

## *Original Paper*

# Not Forgetting the Original, Absorbing Foreign Things, Facing the Future—Comment on Wu Guodong’s “Chinese National Music”

Yueli Bao<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jiangxi National University, Nanchang, Jiangxi, China

\* Yueli Bao, Jiangxi National University, Nanchang, Jiangxi, China

Received: July 24, 2020

Accepted: July 30, 2020

Online Published: August 3, 2020

doi:10.22158/wjssr.v7n3p61

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/wjssr.v7n3p61>

### ***Abstract***

*Mr. Wu Guodong has devoted his life to the research of national music and ethnomusicology. His works are various and achieved. Also, he practices the academic concepts himself introduced and takes the research of traditional Chinese music and culture to a more profound level. “Chinese National Music” is a masterpiece of Wu Guodong, which concentrates on teaching and combines the ethnomusicology discipline theory and traditional music research techniques. This book describes Chinese national music from five perspectives: folk songs, folk instrumental music, song and dance music, opera music, and opera music. As a new variety of textbooks, its combination of rational cognition and perceptual experience dramatically improves readers’ interest in reading. Thus, it intends to allow more students to comprehend and understand China’s rich and diverse national music from each perspective.*

### ***Keywords***

*bi-musicality, aational cognition, perceptual experience, cultural identity*

Ethnomusicology is a comparatively new subject that is receiving increasing attention from music scholars. It has been affirmed by numerous scholars and subjected to several questions as it continues to grow. But more scholars decide to work hard, Mr. Wu Guodong is one of them. He is securely rooted in national and traditional music research, after years of systematizing and consolidating the academic philosophy of ethnomusicology. Then the two concepts of cultural studies of traditional Chinese music and ethnomusicology will be combined, which directed to forming the discipline idea of “Chinese National Music”. As far as the current situation of the teaching field in China is concerned, since the 1960s, when the first book “Introduction to National Music” was published for teaching purposes,

several compilations and publications on the topic of “Chinese National Music”. These writings have represented a significant character in teaching “Chinese National Music” and the popularization and promotion before. Furthermore, some of the works are still the basic textbooks adopted by related music schools. Then, why does the author compose textbooks on the same subject? The author states three reasons in the book’s postscript. First, due to the continuous progress of the times, the theory of cognition of Chinese national music has been updated a lot, demanding updated tutorials to match. Second of all, because the teaching objects and teaching environment have varied, there are several new requirements for teaching content, structure, and techniques. The third reason is that the education department has a new perception and orientation on the way of music education and the teaching content of “national music”. Therefore, there is a requirement to compile such a necessary course of Chinese folk music to reach the “diversified requirements” of teaching in music colleges and universities in China. The author will explain this from the following perspectives.

### **1. A Solid Theoretical Foundation for the “Bi-musicality”**

The term “Bi-Musicality” was first introduced by American musicologist Mantle Hood in the field of ethnomusicological investigations, in *The Challenge of “Bi-Musicality”*, May 1960. It originally refers to the dual musical ability required in the research of ethnomusicology. It highlights the perceptual cognition and practical ability of researchers, rather than remaining on theoretical foundations. However, it is not easy to create a theoretical system of “bi-musicality”. This theoretical perspective has inspired many scholars and successfully used it in Chinese music education to develop their theoretical system. Mr. Wu Guodong is also one of those who employed the idea of bi-musicality to the ethnomusicology course’s compilation. It is simple to notice that apart from the specific and concise presentation of the text, scores, pictures, audio, and video material for researchers that previous books of the same genre have skipped have been added to the “Wu’s work”. Hence, Mr. Wu Guodong’s method is to encourage the public not to ignore perceptual cognition in the teaching process. On the other hand, if people only emphasize perceptual cognition, but neglect the theoretical basis, have they overlooked the basics again? The “bi” of “bi-musicality” indicates two, used in pairs. Accordingly, we should guarantee a solid theoretical foundation and emphasize the significance of perceptual cognition. In the idea of “bi-musicality”, although we cannot remain on theoretical foundations alone, we cannot do so without them. With the development of the times, the idea of ethnomusicology has been updated from time to time. To define the ideas in the book as precisely as possible, the “Wu’s work” have perfected the basic theories and definitions of every music type and variety included in the book. In the process of learning national music, we usually face musical terms and concepts, for example, “national music”, “traditional music”, and “folk music”. There are also teaching materials such as “Introduction to National Music”, “Introduction to Traditional Chinese Music”, and “Chinese Folk Music” in the

teaching of music theory subjects in music schools and departments of numerous colleges and universities. So do we need to define these three theories first? In the book's introduction, Mr. Wu stated that it is a problem that requires to be discussed and explained at the beginning of the book. He said that "national music" as music produced by one's people and by one's people distinguishes it from music formed by other peoples or by other peoples, thus calling itself "national music". "Traditional music" is based on historical time and space, and it is the historical legacy of "national music" in China. It commonly refers to the types of music and associated music works that existed before modern times and were produced and manipulated by multiple national music subjects. Consequently, conceptually speaking, traditional music works cannot include "national music" works generated by modern professional musicians. For instance, all erhu solo pieces created by Liu Tianhua can be regarded as works of "national music", but they are regularly not regarded as "traditional music". However, the statement in "An Introduction to Traditional Chinese Music" edited by Mr. Wang Yaohua and Mr. Du Yaxiong is different. They consider that Liu Tianhua's erhu solo, "Two Spring Reflected in the Moon", belongs to traditional music. Since their structure is inherent to the nation, and their musical style also has features inherent in their people. Here, the author is more likely to Mr. Wu Guodong's statement that "folk music" is based on the musical subject. It is an element of Chinese "traditional music", and traditional music is separated into four sections: court music, literati music, religious music, and folk music. Moreover, it is a technique of dividing the musical genres accumulated in Chinese music history according to the "cultural attributes of music" and the "cultural hierarchy of musical manipulation subjects". Hence, since "national music" already involves "traditional music" and "traditional music" covers "folk music", then "national music" naturally also covers "folk music". These three are at every level, and the author's method clarifies several key theories in China and sets the foundation for the scholars to obey.

## **2. "Bi-musicality" Concentrates on Perceptual Experience**

In the "Outline of Teaching Guidelines for the Compulsory Undergraduate Course in Music (Teacher Education) in the National Higher Education Institutions", it is pointed out that emphasis must be placed on musical aesthetics. Meanwhile, it is advocated to know and appreciate music from perceptual to rational. The curriculum teaching of "Chinese National Music" highlights "the teaching of music aesthetic practice". In works composed by Mr. Wu, to highlight the various functions of "reading, viewing, hearing, and singing" of the national music course, he improved some material descriptions' important content during the rewriting step. He then made musical form and musical performance the center of description, combining some new catalogs of pictures, charts, and score examples. Apart from reliable and concise textual expressions and up-to-date inclusion of the latest investigation outcomes regularly recognized, the book makes up for the inadequate provision of sheet music, graphic, audio,

and video material in previous books of this variety. Most of the different national music species discussed in the book are simultaneously configured with related sheet music, pictures, audio, and in some cases, video. Based on statistics, the book is accompanied by 180 sheet music, more than 130 images, more than 150 audio data of tracks, and 23 video data. From these data, it is easy to see that Mr. Wu uses the heritage and development of national music culture as a benchmark. In the procedure of music education, while highlighting the students' rational cognition, he also desired to improve the students' perceptual experience of music. Besides, in the procedure of learning music, one can know the culture in a better manner. In 1960, he established the Graduate School of Ethnomusicology at the University of California, and showed that researchers in ethnomusicology should comprehend the research techniques of "insiders" and "outsiders". At the same time, it first emerged in the field of linguistics. It is extended the research methods of ethnomusicology to the "bi-musicality" education system. The researcher is an "outsider" if faced with the musical research of a diverse culture than the one in which he or she lives. In contrast, an outsider's perspective can keep the defamiliarization of the research target group, and it can be adopted to intervene in the research with an impartial attitude. China is a big family composed of 56 ethnic groups, each of which has a national music culture based on the traditional culture. At the moment, the cultures of multiple ethnic groups also penetrate each other. In the works made by Mr. Wu, he increases the proportion of ethnic minority music in the book. He assumes that each music variety in the world is equal, so when researchers encounter foreign cultural music, they can analyze it from the prospect of "outsiders". Consequently, read more, see more, hear more, sing more, to do better research. Mr. Wu Guodong used the theory of "bi-musicality" to music education and implemented the theory. He expanded the connotation of national music in China and broadened new horizons in national musicology research. Additionally, he also led a new way for traditional folk music education, which can prevent the researchers from entering into the area of complacency and make an important contribution to the heritage of folk music culture.

### **3. Identify Cultural Mother Tongue and Develop Cultural Identity**

Because of society's development, the advancement of technology, and the exchange and integration of cultures from all over the world, the field of music has presented in numerous ways. That some traditional music and associated musical works, which have acquired throughout history, should have a renewed value in the lives of both young people and the general public in the new era. In the book, Mr. Wu Guodong mentioned: "No country or nation in the world today will be willing to separate itself from its traditional music culture with the evolution of the new era and let its own country or nation have modern ownership. The music civilization of China has turned into sourceless water that is slowly drying up". In appreciating and recognizing this essential musical, cultural heritage produced by our predecessors and the variety of development it has undergone, we must set certain preconceptions.

Chinese national music is the fundamental and cultural characteristic of “mother tongue” in the overall structure of Chinese national music. The music culture of all periods in Chinese history not only has the features of combining the past to the present. In addition, all were derived and developed from the early music culture type as the foundation, and people had various aesthetics at diverse times. Thus, people have refined traditional music to suit social development and their preferences. Meanwhile, it is via diverse forms of education and transmission that traditions continue today. But since opening the border of China, a great deal of Western music theory has overflowed into China, and Western music has converted mainstream. Accordingly, the current professional music education in China is still influenced by the European music education system. The programs accomplished by professional colleges are based on Western music theory as the universal truth. Chinese national music is still in a passive situation. Confronting the condition of being “Europeanized”, Mr. Fan Zuyin also stated in “The Mother Tongue of Chinese Culture and Professional Music Education”, after modern schools’ appearance, the music education in them should have undertaken the responsibility of inheriting Chinese music. Nevertheless, it is precisely music education in schools during this stage of history that missed to take the transmission of traditional Chinese music as its significant responsibility for multiple social and historical reasons. Because most educated people (including most people who will be involved in music projects in the future), taking the spread of national music culture has experienced substantial difficulty and influence. The Arts Education Committee of the State Education Commission and the Music Education Committee of the Chinese Music Association have also introduced Chinese culture as the mother tongue for music education, which matches the overall tendency of developing music education in the world. Meantime, the works composed by Mr. Wu were also adequately responding to this call. In this book, Mr. Wu Guodong advised to appreciate and recognize national music. First of all, we must build the cognitive theory that Chinese national music is a vital determinant in forming the Chinese people’s mother tongue culture. It can not only lead us to more precisely and in-depth direct us to recognize and know the numerous varieties of Chinese national music, as well as the cultural connotation and musical features of relevant music works. It supports us perfectly in recognizing and know the collision and fusion of modern Chinese and Western music cultures. The works made by Mr. Wu clearly show that Chinese folk music is an indispensable component of the Chinese nation’s mother tongue culture. Hence, it is undeniable to strengthen the national cultural identity and call upon the students to heighten their cultural self-confidence and obtain cultural consciousness. Meantime, rediscover the foundation of traditional culture’s advantage and uniqueness, which is a requirement for the inheritance of the Chinese national music culture. It is also the foundation and prerequisite for following and understanding Chinese folk music’s new development in the new era.

#### 4. Conclusion

For a long time, Western music has continuously impacted the music aesthetics of the young generation. Therefore, how do we understand and enjoy their traditions, which has converted a critical issue. With encouragement from the Chinese government, society has set off an upsurge of “rejuvenating Chinese music”. For example, Toutiao and Douyin joined hands with Beijing National Orchestra, Shanghai National Musical Instrument No. 1 Factory, China Shanghai International Arts Festival Center, Shanghai Xinyi National Chamber Orchestra, Sichuan Youth Art Theater and many other cultural organizations to initiate the “Chinese Music Show”. Weibo Headline also launched the super-topics “I Empower Chinese Traditional Music” and “I Know This Instrument”, inviting well-known Chinese traditional music artists and cultural institutions, such as state institutions and national academies, the knowledge of Chinese traditional music to netizens. Under current academia, there are various top music educators like Mr. Wu Guodong. Under their guidance, China has also grown more and more courageous in rejuvenating national music. Besides, the advancement of science and technology has presented human communication more frequently and thoroughly. Music educators encounter numerous artistic and cultural achievements. It is essential to be confident in oneself and be tolerant of the best cultures from all over the world to make Chinese cultural development more diverse. Over the years, China has absorbed the Western music education system and has continuously highlighted its Chinese features. We must keep performing the construction of Chinese music majors and Chinese music departments overseas and break away from the old “imported culture”. It is truly developing a comprehensive interoperability exchange to enhance Chinese music education quality in an internationalization strategy. With mobile Internet guidance, more people have focused on traditional culture and make everyone feel the charm of Chinese traditional music more comprehensively. Since the author’s limited level, there will inevitably be superficial discussions, and it is more welcome scholars to criticize and correct it.

#### References

- Fan, Z. Y. (1996). Chinese Cultural Mother Tongue and Professional Music Education. *Chinese Music*, 2, 26-28, 34.
- Han, L. (2013). On the Teaching Reform of Music Majors in Normal Universities Under the New Condition. *Journal of Inner Mongolia University for Nationalities* (Social Science Edition), 39(5), 91-92.
- Hu, X. D. (2013). An Introduction to the Theory and Method of Music Anthropology. *Journal of the Central Conservatory of Music*, 3, 136-141.
- Wang, Y. H, & Du, Y. X. (Eds). (1999). *Introduction to Chinese Traditional Music*. Fujian Education Press.

- Wu, G. D. (Ed.). (2018). *Chinese National Music*. Nanjing Normal University Press.
- Zhang, H. (2013). Self-preface of “The Theory and Practice of Bi-musicality”. *Chinese Music*, 1, 225-227.
- Zhang, H., & Wang, C. (2013). Interpreting the Cultural Connotation of Ethnic Music: The Ethnological Dimension of Bi-musicality Theory and Practice. *National Art Research*, 26(5), 38-43.
- Zhang, H., & Wang, M. (2012). Multiple Music and Harmonious Society: A Deep Explanation of the Practical Significance of the Bi-musicality Educational Concept. *Chinese Music*, 2, 1-4, 24.