by the conviction of a problematic relationship to "classical music". Chinese traditional values can be conceived as eminently compatible with aspects of this music. For example, some Chinese specialists in comparative education believe that their enthusiasm for "classical music" can be explained by its affinity with the Confucian values of "self-cultivation" and virtue.[9] Some of my interlocutors clearly expressed the idea of a Chinese cultural essence, whereby cultures have quasi-natural characteristics. One of them argued, during a discussion on how to approach the daily practice of a musical instrument, that Confucianism is "in our blood": discipline, effort, and humility as innate components of Chinese learners. The success of Chinese musicians is often attributed to the work ethic, commitment to education, family values, and other characteristics – values that are reflected in the discourses claiming to be Confucian.

These characteristics attributed to Chinese culture, those that facilitate technical and intensive learning, give musicians the opportunity to be considered talented performers despite the lack of cultural proximity. Even though they have been exposed to "classical music" from an early age, my Chinese interlocutors expressed the idea that cultural distance is an obstacle. The cultural essentialism that underlies these remarks is probably partly the result of a political system that fuels them daily with strong nationalist rhetoric.

These arguments assume a form of essentialism on both sides, which are related to each other through a mirror effect, where the validation of the teaching and the authenticity of the style are mostly based on Western expertise. According to this narrative, the challenge for talented Chinese performers is to assert that their interpretations are not just

8 In an interview in the magazine *Pianiste*, a professor at the Paris Conservatory (CNSMDP) and artistic director of the piano department in Tianjin mentions the fact that "Chinese musicians avidly seek out the specificities of European piano art" ("les musiciens chinois cherchent avec avidité les spécificités de l'art du piano européen"), being "extremely distant from European pianists from a cultural point of view because they have not breathed the same air or seen the same light as our great composers" ("extrêmement éloignés des pianistes européens du point de vue culturel car ils n'ont pas respiré le même air ou vu la même lumière que nos grands compositeurs") (Pianiste, 2019).

9 Hao Huang thus considers that the practice of "classical music", through the memorisation "of details of model compositions through disciplined practice and intense concentration" and through "the development of these skills through close contact with a private teacher (music master)," is in accordance with the precepts of a "Confucian scholarly tradition, which regards the study of music as an indispensable means of training the mind" (Huang, 2011, p. 171).

an imitation, a performance that would have been learned through a great deal of technique, a counterfeit in the words of certain Western interlocutors who often enjoy a high position in European musical institutions.[10] In the discourse of my Western interlocutors, the talented performer cannot be a counterfeiter.[11]

The mystifying answer

When asked directly, the question of talent often annoys musicians. Performers know when a musician is good or not, and this knowledge, it seems, cannot be explained. The evaluation is usually binary: one musician will have played "only the notes", while another will have "made music". Thus, in musicians' discourses, playing "notes" and playing "music" are two distinct activities, with neither the term "talent" nor even the term "music" being defined with the support of theoretical definitions.

Such expertise and judgments without precise verbalised definitions or meanings fall into the realm of what has been called "tacit knowledge" (cf. for example Collins, 2010). It can only be apprehended through careful phenomenological observation and description. But when such attempts at description are rejected, tacit knowledge is mystified. The fact that we do not want to or cannot define something may be due not only to the difficulties of such a definition, but also to the tacit dimension of its content that is precisely what creates value. The anthropologist Henry Kingsbury emphasises the contingent or contradictory nature of the use of the term "music" in discourses, which does not seem to constitute a problem for the members of the American conservatory where he is carrying out his research; the vagueness would be part of the aesthetic and even mystical characteristics contained in this art[12] (Kingsbury, 1984, p. 28). The recourse to an indefinite, almost magical notion of music,[13] reminiscent of discourses of Romanticism, is also a trope in the SHCM and the Swiss conservatories, to evoke talent as an indefinable, quasi-indescribable object. Thus, tacit and ineffable go hand in hand for many members of these institutions.

10 In both Chinese and European discourses, the issue seems to be the establishment of a reciprocal link between the two types of authenticity – "sincerity" and "transparency" – which would go hand in hand through the prism of an essentialising cultural conception; in order to transmit the appropriate emotions, the musician must feel them, and in order to feel them, cultural proximity is necessary.

11 It seems possible to link this haunting of imitation so present in musicians' discourses to the Christian pattern of "imitatio diabolica", inspired by the Platonic heritage of the vanity of images (Borgeaud, 2021, p. 47).

12 "When the contingent or self-contradictory character of the music category is pointed out, the response is sometimes characterized less by confusion or consternation than by a form of mystification whereby contradiction is accorded the elevated status of paradox and becomes ideologically integrated into the aesthetic or spiritual power of music, itself" (Kingsbury 1984, p. 28).

13 It is therefore a particular use of "music" in the context of a qualification of talent, or rather an affirmation of its impossible qualification. Of course, this does not mean that all occurrences of "music" among these same locutors are tacit and ineffable: when they talk about their neighbour's overly loud music, it is much more precise: because there is no need for the implicit. In short, the term "music" seems equivocal, and in the case of its use as a mystifying answer to the question of talent, it uses the tacit character of the notion: it means it.

Practice, practice, practice!

In contrast to those who posit that talent is something ineffable, others within the globalised network of conservatories assert, not without authority, that talent is above all a question of quantity of work, 99% to be precise. Talent is reducible to aptitudes – skills that must be acquired through hard work. This definition circumvents the problem by explaining how to access talent. However, the mysterious 1% remains, a percentage that brings us back to this implicit mystical connotation.[14]

Given this subjectivity of the discourse on talent, it seems relevant to pursue the investigation in the context of training in interpretation, since this is precisely where the concepts of talent are shaped. Therefore, I would like to present some of the results of my observations in the field at the middle school attached to the SHCM.[15] First of all, there is an obvious similarity: the courses I attended had important parallels to those of other European or American conservatories, both in form and content. Not surprisingly, I was able to observe that the difficulties encountered by the students, linked to the complexity of the score, the writing of this music, and the musical forms, often corresponded to those encountered by their colleagues in the corresponding Western institutions. Even less surprisingly, difficulties attributed to what is commonly called technique are just as widespread (Grenier Borel, 2019).

However, if the transposition of the pedagogical model in the Shanghai context allows us to highlight some of the frameworks that have been established and which musicians have perpetuated over the generations, it also allows us to appraise what a particular situation – that of Chinese musical institutions – generates in terms of values. These characteristics, specific to the SHCM, demonstrate accentuations of standard features of the European approach to "classical music" and its teaching. They are of various natures and intervene at different levels.

The amplified aspects

This second part is based both on my observations in the field and on the analysis of discourses. It lists some aspects of pedagogical habits in the context of interpretation, aspects which, while present on both sides, are generally amplified at the SHCM.[16] This difference makes visible the values put forward in the two geographical spaces and allows for a better understanding of the differences in the notion of talent.

14 This claim about the quantity of practice could be theoretically grounded into the concept of "deliberate practice", as exposed for instance in Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Römer (1993) or Ericsson (1996).

15 Since 1952, the Shanghai Conservatory has had an intensive pre-college section providing pre-professional music education and a general school curriculum, named *fùzhōng* (附中). Independent from the SHCM in its functioning, it is however institutionally attached to the conservatory. It is a remarkable illustration of an education entirely devoted to the training of solo musicians, in the image of many prestigious musical institutions in East Asia.

16 Among the issues that could be interesting to link to this amplification phenomenon (but which would exceed the scope of this paper) is that of "cultural translation", as described in Liu (1999).

Hierarchical system, compartmentalised system

As Bruno Nettl demonstrates in his numerous ethnomusicological studies,[17] a musical system, with its style and structures, is closely correlated with the way musical practice in that system is acquired (hence the similarities in pedagogical practices observed in Switzerland and China); its learning and its form influence each other: they are interdependent. This learning takes place within the framework of conservatories organised according to the tripartition of composition, interpretation, and evaluation,[18] which can be seen, according to Nicolas Cook, in a parallel with the production, distribution, consumption trichotomy that characterises capitalist society. Such a tripartition implies a hierarchy: the composers are at the top and the performers and "evaluators" come to occupy, in a precise order, a subordinate place (Cook, 1998). The compartmentalisation and precise distribution of tasks is also a guarantee of production, in that it more easily allows for "the recurrent and shared implementation of conventions" which, through their effectiveness, organise artistic work (Buscatto, 2008, p. 102, translation by the author).

This hierarchical distinction associated with the compartmentalised division of learning common to all conservatories, seems even more marked at the SHCM. In the courses I observed that the relationship between the student and the teacher is based, as in the West, on a relationship of devotion from the former towards the latter – the *maestro*. However, conversations revealed that the West differs from China in that individual differences are better accepted and even valued: teachers in the West "respect your personality", a middle school piano teacher at the SHCM tells me, whereas in China this is supposed to happen only after a student has followed the rules for a long time.

The hierarchical tripartition is particularly strong at the SHCM since it is established within departments that largely ignore each other. According to my interlocutors, the departments function in isolation, allowing practically no exchange between them (hence the fact that the practice of chamber music is practically non-existent). This compartmentalisation, even "taylorisation", of the musician learner, reinforces an education centring on the musical instrument, even more so than in the West.

The relationship to the repertory and the score

Among the concepts of "classical music" addressed in the introduction, I would like to highlight the musician's relationship to the repertory and the scores, which emerged as considerably different in Chinese discourses and practices and Western ones.

17 Cf. for example his analysis "On Learning the Radif and Improvisation in Iran" (Nettl, 2009).

18 This tripartition, as a guarantee of production, positions the institution of the conservatory as the model of training through practice par excellence. This historical consideration of the institution has "integrated" a dichotomy coupled with a hierarchy between "knowledge" and "practice", the fruit of a particular Western history that persists in the distinction between musical institutions and those of the university type. This historical aspect also explains its evolution towards a crystallisation of the practical aspect, of instrumental or vocal mastery, with the musical instrument at the core – the latter being even more prewponderant in the way in which the learning of music is framed in Shanghai, as observed during my stay.

It is well known that the challenges in the world of conservatories generally consist of interpreting the masterpieces of the great composers, a "prestigious" repertoire defined by a restriction of the field of music that took place in the 19th century (Vendrix, 2004, p. 639). In China, where the restriction of the field is all the stronger – the baroque, contemporary, and so-called chamber music repertoire having very little place – this challenge is at the heart of the learning process. In the middle school sections of conservatories, these pieces are given very early in the learning process – the age argument being part of the challenge – whereas in the European context, learning generally consists of encouraging the mastery of a set of smaller, easier pieces of an educational nature before that of the prestigious repertoire. In Swiss conservatories likewise, discourses claim, and study plans and practices confirm, that the emotional and intellectual maturity of the young musician must be correlated with the instrumental mastery of the work.[19] The difference – whether an apprenticeship is considered or not – is not insignificant in that it affects the conception of the young musician's place, their individuality, their development in their own learning path.

During my observations of lessons at the SHCM, another aspect of the difference in the relationship to the repertoire emerged. Students often had to follow the indications written on the score to the letter, as if they were sacred. I noticed that the teachers often emphasised a "scientific" dimension of this notation by referring to the "scientific system of tonal harmony" or the "technical precision" of a given symbol, referring to these "rules" to be respected for the technical aspects mentioned in the piano teacher's discourse mentioned above.

Moreover, this relationship to repertoire reveals conceptual differences in musicians' learning process. According to one of my interlocutors, a Chinese pianist who came to study in Switzerland after having completed her entire schooling at the middle school of the Central Conservatory in Beijing, if musicians develop a "personality" during their studies, they cannot perfectly respect the text to be interpreted. In other words, during the learning phase, the development of a personality is incompatible with respecting a score of a musical work in the strict sense of the word. From her point of view, what is at stake is a perfectionism in the respect of the text, a quest for precision and accuracy in interpretation which must be learned during a long first phase covering the years spent at the middle school. For her, this intensive Chinese apprenticeship, in which the execution, from memory, of each indication inscribed on the score, is an obligatory rite of passage. Various testimonies collected at the middle school in Shanghai confirmed this conviction: it is necessary to follow the score faithfully before "developing a personality" – that is, before becoming an accomplished performer. For my interlocutors, this logical sequence implies that even in the final learning process there is still a necessary "lack" of respect for the text, since such respect is fundamentally not compatible with the "development of a

19 This Western hypothesis, however, can be both delicate and problematic. This correlation between the emotional and intellectual maturity of the young musician does not correlate directly with age. Some very young children show incredible maturity in their interpretation of a complex repertoire, whereas some adult students are far from reaching such a level. It can sometimes be revealing and useful to ask pupils to play something well above their level, as ethnomusicologist Frank Kouwenhoven points out.

personality". Their remarks are based on two assumptions. The first is that learning based on respect for the text cannot take place at the same time as the development and affirmation of a personality; it is only when one masters a know-how that one can allow oneself to deviate from it. The second assumption is that the interpretation of notated repertoire implies understanding under-determined parameters; since not everything is written down, signs cannot fully grasp the composer's thinking. Only in the under-determined parameters and the knowledge about them is there space to manoeuvre and a margin for interpretation, according to the testimonies collected from SHCM musicians arriving at the end of their master's degree in performance. However, it is not useless to remember that the preponderant importance of the score conveys a thought that originates in the idea that authenticity implies the faithful realisation of the score, whose authority is not questioned, and by extension, respect for the musical work, a value that brings us back to the concept of *Werktreue* evoked in the introduction. It is part of an approach that was valued by many 19th century composers such as Robert Schumann or Hector Berlioz. Ultimately, this aspect represents yet another amplification of what is and was originally conceived in Europe.

Conclusion

The many points of similarity in the training of young Chinese and Swiss performers show that a relativist perspective as a culturalist perspective leads to a deadlock in reflecting on the study in question. The learning of "classical music" as a globalised phenomenon can be described as universal[20] in the very specific sense that the level of understanding of its musical system and the structures required to master it through a learning process does not depend on the belonging to the "culture" or society which once mainly produced the musical system. Rather, it can decontextualise and recontextualise itself in very diverse societies. Its adaptability makes this apprenticeship an "elastic" training; the amplified aspects mentioned represent the "malleable" and "situated" elements of the training of interpreters of the "classic".

This music and its mastery, following the example of other erudite musics, also presents mechanical characteristics (the use here is not pejorative) of a technical order, a sort of ideal type based on rationalisation by calculation, a commensurable system, due to the calculability of sound scales and harmonics resulting from the physics of sound. Notation, by process of rationalisation (in the Weberian sense) has been developed in the course of Western history.[21] This notation allowed both the cementing of the different forms of the music and the elaboration of the tonal harmonic system. That same ratio-

20 Here, the use of the universal criterion should not be understood as having a global dimension in time and space. For a clarification of this differentiation of the meaning of the universal, see Collier & Ong (2007).

21 This rationalisation has occurred since antiquity, explains Max Weber (1998[1910]), initiated by the calculability and theorisation of musical scales (fixing the notes and their respective pitches from the original glissando, the division of the glissando being the starting point of the rationalisation) as early as Pythagoras, then by Zarlino's scale, and finally by the tempered scale. The appearance of our system of

nalising process underpinned the way in which the learning of this music was structured and compartmentalised – what Bruno Nettl refers to when pointing to the correlation between a specific musical system and the way in which it is acquired. The phenomenon of this correlation confirms, in fact, the "universal" dimension of the acquisition of this music.

Understanding the transnational nature of "classical music" learning is complex. On the one hand, its circulation is undeniably linked to colonialism, while also being the result of deliberately chosen, dosed, and reshaped borrowings. On the other hand, the local particularities of its learning are embedded in a vast set of Eurasian, North African, and American societies with fundamental learning characteristics in common, according to the model described by Robert LeVine and Merry White, namely "the emphasis on memorization in the pedagogical process, the strict authority of the teacher whose role is to embody the characteristics of the model, the tendency to consider texts as sacred", and many other aspects (LeVine & White, in Kipnis, 2011, p. 136). This universal dimension, which goes hand in hand with a standardisation of learning models and institutional structures within conservatories, masks differences in the values that are produced or perpetuated in the training of young musicians: conservatory actors "recontextualise, remodel and objectify a repertoire or musical practice [while producing] their own musical aesthetics" (Le Gargasson, 2020, translation by the author). By analysing discourses, the heterogeneous components of this music and its learning allow us to detect differing values.

To fully account for these specificities and, above all, to contextualise them would require a sinological expertise that, as an ethnomusicologist and musician, I do not have. However, to open the discussion, two topics can be brought to the attention of experts in Chinese society: first, the role of the so-called "Confucian" values of filiality and the exemplary respect – filial piety – owed to superiors. For the specialists LeVine and White, this subsidiary piety, in the history of China, intervened at all levels of the State and society (LeVine & White, 1986, p. 77). It is still present, notably with the return in force of Confucian revivalist discourses (cf. Billioud & Thoraval, 2014) that do not allow for any criticism of the elders. In fact, it would be appropriate to inscribe this hierarchical order within an ancient political tradition that dates to the Zhou dynasty (in 1050 BC), which conceived a power whose structure was modelled on family relations[22] and whose characteristics "traversed the entire history of Chinese society" (Billeter, 2000, p. 13, translation by the author). In the light of the Confucian values, it seems hardly surprising that the relationship of the student to the maestro is reinforced within Chinese musical institutions.

The second issue is the question of the emergence of the subject in the learning process: in the ideal of Western thought, the learning musician must themselves be able

notation within theoretical treatises written by monks of the 9th and 10th centuries, is also the result of a phenomenon of rationalisation.

22 In his essay *Pourquoi l'Europe*, Jean-François Billeter explains in the first part, how a political tradition was forged in China through the description of an initial matrix whose characteristics have endured "until the recent past despite the transformations and upheavals that this society has undergone elsewhere" (Billeter, 2000, p. 13, translation by the author).

to grasp the meaning of what they are playing. They must feel" a music that fundamentally tells the story of the human being: "Western music, and Western art in general, are bearers of a certain ideal of the human being" (Barilier, in Imperiali, 2016, translation by the author). For Ernest Ansermet, in the words of Jean-François Billeter, the emergence of the autonomous subject is at the core of European music and occurred in a similar way in other fields during the same period (painting, philosophy, science); it corresponds to a fundamental movement. The Swiss conductor and musicologist "thought that Western music teaches us what this subject is that has become conscious of its autonomy […] who knows himself as an active and acting being […] through the natural apprehension of the sensitive world […]" (Billeter, 2000, pp. 93–94, translation by the author). In the Chinese conception of the subject's place in the learning process, the opposition between the expression of a personality and respect for the text *stricto sensu* of a musical work seems to stand out from the European thinking described by Ansermet and Barilier. This conception appears very clearly in the texts on learning Chinese calligraphy. Becoming a calligrapher implies, for the learner, a know-how organised in three main stages – the first one dealing with the acquisition of the technique, the second one with the study of the works, and the last one allowing the emergence of the learner's personality.

The example of learning calligraphy offers an even clearer view of this difference in the conception of the sequential organisation of the steps observed in the case of learning "classical music". The emergence of personality, the ultimate stage in the calligrapher's training process, is envisaged from the very beginning of the musician's training in a Western Conservatory such as Geneva. For example, if in China the first stage calls for a particular attention to the "technical" aspects of execution through the experimentation with gestures and the acquisition of a knowledge of style, in a Western conservatory like the one in Geneva, the learning of music proceeds from a transposition of the inner song of each apprentice musician to the instrument – from the outset, a self-awareness through an inner listening, through the voice, a process that would be part of the progressive unfolding of the autonomous subject about which Ernest Ansermet tells us.[23]

The question of the emergence of personality, for the student of calligraphy, also raises, according to Billeter, a paradox, due to this necessary stripping of "all personal traits", "an apparent renunciation of oneself in favour of the personality of others" through the meticulous study of the characteristics of each work and, "in the same movement, a slow discovery of oneself" (Billeter, 2010, pp. 161–162, translation by the author). However, for the sinologist, this paradox is resolved if we conceive of two kinds of personalities: one, temporary, which would be forged during the first two decades of our life, allowing an adaptation to the surrounding world; the other, profound, a second synthesis emanating from the "desire to integrate and express all the forces that inhabit us, those that we were able to include in our first personality and those that remained excluded from it" (Billeter, 2010, pp. 161–162, translation by the author).

23 This way of transmitting music echoes Lin Youren's teaching, who taught Guqin at the SHCM before bee ing fired in 1990. His teaching methods and his vision of learning, at odds with the policy of the musical institution, ended up being unpopular with the head of the school (for more details, see Rees, Chen & Kouwenhoven, 2014).

The knowledge from my own experience as a pianist and teacher leads me to hypothesise that this conception of personality as having two levels in the context of learning calligraphy, would also apply to the learning of "classical music". According to such a hypothesis – whose verification would require a study of a different scope – it would be possible to approach the question of learning an instrument in terms of the progressive affirmation of a profound personality and thus to nuance the difference between Chinese and European conceptions.[24] The autonomy of the subject in the Western perspective, the development of which would go hand in hand with the learning of "classical music", is perhaps more relative than it appears in our contemporary society of norm and control (Gori, 2013). An increased normative dimension is clearly evident in the establishment of national talent labels in Switzerland – standards modelled on the European standard – and in support of talented young musicians[25] based on Swiss federal standards (ASEM & CHEMS, 2019; ASEM, 2019/2021). With these new policies, talent becomes a "talent capital" in a marketing logic with a clear connotation of success. The policy implemented in training young musicians demonstrates that the hold of neoliberalism is attached to "spheres of activity hitherto organized around other scales of value" (Cohenenen-Huther, 2020, p. 152) and that it "permeates mentalities in all sectors and at all levels of social life" (Cohenenen-Huther, 2020, p. 138). The extension of the market relationship includes discourses on "talent" – and its intensive programmes – and focuses on artistic training where it has no purpose. The notion of talent in connection with the ideal of developing autonomy mentioned above, is, therefore, at the centre of issues that call for ever greater control and norms. The characteristics of "classical music" learning in China, and in particular this long first phase of acquiring know-how, seem less surprising in the light of these recent developments in the West. They are in line with these evoked dimensions that accompany the stakes associated – in a certain present-day reality – with the notion of talent, which has the effect of attenuating the actual differences, in terms of the organisation of learning. It is hardly surprising that it is (more than ever) at the level of discourse that these differences remain, where the European cult of the ideal of subject autonomy is the ultimate refuge.

24 From a psychological perspective, it should not be forgotten that student musicians inevitably experience the delicate period of adolescence when identity is forged. Identity is multiple and composite. In the context of conservatories, it is based not only on a sense of belonging to an institution but also to an affiliation with a professor. This progression of personality development is undeniably linked to a process of the human being which, from the moment of birth, includes something temporary, destined to change through enrichment, and at the same time, a more persistent part that corresponds to this deeper dimension. The deepest, precisely, integrates the phenomena of subjective appropriation – more superficial – but above all implies, for the subject, a feeling of being "true", in connection with one's feelings. Consequently, the distinction between temporary and profound personality need not be considered an opposition, as Jean-François Billeter clearly points out, just as it does not signify an "authentic" versus "non-authentic" version of personality.

25 For more information on promoting Swiss talent: www.bak.admin.ch/bak/fr/home/sprachen-und-gesellschaft/formation-musicale/jung-talente-musik.html.

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Eugénie Grenier Borel
teaches piano at the Geneva Conservatory (CPMDT). She holds master's degrees in musical interpretation, in music pedagogy, and in ethnomusicology. Currently, she is pursuing her doctoral studies in Music Anthropology at the University of Bern. Her research deals with the rhetoric of Western and Chinese conservatories concerning classical music, with a particular focus on the Shanghai Conservatory.

A Comparative Exploration of Swiss and Chinese Piano Lessons

Li Huaqi

Abstract
This contribution examines the relationships between teachers and students during piano lessons in China and Switzerland. It is based on field studies at one conservatoire in each of these countries. The comparison shows great similarities between the didactics, but at the same time cultural peculiarities in the application of the same, which is partly due to the language and specific meanings of terms. The lessons are also characterised by each teacher's individual musical biography.

Keywords
China, didactics, intercultural comparison, music education, piano, Switzerland

This paper comparatively describes selected aspects of what is at play between teacher and student during piano lessons, in China and Switzerland. I take my insights from field-work conducted in 2016–2017 at two institutions: the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing and the Haute école de musique in Geneva. By exploring and comparing a limited sample of piano lessons at both institutions, we aimed to detect and reflect on resemblances and culture-specific differences in the didactic process.

Didactics in a comparative perspective

This research is situated in the academic domain of the French "didactique". There is no precise disciplinary equivalent in the current Chinese academic world, nor are there translations of the term available in Mandarin Chinese. French didactique also differs significantly in focus and methodologies from both the English "didactics" and the German "Didaktik". English definitions of didactics tend to limit its focus to the teaching aspect, in demarcation from mathetics, the science of learning. While both German and French academic traditions build on a constructivist approach, they have developed along different paths (Chevallard, 1999; Kilpatrick, 2003). Didactique in French "does not mean the art or science of teaching. Its purpose is far more comprehensive: it includes teaching AND learning AND school as a System, and so on" (Douady & Mercier, 1992, p. 5, quoted in Kilpatrick, 2003, p. 23).

Sensevy and Mercier (2007) summarise the programme of didactique as a comprehensive approach to what is going on inside the classroom, using a Vygotskyan model of

interactions between teacher and learner(s), seen as co-constructing knowledge. Teacher, learner(s), and teaching content(s) are positioned in a triangular topology. Special attention is given to the didactic actions of the teacher. They are categorised as "definitions", "regulations", and "institutionalisations", the latter being the teacher's recognition and validation of the learning process at its completion. French didactique mainly focuses on empirical observations inside the classroom; nevertheless, the wider context, i.e. cultural backgrounds, school programmes, governmental policies, are deemed highly informative points of entry into what is going on inside the classroom (Leutenegger, 2009; Schubauer-Leoni & Leutenegger, 2002).

Alongside didactique, our research is positioned in the field of comparative education, an academic domain that underwent a strong development during the last decades, especially in anglophone countries. Post-war comparative education leaned toward universalist, developmentalist world views, obliterating to some extent the exploration of culturally distinct educational and institutional models. Since then, more sensitive approaches have gradually developed, and comparative education research, especially between Chinese and Western cultures of education, has flourished (Gu, 2014; Hayhoe, 2015). Yet relatively few investigations in comparative didactics between two regions or cultures are available, even if the importance of such comparison is stressed by the specialists (e.g., Schubauer-Leoni & Leutenegger, 2002, p. 70). There is even less research available in the field of comparative didactics in art and music.

Cultural backgrounds can be approached using many disciplinary angles. As a result, comparative research tends to be interdisciplinary in nature. The cultural background of the piano classroom can be approached, for example, using sociology, e.g., by studying social representations and symbolic values attached to music; using political sciences, e.g., by studying governmental policies and incentives; using psychology, e.g., by studying differences in the learning processes; using musicology, e.g., by studying the encounter between Chinese and Western music in the history of teaching institutions. An important literature using those approaches has nourished our reflections (for general introductions see for example Watkins & Biggs, 1996; Li, 2012).

Fieldwork and framework

In both institutions, in Geneva and in Beijing, we selected two teacher-student pairs. All students were studying at the bachelor level. Both teachers and students were of Chinese origin in Beijing, and European origin in Switzerland. Three lessons of each of the four pairs were video recorded over the course of the academic year 2016–17. Subsequent interviews with both teachers and students completed the observation. Such limited samples obviously do not allow for generalisation about the didactique in Chinese and Western music conservatories, but our goal was much simpler: to detect whether, and under which circumstances, elements specific to distinct cultural backgrounds would emerge during those lessons. The size of our data proved to be sufficient in that respect.

Videos and interviews were treated using a four-stage approach common in comparative studies: description, interpretation, juxtaposition, and comparison (Bereday, 1964; Bray et al., 2007). To analyse the video-recorded lessons, we needed a framework that fulfilled specific conditions, the first being its relevance for artistic domains, particularly for music. Secondly, to bring to light cultural markers, the analysis had to take into account apparently non-significant surface events; we could not assume in advance which elements would emerge as cultural markers, so the description and interpretation grids of our analysis were successively refined on the basis of the data itself (video recordings and interviews).

We followed Sensevy (2012) in using the game metaphor to describe interactions inside the classroom, an idea he borrowed from Ludwig Wittgenstein's concept of "language game". This framework invites us to see a piano lesson as a two-player game, obeying implicit and explicit rules of play, where moves in the game are constituted by the verbal utterances (language games) and non-verbal interventions (gestures, mimicry, musical performances) of the players. Somehow freely inspired by Wittgenstein's thoughts, this approach resonates with his life-long interest for music and for discourses on music in the form of aesthetical propositions. Argumentation is non-binding, non-rational; teachers' verbalisations take the form of "further descriptions" (Rubio Marco et al., 2006):

> Reasons, he [Wittgenstein] said, in Aesthetics are "of the nature of further descriptions": e.g. you can make a person see what Brahms was driving at by showing him lots of different pieces by Brahms, or by comparing him with a contemporary author; and all that Aesthetics does is "to draw your attention to a thing", to "place things side by side". He said that if giving "reasons" of this sort, you make another person "see what you see" but it still "doesn't appeal to him", that is "an end" of the discussion; and that what he, Wittgenstein, had "at the back of his mind" was "the idea that aesthetic discussions were like discussions in a court of law", where you try to "clear up the circumstances" of the action which is being tried, hoping that in the end what you say will "appeal to the judge". […] (Moore, 1959, p. 315).

Such descriptions do not intend to define, in a narrow explanatory way, the reasons behind any specific aesthetic choice. They are invitations sent to the student to adopt such or such point of view; they point to some aspects of the artwork, making frequent use of metaphors or comparisons:

> I give someone an explanation, say to him, "It's as though…"; then he says "Yes now I understand" or "Yes now I know how it is to be played" […] Above all he did not have to accept the explanation; it is not after all as though I had given him compelling reasons for comparing this passage with this & that (Wittgenstein, 1998, p. 79).

In such aesthetic game, didactic regulations – suggestions of adjustment addressed to the student – take the form of interjections:

> What does a person who knows a good suit say when trying on a suit at the tailors? "That's the right length", "That's too short", "That's too narrow". Words of approval play no rôle [sic],

> although he will look pleased when the coat suits him. Instead of "That's too short" I might say "Look!" or instead of "Right" I might say "Leave it as it is". A good cutter may not use any words at all, but just make a chalk mark and later alter it (Wittgenstein, 1967 [1938], p. 5).

Such framework proved to be particularly effective for our comparative project, by allowing us to avoid unnecessary reference to any presupposed universal, a-cultural, teaching content. Even if applied to the same artwork, the game of further descriptions depends strongly on the language and the cultural background of the players.

With those specificities in mind, we began our analysis and retroactive feedback with a particular focus on three specific moves in our classroom game:

– Verbal metaphors used by the teachers in the lesson's language: Mandarin Chinese in Beijing and French or English in Geneva. Although such metaphors may refer to aesthetic concepts, they are more frequently taken from very concrete, worldly domains.[1]
– Non-verbal utterances: gestures – like those of an orchestra conductor, grumblings, singing, mimicry, examples played at the piano.

Resemblances

The scenery of the two Conservatories, in Beijing and Geneva, displays striking resemblances. The stage set of the classroom is almost identical, with two grand pianos placed side by side, one for the teacher and one for the student. The repertoire, western classical pieces of celebrated composers (Bach, Beethoven, Schumann), shows no obvious differences.[2] Many rules of the game played on this stage are remarkably similar: e.g. at the beginning of the lesson, the student shall play the totality, or one entire movement, of the studied piece; the teacher will listen carefully, without interrupting this first audition; in a second phase, a rapid dialogue is established, the student playing and the teacher interrupting him through verbal utterances, gestures, or by playing himself at the second piano. As an implicit rule, fully respected in both places, the teacher is entitled to interrupt the student at any moment, where the student will almost never interrupt the teacher's discourse or playing.

Some interactions displayed characteristic cultural differences identified by comparative research between China and the West, such as learners' expectations of teachers, representations of what a good teacher and a good learner are, purpose of learning, etc. (Cortazzi & Jin, 2013; Gu, 2014; Jin & Cortazzi, 2008). However, our small sample did not allow any generalisation of those observations.

1 This is consistent with a specific property of Lakoff & Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphors: their source domain is consistently less abstract than their target domain.

2 This is not always the case: Chinese vocal teaching, for example, tends to focus on Italian bel-canto, at the expense of repertoires such as French *Mélodie* or German *Lieder* that are an important part of European vocal teaching.

Piano Schools

Teachers' biographies play an important role in their didactic approach: distinct piano schools (French, German, Russian, etc.) are demarcated by differences in piano technique, and musical interpretation. Strongly noticeable some decades ago, those differences tend to vanish as a result of the huge circulation of piano students-becoming-teachers across the globe, as well as the ubiquitous availability of recordings. Nevertheless, some traditions remain quite lively.

One of our Beijing teachers, born in Anhui province, had an early training as child prodigy. She also served as pianist to accompany her school choir during the Cultural revolution. Having completed her first studies in Shanghai, she was sent in 1990 to study in St Petersburg with the renowned pianist Ekaterina Murina. She gave us the following definition of the Russian school of piano: "It must be considered as an independent school: compared to the first birthplaces [of piano] in Europe – Italy, France, Germany – the Russian school began later, but only to occupy a major position". According to her, the Russian technical approach to the instrument is quite specific: "This school calls for 'deep key'; it puts emphasis on the capacity to play octaves and chords. Globally it commends strength and clarity, with unbounded passion, and magnificent colours in the interpretation. Lots of importance is placed on the singing". In teaching Robert Schumann's Kreisleriana, this teacher clearly displayed her linkage to the Russian tradition, emphasising melodic elements, clarity of polyphony, and sound.

However, such geographically defined "school" markers are not always present. Traditions may be linked to a particular master rather than to a specific region. As an example, among our teachers, two studied in the United States, one from Beijing and one from Geneva; their approach, however, displayed strong differences, giving evidence of the diversity of American schools.

Verbal metaphors

Our first analysis focused on a lesson of a teacher-student pair from Beijing. The student, enrolled in a bachelors, was a competent pianist, performing Franz Liszt's Etude *La Leggierezza*. Part of one lesson was dedicated to the study of the first measures of this piece, a long and gradual development, where the reining in of expression is of utmost importance to build an appropriate feeling of suspense. It is only at the end of a long preparation that the expressive energy should arrive at its full level.

> Teacher: It appears to me that this opening must slowly introduce the atmosphere; it needs to be done very progressively. This introduction begins with something very simple, like following one's thought (original in Chinese, translated by the author).

The chosen Chinese expression 随想 (*suíxiǎng*), "following one's thought", appears as a good translation of the indication *A Capriccio* provided by Liszt. The student had difficulties in controlling this gradual tension.

> Teacher: How to make this feeling develop correctly, very gradually, coming from something flavourless? Something "progressive" [said in English] is needed here (original in Chinese, translated by the author).

Here, the teacher uses a culturally marked term: 淡 (*dàn*), meaning "flavourless", "bland". Barely an aesthetic category in Western languages, flavourlessness or blandness is a major evaluation criterium in East-Asian aesthetic tradition (Jullien, 1991; 2010). The Dictionnaire Ricci (Institut Ricci, 2001) gives an excellent definition for this term: "Perfection, in serenity, of the sensible harmony. Joy of the heart, with neither desire nor passion."[3]

Speaking of the reining in of emotion, the teacher will make use of another important Chinese aesthetic concept, 含蓄 (*hánxù*), meaning "discretion", "detachment in the expression of feelings". The Dictionnaire Ricci adds: "expressing oneself by small strokes that let you guess; implicit, veiled".[4] Chinese poetic tradition makes frequent use of implicit or allusive discourse (Jullien, 2003; Z. Li & Samei, 2010).

These examples show how local language resources have the potential to describe an art form from another culture, in a process we can call a cross-cultural further description. A similar descriptive strategy is to be seen in the following excerpt from a talk by Fù Cōng (Fou Ts'ong, 傅聰), where the renowned Chinese pianist speaks of his lessons with the pianist Konstantin Lifschitz:

> For example, regarding the Chopin Nocturnes, I introduced him to the poem of Li Bai "Among the field of flowers, I raise my cup". When I had spoken about it, he made a great jump in his technical limitations, and he discovered how to give a great richness to the music. It seems that music is similar to the other arts: the art [功夫 (gōngfu)] is not only located inside the music, but outside it (later published addendum to Fù, 1981, translation by the author).[5]

Fù Cōng transfers to music a quotation of the poem "工夫在诗外" ("Art is outside the poem") by Lù Yóu (陆游), dated from 1208 (Sòng dynasty). Inviting a student to see a Chopin nocturne through the lense of an even earlier Chinese poem – by Lǐ Bái (李白), who lived from 701 to 762, (Táng dynasty) –, using the notion of dàn to describe a feeling of suspense in La Leggierezza, using *suíxiǎng* to describe the uncontrolled train of thought

3 Translation by the author, source text: "Perfection de l'harmonie sensible dans la sérénité, joie du cœur sans désir ni passion".

4 Translation by the author, source text: "Qui s'exprime par touche, qui laisse deviner (style, langage); implicite, voilé".

5 Reported in a conversation between Fù Cōng, Fù Mǐn (his brother), and the editor of the Fù Léi Jiāshū. The source is second-hand and could not be verified directly, but the quote appears here because it illustrates the argument developed here very clearly.

of the Italian A Capriccio, are different instances of a same didactic strategy, one that makes use of resonances between cultures.

Such aesthetic concepts do not have perfect equivalents in Western languages. Conversely, at the time of the introduction of Western music in China, from the 17th century on, the vocabulary of Western music did not have usable equivalents in Mandarin Chinese. Missionaries and translators had to forge a large number of new terms. Lydia Liu (1995, appendices A–F) gives a list of such neologisms and analyses the complex process of their creation. Among them, we find basic terms such as "music" (音乐, *yīnyuè*), "dance" (跳舞, *tiàowǔ*), "piano" (洋琴, *yángqín*, and later 钢琴, *gāngqín*), "fine arts" (美术, *měishù*), "pedagogy" (教育学, *jiàoyùxué*), "performing on a musical instrument" (演奏, *yǎnzòu*), "artwork" (作品, *zuòpǐn*), "romantic" (浪漫, *làngmàn*), "theory" (理论, *lǐlùn*), and a large number of phonetic translations for names of musical forms and styles, e.g. "baroque" (巴洛克, *bāluòkè*), and musical instruments, e.g. "bassoon" (巴松, bāsōng). This creation of neologisms is a clear indication of the relative incommensurability of languages and concepts. Of course, creating a neologism for "music" does not mean that music did not exist in pre-modern China; it means that the Western concepts of music were too different to match any classical Chinese term.

Non-verbal utterances and verbal recommendations for self-study

Another teacher-student pair, in Geneva, was working on Johann Sebastian Bach's French Suite in Eb major. Strongly gifted and dedicated, of Ukrainian origin, the student displayed an apparent lack of freedom in her play, a kind of restraint in the expression. This apparent shyness could have been linked to her preconceptions about a supposed seriousness and strictness of the performed piece. During the lesson, the teacher attempted to liberate the expressive potential of the student's playing through a long discourse about Bach and his time, using description of that period's courtly life, and directing the student's mind toward the grandiosity and warm generosity of Bach's compositions.

At some point, something happened in the student's artistic understanding, a moment of sudden epiphany, and her playing became much more powerful in its expression. In subsequent interviews, both teacher and student recalled this striking instant:

> Teacher: We repeated this passage several times – three or four times. I had the impression that she began to open more, in the sound, the expression, the liberty, the rubato, the generosity […] This is the kind of moment I like […] Suddenly, there is a little light in the eyes, which makes the student discover something, like a perfume of freedom.

The student corroborated the teacher's account, having felt at some point this impression of gaining an artistic understanding – both in the conception of this work and in its realoisation through technical gestures.

The role of further descriptions in triggering artistic understanding was apparent in many instances, both in Beijing and Geneva. Such triggers can take a verbal form,

e.g. metaphors and comparisons, but is also frequently non-verbal: gestures, grumbling, singing, giving an example at the piano. This mechanism is found cross-culturally, and seems universal; descriptions of it are to be found in the Chinese ancient literature, such as the following story of Liú Yìqìng (刘义庆, 403–444) about the painter Gù Kǎizhī (顾恺之):

> When Gu Kaizhi had completed the portrait of Pei Shuze, he added three whiskers on his chin. Asked for the reason why, he answered "Pei Shuze had an exceptional knowledge of men, and this addition allows to express this quality". Those who were looking at the picture tried to see if it was really so, and perceived that, indeed, the addition of those three hairs expressed better than before the intelligence of this character (Liu, 2002, p. 196, translation by the author).

Gu Kaizhi's explanation takes precisely the form of a further description, raising an aesthetic puzzlement (Arbo, 2013; Bouveresse, 1973) in the audience. If such mechanism is found cross-culturally, the resources it uses frequently bear cultural marks. The knowledge of men of Pei Shuze is to be comprehended within the context of a long Chinese tradition of appreciation applied to the detection of talented individuals, each having their own specific qualities.

Conclusion

Didactics in the two conservatories in China and Switzerland bear strong resemblances to each other in their mechanism for triggering artistic understanding by using verbal metaphors or applying non-verbal utterances. However, the specific resources used for this general mechanism are culturally marked. While some instances of such further descriptions are not specifically tied to one culture – e.g. when a teacher asked his student to imagine an old man in a movie scene – other instances display strong cultural specificities. They are linked to the teachers' differing piano-school educations and their different backgrounds, cultural histories, and languages; and to the interacting persons' differing personalities. The case study from Beijing moreover shows that, in a process of cultural translation, some aspects of Western music – an imported repertoire – are introduced to the Chinese student using resonating concepts from the Chinese aesthetic tradition.

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Li Huaqi
was born in Shanghai, China, and studied piano at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. She completed her education at the Geneva Haute école de musique (HEM) with a MA in Music performance and a MA in Music Pedagogy. She won several distinctions in Shanghai, such as First Prizes at the MAMI Competition and at the TOYAM Competition. Active as both a pianist and teacher, she has been involved in several academic projects and research projects in relation to China at the Geneva HEM.

A Comparative Investigation of Chinese and Swiss Students' Reasons for Having Enrolled at a Conservatoire

Annatina Kull

Abstract

The aim of this contribution is to provide insights into Chinese and Swiss students' reasons for having enrolled at a conservatoire to study art music of European tradition as string or wind instrument players. The following questions are addressed: To what extent was their choice of study based on intrinsic or extrinsic motivation, and in what sense was it self-determined or influenced by the environment? Social Cognitive Career Theory and Self-Determination Theory serve as frameworks for the interpretation of the data, consisting of 36 problem-centred interviews with students in a master's performance programme in China and Switzerland. The transcribed and translated interviews were evaluated using Thematic Qualitative Content Analysis and the data compared on an inter-individual and cross-cultural level. In summary, the Swiss interviewees mostly described having made the decision to study music in a self-determined way during adolescence. The Chinese participants explained that their parents were strongly involved in the choice of their study subject, and the foundation for the path to a career as an instrumentalist was laid early on by specialising in music. In the narratives of several Chinese interviewees, the decision was based on extrinsic reasons such as tactical and economic considerations, while Swiss students presented their choice of study as intrinsically motivated and a consequence of individual interests. The article discusses these results, considering cultural differences in values as well as country-specific conditions and education systems.

Keywords

Choice of study, music studies, intercultural comparison, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, self-determination, China, Switzerland

Introduction and theoretical background

This paper addresses the choice of study of Chinese and Swiss students enrolled in master's performance programmes in art music of European tradition as instrumentalists. Their reasons for studying music are considered through an empirical examination of their biographies to explore the extent to which their choice was based on intrinsic or extrinsic motivation, and in what sense it was self-determined or influenced by the environment. The goal is a better understanding of the pathways to conservatoires in different societal contexts. This investigation contributes to the scientific discourse by turning the

attention to culturally distinct values and country-specific educational structures that shape choices of degree subject.

Choice of study and motivation

The present paper deals with choice of study, which must be differentiated from the choice of a particular profession. The former is not necessarily based on a clearly defined career goal but can be guided by an interest in a field of study. However, the decisions of degree course and profession are both the result of a selection process and correspond less to a free choice than to a weighing up of personal interests and external factors (Neuhaus, 2008, pp. 17–29). For instance, in addition to individual preferences, the self-assessment of talent, the labour market, and study conditions are likely to be taken into consideration (Bailer, 2002, p. 67). With regard to instrumental or vocal music studies, the selective entrance examination may be a hindrance. Among other factors, the socio-economic situation of the family influences the possibility of extracurricular music lessons, which are a prerequisite for accessing conservatoires. Furthermore, values conveyed through socialisation influence the decision-making process (Neuhaus, 2008, pp. 28–29).

Personal and external conditions are taken into account to varying degrees in theories of study and career choice. An approach that includes the interaction of person-related variables with social, cultural, and economic factors is the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). According to this concept, learning experiences are shaped by personal conditions and *background* environmental influences (e.g. role models, encouragement by socialisation agents for specific extracurricular activities, opportunities for skill development). These learning experiences affect the development of self-efficacy expectations (confidence in one's ability to complete a specific task) and outcome expectations (anticipated consequences of a specific behaviour), which have an impact on the development of career-related interests, goals, and actions. Furthermore, the decision-making is moderated and directly influenced by *proximal* environmental factors such as the labour market or decisions by parents (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000; 2006; figure 1).

SCCT differentiates between barriers and supportive conditions, and between the immediate environment and the larger societal context. In cultures in which collectivist values tend to play a prominent role, the wishes of parents may be given more weight than personal professional preferences (Lent et al., 2000, p. 38). An investigation in this kind of cultural setting based on SCCT showed that parental expectations were directly associated with adolescents' career aspirations and actions. In addition, adolescent-parent career congruence (being supported by parents and in line with their wishes) served as a source of adolescents' self-efficacy information and outcome expectations (Sawitri, Creed, & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2014). Even in more individualistically oriented cultures, it cannot be assumed that an individual makes his or her choice of study in an entirely independent manner (see also Hirschi, 2013). In this context, the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provides an essential analytical framework for understanding the influence of proximal environmental influences on decision-making. This theory assumes a

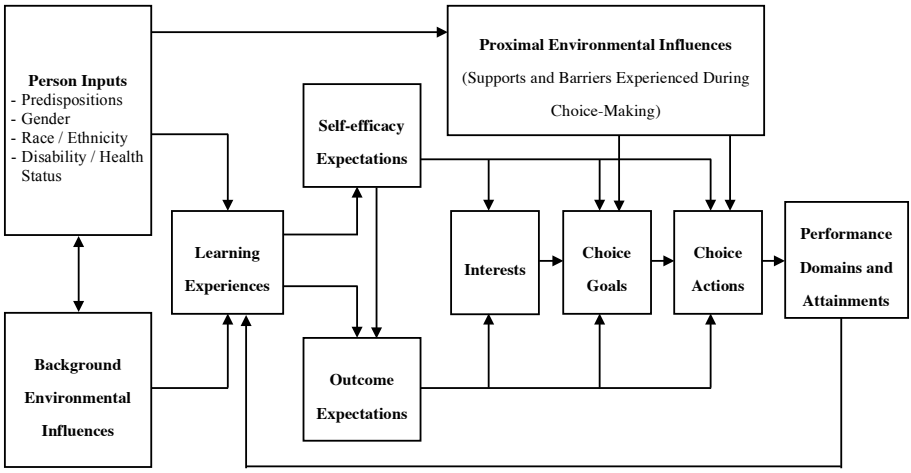

Figure 1: A Simplified view of how career-related interests and choices develop over time, according to SCCT (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2006, p. 751), adapted from Lent, Brown, & Hackett (1994, p. 93)

continuum from amotivation to intrinsic motivation, whereby in the latter an activity is performed out of inherent pleasure, interest, or the challenge entailed. Between these two poles, different types of extrinsic motivation are distinguished, ranging from controlled (non-self-determined) to autonomous (self-determined). The most controlled form of extrinsic motivation is the *externally* regulated behaviour that attempts to achieve imposed goals or avoid punishment. Another rather controlled form is the *introjected* regulation, in which a person attempts to gain social approval or to avoid feelings of guilt through his or her behaviour. The two self-determined types of extrinsic motivation are the *identified* and *integrated* regulation, in which a person has internalised the importance or value of an activity (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

SDT states that the satisfaction of the three basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness enhances the internalisation process of externally imposed goals (Deci & Ryan, 2000; 2008). The need for relatedness is the main reason to perform an activity that is not inherently interesting but valued by significant others to whom a person feels connected (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 64). A sense of competence for a task (positive self-efficacy expectation) also plays a central role for internalisation. For the most self-determined forms of motivation, the satisfaction of the need for autonomy is essential, whereas pressure and surveillance are likely to thwart integrated and intrinsic motivation (Deci & Moller, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

> According to SDT, the three basic psychological needs [autonomy, competence, relatedness] are universal […]. Nonetheless, there is considerable variability in the values and goals held in different cultures, suggesting that some of the avenues to basic need satisfaction may differ widely from culture to culture. For example, in a collectivist culture, people may resonate to

> group norms so acting in accord with them might lead them to experience relatedness and autonomy insofar as they have fully internalized the collectivist values of their culture. By contrast, in an individualistic culture, acting in accord with a group norm might be experienced as conformity or compliance and thus as a threat to autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 246).

Consequently, a socially oriented achievement motivation is widespread in East Asian countries, meaning that goals of belonging and smooth social relationships tend to be considered more important than individual aims (Plaut & Markus, 2005, pp. 474–478). Based on collectivist values, the need for relatedness can even effect intrinsic motivation, as a study by Iyengar and Lepper (1999) illustrated: Asian American children showed the highest level of intrinsic motivation to complete a particular task when they were told that their mother or classmates had chosen the activity for them, whereas Anglo American children were more intrinsically motivated when they made their own choices. In a systematic literature review by Akosah-Twumansi and team on factors that influence career choices, youth in more individualistically oriented societies tended towards greater independence in their decision-making and experienced less parental guidance than youth in more collectivist settings. The principal factor for the former was intrinsic motivation, namely personal interest. Adolescents in more collectivist settings were mainly influenced by parental expectations or opinions (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018). If they followed the imposed career goals only to avoid feelings of guilt, their motivation can be characterised as controlled. However, if they have internalised the professional preference of their parents or the virtue of honouring parental wishes, they may have experienced the externally directed career choice as largely self-determined.

While bearing these studies in mind, it is important to avoid cultural generalisations and stereotypes that overlook individual variations within the same culture. Thus, instead of claiming that all East Asians value collectivism over individualism, we can only assume tendencies. As Littlewood (1999, pp. 77–80) formulates it, East Asian cultures *tend* to support the conception of the interdependent self, which is *more likely* to attach importance to group goals and expectations and feels comfortable in hierarchical relationships, while Western cultures have a greater *tendency* to endorse the independent self, which *may* place emphasis on individual views and horizontal relationships.

Empirical state of research concerning the choice of music as degree subject

In the following, results of selected empirical investigations with students and professionals in instrumental and vocal majors are described. One interview study of note was conducted with undergraduate instrumentalists and vocalists enrolled in a British conservatoire,[1] for whom love of music was a primary motivation for choosing music as study subject (Burland, 2005, p. 103). Furthermore, they shared a desire to fulfil their po-

1 In her study, Burland (2005) also examined a sample of university music students, which is not discussed here.

tential, "and they were driven by their positive attitude towards challenges as a means for further extending themselves and their musical abilities" (Burland, 2005, p. 106). Similar motives emerged in an interview study with 40 graduates in instrumental performance in Austria (Bork 2010). Bork groups the main reasons for respondents' choice of study into three categories: The first encompasses the joy of instrumental playing as a favourite activity and as a means of artistic expression. The second category includes the ease of learning and the rapid progress, and the third comprises the pleasure of success and admiration. In conclusion, the motivation of Bork's interviewees to take up instrumental studies was usually not a specific professional goal, but the desire to engage intensively with music itself. They usually did not make a conscious decision for their degree subject at a certain point in time. For 30 of the 40 participants who had completed preparatory courses at music colleges prior to their studies, the study choice was largely anticipated by the decision to take part in these preparatory courses at an average age of 15.5 years (Bork, 2010, pp. 66–84, 96–98). Thus, the choice of degree course can be understood based on a biographical investigation (see also Bork, 2010, p. 97).

In a survey of graduates of instrumental and vocal performance programmes at music conservatoires in Germany, musical fulfilment was of primary importance for the choice of study, while all other aspects, such as earning potential and career prospects, were less significant. In the free answer category, the most frequent reasons given were love of music, making music together, personality development and talent development (Gembris & Langner, 2005, pp. 55–60). As the authors suggest, one possible explanation could be that musicians are intrinsically motivated idealists who place little importance on material aspects for the sake of musical fulfilment (Gembris & Langner, 2005, p. 60). Gembris and Langners' set of questions regarding the choice of study was used in a slightly extended version in a survey of instrumental and vocal teachers in Switzerland. The teachers' major reasons – in retrospect – for studying at a music conservatoire were also musical fulfilment and an item named "better mastery of the instrument", while economic considerations played a much smaller role. At the beginning of the undergraduate course, a soloist career was a more frequently cited aspiration than at graduation; the imaginable vocational activities changed during the period of study, resulting in teaching professions (Binder, Laveglia, & Niehaus, 2012, pp. 14–15).

In summary, research on the choice of instrumental and vocal music studies with European samples shows that the underlying motivation is predominantly self-determined (intrinsic or integrated), namely based on a passion for music and the desire for musical fulfilment and progress. Satisfying the needs for autonomy and competence seems to play an essential role.

In a comparative survey by Wu (2012) on study choice motivation among students in instrumental education and performance courses in Austria and Taiwan, the Austrian participants were almost exclusively driven by intrinsic motivation, while for the Taiwanese, the decision included controlled and self-determined forms of extrinsic motivation. The main extrinsic reasons for Taiwanese students were the reputation of the university and parental wishes, the latter presumably in connection with the psychological need for relatedness. Other important factors were the social prestige of the profession and the fact

that studying music was the least bad of their options. The author of the study relates these perceived limited choices to the fact that the majority of Taiwanese respondents had specialised in music within the school system early on by attending elite music classes. Since music education in Austria is mostly organised outside of compulsory school and thus less connected with examinations or the expectation of pursuit of higher music studies, Wu assumes that for the Austrian respondents, playing music was rather perceived as a voluntary leisure activity. Consequently, self-determined forms of motivation lead to their decision for instrumental studies among various career alternatives (Wu, 2012, pp. 98–106, 129–132, 172–173). Research by Bai indicates that the decision to pursue higher education in music in China is closely related to the competitive education system which requires an early specialisation on the intended career field: According to his results, the decision is often based on low school grades and limited chances of admission to a high-ranking academic university. In addition, the financial prospects of a music career and interest in the profession seem to be determining factors (Bai, 2021, pp. 3–9).

The author has no knowledge of any further research about the choice of study of East Asian conservatoire students. However, an interview study with 24 musical high achievers of primary and secondary school age in Hong Kong provides insight into their professional aspirations, as more than half of them wanted to make music a career, the majority in a teaching position. As reasons for their career goal, some named an interest in music, others wanted to fulfil parental expectations. Those parents who promoted becoming a music teacher did so because of the perceived high income and other utilitarian considerations (Leung & McPherson, 2011, pp. 84, 87).

Music-related educational context of the empirical investigation

In China, opportunities for music and instrumental education – apart from music lessons embedded in general schools – are provided through private tuition, state-run institutions such as Children's Palaces (少年宫, *shàonián gōng*) with learning offerings for preschool children to teenagers, or primary and high schools attached to a conservatoire. These special schools prepare pupils for later music studies and focus on music-related subjects and practice (see also Bouvier's contribution in this volume and Xie & Leung, 2011, pp. 61–64; Yeh, 2001, pp. 33–37). In Switzerland, instrumental instruction and musical talent promotion programmes are primarily offered by music schools, sometimes in cooperation with conservatoires and grammar schools. Music schools – many of which are publicly subsidised – are part of the extracurricular sector. A music specialisation within general schools is typically only possible after the compulsory nine years of education, and then only at a small number of schools and with only a minimal reduction of general education content (Bundesamt für Kultur, 2013, pp. 10–17; Petersen, 2014, pp. 30–40).

When investigating the choice of study in China and Switzerland, the different admission requirements for tertiary education bear mentioning. In China, access to renowned universities that offer promising career prospects is highly selective and regulated by a nationally uniform examination (高考, *gāokǎo*) (e.g. Heger, 2018). For conservatoires,

a subject-specific qualifying examination must be passed, but the entry threshold for gāokǎo results is much lower than for other study programmes (Bai, 2021, pp. 3, 10). In Switzerland, a successful completion of the grammar school final examination (Matura) grants access to almost all degree courses and universities regardless of the grades achieved (Schweizerische Koordinationsstelle für Bildungsforschung SKBF, 2018, p. 144); however, for instrumental and vocal music studies a subject-related assessment exam must also be taken (Orelli, 2018).

Methods

Sample

The participants for this study were 36 music students in China and Switzerland, who were enrolled at conservatoires in Beijing, Shanghai, Suzhou, Lucerne, Zurich, Basel, and Geneva. They were between 22 and 28 years old and had been born and educated in the respective country. Comparability was ensured by restricting participants to those enrolled in master's performance programmes in art music of European tradition as wind or string instrument players. In China, nine women and nine men participated; in Switzerland eleven women and seven men. The sampling strategy considered some of the criteria mentioned above, whereby the exact structure and size of the sample was determined by continuous review of the collected data according to theoretical sampling (see also Flick, 2010, Chapter 11). All students contacted were informed about the objectives of the research and participation was voluntary. In order to prevent identification, recognisable information such as instruments and names are anonymised in the results section of this paper. Quotations from and references to individual interviewees (I) are numbered by person, beginning with I_C for the Chinese and I_S for the Swiss students.

Data collection and processing

Choosing a course of study is not an isolated decision. Investigating musical socialisation can thus be instructive for interpreting the explanations for selecting music studies (Bailer, 2002, p. 67). Accordingly, problem-centred, biographically oriented interviews were conducted in China and Switzerland.[2] The interview guide was translated from German into Chinese (Mandarin) and French (for interviews in the French-speaking part of Switzerland). In order to tackle methodological challenges in this cross-cultural research project, the meanings and translations of central concepts were discussed extensively within the multilingual research team and in expert workshops in the two countries, and several pilot interviews were carried out. Interviews in Switzerland were conducted

2 The data was collected for the author's PhD thesis on the influence of socialisation agents on musical talent development; for details on the methodological approach, see Kull, 2022, chapter 6.

in Swiss German or French, depending on the first language of the participants. The audio recordings were transcribed and the French transcripts subsequently translated into German by a native German speaker. For the interviews in China, a Chinese musician assisted as co-interviewer and interpreter, and the recordings were transcribed verbatim in Mandarin. The transcripts were translated into German by a native German speaking sinologist familiar with both cultures. In the case of ambiguous and culture-specific terms, he listed alternative translations or explanations, and for some key concepts, he added the Mandarin term in Pinyin. He and other experts on Chinese culture made a significant contribution to capturing and understanding culture-specific connotations and contexts (see also Kull, Petersen, & Camp, 2019). The quotations in the present paper were translated into English directly from the original French, German, and Chinese interview transcripts by the two translators who are not only German native speakers, but also proficient in English.

Analysis and interpretation

The data was evaluated using Thematic Qualitative Content Analysis according to Kuckartz (2018) by means of the software MAXQDA. In a combination of deductive and inductive approaches, relevant topics were identified and categorised. The thematically structured findings were analysed for inter-individual differences within the Chinese and Swiss study groups. Furthermore, similarities and differences between the two study groups were identified on the basis of summarising comparisons.

Results of the empirical investigation[3]

Choice of study of the Swiss participants

The majority of Swiss respondents stated that they chose their degree subject when they were between 15 and 17 years old. Some of the Swiss participants took the decision only at the age of 19 or later after a long period of reflection, and a very small number had already decided to study instrumental music at primary school age. The only Swiss interviewee who attended a specialised school described that aspiring to study music was a condition for admission to this art high school. With one exception, all Swiss respondents decided on their degree course based on their own desire, although for about half of them an impulse to consider this subject as an option came from outside. Socialisation agents such as parents, teachers, peers, music students, or graduates gave suggestions or acted as role models. The parents of several Swiss participants had themselves studied instrumental music and others had worked as instrumental teachers, despite not having a music degree. Other interviewees learned a lot about conservatoires from their teachers or

3 The results are also published in Kull, 2022.

(former) music students and were inspired and encouraged by them to take the entrance examination.

The parents of several Swiss participants had expressed concerns about their financial prospects as professional musicians but supported their choice of study. External motives like financial aspects or labour market conditions do not seem to have been factors in the Swiss respondents' decisions. For all of them, intrinsic motivation – namely their love of music and their enjoyment of instrumental playing – were pivotal in their choice of degree course. An interviewee who had considered different professional directions and decided for instrumental studies out of joy and interest in the subject stated:

> Everyone who studies here [at the conservatoire] has that [passion for music] […]. Otherwise, you would not be able to enjoy these studies. I mean, otherwise practicing would be no fun, otherwise practicing would make no sense, otherwise making music would make no sense, if you don't enjoy it (I_S_8).[4]

From several interviews with Swiss students, it becomes evident that an everyday life without instrumental playing would be unthinkable for them. Through music, they can process and express their feelings; when making music they feel "comfortable". Some of them mention the emotionally regulating function of instrumental playing as a specific reason for their choice of degree subject, which can also be classified as integrated motivation. For several Swiss respondents, the fact that they made effortless progress on their instrument and that they did not consider themselves comparably talented in other disciplines was also relevant, which can be related to the psychological need for competence. Their self-efficacy expectation was based on reinforcing music-related learning experiences like encouragement from the environment or successful performance accomplishments:

> I think it was simply the fact that I kept making progress on the instrument […] and that I saw that I could play increasingly challenging pieces without it being enormously difficult for me. […] That's really what triggered my love for music and consequently my desire to be a professional musician. As I mentioned, it is also through the participation in various projects, either short- or long-term ones, that I realised: "This is what I want to do because I like it" (I_S_13).[5]

Most Swiss participants name various key moments that sparked their passion for music and instrumental playing. Almost half of the Swiss sample explicitly describes orchestra

4 Source text: "Alle, die hier studieren, haben das […]. Also sonst könnte man dieses Studium ja gar nicht geniessen. Also ich meine, sonst macht Üben keinen Spass, sonst macht Üben keinen Sinn, sonst macht Musikmachen keinen Sinn, wenn man das nicht gerne macht."

5 Source text: "En fait tout simplement je pense que c'est à force de progresser sur l'instrument, […] et de voir qu'on arrive à jouer des pièces de plus en plus compliquées sans que ça soit forcement une énorme difficulté pour nous. […] C'est vraiment ce qui a déclenché chez moi cet amour pour la musique et cette envie d'être professionnel par la suite. Comme je l'ai dit aussi, c'est la participation à des différents projets, que ce soit à court terme ou à long terme qui fait qu'on s'aperçoit qu'en fait: 'C'est ce que je veux faire parce que ça me plaît.'"

and ensemble participation as decisive for their desire to enrol at a conservatoire, which may be linked to the psychological need for relatedness.

> When I was a teenager, I joined the high school orchestra and that's where it really struck me that I wanted to be a professional musician, by playing in the orchestra actually. It was really because of the orchestra that I said to myself: "Oh, this is way too awesome. I cannot *not* do this for the rest of my life". And that's when I really decided to study it (I_S_14).[6]

In some cases, the opportunity to perform solo parts and the related enjoyment of challenges and admiration were also crucial – the latter may be considered as introjected motivation and can also be understood as supporting feelings of competence. Other interviewees describe concert visits, music reception via media (e.g., live concert broadcasts on television) and encounters with role models as key experiences that triggered their interest in an instrumental degree course.

Choice of study of the Chinese participants

Half of the Chinese respondents completed the reflection process about their study choice in junior or senior high school. For the others, the decision was already made during primary school age by registering for a special school that prepares pupils for studying at a conservatoire. The path to a profession as a musician was predetermined by this early specialisation, and career alternatives seemed unattainable because of negative self-efficacy expectations for other subjects of study, as the following comments from a Chinese interviewee illustrate:

> So I thought to myself […], if I really don't get into university [conservatoire], then I don't know what else to do, because since childhood I only learned this, this one instrument (I_C_18).[7]
>
> Since the affiliated primary school it was decided that I am predestined to study [this string instrument] in this life (I_C_18).[8]

In half of the Chinese respondents, the parents had decided that they should strive for music studies, while for others the parents at least gave a recommendation to that effect. For some interviewees, suggestions were also made by other socialisation agents such as their instrumental teacher, a future professor, or a person with connections to a conservatoire. As one Chinese student described, her mother – more than she herself – wanted her

6 Source text: "À l'adolescence je suis rentrée à l'orchestre du collège et là ça m'a vraiment frappé que je voulais être musicienne professionnelle en faisant de l'orchestre en fait. C'est vraiment par le bien de l'orchestre que je me suis dit: "Oh, c'est beaucoup trop génial ça. Je ne peux pas *ne pas* faire ça toute ma vie. Et c'est à partir de ce moment-là où j'ai vraiment décidé de faire des études."

7 Source text: "所以我想的是 […] 或者大学真的考不上, 我不知道自己的出路在哪儿，因为我从小只学了这一门乐器, 就这样. "

8 Source text: "就从上了附小就确定了，我这一辈子注定要学 [instrument anonymised]."

to pursue a professional music education. In addition, her instrumental teacher attributed her potential and "indoctrinated" her with the idea of seeking admission to the affiliated middle school of a particular conservatoire (I_C_10).

Only four participants, all of them male, had selected their field of study explicitly in a self-determined manner, and only for two of them does the decision seem to have arisen primarily from intrinsic motivation, namely from their passion for music. For several Chinese respondents, the choice of study was partly supported by their interest in or love for music, but also influenced by environmental factors. Several Chinese interviewees and their parents feared that their grades in general school subjects would not be sufficient to be admitted to one of the highly respected universities. They considered the chances of being accepted to a conservatoire higher:

> Because at that time it was really particularly difficult to get into a good university in the general subjects. And [the brass instrument I learned] is also a fringe subject. Moreover, when I was young, I learned it much faster than other people. I thought this was very suitable for me, and after all it was the [name of a conservatoire], that does not sound too bad. That's why my dad supported me, that was also a very important reason (I_C_13).[9]

In those cases where the parents had a strong influence on the reflection process or even anticipated the decision to enrol at a conservatoire by registering the child for a special school, the considerations relied mainly on earnings prospects. Several Chinese interviewees were taught by their parents that artistic skills are a beneficial qualification for future life and that studying music can ensure their livelihood (see also Kull, 2021, pp. 77–78):

> First of all, they [the parents] probably hoped that I could enter a university [conservatoire] with my major and that I would have no problem finding a job afterwards, namely a regular job that would enable me to earn a living. […] Because there is nobody else in my family studying this major, and they hope that I will later have a better life than they do (I_C_17).[10]

Some of the interviews also revealed that the parents had transferred their high appreciation of instrumental playing and their own aspirations in music to their child. One father who worked as a musician and instrumental teacher without a corresponding degree wanted the son to realise "his dream" of instrumental studies. The expectation to enrol at a particular conservatoire was clearly imposed on the son (I_C_9). Other respondents wanted to pursue music studies out of a sense of obligation to their parents, who had invested a lot in their musical education.

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9 Source text: "哦，因为当时考文化课去上一个很好的大学，实在是非常就是不容易。然后 [instrument anonymised] 是一个冷门，而且我小的时候就会比别人学的快很多，我觉得这个可能很适合我，而且毕竟 [name of a conservatoire]，听起来还是挺不错，所以说，我的爸爸也支持我，这个也是非常重要的一个原因。"

10 Source text: "首先，他们可能会期望当时我这个专业考上一所大学，然后能顺利找到一个工作，就是能正常的工作就是去生活 […] 因为家里没有走这个专业的，希望我走了这个专业，以后能生活的比他们更好吧。"

Only half of the Chinese respondents mentioned concrete positive key experiences before enrolling at the conservatoire, such as participation in school orchestras and competitions, a master class or lessons with the future professor. Specific instances that influenced their desire to study music were rarely stated. Several Chinese interviewees developed a love for music and their instrument only during their undergraduate courses. Others report a great passion for music already in childhood and youth, which intrinsically motivated their choice of study:

> I think learning music makes me very happy every day […]. And then, if you can turn what you love to do into your profession – I think such a life is really very happy (I_C_8).[11]

Discussion

While there are various inter-individual differences within the Swiss and Chinese samples, as have been outlined in the results section, there are also noticeable differences between the two groups. A main difference in the accounts of the Chinese and Swiss interviewees concerns the greater self-determination and in particular the higher intrinsic motivation in choosing music studies among the Swiss, whereas half of the Chinese respondents named their parents as the decision-makers for their degree subject. These differences can likely be attributed to culture-specific values (see also Kull, 2022, pp. 221–225, 228–232). While autonomy, personal goals, and intrinsic motivation tend to be considered important in more individualistically oriented societies such as Switzerland, more collectivistically oriented societies like China tend to prioritise the concerns of the social group. According to deeply rooted Confucian ideologies still influential in China, children should respect their parents' wishes for the sake of harmony (Chan, 2007; Huang & Gove, 2015; Trommsdorff, 1995). Consequently, children are likely to consider the expectations of their family and even give up their own career desires in order to conform to those their parents held for them (Sawitri & Creed, 2017, p. 538). Lent, Brown, and Hackett (2006) state it as follows regarding their Social Cognitive Career Theory:

> Consistent with SCCT's assumptions about the importance of environmental and cultural influences, some recent research also suggests that interests may play a smaller role in the choice-making process of adolescents and young adults from particular cultures. Specifically, those from a culture characterized by collective decision making were more inclined to choose a career path that was consistent with the preferences of their family members and with their self-efficacy beliefs rather than one that necessarily fit their personal interests (p. 573).

Cultural values thus place different expectations on parents, who in China tend to bear a large share of the responsibility for the professional future of their children (see also Bai,

11 Source text: "我觉得就是学习音乐让我感觉到我每天都很快乐 […]. 然后，就是我觉得就是做自己喜欢的事儿,它是你的职业, 我觉得人生就…就真的是非常幸福."

2021, p. 5; Huang & Gove, 2015, pp. 43–45), and on young people, who in Switzerland are likely to be solely responsible for their professional careers.

In the current investigation, the decision to study music was usually made at a significantly younger age among the Chinese respondents compared to the Swiss because of different educational structures. The reflection process took longer for the Swiss respondents because they perceived various degree courses as realistic options and weighed them against each other. This was possible firstly because of their comprehensive general education and secondly because of the permeability of the Swiss education system. In contrast, due to an early specialisation, the study direction of half of the Chinese sample was determined in primary school – at an age where children are generally less autonomous in making key decisions. This result is in accordance with findings by Wu in Taiwan (2012, p. 173) and Bai in China (2021, pp. 8–9). The results of a survey by Park (2009) in South Korea and Australia with over one hundred talented young instrumentalists and their parents point in a similar direction. According to Park, all South Korean teenagers in his research had already decided to become musicians by joining the Preparatory Training Program for Young Artists, whereas only 60% of the Australian adolescents stated this career goal. With the exception of one missing answer, all parents in the South Korean sample expected their child to become an "excellent musician", while just about 60% of the Australian parents shared this expectation. Park concludes that the results indicate a linkage between parental aspirations and the career objectives of their children (Park, 2009, pp. 257, 297–300). It can be supposed that the need for relatedness contributes to the internalisation of parental aims and also plays a role with regard to being surrounded by peers who aspire to instrumental studies when attending a specialised boarding school (see also Stabell's contribution in this volume). Furthermore, it seems reasonable to assume that meeting imposed expectations and absolving an elite education satisfies the need for competence (see also Wu, 2012, pp. 98–106).

The reasons for strong parental encouragement for the majority of Chinese respondents to enrol at a conservatoire seem to lie primarily in the parents' view that professional instrumentalists have good earning opportunities (see also Bai, 2021, p. 8) as well as in their high appreciation of musical skills, probably due to the thriving scene and high standing of art music of European tradition in China. The high esteem of playing an instrument can also be understood historically: it has been considered an expression of a cultivated person as far back as in Ancient China (see also Dai's and Wang's contribution in this volume). Furthermore, in view of China's highly competitive society, admission to a renowned university is seen as an important component in securing a livelihood (see also Xie & Leung, 2011, p. 61). In contrast, several Swiss respondents were made aware by their parents of uncertain financial career prospects but did not let these concerns dissuade them from their desired course of study. In Bork's research in Austria (2010, p. 75), too, warnings of difficult career prospects did not influence the respondents' motivation to enrol at a conservatoire. These results are also consistent with several investigations in German-speaking countries (Binder et al., 2012; Gembris & Langner, 2005; Neuhaus, 2008), in which, concerning the decision to study music, income was given much less weight than the desire for a future that promises professional satisfaction. It can be assumed that the economic factors (not only salaries of specific occupations but also

macroeconomic conditions) mentioned by Lent, Brown, and Hackett (2000; 2006) in their Social Cognitive Career Theory, have to be considered relevant influences, in so far as Switzerland has enjoyed a high level of prosperity for decades, which was unimaginable for Chinese parents in their childhood. In China, social advancement, made possible by a good education (Huang & Gove, 2015, pp. 43–44), is very important for reasons of the economic past and in light of the challenges of the present labour market.

Conclusion

According to the interviewees, choice of study subject was mainly driven by intrinsic and integrated motivation among the Swiss respondents, while for most Chinese participants it was also based on extrinsic factors such as economic and tactical considerations, which is in line with the results of Wu's (2012) comparative study in Austria and Taiwan and Bai's (2021) investigation in China. It also supports Lent, Brown, and Hackett's (2006) theory that career-related choices are sometimes influenced less by interests than by distal outcome expectations such as wages, or by environmental factors like education systems. Although different forms of motivation often coexist in a complex combination[12] and cannot always be clearly distinguished, it can be concluded that due to cultural values, country-specific conditions and education structures, Swiss respondents tended to primarily follow their own interests when choosing their music degree course, while several Chinese participants reported having been strongly influenced by proximal environmental factors like parental expectations. In cases where they fully internalised the value of respecting parental wishes and if their needs for relatedness and competence were satisfied, their motivational regulation could be categorised as a partially self-determined extrinsic form. For Swiss students, the need for relatedness – alongside the needs for competence and autonomy – presumably also played a role, as their parents and teachers inspired and supported them in their choice of study.

In spite of the overall tendencies, there were also interindividual differences within the two samples. For example, admiration by others was one of the motivating factors for individual Swiss respondents, which can be classified as introjected regulation; and for individual Chinese interviewees, intrinsic motivation prevailed in their degree choice. As some Chinese respondents developed a love for their instrument only during their undergraduate course, it would be interesting to investigate how enjoyment of making music can unfold as late as at this stage, and to what extent the students' satisfaction and success is related to their initial motivation. A further investigation of such interindividual differences and cross-cultural similarities by means of corresponding research questions would be worthwhile for future comparative studies – also in view of the dynamically developing societies and values (see also Liu et al., 2015, p. 671).

12 For example, a given intrinsic motivation can be accompanied by controlled forms of motivation in light of competitiveness and high demands during professional training and work (Evans & Ryan, 2022, pp. 593).

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Annatina Kull

studied clarinet at the Lucerne School of Music and at the University of Music and Performing Arts Graz. She graduated with honours with a Master of Arts in music and a Master of Arts in music pedagogy. Subsequently, she completed a Certificate of Advanced Studies in music research at the Lucerne School of Music and in 2023 she completed her PhD on talent development in a comparative perspective. Since 2013 she has worked as a researcher in the area of music education and, since 2023, as an associate lecturer at Lucerne School of Music. She has also taught in regional music schools and works as a freelance clarinettist.

The Role of Chinese Culture in Musical Talent Development: For Better or for Worse

David Yun Dai, Tianshu Wang

Abstract

In this article, we first provide a historical background for the development of musical talent in China, taking into account Western cultural influences as well as Chinese traditional values and beliefs, all of which have helped to unleash the potential of musically talented youths. We go on to discuss how some pedagogical differences and psychosocial processes tend to present advantages as well as challenges to musically talented Chinese youngsters. We will show how musically talented individuals negotiate developmental transitions under the influence of different cultural traditions as they navigate their pathways to success. Finally, we will present a mini-study of three eminent Chinese pianists, Lang Lang, Yuja Wang, and Haochen Zhang, to illustrate the course of their careers: all of them received a fairly traditional music training in China and then went on to the United States for a more advanced music education, with the aim of making eminent accomplishments as young piano virtuosi. We conclude the article arguing that an integration of Chinese and Western cultural ways of musical education, balancing discipline with freedom, and technical proficiency with musical individuality, should be the optimal choice for a full-fledged musical talent development.

Keywords

musical talent development, musical pedagogy, psychosocial issues, cultural traditions, cross-cultural differences

In recent decades, many young Chinese musicians have gained widespread attention and received critical acclaim on the international concert scene. What is behind their stories of success? In particular, how have Chinese musicians developed who received a twofold education, first in China, and then in the United States? What are some of the strengths and weaknesses of musical development in that specific context? And, overall speaking, why do music and musical education tend to be so important in China? To understand their prominence, one must understand that the notion of cultivating one's personality or character is deeply rooted in Chinese culture, especially in the realm of Confucianism.[1]

1 We thank Frank Kouwenhoven for his comments on an earlier version of this article.

The large social-historical context: Why music, not sport?

The ancient term *liyue* (礼乐), a reference to (Confucian) musical rites, offers a telling insight into the strong social and spiritual importance attached to music in China. In this term, *li* (a kind of social etiquette that has normative power similar to that of law) is fundamentally connected with *yuè* (music) with the aim of creating harmonious social relationships via lofty musical rituals. The cultivation of personality is further stressed in the elite traditions of the aristocracy, featuring various string instruments, first and foremost the seven-stringed zither *gǔqin* (古琴), but also the game of Go and the arts of calligraphy and painting (琴棋书画, *qínqíshūhu*). A distinct difference between Chinese and Western ancient cultures is that athleticism or physical sports have gradually become less prominent over the course of China's history. In war times, of course, physical prowess would always be at a premium in the Chinese empire (the Central Kingdom), but many Chinese emperors became better known for their mastery of Chinese calligraphy (a major art form) than for their talents in the art of war. Thus, an emphasis on music and other forms of art in Chinese culture is by and large the legacy of an agricultural civilisation where building social harmony and enrichment of the aesthetic life of the aristocracy were viewed as more important than adventuring overseas for commerce and territorial conquest, or showcasing bravery, dignity, or physical prowess on the part of the nobleman.

An East-West melting pot and the rise of music after the Cultural Revolution

Modern and contemporary contexts constitute another important consideration in understanding the rise of interest in music, especially Western classical music, in China. The latter evolved in a wider context of Western influences. For example, the Shanghai Conservatory (the alma mater of one of the authors of this paper) was the first institute of higher music education in China, founded in 1927, and modelled in various ways after Western institutions of this kind. Its director was Dr. Xiao Youmei,[2] a graduate of the Leipzig Conservatory of Music, and many of its teachers came from France and from Russia. Some of the Russians were among the 20.000-plus Russian refugees who were living in the city of Shanghai at the time (Edmunds & Yang, 2012). It is worth noting that Li Delun and Ding Shande, among others, were trained at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. Later, during the second half of the 20th century, both became influential leaders in China's music scene.

The period of 1966–1976 constituted a dark era for Western music in China. It was the time of the notorious Great Cultural Revolution, when all "Western bourgeois influences" were purged, and music professors had to be "re-educated". In this political

2 In spelling names of the Chinese, we use the Chinese convention of family name first, followed by given name, with the exception that the names of some well-known people, such as Yuja Wang or Haochen Zhang, as well as the authors of this article, are spelled the way they appear in Western social media and publications.

climate, Western classical music was forbidden, and henceforth the sole purpose of the arts was to "serve the people". Here "the people" refers to workers, peasants, and soldiers, who, according to Vladimir Lenin, represent the main pillars of a socialist society (Soviet Russia at this time served in several ways as a model for cultural and social policies in China). Concert stages were dominated by eight "Revolutionary Model Operas", where traditional instrumental ensembles were replaced by symphony orchestras working to promote Peking Opera and modern Chinese ballet fashioned in a "revolutionary" style. The outside world knew very little about musical education and the more general social and cultural developments inside China during this period.

In 1979, a film entitled *From Mao to Mozart* (Lerner, 1979), which documented Isaac Stern's visit to China right after the Cultural Revolution, marked the beginning of a new era of cultural communication between the country and the West. For many spectators abroad the film provided a first glimpse of musical education in modern China. Stern (1920–2001) was an influential American violinist who, in his prime, was considered one of the greatest instrumentalists of the 20th century, and who also became an important power broker in the classical music world after he led a successful campaign to save Carnegie Hall from destruction (see Kozinn, 2001). Stern's visits to two music schools in China, the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing and the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, clearly reinvigorated the long-abandoned enterprise of Western music in China. Some of the young musicians who appeared in the film later became eminent artists. For example, Jian Wang was a cello student at the elementary school affiliated with Shanghai Conservatory of Music at the time he met and played for Stern. Later, through Stern's encouragement and support, he was able to attend Yale University's School of Music. Now one of the busiest classical music artists, Wang has performed as a renowned cellist throughout the world. During his visit to China in the late 1970s, Stern was deeply impressed by the musical skills of the young music students he met. He strolled through the practice rooms of the elementary school affiliated with the Shanghai Conservatory of Music and was amazed by all the musical talent he witnessed. He proclaimed that a younger generation of greatest instrumentalists would appear in China. The prediction seems to have materialised. Since then, many young artists, especially piano virtuosi, have emerged on the international stages: Lang Lang, Yuja Wang, and Haochen Zhang, to name just a few. Their successful stories can be attributed partly to the cultural and pedagogical advancements made in China.

Popularity of music training as a middle-class phenomenon in China

Like the game of Ping Pong in China or Soccer in Brazil, the success of young musicians in piano and violin is partly due to a large base of aspiring young – and talented – students. In China, hundreds of thousands of children start learning musical instruments as early as age four or five. The most gifted and promising ones will try to get into preparatory schools of famed conservatories, and then begin their long journey towards a

professional musical career. The widespread fashion that prompted millions of Chinese parents to seek music training for their children early on is a middle-class phenomenon. Chinese parents tended to see music education as beneficial to their children, in terms of both enriching their offspring's inner life and developing an essential skill (Dai & Schader, 2001). Because of the recently gained financial security, these families can afford the high cost of such prolonged commitments. One may wonder why so many Chinese parents are willing to invest so much in music when only very few children can be expected to join to the ranks of elite performing artists. Part of the parental motivation might come from the perception that musical competence is the hallmark of the well-cultivated or cultured mind (reminiscent of the long-standing cultural tradition we discussed at the beginning of this article), and part of it might come from their beliefs that music training can teach discipline and life skills, so that even if their children do not make it to the elite ranks of excellence, their labour of love is not totally lost. To be sure, once their children are older, Chinese parents may become just as ambivalent as US-American parents about the competitive nature of academic and musical ambitions (Dai & Schader, 2002).

There is another side of the story to be told. When we began to look carefully at the success formula of Chinese parents, we stumbled upon a worrisome approach-avoidance pattern: the Chinese tend to embrace well-structured rather than ill-structured pathways to success (Dai & Zhao, 2021). They try to look for the best possible guarantees for success. For example, they tend to see the pursuit of entrepreneurship as too precarious and risky, whereas in fact its failure rate is not necessarily higher than that of pursuing an academic or music career. However, as academic or musical talent development happens to be more institutionalised, and the pathways to entrepreneurship are not as well charted and predictable, the former appears to offer Chinese parents more psychological security. Even within music, Chinese parents prefer to play it safe for their children with Western classic music training rather than let them take on traditional Chinese or pop music, which is perceived as a less secure and prestigious career option. This tendency of strong interference with their children's career paths (sometimes referred to as "Tiger Mom Syndrome"; namely, a tough-handed, authoritarian approach to children's education) leads to another concern from the talent development point of view: Chinese parents tend to see music as a skill that helps their children gain prestige, not as a form of lived experience or personal expression. Because of this tendency, the embracing of music education by Chinese middle-class families is a mixed blessing, when we consider how talent actually develops.

Pedagogical and psychosocial issues of musical talent development

There are two important interrelated aspects of musical talent development: pedagogical approaches and psycho-social processes. The former concerns how children pick up music skills and how skill development can be facilitated by instruction, training, and practice; the latter concerns how children interact with challenges involved in musical development (including different instructional practices), and how their feelings, self-concepts, and motivations either enhance or debilitate their engagement with musical develop-

ment. In the following discussion, we will focus on piano performance, as piano is the most popular instrument in China, which epitomises how musical talent development plays out individually and institutionally.

Pedagogical issues: The Russian influence meshed with the Chinese cultural tradition

As a cultural icon of Western civilisation, keyboard instruments were first brought to China by Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), an Italian Jesuit missionary who was the first European to enter the Forbidden City. Invited by the Emperor Wanli in 1601 (the Ming Dynasty), Ricci went to Beijing carrying a cache of gifts including mechanical clocks, religious objects, and many other curious things, among them a clavichord, a predecessor of the piano. Perhaps Ricci did not know that he started China on the path to becoming a "nation of pianists, piano makers, piano students, and piano lovers" (Melvin, 2015). Piano education began to spread rapidly at the beginning of the 20th century. In the 1930s, the development of original compositions for piano began to emerge in China with the highly acclaimed masterpiece, "Buffalo Boy's Flute" by He Luting. The birth of this piece was indebted to Alexander Tcherepnin (1899–1978), a Russian composer and pianist who at the time was traveling in the Far East to collect folk music materials for his compositions. Fascinated and inspired by the rich Chinese artistic culture, he decided to stay in China. As a result, in the years 1933–1936 he spent his time learning and observing traditional music, theatre, and religious activities. He was also invited to teach composition at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. Enjoying his experience of getting the traditional materials first-hand, Tcherepnin sensed the importance of recreating such Chinese sounds on Western instruments and establishing a repertoire of new native compositions. Therefore, he sponsored a contest of "Piano Compositions of Chinese National Flavour" in 1934. He Luting was a student in the composition department and entered the competition with three pieces. "Buffalo Boy's Flute" won the grand prize with a cash award, and he was granted publication of the work by Tcherepnin's publishing firm in Japan (Wang, 1999). Later He Luting became one of the most prominent figures in China's musical world, holding the position of President of the Shanghai Conservatory for many years, and exerting major influence on generations of Chinese musicians.

Although the establishment of the first conservatory of music in China was supported by Western Europe, the development of music education was tied to a strong Russian philosophical influence. The famous Russian school system for gifted children served as a model for Chinese music schools. Based on this system, musical talent involved a combination of natural abilities and hard work. Therefore, early formation of technical skills was thought of as essential. Specialised music schools in China admitted talented children from ages 7 to 17 and offered professionally oriented music studies with a focus on developing future music performers. For gifted children, a high level of difficulty was (and still is) considered optimal in Russia because it is seen as the only pathway to the full realisation of their potential abilities (Nadyrova, 2016). The Russian system has produced

a massive collection of great pianists and violinists. In many ways, the Russian viewpoints resonated with Chinese culture: the kinaesthetic nature of piano technique relates to the psycho-motor foundation of a traditional martial artist, which required intensive practice already at an early stage in in life, the so-called "Childhood Kung Fu" (童子功, *tóngzǐgōng*). Building up such a quality demands persistent hard work, concentration, and dedication. This is also true for the training of Beijing Opera actors, as their motto says: "It takes ten years of hard work off stage to trade for one minute of satisfactory performance on stage" (台上一分钟，台下十年功, *táishàng yīfēnzhōng, táixià shíniángōng*). Thus, in China, it is a common understanding that the road to becoming a professional pianist is rough, and the process can be painful. It is a choice of lifestyle that dictates self-discipline. Very early on in life, practice sessions occupy most of a child's daily time, and they are filled with repetition of mechanical finger exercises. Children naturally resist the pressure. Here the role of the parents reveals its importance.

Chinese parents tend to believe children need guidance in choosing what they want, otherwise they will eat candy all day, figuratively or literally speaking (Chua, 2011). Out of the best intentions, they make decisions for their children and monitor their progress every step of the way. These parents can be extremely strict, they may even sometimes appear cruel. One of the authors of this chapter became acquainted with Lang Lang and his family long before the pianist became a star. In fact, both the author and Lang Lang studied under the same teacher. The "cold-blooded" father who made a piano virtuoso out of Lang Lang is portrayed in the memoir *Journey of a Thousand Miles: My Story*, where he met some resistance from his rebellious teenager son (Lang & Ritz, 2009). However, long hours and supervised practicing paid off in the case of Lang Lang. Chinese students in general have a solid technical foundation, which allows them to build toward the highest levels of artistry. At the end of the day, those children thank their parents for the "tough love", which from a Westerner's perspective could be seen as cold and unacceptable. There are many successful examples. When the three young pianists, Lang Lang, Yuja Wang, and Haochen Zhang, arrived in the United States in their teens, they were fully equipped with superior technique and ready to be nurtured with a deep level of musicianship. Their stories will be looked at in more detail in the remainder of this article.

Psychosocial issues: Differing pedagogies and consequences in China and the US

A competitive spirit prevails in Chinese society, not only because its large population has to contend with limited resources, but also because competition is closely anchored in the country's long cultural history. Ancient China used a civil service examination system (科举制, kējǔzhì) to select candidates for the bureaucracy. It was the first nation to appoint public officials on merit rather than through patronage. The posts were open to anyone who could pass the daunting examinations at provincial and national levels. This system of civil examination provided an entry into political life and a gateway to economic and social success. For two thousand years, being a scholar and obtaining the

right to wear a mandarin costume has been the dream of many educated intellectuals. This prestigious group was the most honoured and the wealthiest class in China. The road to this level of success was highly competitive and demanded extended and enduring hard work.

Chinese parents and teachers know well that social success is contingent on meeting someone who can provide guidance and mentorship. "Once a teacher, he is the father for the rest of your life" (一日为师，终身为父, *yírì wéishī, , zhōngshēn wéifù*). Obedience is a respected virtue and it assures the reception of a tough, technique-centred pedagogy. The traditional piano teaching materials consist mostly of finger exercises, etude collections in sequence, and sonata collections in volumes (Guo & Cosaitis, 2019). With this type of instruction, enjoyment is not to be expected, and piano students can easily lose their interest in playing the instrument. What comes to the rescue is the belief in persistence and mental toughness. It is not unusual for children at age ten to practice for ten hours on the piano daily. In addition to dedicated parents, a new profession of "practice supervision" has emerged. The supervisors have some degree of piano background, but they are not ready to teach on their own. They attend lessons with the student and are paid to watch the student practice according to the teacher's instructions. The teachers may have all sorts of "tricks" to improve their students' techniques. One of the authors witnessed a teenager play the notes of Chopin's *Winter Wind* etude (Op. 25, No. 11) perfectly in full speed while blindfolded, and she had also practiced with "weighted keys" on her piano – attaching extra little weight bags to the hammers. Entrance exams to music schools all require the playing of etudes, and children opt for the most difficult materials such as Chopin Etude Op. 10, No. 2 to compete for a place in the elementary school affiliated with the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing.

Compared to the Chinese mentality of "sweetness is born out of hardship" (苦尽甘来, *kǔjìngānlái), the* US-American educational approach, by contrast, tends to make learning an enticing and enjoyable experience. Many method books in piano teaching deal with students of different backgrounds and abilities. Helping student develop a life-long interest in music is important, so the music textbooks are more closely related to the students' everyday life, using trendy tunes instead of European classics. Technical exercises are turned into musical games on the piano. In addition to pure finger activities, knowledge of music theory and history is introduced, and piano lessons are combined with music classes. Sight reading and ensemble playing is also part of the curriculum in private lessons. Piano teachers make constant efforts to build "character" in their students, including self-confidence, enthusiasm, persistence, and patience (Bastien, 1988). Although character building as a part of education is common across cultures, Americans tend to focus on developing an identity in music training, whereas the Chinese tend to emphasise self-control and discipline as the only way to ensure long-term development and social success in a manner that aligns with the long history of civil exams. More broadly, American education aims to be "developmentally appropriate" and sensitive to age (maturity) and individual differences, whereas in Chinese education, children, regardless of their backgrounds and differences, are expected to accommodate the system and be moulded to fit its requirements.

Opposite to the Chinese doctrine of self-control in compliance with the social norms of achievement, the US-American approach views individuality, including spontaneity and authenticity, as a source of power, an asset to be capitalised on, rather than a liability to be kept in check (Yu, 1996). Encouragement helps students to build confidence. Freedom invites curiosity, authenticity, and creativity. As a result, American students are usually more open-minded and independent in their approaches as compared to Chinese students. They are curious to find out more around the music they are playing, but often lack the technical proficiency that could take them deeper and further. Perhaps at the risk of over-generalisation, we discern a trade-off between the US-American and Chinese systems in their extremes, between freedom and discipline, between pursuing personal renditions of classical pieces and following the musical canon. Although there are cases of the lack of formal training and technical proficiency that actually enable someone to innovate their artistic ways of expression, as sometimes shown in the visual arts, the lack of technical proficiency is a major hindrance to musicianship in the performing arena. It is not unlike the game of soccer or other sports, in which the lack of high-level technique will impose significant constraints on how effectively one can execute a fancy tactical manoeuvre.

In a different venue of higher education, a tough early college entrance setting in China, one of us characterised what highly talented Chinese students are going through as a process of Cope-and-Grow. This is about coping with challenges every step of the way, and about growing by overcoming barriers and hurdles. The idea is to learn to see oneself in a new light and find oneself capable of making an impact in a field (Dai et al., 2015). The Cope-and-Grow experience should be ubiquitous across cultures, as talent development involves the same levels of challenges and opportunities regardless of cultural differences in pedagogy and belief systems. However, it does mean that the challenges experienced by Chinese and American students might be of different kinds. For example, the notion of deliberate practice and discipline (work ethic and technical proficiency) resonates with the Chinese ethos of hard work, and as such should be more easily established as the norm or standard of practice in private instruction settings as well as conservatories in China. In the same vein, personal drive, musicality, and creativity (intrinsic motivation in music, deep insights into music works, and individuality) should be more easily recognised and promoted in American education settings. On the possible negative side, a heightened emphasis on technical proficiency can be purchased at the cost of deep frustration and dampened self-confidence as a musician, whether one is a child just beginning to develop an interest in music, or a young adult who just entered a conservatory as a fledgling musician (Subotnik & Jarvin, 2005). Conversely, an unchecked endorsement of individual expressions and idiosyncratic interpretations could enhance the illusion of mastery and undermine the rigorously established standards of excellence. Psychologically, both confidence and humility are needed for overcoming the hurdles and improving oneself in talent development. In Subotnik et al.'s (2011) "mega-model" of talent development, a host of psychosocial skills are proposed as possible targets of intervention. Some of them are techniques useful for performers (e.g., how to regulate one's anxiety before and during performance), and others are meant to enhance long-term engagement (e.g., resisting temptations and distractions, and maintaining one's striving for achievement).

Negotiating developmental transitions: A tale of three piano virtuosi

Bloom (1985) and his colleagues conducted an extensive interview study with eminent young musicians, scientists, and athletes. Based on their interview data, they characterised talent development as having three stages. The first stage can be described as an acclimation stage, where substantial, though informal, experience is gained about a domain (be it music or mathematics). The second stage can be characterised as a stage of developing technical proficiency, involving more formal, typically institutionalised, training, such as at music prep schools or conservatories. The third stage can be called a stage of developing personal niches and styles, characterised as going beyond technical proficiency to work on the cutting-edge of performance or production, often revealing personal creativity. These stages can be roughly reinterpreted as a phase of characteristic adaptation to demands and activities in a domain, followed by maximal adaptation to task constraints imposed in a domain, and further transitioning to a phase of finding one's own personal voice within a community of professional practitioners; namely maximal adaptation with a distinct personal touch (Dai, 2017, 2020). Bloom also found that each stage is different in terms of not only skill levels, but also self-understandings, understanding of the nature of the domain one finds oneself in, and the significance of the domain to oneself, summarised as follows (see table 1).

Table 1. An elaboration of Bloom's Three Stages of Talent Development

	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
Self-understanding	Recognise one's strengths and interests Aware of one's "comparative advantages"	Life purpose and direction clarified Understanding of intrinsic, instrumental social value of what one is doing	An increasingly clear understanding of one's role in and potential contributions to the field
Understanding of the "domain"	Some preliminary, thematic understanding of the domain	Deep insights into the nature of the domain as opposed to other domains	An increasingly deeper insight into important issues, key progress to be made
Personal significance of the domain	Confined to interest, popularity, & social distinction	The fusion of the nature of domain with one's personal values and strengths	An increasing appreciation of the value of the domain, especially its intrinsic appeal and meaningfulness

Source: adapted from Bloom, 1985.

In the most recent research on talent development, the focus has been on "negotiating developmental transitions" as the make-or-break issue (Dai, 2017; MacNamara et al., 2008; Subotnick & Jarvin, 2005). We argue that, given different education systems in China and the United States, students from different traditions who are seriously pursuing musical talent development would have different experiences when negotiating these developmental transitions. For example, the notion of music as mainly concerning technical proficiency may hamper the development of Chinese students' insights into music as fundamentally expressive, and particular techniques as the means to an end of the expressive nature; it may hinder their transition to the third stage or phase of finding a personal niche or voice when there is a lack of intellectual and aesthetic wealth of musical experiences and knowledge to draw from (e.g., making connections between what one is doing and various forms and traditions of musical expression in history). It is not unusual, for example, to see some musically talented Chinese young people who, in spite of their technical excellence, fail to achieve a deeper understanding of Western music evolution or find their own unique cultural identity in music, in the way in which Tan Dun, the renowned Chinese musician, has done.

For illustrative purposes, we select three individuals, Lang Lang, Yuja Wang, and Haochen Zhang, who grew up in China, received piano lessons in early childhood and education in a Chinese conservatory, then went on to study under the tutelage of Gary Graffman at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, and achieved fame as piano virtuosi at relatively young ages. Table 2 presents the basic information about the developmental histories of the three young Chinese pianists, up to the point when they made career "breakthroughs" as piano virtuosi.

Our first question about the three young musicians is the following: Did these young Chinese musicians go through the stages and phases as described by Bloom (1985), who based his arguments on American samples of talented young professionals?

To address this question, the three Chinese pianists, who started piano training very early in childhood, seemed to skip the first stage of playful engagement altogether, and started right into technical proficiency training (the second stage in Bloom's theory). Nonetheless, the three individuals seemed to enjoy what to other children might feel like drudgery. Lang Lang apparently experienced more pressure from his father in terms of enduring the rigorous training regiment, and the unrelenting demand for conformity from his father, as documented in his autobiography (Lang & Ritz, 2009). However, we can characterise all three as possessing the kind of "musical temperament" (Kemp, 1996) essential to going through the transitions unscathed, or even flourishing, since all of them were able to make an early music performance debut as children, and were admitted to Curtis at the age of 15. All three pianists can be considered precocious in terms of being receptive to high-level music training and able to achieve mastery of piano techniques and artistic expressiveness at young ages, as indicated by the ages when they had their performance debut at prestigious venues. In terms of their psychosocial development along with skill development, we might conjecture that most of their deep appreciation of music started after they entered Curtis, though sensitivity to the aesthetic and expressive aspect of music should be there despite the technical training regimen. As Yuja recalled,

Table 2. A capsule history of three eminent young Chinese pianists who were musically educated in both China and the United States

	Lang Lang	Yuja Wang	Haochen Zhang
Year of Birth	1982, into a musical family	1987, into a musical family	1990, into a non-musical family
Starting Piano Playing	At 3 years of age	At 6, Elementary School affiliated to Central Conservatory of Music	Private piano lessons at 3 years of age
Parents and Teachers	Zhu Yafen as teacher Father, a musician himself, heavily involved, often heavy-handed	Ling Yuan (a professor) as teacher, famous for her piano pedagogy; Commented that the young Yuja loved playing and practice	Dan Zhaoyi as teacher, who taught another young pianist Yundi Li Stressing fundamentals of playing piano
Performance	Debut at 5 and won competition A recital of the entire Chopin Etudes at 12	At 12, performing in the Morningside Music Bridge International Music Festival in Calgary, Canada	A performance debut at 5, playing Bach, Haydn, & Mozart at Shanghai Music Hall At 6, performing a piano concerto by Mozart with the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra
Year when entering Curtis with Gary Graffman	At 15, auditioned at Curtis and was accepted by Graffman	At 15, hand-picked by Graffman due to her superb technique	At 15, accepted by Curtis Selected Graffman as the mentor
Major “breakthroughs”	At 17, substituted for André Watts at the Ravinia Festival and played Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No. 1	At 20, substituted for Martha Argerich, and played Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No. 1 with the Boston Symphony Orchestra	At 16, debut with the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra, performing Rachmaninoff’s Piano Concerto No. 2 At 19, the youngest person ever to win the first prize at the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition

> I started playing the piano really naturally because everything I heard from the beginning was through music. I studied with only one teacher from the age of seven to 14. She was Russian taught, but she had all the great recordings of a very European approach to music. She talked a lot about sound. She really loved Kissin, so I heard all his Chopin recordings when I was nine. My teacher also liked Argerich, and I liked Alfred Cortot; I found him extremely poetic and very inspiring. Horowitz? I don't care what other people think – for me, he's just so gripping. And Rachmaninov – very sincere playing (Wang, n.d.).

Cultural differences were clearly experienced by these Chinese music students when they started music education in the United States. In an interview, Haochen Zhang observed that it was not until he started to study at Curtis that he realised that there are many ways of interpreting the same piece of music. A more intimate connection with music apparently started later for the young Chinese pianists compared to their American counterparts, as indicated by Haochen's comments:

> In China it's more systematic – the teachers I studied with are wonderful teachers but they are into details. They give you a very specific direction: what is right and not right. This Chinese way gives me a certain work ethic and discipline which is absolutely crucial because you need to be self-critical. It's often mentioned in music you need two ears; one ear is enjoying, and the other is criticising. Otherwise, you can't improve. In the States it's an opening-up process. I still criticise myself in my own way but not in the teachers' expectation. I am fortunate to have benefited from both (in Harrington, 2017).

Lang Lang also recalled: "When we came to America, my father could see that the American system was much more relaxed. At that time, he said he still believed in the Chinese way" (in Greenstreet, 2011).

Our next question logically follows: If these young musicians encountered distinctly culturally different educational experiences during their musical development, did they experience a "cultural shock" of some sort? Was their transition from the Chinese to American educational systems a smooth one? For these precocious pianists, the answer to the last question is yes. In this regard, we consider Lang Lang, Yuja Wang, and Haochen Zhang fortunate, because before going to Curtis, they had already laid a solid music foundation with the best piano teachers (Zhu Yafen, Ling Yuan, and Dan Zhaoyi, respectively) and at the best prep schools in China. When their talent was mature to the point of being socially recognised (all three were child prodigies and acquired staged performing experiences before they reached young adulthood), they all had the fortune to study with Professor Graffman at Curtis. The timing could not have been better, as Graffman gave them full freedom to explore their musical individuality, a critical step to ushering these musical talents into the next level of talent development: finding a distinct personal niche. In hindsight, it has worked out the way that suited each person's strengths and personality. Lang Lang has achieved his international fame with his charisma and musical flair; he developed a wide repertoire of music, and even delved into the realms of popular and folk music. Yuja Wang also has performance tours

worldwide and collaborated with many top musicians. Her versatility and virtuosity are truly remarkable and have won her critical acclaim. Haochen Zhang is younger compared to the other two, but he has many accomplishments under his belt, including being the youngest ever pianist to win first place at the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition in 2009. Haochen works more like a pianist-scholar who would prefer to dig deeper into the music of some historical giants such as Brahms, rather than becoming a music superstar. Ultimately, the goal of talent development is not to beat others but fulfil one's own potential as an individual. These three young artists are still growing as we are writing this paper.

What can we learn from their talent development experiences, especially regarding the positive impact of both cultural experiences in China and the USA, which we argue are both partly responsible for the career success of the three eminent young musicians? Though not necessarily beneficial to everyone, the early start to piano lessons and music training did seem to pay off for them. First, it helped build a solid foundation at very young ages for these musically talented individuals, with the coaching and support of excellent teachers. Second, among hundreds and thousands of children in China learning to play piano, these three individuals represent the most promising ones who stood out and eventually gained the access to Curtis, a milestone that is itself a stepping stone to their impressive accomplishments. For that matter, we should not discount the significance of the large base of participation in music playing in China (in the same manner Brazil has for soccer playing). Third, the more open, freer cultural climate at Curtis apparently contributed to the cultivation of a musical individuality in these young musicians, which would otherwise have remained underdeveloped. Here, Gary Graffman played an instrumental role, perhaps less on a technical level and more on a psycho-social (and even spiritual) one, given the more conservative tendency of the Chinese tradition these young Chinese musicians had inherited. After all, at the more advanced level of musical development, encouragement of personal exploration and "soul-searching", as it were, can be more important than pedagogical and technical support. In this article, we attempted to explore the ancient and modern history of music and musical talent development in China, especially with respect to cultural values attached to this process, and implications of music education systems arising in these historical contexts. We further compared strengths and challenges of the Chinese and American education systems in terms of their pedagogical and psycho-social ramifications for musical talent development in different phases, as well as critical transitions through these phases. Our argument is that an educational system that adheres to the principle of developing not only technical proficiency but also musical individuality, of balancing discipline and freedom, tends to yield optimal developmental outcomes. The success stories of the three young Chinese pianists who were musically educated in both China and the United States seem to bear out this argument.

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David Yun Dai

is Professor of Educational Psychology and Methodology at University at Albany, State University of New York. He received his doctoral degree in psychology from Purdue University and worked as a post-doctoral fellow at the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, University of Connecticut. He was the recipient of the Distinguished Scholar Award in 2017, conferred by the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) in the United States. He was a Fulbright Scholar twice, to China during 2008–2009, and to Germany during 2015–2016. Currently, he serves on the editorial boards of Gifted Child Quarterly: *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, *Roeper Review*, and *Academic Journal of Special Education* (Taiwan). He has published 13 authored and edited books, and over 130 journal articles, book chapters, encyclopaedia entries, and book reviews in general psychology, educational psychology, and gifted and talented education. David Dai's current research focuses on talent development and creativity from a developmental science perspective.

Tianshu Wang

a Steinway artist, is Linebaugh Distinguished Professor of Piano and Head of Keyboard Department at Capital University's Conservatory of Music. She was the recipient of the Praestantia Award for Distinguished Teaching in 2011, the Faculty Scholarship Award in 2017, and the Cotterman Award for Excellence in Advising. An active performer on the concert stage, Dr. Wang has been seen on China's National TV (CCTV 15) and New York City's Carnegie Hall, as well as many cities in Asia, North America, and Europe. She has performed as a soloist with a number of orchestras, and published a solo album entitled Piano in China (Albany), which was featured on the cover of Fanfare magazine. Other chamber music CDs are available in the US and China. A recent album on sonatas for violin and piano by Richard Strauss and Alfred Schnittke was released by Sheva (Italy). From 2002–2016, she has worked as Chair of Piano Department at Shenyang Conservatory of Music in China. Tianshu Wang holds degrees from Shanghai Conservatory of Music and University of Arizona.

Chinese and Swiss Music Students' Conceptions of Musical Talent, Perception of Music's Influence on Character, and Musical Preferences

Suse Petersen

Abstract

The way an individual is raised in a specific cultural and societal setting, as well as the role of music and musical training influence his or her relation to music and the conception of musical talent. The present comparative study discusses Chinese and Swiss university music students' conceptions of musical talent, namely regarding the importance of practice, discipline, and innate talent. Furthermore, the students' enjoyment of listening to selected musical styles, and their perception of the influence of music and certain musical styles on a person's character are evaluated. The aim of the present study was to answer the question of whether Swiss and Chinese students differ significantly in their assessment of the above-mentioned points. 293 Swiss and 356 Chinese university music students were assessed with a questionnaire. The data of these samples were compared through Chi2-Tests and Mann-Whitney U-Tests. The results show that the Swiss and Chinese sample differed significantly regarding a set of sociodemographic and personal characteristics. In addition, they differed in their assessment of how musical styles influence character and the importance of discipline, practice, and innate talent for becoming a good musician. Moreover, the Swiss and Chinese students did not always enjoy listening to certain musical styles to the same extent. In conclusion, the differences between the Swiss and Chinese music students might partly be explained by their cultural background, such as the emphasis that is placed on effort and discipline. However, the samples themselves differed to a certain degree. Thus, for an explanation of the differences sociodemographic and personal factors should also be considered.

Keywords

Swiss and Chinese university music students, conceptions of musical talent, musical preferences, music and character

Musical styles circulate digitally around the world, music students and teachers travel between countries, and music education today has to be considered a globalised discipline. The exchange and mutual influence of musically active people, which has been steadily increasing for decades, could suggest that cultural differences have been levelled out. However, experiences in the field of music education suggest that cultural traditions with their specific values have a great influence on music-related socialisation and musical ideas. The present contribution aims to empirically determine cultural differences and similarities bet-

ween music students from different social and cultural contexts. In this comparative study, Swiss and Chinese university music students' conceptions of musical talent are discussed with regard to discipline and ideas about innate talent. Moreover, the students' assessment of music's influence on a person's character, and their preferences for certain musical styles are debated. The study also encompasses an evaluation of the sociodemographic and other personal characteristics, such as career goals, of the study's samples.

Culture can be defined as "the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterise a society or social group. It includes not only arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs" (UNESCO, 1982). Culture influences the development of an individual and leads to differences between individuals and between groups of persons. Thus, the socio-cultural context is taken into consideration when human behaviour and attitudes are researched and interpreted (Hernández de Hahn, 2002). It can be assumed that music students' conceptions of musical talent are influenced by culturally varying ways of upbringing and the importance that is placed by society, family, or peers on music itself as well as on the acquisition of musical skills. The view someone has about musical ability also affects their motivation to practice and engage with music (Hallam, 2011). Western and Chinese traditional views regarding the importance of training and discipline to become a good musician seem to differ, even if alignments have occurred due to the processes of globalisation that foster interactions between people and world regions (Zhang, 2019).

For Western parents, a certain independence and democratic inclusion of the child are often important aspects of education. Parents foster self-responsibility and discuss common rules with their child. Thus, there has been a trend towards a certain child-centeredness of parenting in the West (Büchner et al., 1997; Faircloth, 2023). While focus on the child is an aspect of Chinese parenting as well, there are certain important differences. Disciplined practice, self-effort, and focused training (under a master or teacher) are important parts of traditional Chinese education and parenting – in academic subjects and in music (H. Huang & Thibodeaux, 2016; Wu, 2006). Thus, the emphasis on hard work might be influenced by a Confucian cultural background (G. H.-C. Huang & Gove, 2015; Wang, 2013). Chinese students are more likely to see repetition and effort as the key to success compared to Western students (Watkins, 2000). A comparative study of views on academic achievement among Western and Asian pupils showed Asian mothers to attribute pupils' ability level to effort and engagement rather than to innate potential, whereas American mothers tended to emphasise innate aptitude (Stevenson & Lee, 1990). Consequently, in China, parents' involvement and expectations regarding their child's education can be quite high, with parents watching and directing their child's educational pathways in order to ensure the child's success in society (Gu, 2020; Zhu, 1999). However, in the Western world, parenting has also become more intense in recent decades, with (middle class) families increasingly promoting extracurricular activities such as music lessons to help their children develop skills they believe will give them better prospects for success in life (Conkling, 2018; Ilari, 2018). Correspondingly, in our previous work (Petersen, 2018), a qualitative study found Chinese and Swiss music students not to differ in their assessment of the importance of inborn and environmental factors for musical talent development. However, the sample

size of that study was small. All students of that investigation reported being supported by their family throughout their musical development, but differed regarding the continuing importance of the family: the Chinese participants reported support from and contact with their parents in young adulthood during university on a larger scale than Swiss students did, thus pointing to the strong engagement of Chinese parents.[1] The associated high expectations that Chinese parents have for their offspring might be reflected in the students' view on the importance of discipline and practice for becoming a good musician. Chinese students can thus be expected to put more emphasis on these aspects compared to the Swiss students, while the importance placed on innate talent might be more similar between Swiss and Chinese students.

The environment and cultural traditions in which an individual is raised not only influence views on important factors for becoming a good musician, but also affect the music someone is exposed to (Hallam, 2011), which in turn can influence musical preferences (Peretz et al., 1998). There is a whole body of research regarding musical preferences in general as well as among different groups of people (as for example summarised in Greasley & Lamont, 2016). Studies have examined musical preferences of younger children (e.g. Peery & Peery, 1986), adolescents (Lamont & Hargreaves, 2019; Thomas, 2016), university students (e.g. Gürgen, 2016), and in relation to factors such as gender, age, personality, listening contexts, familiarity with musical styles, or culture (e.g. A. S. K. Fung, 2018; Teo et al., 2008). A study with young students in Singapore found no differences in musical preferences by musical training (Teo, 2005). In other investigations, musicians showed higher preferences for world music excerpts (C. V. Fung, 1996), Western art music excerpts (Brittin, 1995), or several styles of music (Elvers et al., 2015; Morrison & Yeh, 1999) than non-musicians. Thus, it can be assumed that music students, compared to non-music students, tend to like more different musical styles such as classical music or jazz due to their extensive musical training and the exposure to diverse styles during their higher education, with early adulthood as such being a critical point for the formation of musical preferences (Greasley, 2008). As familiarity with a certain musical style increases through learning and studying it at university, the enjoyment of listening to this style probably increases likewise (Teo et al., 2008), a process known as the exposure effect (Mungan et al., 2019; Peery & Peery, 1986; Peretz et al., 1998).

In the current survey we focused on Chinese and Swiss university music students' enjoyment of listening to Western classical music as well as popular and traditional music of the students' respective native countries. The data from Chinese and Swiss students can be compared, but they do not only indicate the degree of enjoyment itself; rather, they must be understood as partially the result of specific images and functions that different musical styles have in the respective countries. In other words, Swiss traditional music may have other standings in Switzerland than Chinese traditional music and opera does in China, which may lead to a differing familiarity with and assessment of the respective traditional music. Moreover, the style categories, especially "traditional" and "popular", are not always clearly

1 A comparative, qualitative study on the influence of parents and other socialization agents on the musical talent development of Swiss and Chinese music students during their upbringing has been conducted by Kull (2021).

distinguishable. However, this study focuses on the hypothesis that Chinese and Swiss students like to listen to Western classical music most, since the majority of the students in our survey were studying Western classical music and were familiar with it.

Musical preferences are associated with personality, gender, and age (Lamont, 2019), as well as with belonging to different social groups (such as being a music student) (North & Hargreaves, 2007), or a certain social class. Peterson & Simku (1992), for example, point to the relation of musical taste to occupational status. Musical preferences can be considered as (a changing) part of a person's identity over their lifespan (Green, 2011; Lamont & Hargreaves, 2019). Therefore, it can be imagined that certain musical styles might also be seen as unfavourable for the self, as 'not desirable to integrate them into one's view on the self' (or one's character). On the other hand, music as such can also have beneficial effects on the individual, or more precisely the character, as well as being a guiding influence on an individual as part of the society, as it was often promoted in China (Ho & Law, 2004; Law & Ho, 2009). Compared to the Western education system, character or moral education is a strong part of the Chinese educational system. It can thus be assumed that the Chinese students in the present survey are more sensitive to perceived influences on their character, such as "usndesirable musical styles". The possible positive aspects of music in general are likely recognised by both samples, albeit perhaps for different reasons, which are not the focus of this study and will therefore not be addressed here.

In light of the comparative approach of this paper, it is important to be aware of the following: Even if a presumed dichotomy between Western/Swiss and Asian/Chinese cultures can provide a helpful scaffolding to explore possible differences and facilitate the understanding of differences due to historical and sociological developments, it is of utmost importance to not understand this simplification as a reflection of reality. On the contrary, the increasing convergence between cultures must be taken into consideration. This is reflected in Chinese society becoming more individualistic and consumption-oriented, where previously the individual had to subsume to the collective (Ratner, 2011). Therefore, even if differences between cultural groups can been identified, there might be various legitimate interpretations. Additionally, it is essential to take into account that often measurement instruments are validated in one culture but then used in another, highlighting the importance of considering the contextual factors (Hernández de Hahn, 2002; Yeung, 2005). To mitigate this, a pretest was carried out and the survey instrument was extensively discussed with experts and music students from both countries. There were several back-translation rounds to ensure the best possible adaptation of the survey instrument to both countries. However, scholars with a Western European background carried out the research and this work therefore demands a heightened awareness of possible related biases in both the study and the discussion.

Sample and survey instrument

Participants were music students ($N = 649$) at conservatories and music universities in China (Beijing, Shanghai, and Suzhou) and Switzerland (Lucerne, Zurich, Basel, and Geneva). A questionnaire was distributed in a class setting in 2018 and 2019 in pa-

per-and-pencil form. An online version was not possible due to restrictions in access and anonymity in China. In Switzerland, the questionnaire was in German and French, and in China in Mandarin. Before filling out the questionnaire the students gave their written consent to participate after being informed about their full anonymity, the use of their data for research purposes only, and their right to deny or interrupt their participation at any time without having to give a reason.

The aspects analysed in this paper were part of a questionnaire about the musical self-concept of music students, their views on musical talent, on influences of music on the character, their musical preferences and sociodemographic background. The questionnaire itself was part of a comparative research project focusing on the biographical talent development and the musical self-concept of music students in China, Taiwan, and Switzerland, jointly undertaken by Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts and Geneva Haute école de musique.[2] The part of the questionnaire assessing the musical self-concept as developed by Spychiger (2017) and further processed by others (Fiedler et al., 2018; Fiedler & Müllensiefen, 2017; Petersen & Camp, 2016) was not topic of the present paper, but these results were analysed in a paper by Petersen, Kull, and Camp (2023).

This paper examined, if the Swiss and Chinese samples differ significantly concerning:

A) their sociodemographic and personal characteristics:
   a. gender and age
   b. course of study and main instrument
   c. instrumental practice
   d. career goals
   e. parental educational level and musical activity

B) their assessment of the following statements regarding the conditions for being a good musician (see table 1):
   a. To become a good musician, you have to practice a lot.
   b. To become a good musician, you have to be disciplined.
   c. You can become a good musician without innate musical talent.

C) their enjoyment of listening to the following musical styles in their leisure time (see table 2):
   a. Traditional music of their native country
   b. Popular music of their native country
   c. Western classical music

D) their assessment of the following statements regarding music and character (see table 3):
   a. Some musical styles have a bad influence on my character.
   b. Music has a positive influence on my character.

The questionnaire encompassed closed questions (gender, parental educational level, and musical activity), open questions (all other sociodemographic and personal characteristics), and 5-point Likert scales for all remaining questions with the options *fully agree – rather agree – neither agree nor disagree – rather disagree – strongly disagree*, except

2 The project was mainly funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (Project 100016_169711).

for the questions about the enjoyment of listening to certain musical styles which used the 5-point Likert scale *very much – much – neither-nor – not much – not at all*.

According to the considerations made in the introduction, the following assumptions were made:

(1) Chinese students would give higher importance to discipline and practice for becoming a good musician compared to Swiss students, while there would be no differences regarding the need of innate musical talent.
(2) Both Chinese and Swiss students would enjoy listening to Western classical music, while the appreciation of their respective native countries' popular and traditional music might not be similarly pronounced.
(3) Both Chinese and Swiss students would agree that music has a positive influence on their character. Meanwhile, Chinese students would think that certain musical styles can have a bad influence on their character more so than Swiss students would.

Results

Descriptive statistics of sociodemographic and personal characteristics of the whole sample

This chapter describes the characteristics of the whole sample, while differences between Chinese and Swiss students are shown in the data analysis section in chapter 3.2.

649 completed questionnaires from Chinese and Swiss students were included in the analysis. All the participants were born and raised in the respective country and were studying music at university level at the time of questioning.

Nationality, gender, and age:

– 293 (45.1%) students were Swiss, and 356 (54.9%) Chinese nationals.
– With almost two-third of the students being female (412 or 63%) and 234 (36%) being male, the gender distribution was not balanced. Three individuals (0.5%) did not disclose their gender.
– The majority of the students were 19–24 years old (65.9%), followed by 171 (26.3%) being 25–29 years old, and a minority being older than 30 years (35 or 5.4%). 12 (2.3%) students did not answer this question.

Study course and main instrument:

– 407 (62.7%) students were enrolled in an undergraduate programme and 239 (36.8%) in a postgraduate program, while 6 (0.9%) students did not answer the question.
– Most of the participants were studying either music education (206 or 31.7%) or performance (369 or 56.9%), while 45 (6.9.%) were studying music theory/science, and 29 (4.5%) something else such as computer music or gave no details about their current course of study.
– Out of almost three-quarters of the students (469 or 72.3%), most were studying a Western instrument, followed by 130 (20%) studying voice, and a minority of 38 (5.9%) studying a Chinese instrument. Unfortunately, due to lack of detail in the

students' answers, it could not be determined how many of the voice students were pursuing Western classical, Jazz, or a form of Chinese singing (e.g., Chinese opera). Apart from voice, the students' main instruments ranged from (Chinese) string instruments, (Chinese) wind instruments, keyboard or percussion instruments, and (Chinese) plucked instruments. 12 (1.8%) students did not indicate their main instrument (which could therefore not be classified as Western, Chinese, or voice), or they were studying conducting, music theory/science, or computer music.

Instrumental practice:

– The age at which the students started to practice their main instrument was almost equally distributed between less than 7 years of age (219 or 33.7%), 7 to 10 years of age (229 or 35.3%), and 11 to 17 years of age (170 or 26.2%); while students starting over 18 years of age were rare (19 or 2.9%). 12 (1.8%) students did not indicate the starting age of practicing.
– Almost half of the students practice 2.5 hours or less per day on their main instrument (322 or 49.6%), while around one third (229 or 35.3%) practice 2.6–4 hours per day, and 80 (12.3%) students practice more than four hours per day. 18 (2.8%) students did not specify their daily practice hours.

Career goals:

– Although the career goals of the students were numerous, if grouped, 284 (43%) of them plan to work as music teachers. Almost the same number plan to work as musicians (133 or 20.5%) or as musicians *and* teachers (125 or 19.3%), respectively. 78 (12%) of the students had other career plans such as manager or translator, and 29 (4.5%) students did not give any details about their plans after university.

Parental educational level and instrumental activity:

– The instrumental activity of the students' parents varied. 276 (42.5%) students had parents who never played an instrument, while 162 (25%) students had one parent and 203 (31.3%) students both parents who play or used to play an instrument at professional or amateur level. 8 students did not disclose any information about their parents' musical activities.
– The highest educational level of the students' parents ranged from secondary school or lower (34 or 5.2%) to apprenticeship certificate or equivalent (109 or 16.8%), middle school diploma (142 or 21.9%), and undergraduate (179 or 27.6%) or postgraduate diploma (175 or 27%). 10 (1.5%) students did not answer this question.

The agreement of the whole sample with the need to practice a lot and to be disciplined to become a good musician is quite high; around 90% of the students fully or rather agreed with both statements. In contrast, the approval rate to the possibility of becoming a good musician without innate musical talent is still high, but no longer quite so clear, and a considerable number of students are unsure or rather disagrees, as table 1 illustrates.

Table 1: Becoming a good musician (Swiss and Chinese sample)

	To become a good musician, you have to practice a lot.		To become a good musician, you have to be disciplined.		You can become a good musician without innate musical talent.	
Agreement	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
fully agree	387	59.6	337	51.9	121	18.6
rather agree	219	33.7	241	37.1	244	37.6
neither-nor	30	4.6	49	7.6	149	23.0
rather disagree	6	0.9	19	2.9	97	14.9
disagree	6	0.9	3	0.5	35	5.4
missing	1	0.2	0	0	3	0.5
total	649	100.0	649	100.0	649	100.0

The musical preferences of all students concerning traditional and popular music of their native country as well as Western classical music are shown in the following table 2. Western classical music is most popular and the traditional music of the students' native country the least liked.

Table 2: Musical preferences (Swiss and Chinese sample)

	How much do you enjoy listening to the following musical styles in your leisure time?					
	Traditional music of my native country		Popular music of my native country		Western classical music	
Agreement	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
very much	93	14.3	121	18.6	248	38.2
much	168	25.9	260	40.1	292	45.0
neither-nor	163	25.1	123	19.0	76	11.7
not much	144	22.2	95	14.6	23	3.5
not at all	78	12.0	47	7.2	7	1.1
missing	3	0.5	3	0.5	3	0.5
total	649	100.0	649	100.0	649	100.0

The agreement with the statements regarding the influence of music or musical styles on a person's character are displayed in table 3. There were very varied levels of agreement with the idea that some musical styles may have a bad influence on character, while the students tended to agree fully or mostly with music (in general) having a positive influence on their character.

Table 3: Music and musical styles and the character (Swiss and Chinese sample)

	Some musical styles have a bad influence on my character.		Music has a positive influence on my character.	
Agreement	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
fully agree	58	8.9	330	50.8
rather agree	103	15.9	241	37.1
neither-nor	183	28.2	65	10.0
rather disagree	157	24.2	9	1.4
disagree	147	22.7	3	0.5
missing	1	0.2	1	0.2
total	649	100.0	649	100.0

Data analysis

The variables were all normally distributed with the values of skewness < 2 and of kurtosis < 7 (West et al., 1995). A Mann-Whitney U-Test or a Chi2-Test was executed to assess the differences between (A) the Chinese and the Swiss students regarding sociodemographic and other personal characteristics; (B) the views on the importance of innate talent, practice, and discipline for becoming a good musician; (C) musical preferences; and (D) the perceived influence of music and musical styles on the character. Negatively coded items were recoded. An agreement with a statement is indicated by a lower mean, a disagreement by a higher mean.

(A) Sociodemographic and other personal characteristics
The differences between Chinese (n = 356) and Swiss (n = 293) students regarding the sociodemographic and other personal nominal variables of the questionnaire have been tested with a Chi2-test after Pearson and were highly significant (see table 4).

- With almost half of the students in the Swiss sample being male (43.3%), the relation of males to females was more balanced than in the Chinese sample where only a little below one-third of the students were male (30.3%).
- Regarding the course of study, 49.5% of the Swiss participants were studying performance, while at 63.4%, this proportion was higher among the Chinese students. In contrast, only 20% of the Chinese students were studying music education, compared with 46.4% of the Swiss students. The cumulative percentages for other courses of study were 4.1% of the Swiss and 16.7% of the Chinese students.
- As expected, no Swiss students studied a Chinese instrument, while 11% Chinese students did. Around 20% of the students in both samples were studying voice, and 79.4% (Swiss) and 68.8% (Chinese), were studying a Western instrument.
- While the share of students aiming at a career as musician was quite similar in the Swiss (22.5%) and the Chinese (20.6%) samples, Chinese students tended to aim at working merely as a teacher (55%) compared to the Swiss students (34.6%). The

latter also aimed at a combination of teaching and performing (30.4%), while fewer Chinese students (11.8%) did so. Other career goals were mentioned by 12.5% of the students in each sample.

– The difference between the Swiss and Chinese samples regarding parents' instrumental activity was very clear, as 51% of both parents of the Swiss students played or used to play an instrument, while this was only the case for 15.5% of the Chinese students. The inverse was true for no instrumental activity, which applied to 15.4% of the Swiss students' parents and 66.2% of the Chinese students' parents. For one-third (33.6%) of the Swiss and one-fifth (18.3%) of the Chinese students, one parent played or used to play an instrument.

Table 4: Chi2-Test: Sociodemographic and personal differences between Swiss and Chinese students

Variable	Chi2	df	Asymptotic significance (two-sided)
Gender (male/ female)	11.892	1	0.001
Course of study (performance/ education/ theory/ other)	64.460	3	0.000
Main instrument (Western/ Chinese/ voice)	34.381	2	0.000
Career Goal(s) (musician/ teacher/ teacher + musician/ other)	40.483	3	0.000
Parental instrumental activity (no instrument/ one parent/ both parents)	173.243	2	0.000

The other (ordinal or interval scaled) variables of the sociodemographic data were tested with a Mann-Whitney U-Test for differences between the Swiss and Chinese students, whereby the effect size shows the expression of the differences (see table 5). While effect sizes might have differing threshold values for different areas, Gignac and Szodorai (2016), for example, proposed an effect size > .1 as small, > .2 as middle, and > .3 as large.

To assess the direction of the differences, the data were analysed for their mean (*M*), median (*Md*), and/or mode (*Mo*).

– The age of the students at the time of the questionnaire was significantly higher in the case of the Swiss participants (M = 25.07; N = 292; SD = 3.773) compared to the Chinese participants (M = 22.71; N = 342; SD = 3.148). The effect size was high.
– The samples did not differ regarding the age at which they started to play their main instrument (Swiss students: M = 9.16; N = 291; SD = 3.865; Chinese students: M = 8.98; N = 346; SD = 4.43).

– The difference between the Swiss and Chinese students regarding the practice hours per day on their main instrument differed on a low significance level with a negligible effect size, with the Chinese students practicing more than the Swiss students (Swiss students: M = 2.74; N = 290; SD = 1.587; Chinese students: M = 2.94; N = 341; SD = 1.421).
– The current level of study at the time of questioning differed significantly with a high effect size. Most of the Swiss students were studying for a postgraduate degree, while most of the Chinese students were enrolled for an undergraduate degree (Swiss students: Md = 2; Mo = 2; N = 291; Chinese students: Md = 1; Mo = 1; N = 355).
– The difference between the Chinese and Swiss students' parents' highest level of education was significant with a middle effect size. Swiss students' parents had a higher educational level with most parents holding a postgraduate degree (followed by those having an apprenticeship certificate), while most Chinese students' parents had an undergraduate degree (followed by those with a middle school degree) (Swiss students: Md = 4; Mo = 5; N = 292; Chinese students: Md = 4; Mo = 4; N = 347).

Table 5: Mann-Whitney-U-Test: Sociodemographic and personal differences between Swiss and Chinese students

Variable	Mann-Whitney-U	Z	Asymptotic significance (two-sided)	Effect size
Age at time of questionnaire distribution	27202.500	-9.956	0.000	-0.39
Age at starting to play the main instrument	46007.000	-1.881	0.060	-0.07
Average practice hours on the main instrument per day	44667.500	-2.113	0.035	-0.08
Current level of study (1 undergraduate / 2 postgraduate)	36362.000	-7.748	0.000	-0.30
Highest educational qualification of the parents (1 secondary school or lower / 2 apprenticeship / 3 vocational or middle school / 4 undergraduate / 5 postgraduate)	39450.500	-4.971	0.000	-0.20

The differences in practice hours might also be influenced by the course of study, as education students (M = 2.51; N = 202; SD = 1.603) practice significantly less than performance students (M = 3.16; N = 361; SD = 0.073), which was assessed with a t-test for independent variables, t (561) = -5.059, p < .001. The proportion of music education students among Swiss students (46.4%) was higher than among Chinese students (20%, see above), which may explain some of the differences. However, the effect size for this difference was only slightly above the threshold of medium effect sizes (r = -.212). Together

with the low significance level and very small effect size of the difference in practice hours between Swiss and Chinese students, this aspect seems to be negligible.

(B) Becoming a good musician

The differences between Swiss and Chinese students were highly significant concerning the perceived importance of discipline, practice, and innate talent for becoming a good musician (see table 6). The Chinese students agreed more to the statements regarding the necessity of practice and discipline for becoming a good musician, albeit for discipline with a low effect size (*practice*: Chinese students: $M = 1.34$; $N = 356$; $SD = 0.636$; Swiss students: $M = 1.69$; $N = 292$; $SD = 0.757$; *discipline*: Chinese students $M = 1.56$; $N = 356$; $SD = 0.765$; Swiss students: $M = 1.71$; $N = 293$; $SD = 0.802$). In contrast, Swiss students agreed significantly more than Chinese students that innate talent is *not* needed to become a good musician (Chinese students: $M = 2.70$; $N = 354$; $SD = 1.117$; Swiss students: $M = 2.27$; $N = 292$; $SD = 1.077$).

Table 6: Differences between Swiss and Chinese students: Becoming a good musician

Statement	Mann-Whitney-U	Z	Asymptotic significance (two-sided)	Effect size
To become a good musician, you have to practice a lot.	36931.00	-7.335	0.000	-0.29
To become a good musician, you have to be disciplined.	45940.00	-2.908	0.004	-0.11
You can become a good musician without innate musical talent.	40164.50	-5.077	0.000	-0.20

(C) Enjoyment of listening to certain musical styles

How much the students enjoyed listening to traditional or popular music of their native country differed significantly between Swiss and Chinese students. Effect sizes were medium. The Chinese students liked to listen to both styles more than the Swiss students did (*traditional music*: Chinese students $M = 2.64$; $N = 353$; $SD = 1.215$; Swiss students: $M = 3.25$; $N = 293$; $SD = 1.187$; *popular music*: Chinese students $M = 2.22$; $N = 353$; $SD = 1.076$; Swiss students: $M = 2.88$; $N = 293$; $SD = 1.167$; see table 7). Listening to Western classical music was very much liked by both samples – and preferred over traditional and popular music from their native countries; the samples did not differ significantly (Chinese students $M = 1.86$; $N = 355$; $SD = 0.862$; Swiss students: $M = 1.81$; $N = 291$; $SD = 0.828$; see table 7).

Table 7: Differences between Swiss and Chinese students: Musical preferences

How much do you enjoy listening to the following musical styles in your leisure time?	Mann-Whitney-U	Z	Asymptotic significance (two-sided)	Effect size
Traditional music of my native country	37407.500	-6.214	0.000	-0.24
Popular music of my native country	34724.500	-7.510	0.000	-0.29
Western classical music	50362.500	-0.593	0.553	-0.02

(D) Music and character

The Swiss and Chinese students differed significantly and with a middle effect size as regards the assumption that some musical styles have a bad influence on their character. While both samples tended to neither agree nor disagree, Chinese students' average agreement was higher (M = 3.11; N = 356; SD = 1.160) compared to Swiss students' average agreement (M = 3.66; N = 292; SD = 1.273; see table 8). The positive influence of music on character was rather affirmed by both groups; they did not differ significantly in their assessment (Chinese students: M = 1.60; N = 355; SD = 0.712; Swiss students: M = 1.68; N = 293; SD = 0.807; see table 8).

Table 8: Differences between Swiss and Chinese students: Music and character

Statement	Mann-Whitney-U	Z	Asymptotic significance (two-sided)	Effect size
Some musical styles have a bad influence on my character.	38336.00	-5.912	0.000	-0.23
Music has a positive influence on my character.	50061.50	-.909	0.364	-0.04

Discussion

As stated in the introduction, the use of a survey instrument or items mainly developed in one culture and applied in another culture can present obstacles. Although a thorough adaptation and translation process of the questions was carried out (including students, music researchers, and translators from both countries), it cannot be ruled out that certain formulations or wordings were not precise enough. In addition, the survey instrument did not include further questions regarding the reasons for the students' ratings. While this is common in questionnaires using Likert-scales without open questions or commentary fields, it limits the results to a certain extent. The results must be interpreted in light of the above-mentioned considerations and literature.

Additionally, as the analysis of the Chinese and Swiss samples show, the interpretation must be done with caution as the samples differ in quite a few characteristics. In the following, the assumptions mentioned at the beginning will be discussed.

(1) It was assumed that Chinese students would place greater importance on discipline and practice for becoming a good musician compared to Swiss students, while the perceived importance of innate talent would be similar between them. This expectation was partially confirmed. The Chinese students strongly agreed with the importance of practice and discipline. The Swiss students agreed slightly less and the difference to the Chinese students in the strength of agreement was significant. This is in line with the fact that Chinese students practiced significantly more than Swiss students, which, however, might also be partly explained by Swiss students studying education relatively more often than performance compared to Chinese students. In contrast, Swiss students tended to agree that one could become a good musician without innate talent, while Chinese students were not so sure; this difference was significant as well. Therefore, the Chinese students' view on discipline and practice meets the expectations, while the fact that Swiss students placed less importance on innate talent than Chinese students is somewhat astonishing – especially as they also perceived discipline and practice to be less important than did their Chinese counterparts. Here the question arises what else then contributes to becoming a good musician in the Swiss students' views. It might be that (the possibility of) playing an instrument is associated with a higher socioeconomic family status, as are the choice of the secondary school and the access to university (e.g. Becker & Hecken, 2007). Thus, the environmental factors at the beginning of a musical career play out in such a way that the Swiss students tend to think of a set of environmental and personal factors and place less emphasis on individual aspects of talent development. In China, playing an instrument can be a means of attaining a higher socioeconomic class in the long-term and disciplined musical training can help in getting admission to better universities by adding bonus points to the student's score of the national university entrance exam (高考, *gāokǎo*), and consequently offering access to better job opportunities. However, the resources to afford training in music (or other talent areas) can differentiate the students in the first place along socioeconomic lines (Luo et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the Chinese students undoubtedly emphasised discipline, practice, and to a certain degree the need for innate talent for becoming a good musician more than Swiss students did.

(2) It was assumed that both Chinese and Swiss students would enjoy listening to Western classical music, while the appreciation of their respective native countries' popular and traditional music would be less pronounced. These assumptions were supported by the data. Overall, the students preferred Western classical music to the other styles and enjoyed listening to Western classical music very much; the Chinese and Swiss students did not differ in their enjoyment. Both sets of participants also enjoyed listening to popular music of their native country very much, but the enjoyment of listening to traditional music of their native country was more varied. The Chinese students enjoyed listening to popular as well as traditional music of their native country significantly more so than the Swiss students.

In view of the sample, with the majority being music students studying Western classical music, it is not surprising that this musical style is very liked. Thus, the mere exposure to this style, along with this unifying element of playing and listening to the same music as peers might have contributed to this result. Correspondingly, in China, a professional music education should not only be seen as an effort by parents to achieve intergenerational upward mobility, as mentioned above, but the children also identify themselves to a high degree with the Western classical music they study.

Traditional music of the native country was the least liked of the styles, which might appear further away from the reality of the students' lives. Although there is a strong and growing traditional music scene in both Switzerland (e.g. Jodel) and China (e.g. Chinese opera), the younger generation – at least in Switzerland – is not very close to this musical style (in Süss & Giordani (2000) Swiss adolescents did not even mention traditional music as a style they are listening to.). However, at least in Switzerland, folk musicians can earn a good living and the results would probably have been different if more students of folk or traditional music would have been asked.

The enjoyment of listening to popular music of one's native country was recognisable, but not as high as that of Western classical music. Chinese students liked to listen to popular music very much, while the Swiss students tended to be undecided. Still, as the Swiss music scene is very small, it can be assumed that the music students personally knew at least some of the Swiss pop musicians and that they can at least partly identify with them, as some of these musicians had also completed their education at a Swiss music university. Some of the students might also see themselves as part of the Swiss pop music scene and, as such, they were rating their own music or that of their fellow students. But, as the majority of the students were studying classical music, this effect was probably not very strong.

(3) It was assumed that both Chinese and Swiss students would believe music to have a positive influence on character, while Chinese students, more than Swiss students, would believe certain musical styles to have a potential bad influence on character. The first assumption can be confirmed: Both samples tended to agree with music generally having a positive influence on a person's character and the samples did not differ significantly. This is not surprising, as music is a large – if not the most important – part in a music student's life. If music were not doing at least some good and the students were not benefiting in some way from music and music making, it is doubtful that they would

continue with their education. Although there might be cases where the students were pushed to engage with music by the parents or other caretakers, completing an entire course of study without seeing the benefit and connecting at least somewhat positively to the subject is probably very rare. The Chinese students' view on this statement might also be influenced by the political understanding of what music can or should do, since music was long seen as political instrument for guiding the Chinese population and promote the political agenda (Ho & Law, 2004). Still today the Chinese government influences what is broadcast (Man, 2020) and thus to a certain degree what might be popular and seen as beneficial among music consumers. Generally, moral education is very present in China and from the point of view of parents, some musical styles may be considered unfavourable for their children's development. As the parents' opinion is traditionally highly valued in China, this assessment probably still resonates with the students. As such, a possible perception that musical styles have an implication on the self or the character is relevant for the evaluation of the second assumption. Consequently, the second assumption – that Chinese students will believe certain musical styles to have a bad influence on the character more so than the Swiss students – was confirmed. The perception of certain musical styles as having negative consequences for a person's character is not common in Switzerland, while in China, as explained above, it is not unreasonable to think like this.

Finally, it is essential to discuss the possible ways in which sociodemographic and other personal characteristics of the Chinese and Swiss samples could have influenced the results – especially the assessment of the aspects for becoming a good musician. First, the average number of practice hours per day was higher among the Chinese students, albeit with a very small effect size. Still, this goes hand in hand with the greater importance Chinese students attached to practice and discipline for becoming a good musician compared to Swiss students. Perhaps the Swiss students' higher age and more advanced level of study contributed to the fact that they placed less importance on discipline and practice as well as on innate talent; perhaps they saw other factors such as opportunities, support from teachers, or other environmental factors as increasingly decisive. Further, the fact that more than 80% of the Swiss students' parents played or used to play an instrument could have been relevant (compared to one-third in case of the Chinese students' parents), less in terms of parental support, as this was likely also very high in the case of the Chinese students, and more in the sense of having grown up in a "musical environment". It can also be assumed that the attitude of students towards discipline and practice is influenced by their parents' economic background. The financial security generally associated with a high level of parental education gives Swiss students more room for artistic scope and the prospect of more varied paths with less rigorous training than Chinese students, who are under family pressure to succeed.

In addition, the fact that almost two-thirds of the Chinese students were studying performance, compared to only half of the Swiss students, could also have influenced the evaluation of the importance of discipline, practice, and innate talent for becoming a good musician, and this was mirrored in the fact that education students practiced less than performance students. As expected, performance students rated discipline and practice higher than did education students (who do not generally have to reach the same

instrumental level). However, over half of the Chinese students aimed to work as music teachers, a higher share than the one-third of the Swiss students, who also aimed at a combination of teaching and performing. This finding might be explained by the competitive music market in China, with a very high number of musicians graduating each year and where even very good performers have to rely on – widely available – teaching jobs to subsidise their living. This is said without assuming that teaching is or should only be a backup; on the contrary, it should probably be more strongly advertised as a very valuable profession for the good of teachers and students.

Relating sociodemographic and personal differences between the samples in examining the aspects of musical preferences and the influence of music or musical styles on character seems more difficult. A more diverse sample in terms of sociodemographic and further personal characteristics would be promising for assessing influences on these aspects. While musical preferences are quite well researched (especially in a Western context), a possible perceived influence of musical styles on character and the related reasons (from parental and societal to personal aspects) would be stimulating questions to follow up on, especially in a Chinese setting. In this context, investigating differences between the students' generation and their parents' generation would also be valuable.

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Suse Petersen

studied education, educational psychology, and religious studies at the University of Fribourg (CH) and received her PhD in the field of attitudinal research and animal ethics. She is a senior research associate at the Competence Center for Music Education Research and a lecturer in educational psychology at the Lucerne School of Music.