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Fostering Virtue through Education in Senior High School Music Teaching from the Perspective of Cultural Nurturing: A Practical Exploration

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Abstract

Cultural nurturing occupies a central place in contemporary educational reform in the new era. As a carrier of aesthetic education, music as a school subject plays an irreplaceable role in transmitting excellent traditional Chinese culture and in developing students' cultural identity and aesthetic literacy. Drawing on senior high school music teaching practice and the theoretical meaning of cultural nurturing, this study examines specific explorations at Chengdu Shishi High School. It systematically considers why culturally oriented music teaching matters, how it can be enacted, and what representative lesson designs look like in practice. Strategies such as uncovering the cultural meanings encoded in teaching materials, bringing the musical resources of the Bashu region into the curriculum, and organizing thematic learning across disciplinary boundaries. These approaches have been used to construct a new model of music classroom characterized by "conveying the way through music and nourishing the heart through beauty." The discussion offers a practice-based reference for pursuing the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education in senior high school music.

Keywords

cultural nurturing, senior high school music teaching, excellent traditional Chinese culture, aesthetic education immersion

1. Introduction

The report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China explicitly calls for "building cultural confidence and strength and securing new successes in developing socialist culture." This formulation places cultural development firmly within national strategy. In 2023, the Ministry of

Education issued *the Notice on Fully Implementing the School Aesthetic Education Immersion Action*. It emphasizes immersing students, teachers, and schools in aesthetic education, and giving full play to art courses as the main channel of cultural inheritance. Read together, these policy statements reposition "cultural nurturing." It is not confined to moral education; rather, it has become a shared value pursuit of teaching across all subjects.

Music is an important carrier of human culture. "All music arises from the human heart," as an ancient Chinese classic observes. Across more than five thousand years of civilization, the Chinese nation has produced an immense musical heritage, extending from the "Airs, Odes, Hymns" of the Book of Songs to the daqu(grand suites) of the Tang dynasty, and from the "clear, subtle, tranquil, and far-reaching" art of the guqin to the "water-polished" melodies of Kunqu opera. Music has always resonated with the spiritual world of the nation. The senior high school years are crucial to the formation of aesthetic sensibility and cultural identity, which gives the music classroom a particular responsibility for cultural nurturing. Grounded in experience as a senior high school music teacher, the author attempts to explore workable approaches to this task. The aim is for the classroom to truly become a spiritual home where students experience beauty of culture and cultivate love for the family and the country.

2. The Educational Significance of Culturally Oriented Music Teaching

2.1 Music as an "Audible Carrier" of Cultural Inheritance

At its core, cultural nurturing fosters the all-round development of the person through sustained immersion in culture. Music, among the oldest art forms, has always emerged and developed within a particular cultural setting. The pentatonic scale, the banqiang (tonal-pattern variation) structure, and the "scattered–slow–moderate–fast–scattered" formal layout of traditional Chinese music all embody distinctive Chinese people's understandings of the cosmos, nature, and aesthetic ideals. A classroom encounter with *A Moonlit Night on the Spring River* therefore involves more than melodic pleasure: it can open onto the philosophical artistic conception of "the unity of heaven and humanity." *Jasmine Flower* works in a similar way, since learning the song gives students access both to its grace as a folk song and to the gentle temperament associated with Jiangnan culture. Because its emotional meaning is not bound to semantic language, music can cross temporal and spatial boundaries. Music turns an abstract cultural spirit into an aesthetic experience that can be perceived and felt—a unique advantage of music as a school subject in cultural nurturing.

2.2 Music Education as a "Foundation-laying Project" for Cultural Identity

Cultural identity supplies a spiritual bond for national cohesion. Contemporary senior high school students are growing up amid globalization and digitalization, where they face the impact and collision of diverse cultures. Some can discuss popular culture in considerable detail yet know very little about their own nation's musical traditions. This form of "cultural picky eating" warrants vigilance. A systematically designed music curriculum can bring students into sustained contact with Peking opera, Kunqu, the guqin, folk songs, and other forms of intangible cultural heritage. Through these aesthetic

experiences, emotional belonging and value identification with Chinese culture begin to take shape. As the Hungarian educator Zoltán Kodály observed, "A nation's musical culture is its spiritual heritage." On this account, helping students know and love their own nation's music constitutes the foundation of cultural confidence.

2.3 The Music Classroom as a "Natural Site" for Aesthetic and Moral Formation

The Music Curriculum Standards for General Senior High Schools (2017 Edition, Revised 2020) identify "aesthetic perception, artistic expression, and cultural understanding" as core competencies. Within this framework, "cultural understanding" explicitly requires students to "understand the humanistic connotations of musical art in different cultural contexts." A culturally nurturing approach brings the perceptual experience of aesthetic education into relation with the value guidance of moral education. As students respond to melodic beauty, they also come to understand the national character and moral integrity, love for the family and the country, and the humanistic spirit carried by the works. For example, when appreciating *the Yellow River Cantata*, its stirring melodies arouse students' patriotic enthusiasm; when learning to sing *Farewell*, its far-reaching artistic conception nurtures their affection for friends. Such education,like rain moistening things silently, works quietly. Its influence is more profound and enduring than hollow preaching detached from experience.

3. Practical Approaches to Culturally Oriented Music Teaching

3.1 Uncovering the Cultural Genes of Teaching Materials to Build a Teaching-content System of "Conveying the Way through Music"

Current senior high school music textbooks already contain numerous classic works with substantial cultural connotation. The pedagogical question is how teachers read them. If instruction stops at the technical cycle of "listen–sing–practice," much of that depth remains inaccessible. In the textbooks published by the People's Music Publishing House, for example, ancient pieces such as *Flowing Water* and *Three Variations on the Yang Pass* carry the aesthetic pursuits of literati music. Folk songs—including *The Lishui Boatmen's Work Song*, *The Midu Mountain Song*, and *The Vast Grassland*—reflect the ways of life and the character and temperament of different regions. A different set of connections appears in *I Am on the City Tower Viewing the Mountain Scenery* and *Seeing the King Sleeping Peacefully in His Tent*, which are connected with the rich traditions of Chinese opera and quyi(narrative singing).

In classroom practice, the author has attempted to develope a "cultural dossier" for each work, recording its compositional background, historical context, related cultural allusions, and contemporary significance. A lesson on the guqin piece Flowing Water, for instance, moves beyond Guan Pinghu's recorded performance. Students encounter the allusion of "high mountains and flowing water meeting a kindred spirit," examine the guqin's distinctive abbreviated-character tablature (jianzipu), and consider contemporary significance that the piece was included on the Voyager Golden Record launched into space in 1977. Approached in this way, an ancient composition links tradition with modernity. It also

becomes a vehicle for dialogue between Chinese culture and the cultures of the world.

3.2 Drawing on the Local Music Resources of Bashu region to Build a Local Classroom where "each Place's Water and Soil Nourish Its Own Music"

Cultural nurturing calls for both "looking up at the stars" and "keeping one's feet on the ground." Local musical culture forms an organic part of excellent traditional Chinese culture, and its closeness to students' lived experience makes emotional resonance more likely. The author's school is in Chengdu, where the land of Bashu region has nourished a rich and varied musical heritage: the powerful ruggedness of Chuanjiang haozi, the delicate grace of Sichuan qingyin, the stirring intensity of the gaoqiang style of Sichuan opera, and the mysterious archaic quality of Qiang polyphonic folk songs. Such "music at our doorstep" offers an invaluable resource for teaching.

The author has converted these local resources into curriculum through three practical routes. One is "inviting in": inheritors of the Chuanjiang haozi and performing artists of Sichuan yangqin are invited to campus to lead "intangible cultural heritage(ICH) music workshops," giving students close contact with the distinctive charm of local arts. A second route is "going out." Students conduct fieldwork at the Chuanjiang haozi inheritance base, where the authentic settings allow them to feel the pulse of local culture. The third is "blending in," which brings local musical elements into composition and arrangement. Students create new folk songs with contemporary vitality, so that traditional local music can be renewed through the creativity of the new era.

Rooting music teaching in regional culture broadens what takes place in the classroom. It also gives students a familiar cultural setting in which to develop identification with, and pride in, their hometown and nation. The resulting elecation is emotional as well as cognitive: from "knowing music" to "knowing one's homeland," and then to "knowing one's country."

3.3 Carrying on Interdisciplinary Thematic Integration to Establish a "Broad Culture" Teaching Framework

Music never exists in isolation. Culturally oriented music teaching therefore needs to reach across disciplinary boundaries and establish a "music +" model of integration. The author has explored this model through several thematic pathways.

In the "music + Chinese language" pathway, AI-assisted composition is organized around classical poetry. Students use Li Bai's poem *The Road to Shu Is Hard* as the lyrics and work with AI music generation tools such as Suno and AIVA. The teacher guides students to input the poem's text and select the style tag "ancient style + Sichuan flavor." The AI generates a melodic framework almost immediately; secondary composition then begins: students transpose, ornament, and vary the rhythm. The fusion of poetry and music brings the grandeur of the High Tang and the local charm of the Shu region into experience, while also showing how technology can empower contemporary expressions of traditional culture. A "music + history" pathway uses musical works to connect historical trajectories. *March of the Volunteers*, *On the Songhua River*, and *the Yellow River Cantata*, for example, construct a thematic unit on "the memory of the War of Resistance in music," enabling students to touch the

warmth of history through song. The third pathway,"music + fine arts", takes the form of "symphony of sound and vision" activities. Starting from the artistic conception of "west of the Yang Pass there will be no old friends" in Wang Wei's *Seeing Yuan Er Off on a Mission to Anxi*, students listen to the guqin piece *Three Variations on the Yang Pass* and feel the reluctance to part that deepens through the "three variations." They then paint a *Farewell at Yang Pass* in ink or watercolor. The auditory sense of distance is transformed into visual boundlessness, opening an aesthetic channel between hearing and sight. Such integration is not a simple platter of subjects; it requires deep connections organized around cultural themes. To sustain this work, music teachers need relatively broad humanistic cultivation, an eye for cultural connections among disciplines, and the capacity to guide students toward a holistic understanding of culture through integrative artistic experience.

3.4 Innovating Teaching Methods to Create an "Immersive" Cultural Experience Field

Traditional music teaching often privileges teacher exposition and student listening. Student participation and the depth of cultural experience are both clearly insufficient. Cultural nurturing instead requires a movement from "knowledge transmission" toward "situational experience," so that students "learn by doing and learn with joy." The author's practice has drawn chiefly on the following strategies.

The method of situational restoration. Multimedia technology and carefully chosen props can reconstruct aspects of historical scenes for ancient pieces or opera, creating an atmosphere of "traveling through time." For the national orchestral piece *A Moonlit Night on the Spring River*, the teacher presents AI-generated scroll paintings of a spring river on a moonlit Tang-dynasty night and arranges fishing lamps, lotus lanterns, straw rain capes, and other props around the classroom. The resulting poetic space evokes "the river winds around the fragrant meadows." As the music plays, students close their eyes and listen to passages including "Drums and Bells from the Riverside Tower," "The Moon Rising over the Eastern Hills," and "Layered Shadows of Flowers," imagining the scene of river and moon rising together with the tide. Group work follows. Students use body movements to simulate "sculling the oar," "rowing," and "rippling water." Through the alternation of motion and stillness, they experience the aesthetic realm of "fusion of emotion and scenery" in traditional Chinese music and come to understand the artistic quality of "painting within sound and sound within painting."

Project-based learning. Under the theme "I Am an Intangible Cultural Heritage Inheritor," groups select a local musical ICH item, such as Sichuan qingyin, Qiang flute performance, or the Chuanjiang haozi. Their research combines literature review, interviews with inheritors, fieldwork, and the production of mini-documentaries, followed by presentations in class. This deep-learning approach enables students to truly become active inheritors of culture in the process of inquiry.

4. A Representative Lesson Example: The Unit Design of "Sounds that Move Mountains and Rivers—A Multidimensional Cultural Interpretation of Chinese Folk Songs"

The following unit, designed by the author around the "folk songs" unit of the People's Music

Publishing House senior high school music textbook, shows how culturally oriented music teaching can be put into practice. Four representative textbook works are included: The Lishui Boatmen's Work Song, The Porters' Tune, The Midu Mountain Song, and The Vast Grassland. Together they cover Han work songs and mountain songs as well as Mongolian long song(urtiin duu). Through the sequence "listening–singing–thinking–creating," students understand the cultural logic of "each place's water and soil nourishes its own music" and experience the diversity and vitality of Chinese folk songs.

4.1 Unit Background and Design Rationale

Folk songs are the most primordial voice of the Chinese nation: born of labor, rooted in the land, and flowing through our veins. The "folk songs" unit of the People's Music Publishing House textbook contains more than ten classic works from different regions and ethnic groups, offering rich material for cultural nurturing. Its design here rests on the core idea of "recognizing the land through its sounds and understanding the people through their music." Students need to identify the musical characteristics of different folk-song genres, but recognition is only a starting point. They are also guided to ask: Why the boatmen's work song of Hunan is so forceful? Why the xintianyou of northern Shaanxi sounds so desolate? Why singing on the Mongolian grassland feels so distant and lingering? By placing music within a coordinate system of geography, history, and ways of life, the unit helps students form a holistic understanding of Chinese culture.

4.2 Unit Objectives

(1) Aesthetic perception: students are able to identify the musical characteristics of folk-song genres such as work songs, mountain songs, and long song; perceive differences in rhythm, melody, and timbre; and understand the close relationship between musical form and geographical environment.

(2) Artistic performance: through listening, imitative singing, cooperative performance, and other practical activities, students develop a preliminary command of vocal techniques such as "one leads and all join in," free prolongation, and the nugala ornament of long song. They learn to use natural voices to convey the stylistic character of different folk songs.

(3) Cultural understanding: investigation of the contexts in which folk songs from different regions arose helps students understand the spirit of labor, the longing for love, and the philosophy of life embodied in them. Students also experience both the diversity and the commonality of the musical cultures of China's ethnic groups, and strengthening their cultural confidence and national identity.

4.3 Lesson Arrangement and Teaching Implementation

Lesson 1: Work songs—the cry of strength (*The Lishui Boatmen's Work Song*). The lesson begins with a team-legged race. As students shout commands in unison to coordinate their steps, their own experience leads naturally into the concept of the "work song" (haozi). A video of the Lishui boatmen's work song follows, together with a map of Hunan's river system. The teacher explains the treacherous navigation channels of the Lishui basin—"Lishui has one hundred and eighty rapids"—and guide students to undersatnd the essential function of haozi as "born of labor and serving labor." Students then compare two excerpts, the "calm-water haozi" and the "desperate-struggle haozi." Group

discussion considers when boatmen shout a faster rhythm and when they use a slower one, leading students to discover that tempo and dynamic change with the intensity of labor. Finally, groups simulate "one leads and all join in," with the song leader's solo answered by the boatmen's chorus. Through sound-and-gesture rhythm, students feel the boatmen's collective strength and tenacious spirit in braving the rapids together.

Lesson 2: Mountain songs—the echo of love (*The Porters' Tune* and *The Midu Mountain Song*). Two mountain songs are juxtaposed to create a "northwest–southwest" geographical contrast. Students first listen to the northern Shaanxi xintianyou *The Porters' Tune* while viewing photographs of the Loess Plateau's crisscrossing gullies. This pairing helps them consider the inner connection between the high-pitched, long-drawn, freely unfolding melodic features of xintianyou and the plateau's open expanse. The lyrics portray the hardship of porters driving pack animals and their longing for love, revealing the depth of life experience carried in folk songs. Attention then turns to Yunnan's *The Midu Mountain Song*. Videos of the song and dance of the Yi, Bai, and other ethnic groups support comparison of the two mountain songs in mode, range, and ornamentation. During imitative singing, students notice that northwestern mountain songs generally use wide intervallic leaps to convey vastness and desolation, whereas southwestern examples mainly move by step and include delicate slides, producing a graceful and moving character. To close the lesson, groups perform *The Midu Mountain Song* antiphonally and experience, through interaction, the mountain song's original function as a medium of social exchange.

Lesson 3: Long song—the expanse of the grassland (*The Vast Grassland*). Mongolian long song is the focus of this lesson. A video of grassland scenery establishes the setting before students listen to The Vast Grassland with attention to its free rhythm and long-drawn breath. The teacher explains how the Mongolian nomadic way of life—"nomadizing in search of water and pasture" —is deeply connected to long-song music: the vast grassland nurtured an open vocal range, while the solitude of nomadic life gave rise to an ode to heaven, earth, and nature. In the singing segment, the teacher gives a focused demonstration of the nugala, the distinctive vibrato ornament of long song. Through imitation of this technique, students experience the Mongolian aesthetic pursuit expressed in the image of long song as wind on the grassland—unfettered and free. An extension task after class asks students to research Mongolian khoomei (throat singing) and short song, then prepare comparative tables so that they can understand the diversity of grassland musical culture from a broader perspective.

Lesson 4: Integration—a cultural map of folk songs. This final lesson brings the unit together. Each group selects a folk song from the textbook repertoire and produces a "folk-song cultural dossier" poster addressing four dimensions: region, function, musical characteristics, and cultural spirit. During class presentations, students act as "folk-song recommender." Some annotate maps to show folk-song distribution, some use mind maps to organize genre classifications, and others reenact the labor scenes in which folk songs were born through short skits. After the presentations, teachers and students jointly construct a "cultural map of Chinese folk songs." The learning outcomes of the four lessons thus

converge into a visualized network of cultural cognition.

4.4 Teaching Outcomes

Students showed relatively high enthusiasm for learning after the unit was implemented. In the questionnaire survey, 89% of the students indicated: “It turns out that folk songs are not rustic; they are closely related to our living environment and modes of production.” The survey also found that 85% of the students could accurately distinguish the musical characteristics of the three genres of work songs, mountain songs, and long song. Even more encouraging, some students took the initiative to collect folk songs from their hometowns after class. Several students took the initiative to collect folk songs from their hometowns; one recorded field songs passed down from grandparents, while others used holidays to conduct fieldwork in places such as northern Shaanxi and Yunnan, making short videos of what they saw and heard to share on WeChat Moments. These outcomes indicate that folk-song teaching can develop strong emotional resonance and a sense of cultural identity when it genuinely engages the cultural core of “people and land,” “people and labor,” and “people and emotion.”

5. Reflections and Future Directions

The author offers the following reflections on practicing music teaching from the perspective of cultural nurturing.

The first concerns teachers’ own cultural cultivation, which is a prerequisite. To help students understand the culture behind the music, teachers need relatively deep cultural accumulation and an interdisciplinary vision. For music teachers, this means moving beyond the “technique-centered” comfort zone and taking the initiative to study music aesthetics, ethnomusicology, cultural anthropology, and related fields. The professional role must widen accordingly, from “teaching artisan” to “bearer of the cultural lamp.”

Second, cultural symbols should not be accumulated superficially. Cultural nurturing cannot be reduced to “music plus iscrete cultural facts,” and a music class should not be turned into a history class or a culture class. Cultural integration needs aesthetic experience as its medium. Students can then arrive at cultural understanding through direct, perceptual encounters with music, joining “entering within” (immersive appreciation) with “emerging beyond” (rational reflection).

Third, assessment needs to become more diverse. Conventional skill assessments cannot adequately capture the effects of cultural nurturing. A mechanism that combines process evaluation with performance evaluation is therefore required. A “music culture portfolio,” for example, could gather inquiry reports, creative compositions, reflective journals, and related evidence, allowing students’ development in cultural understanding, creative practice, and value identification to be assessed more comprehensively.

Looking ahead, with the development of digital technology, virtual reality (VR), artificial intelligence (AI), and related tools will offer more possibilities for presenting culture in music teaching. VR could allow students to “walk into” the Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes and hear reconstructed performances of

ancient music; AI could assist in analyzing the melodic characteristics of folk songs from different regions. Such tools will greatly expand the temporal and spatial boundaries of cultural nurturing. Yet their value depends on the purpose they serve. Technology remains a means, while educating people is the end. Only by holding firmly to this original aspiration can the music classroom become spiritual fertile soil that nourishes the soul and carries forward the cultural lineage.

6. Conclusion

"Awakened by poetry, established through rites, completed in music." Since ancient times, music education has been an important pathway for cultivating character. Within the contemporary call for cultural nurturing, senior high school music teaching carries a dual mission: inheriting excellent traditional Chinese culture and cultivating students' cultural confidence and aesthetic literacy. For front-line music teachers, that mission changes the work at hand. They transmit musical knowledge, but they also communicate cultural spirit. Teaching students to listen to and sing songs is only part of the task; students must also be guided to understand the voice of culture in music and to sing out the feeling of the nation from their hearts. May the strings and songs never cease, and may beauty nourish the heart. Every music teacher can serve as a lamplighter in the long river of culture, helping the genes of excellent traditional Chinese culture take root, sprout, and blossom in the hearts of generation after generation of young people.

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