

# Reform of Music History Teaching and Value Guidance in China and Abroad from the Perspective of Cultural Confidence

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**Abstract:** The history of Chinese and foreign music is a core theoretical course in the music education system of higher education institutions, serving multiple functions including historical organization, aesthetic education, cultural dissemination, and value shaping. Against the backdrop of strengthening cultural confidence and building a culturally strong nation, traditional teaching of Chinese and foreign music history has encountered structural issues such as overemphasis on the West at the expense of China, prioritizing knowledge over values, focusing on theory over culture, and valuing inheritance over innovation. These shortcomings hinder its ability to fulfill the mission of promoting China's excellent traditional music culture and fostering cultural confidence among young students. This paper adopts cultural confidence as a theoretical perspective to analyze the current practical challenges in Chinese and foreign music history teaching, elucidates the intrinsic logical relationship between cultural confidence and music history education, and proposes teaching reform pathways from six dimensions: teaching philosophy, curriculum structure, teaching content, teaching methods, evaluation systems, and value guidance. It explores how music history courses can serve as a vehicle to achieve an organic integration of knowledge transmission, skill development, and value leadership, providing theoretical support and practical solutions for higher education institutions to implement the fundamental task of moral education and enhance young people's cultural confidence.

**Keywords:** Cultural confidence; History of Chinese and foreign music; Teaching reform; Value guidance; Aesthetic education; Music education

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## 1. Introduction

Cultural confidence is a nation or a people's full affirmation of their own cultural values, a firm belief in the vitality of their own culture, and a more fundamental, extensive, and profound confidence. The excellent traditional Chinese music culture has a long history and profound depth, ranging from ancient music and dance, bell and drum music, to literati Qin music, opera and storytelling, and ethnic instrumental music, forming a unique Eastern system in the world's musical civilization and serving as an important carrier of cultural confidence. The courses on Chinese and foreign music history undertake the important tasks of tracing the development of China and world music, interpreting the spiritual connotations of musical culture, and enhancing students' aesthetic and humanistic literacy, acting as a crucial bridge connecting historical musical

civilizations with the values of contemporary youth.

For decades, influenced by Western-centric music education philosophies, Chinese universities have faced persistent challenges in teaching Chinese and foreign music history, including structural imbalances, content biases, and ambiguous value orientations. Some curricula have adopted Western musical systems as the sole benchmark, diminishing the historical significance and cultural value of traditional Chinese music. This has resulted in students' limited understanding, shallow identification, and lack of confidence in their native musical heritage. In the new era context, integrating cultural confidence into the entire process of Chinese and foreign music history education, advancing systematic curriculum reforms, and strengthening value guidance functions are not only essential requirements for moral education but also crucial pathways to preserve Chinese musical civilization and promote cultural exchange between China and the world. Grounded in the perspective of cultural confidence, this study focuses on teaching reforms and value guidance in music history education. By systematically analyzing curriculum shortcomings, it proposes a new teaching paradigm of "cultivating character through culture and nurturing individuals through music." The goal is to help students deeply appreciate the unique charm of Chinese musical culture through comparative studies of global musical traditions, fostering correct cultural perspectives, historical understanding, and aesthetic appreciation. Ultimately, this approach aims to cultivate students as conscious inheritors, innovators, and disseminators of China's outstanding musical heritage<sup>[1]</sup>.

## **2. The intrinsic logical connection between cultural confidence and music history teaching in China and abroad**

### **2.1. Chinese and foreign music history serves as a vital knowledge carrier for cultural confidence**

The history of Chinese and foreign music is not merely a compilation of chronological threads and catalogues of works, but also a chronicle of the development of human musical civilization and the evolution of cultural spirit. The history of Chinese music embodies cultural concepts such as ritual-music civilization, the unity of heaven and humanity, and harmonious coexistence of music and life. It encompasses unique systems of musical scales, instruments, notation, and aesthetics, serving as a living legacy of China's excellent traditional culture. Through systematic teaching, students can gain a clear understanding of the historical significance, cultural depth, and global influence of Chinese music, thereby solidifying the knowledge foundation for cultural confidence.

### **2.2. Cultural confidence as the core value of music history teaching in China and abroad**

Music history education transcends mere knowledge transmission, with its core objectives being cultural comprehension, value recognition, and spiritual cultivation. Teaching devoid of cultural confidence risks falling into technicality, fragmentation, and Westernization. Only by grounding instruction in cultural confidence can we restore its essence to students, enabling them to discern the distinctions between Chinese and Western musical cultures through comparative analysis, appreciate civilizational diversity through understanding, and strengthen national pride through identity recognition, ultimately achieving the elevation from "knowledge acquisition" to "spiritual enrichment."

### **2.3. Teaching reform as a practical path to strengthen cultural confidence**

The core direction of teaching reform in Chinese and international music history lies in dismantling imbalanced curriculum structures, fostering equitable dialogues between Chinese and foreign musical traditions, and reaffirming the cultural identity of Chinese music. By restructuring content, innovating methodologies, and strengthening guidance, traditional music can be revitalized, elevated, and shared globally. This approach transforms students from passive recipients into active inheritors, establishing music education as a vital platform for nurturing cultural confidence and promoting national spirit<sup>[2]</sup>.

## **2.4. Value guidance as the fundamental mission of music education**

Aesthetic education encompasses aesthetic cultivation, moral development, and spiritual nurturing, while also serving to enrich imagination and foster innovative thinking. Through the lens of music history across cultures, beauty acts as a medium for cultural enlightenment. By guiding students with core values, it helps them establish proper cultural perspectives, enhance critical discernment, and consciously resist historical nihilism and Western-centric ideologies, ultimately realizing the profound philosophy of “cultivating fundamental values through music and forging spiritual identity through culture <sup>[3]</sup>.”

## **3. The practical challenges in teaching music history between China and foreign countries from the perspective of cultural confidence**

### **3.1. Imbalanced teaching philosophy: Pronounced Western-centric bias and weakened cultural subjectivity of indigenous traditions**

Influenced by the long-standing professional music education system, many universities exhibit a conceptual bias of “overemphasizing Western while neglecting Chinese” in their Chinese and foreign music history courses. Teaching primarily revolves around Western music history, using Western tonal music, harmonic systems, and formal structures as evaluation criteria, while dedicating insufficient space and depth to the teaching of Chinese music history. Some even interpret Chinese music within the framework of Western theories, overlooking its unique aesthetic paradigms and cultural logic. This leads students to form the erroneous perception that “Western music is more advanced while Chinese music is relatively backward,” resulting in a lack of conceptual support for cultural confidence <sup>[4]</sup>.

### **3.2. Imbalanced course structure: Disproportionate ratio of Chinese to foreign languages and insufficient cultural contrast**

In terms of curriculum design, most institutions prioritize Western music history, with class hours far exceeding those allocated to Chinese music history, resulting in teaching that exhibits characteristics of “prioritizing the West over the Chinese, emphasizing technique over philosophy, and valuing history over literature.” The courses lack horizontal comparisons and parallel analyses of Chinese and foreign musical cultures, failing to place Chinese ritual music civilization, literati music, and folk music on an equal footing with Western religious music, court music, and Romantic music for mutual interpretation. As a result, students struggle to establish a comprehensive cultural framework and fail to understand the unique value of Chinese music through comparative analysis.

### **3.3. Insufficient teaching content: Emphasis on historical fact memorization over cultural interpretation, with inadequate value guidance**

Current teaching primarily adopts a linear narrative approach of “time + figures + works,” focusing on memorizing knowledge points such as schools, genres, and techniques while neglecting the philosophical ideas, cultural spirit, aesthetic pursuits, and contemporary values behind music. The core connotations of traditional Chinese music, such as the “harmony” culture, ritual optimism, artistic conception theory, and Qi-Yun concept, are not deeply explored. There is insufficient integration of red music culture and innovative achievements of Chinese music in the new era, and the value shaping and spiritual guidance functions of the curriculum are severely lacking <sup>[5]</sup>.

### **3.4. Rigidification of teaching methods: Predominantly one-way indoctrination with insufficient cultural experience and practice**

Teaching methods still predominantly rely on classroom lectures and PowerPoint presentations, lacking immersive, experiential, and inquiry-based approaches. Students struggle to engage with the living traditions of traditional music, with their understanding of art forms like Guqin, Kunqu opera, Bianzhong, and ethnic instrumental music remaining

confined to textual descriptions. The absence of auditory perception, live experiences, and hands-on participation hinders the establishment of genuine cultural identity, resulting in superficial learning outcomes that remain at the level of surface-level memorization.

### **3.5. Single evaluation system: Overemphasis on knowledge assessment at the expense of competency evaluation, with ambiguous cultural orientation**

The course assessment primarily consists of final written exams and objective questions, focusing on memory-based content such as historical periods, figures, and works, while neglecting the evaluation of students' cultural understanding, aesthetic judgment, value orientation, and innovative capabilities in inheritance. The evaluation system lacks consideration of students' cognition of China's music culture, cultural confidence attitudes, and traditional music practice abilities, making it difficult to guide students to genuinely identify with and cherish Chinese music culture from within.

### **3.6. Weak cultural dissemination: Lack of contemporary adaptation, with traditional music becoming disconnected from the times**

The teaching content mostly focuses on ancient music history, with limited coverage of modern and contemporary Chinese music transformation, innovation in contemporary ethnic music, and international dissemination of Chinese music, failing to showcase the vitality of Chinese music culture in the contemporary era. Traditional music culture has not been integrated with new media, new stages, and new communication methods, leaving students lacking the awareness and ability to modernize and internationalize traditional music expressions, and undermining the foundation of cultural confidence<sup>[6]</sup>.

## **4. General principles for teaching reform of Chinese and foreign music history from the perspective of cultural confidence**

### **4.1. Adherence to the principle of subjectivity: Establishing the dominant position of Chinese musical culture**

Teaching reform must take Chinese culture as the main body, base itself on the history and reality of Chinese music, break the framework of Western centrism, and build an equal, mutually learning, dialogic, and inclusive Sino-foreign music education system, so that students can clearly understand the unique contributions and important status of Chinese music in the history of world music.

Specifically, in curriculum design, the proportion of China's music history content should be increased to systematically outline the complete trajectory from ancient music and dance, Zhou Dynasty ritual music, Han-Tang court music, Song-Yuan opera, Ming-Qing storytelling performances, to modern new music movements and contemporary ethnic music development, ensuring students gain a comprehensive understanding of the historical depth and lineage of Chinese music culture. In textbook compilation, the development logic of China's music itself should serve as the guiding thread, highlighting its unique innovations in theoretical systems of tuning, instrumental systems, musical forms, and aesthetic concepts, such as elaborating on the earlier invention of the twelve-tone equal temperament compared to Western music, the philosophical essence of "harmony between heaven and humanity" in Guqin music, and the integrated artistic features of singing, recitation, acting, and martial arts in opera music, while avoiding the exclusive interpretation of China's musical phenomena through Western music theory frameworks. Meanwhile, during teaching processes, emphasis should be placed on uncovering the spiritual values embedded in China's music culture, guiding students to comprehend the national sentiments, moral principles, and aesthetic pursuits conveyed by Chinese music. For instance, appreciating "The Yellow River Cantata" can help students experience the Chinese nation's spirit of resistance and patriotism, while studying Jiangnan silk and bamboo music can reveal the Chinese people's longing for harmony with nature. This approach enables students to establish emotional identification and value confidence in Chinese music culture through in-depth understanding, consciously regarding it as the core and foundation of their academic and research endeavors.

#### **4.2. Adherence to the principle of integration: Achieving organic fusion of history, theory, literature, and technology**

By integrating historical context, theoretical knowledge, cultural spirit, and artistic practice, we not only clarify “what it is” but also thoroughly explain “why it exists” and “its value,” transforming music history into a cultural course that is warm, soulful, and spiritually enriching.

From the perspective of “history,” it is essential to systematically trace the development of Chinese and foreign music from its origins to contemporary times, not only presenting the temporal coordinates of significant musical events, composers, and works, but also revealing the profound impact of socio-cultural backgrounds across different historical periods on the evolution of musical styles. For instance, how China’s ancient ritual music system shaped the solemn character of elegant music, or how the humanist trends of the European Renaissance propelled the prosperity of secular music. At the level of “theory,” musical theoretical knowledge must be integrated into historical narratives, using analytical tools such as music theory, form, and harmony to interpret representative works from different eras. For example, analyzing Bach’s “The Well-Tempered Clavier” through its polyphonic techniques helps understand the rational spirit of Baroque music, while combining pentatonic scale theory to elucidate the melodic characteristics of traditional Chinese music enables students to deepen their understanding of musical historical phenomena while mastering theory. The integration of “literature” requires exploring the cultural connotations behind music and examining it within broader cultural contexts, such as the connections between ancient Greek music and philosophy and mathematics, or the alignment between Chinese Guqin music and the Taoist aesthetic concept of “great sound is silent.” This approach helps students recognize music as a vital carrier of culture, embodying the value systems and aesthetic tastes of specific eras. The integration of “technique” emphasizes practical experience. Through activities such as instrumental performance, choir rehearsals, and music composition, students gain firsthand exposure to music’s expressive power. For instance, when studying Tang Dynasty court music, students can practice playing instruments like the Pipa and Bili. When performing traditional folk songs like “Jasmine Flower,” they can appreciate the unique nuances of vocal techniques and embellishments. This approach transforms abstract historical knowledge and theoretical concepts into tangible artistic skills, achieving a harmonious unity of cognition, emotion, intention, and action.

#### **4.3. Adherence to the principle of contrast: Enhancing recognition and confidence through mutual learning**

We embrace inclusivity and openness, adopting a global perspective to appreciate musical civilizations worldwide. Through comparative analysis, we highlight differences, understand unique characteristics, and respect diversity, enabling students to better recognize the distinctiveness of Chinese culture through cross-cultural comparisons, fulfilling the principle of “each cherishing its own beauty, appreciating others’ beauty, and sharing beauty collectively.” We integrate theoretical instruction with musical practice, intangible cultural heritage preservation, stage performances, and creative dissemination, allowing students to experience the charm of traditional music through listening, singing, playing instruments, performing, and creating. This approach transforms cultural confidence from intellectual understanding into heartfelt emotions and concrete actions.

### **5. Specific approaches for teaching reform of Chinese and foreign music history from the perspective of cultural confidence**

#### **5.1. Reconstructing teaching philosophy: Returning to cultural primacy and establishing the subjectivity of China music**

The primary task of reform is to transform teaching concepts, shifting from “Western centrism” to “cultural equality and China as the subject.” Teachers should establish a correct view of music culture, acknowledge the diversity of world

music civilizations, and not regard Western music as the sole standard, but rather consider Chinese and foreign music as two parallel cultural systems. In teaching, it is essential to emphasize the subjectivity, uniqueness, and originality of Chinese music culture, enabling students to understand the aesthetic logic, cultural genes, and spiritual core of China's music, thereby fostering cultural confidence at its root. Meanwhile, "moral education and cultural cultivation" should be regarded as the fundamental goal of the curriculum, clarifying that the history of Chinese and foreign music is not only a professional foundation course but also an aesthetic education course, a cultural course, and a political education course, achieving deep integration of professional education and value guidance.

### **5.2. Optimization of course structure: Balancing domestic and international components to establish a comparative and mutual learning teaching framework**

The allocation of class hours and the content structure should be adjusted to significantly increase the proportion and depth of teaching on China's music history, thereby achieving parallel and equal emphasis on Chinese and foreign music history through dual-track advancement. A "vertical general history + horizontal thematic comparison" structure should be adopted. Based on tracing their respective historical trajectories, thematic teaching modules can be established, including comparisons of Chinese and Western musical scales and musical thinking, instrumental cultures and aesthetic pursuits, ritual-music concepts and humanistic spirit, opera and operatic artistic spirit, as well as exchanges and mutual learning between Chinese and Western music in the 20th century.

Through such parallel comparisons, students can more clearly recognize the characteristics of Chinese music, namely "emphasizing artistic conception, spirit, humanism, and harmony." This approach can help students understand the spiritual depth of China's music culture and enhance their cultural identity and pride through mutual learning between Chinese and Western musical traditions.

### **5.3. Enriching teaching content: Delving into cultural connotations to achieve integration of ancient and modern perspectives with ideological and political education**

The in-depth interpretation of China's excellent traditional music culture should be strengthened through the systematic teaching of topics such as ritual music culture, the spirit of Qin music, the Ci music tradition, musical pattern systems, and folk music. Philosophical connotations such as "harmony between music and heaven," "harmony between music and humanity," "vibrant energy," and "ethereal artistic conception" should be explored to help students understand that Chinese music is not only an art form, but also a cultural spirit and a realm of life.

At the same time, revolutionary music culture and revolutionary spirit should be integrated into the curriculum by adding content related to modern revolutionary music, anti-Japanese war music, new Chinese national instrumental music, and new operas. The creative backgrounds and spirit of the times reflected in works such as *The Yellow River Cantata*, *Butterfly Lovers*, and *The Long March Suite* should be introduced. By combining music history with Party history and the history of New China, education on patriotism and national sentiment can be further strengthened.

In addition, the innovative achievements of China's music in the new era should be incorporated into the curriculum by supplementing content on contemporary ethnic music creation, international awards received by Chinese music, the growing popularity of traditional Chinese music, and the digital dissemination of traditional music. This approach can demonstrate the contemporary vitality of Chinese music culture and enable students to recognize the creative transformation and innovative development of traditional music in the new era. Furthermore, a content system for equal dialogue between China and the world should be established by objectively introducing the achievements of Western music while also acknowledging its historical limitations. Students should be guided to rationally learn from and adapt these elements for their own use, thereby fostering an open and inclusive cultural mindset without blind conformity.

#### **5.4. Innovative teaching methods: Strengthening experiential practice to promote immersive cultural learning**

Immersive traditional music experience teaching involves live performances of instruments such as the Quqin, Zheng, Erhu, and bamboo flute, playback of high-fidelity traditional music works, and viewing videos of intangible cultural heritage inheritors' performances, creating an aesthetic atmosphere of traditional music to allow students to perceive the beauty of China's music through auditory means. Living inheritance and practical teaching organize students to visit opera troupes, intangible cultural heritage inheritance bases, and ethnic orchestras for field research and on-site learning. Practical sessions such as simple singing techniques, instrumental experience, and ancient score recitation are offered, enabling students to engage with traditional music through hands-on practice, verbal expression, and emotional connection.

Multimedia and digital teaching utilize new media resources such as digital museums, VR ancient music scenes, high-definition documentaries, and short videos with traditional Chinese aesthetics to recreate historical scenes like ancient music and dance performances, Bianzhong playing, and literati gatherings, bringing ancient music to life in the classroom. Thematic seminars and inquiry-based learning focus on topics such as "cultural confidence and China's music development" and "contemporary innovation in traditional music," encouraging students to express independent opinions and cultivate cultural critical thinking skills. Students are encouraged to use new media, technologies, and formats to disseminate traditional music, promoting innovative practices such as traditional Chinese music, traditional instrumental music, and new interpretations of ancient music, enabling China's music to reach a broader global audience.

### **6. Interpretation of the value guidance function of music history teaching in China and abroad from the perspective of cultural confidence**

#### **6.1. Strengthening cultural foundations: Enhancing historical identity with Chinese musical civilization**

Through systematic teaching, students gain a clear understanding of the glorious achievements of Chinese music over thousands of years, comprehend its unique value in the history of world music, draw confidence from the depths of history, and form a stable, profound, and enduring cultural identity. It shapes spiritual character, enhances humanistic literacy through musical aesthetic education, and pursues the aesthetic realm of "harmony, balance, elegance, and unity" in China's music, playing a significant role in cultivating sentiments, nurturing the soul, and refining character. The curriculum educates and beautifies through beauty, helping students develop noble moral sentiments and sound personalities.

#### **6.2. Firm value orientation: Conscientious resistance to incorrect cultural trends**

Against the backdrop of multicultural collision, the curriculum helps students establish clear cultural coordinates, enhance cultural discernment, consciously resist erroneous trends such as Western centrism and historical nihilism, and uphold the position of Chinese culture. It also aims to cultivate a sense of mission by nurturing talents dedicated to the inheritance and innovation of musical culture. The new era requires a large number of musical talents who love local culture and possess an international perspective. Through value guidance in teaching Chinese and foreign music history, students are entrusted with the mission of inheriting China's excellent musical culture and promoting Chinese music to the world.

### **7. Implementation strategies to ensure the successful implementation of teaching reform**

#### **7.1. Strengthening teacher team building to enhance cultural literacy and teaching competence**

Higher education institutions should implement specialized teacher training programs to strengthen educators' cultural confidence and traditional Chinese music literacy, update teaching methodologies, enhance ideological education and

value guidance capabilities in curricula, and cultivate teaching teams with cultural depth, national identity, and professional expertise. Institutions should improve course resource development by enriching cultural teaching platforms through initiatives such as establishing traditional music audio libraries, video archives, digital museums, and intangible cultural heritage repositories. Additionally, they should develop school-based textbooks that highlight cultural confidence while maintaining balanced perspectives between Chinese and international contexts, thereby providing robust resource support for educational reforms.

## **7.2. Promote school-enterprise and school-local cooperation to expand practical education platforms**

Through collaboration with local cultural centers, intangible cultural heritage centers, performing arts troupes, and media platforms, we establish off-campus practice bases to provide students with authentic environments for experiencing, performing, and disseminating traditional music, thereby enhancing the practicality and appeal of teaching. We refine incentive mechanisms for education to drive continuous reform, integrating cultural confidence into teaching evaluations, curriculum innovation initiatives, and achievement awards. This encourages teachers to pursue pedagogical innovation, establishes sustainable incentive systems, and ensures sustained progress in educational reforms.

## **8. Conclusion**

Cultural confidence is the spiritual banner of China's music education in the new era, and the reform of music history teaching at home and abroad serves as a crucial approach to strengthening cultural confidence and reinforcing value guidance. Currently, music history teaching in universities must break free from the inert thinking of Western centrism and return to the essence of Chinese culture. Through conceptual reshaping, structural optimization, content enrichment, method innovation, evaluation reform, and value guidance, a new teaching system should be established that cultivates individuals through culture and nurtures them through music. In teaching, students should be guided to appreciate the historical beauty, cultural beauty, and spiritual beauty of China's music, recognize their cultural advantages through mutual learning between Chinese and foreign music, and strengthen cultural confidence by connecting history with reality. Ultimately, this will achieve the unity of knowledge acquisition, aesthetic enhancement, personality shaping, and mission fulfillment. Only in this way can music history truly become an important course for fostering cultural confidence among young people, playing an irreplaceable role in inheriting China's excellent musical culture, building a socialist cultural powerhouse, and cultivating new-era individuals capable of shouldering the great task of national rejuvenation.

## **Disclosure statement**

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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