



## THE DEVELOPMENT AND CHALLENGES OF CELLO TEACHING IN CHINA: INTEGRATION OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE MUSIC AND PEDAGOGICAL INNOVATIONS

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### Abstract

This paper explores the development and challenges of cello teaching in China, with a particular focus on integrating traditional Chinese music and culture into the pedagogical process. As China's economy and international cultural exchanges have flourished, there has been a growing interest in Western instruments, especially the cello. This development has led to the establishment of systematic cello education in Chinese music academies, though challenges such as technical limitations, lack of interpretative depth, and unfamiliarity with classical works persist among learners. The paper emphasizes the need to blend Western cello techniques with Chinese musical traditions, highlighting the importance of incorporating Chinese cultural elements into cello pedagogy. Strategies for achieving this integration are proposed, including adapting traditional Chinese music for the cello, utilizing Chinese performance techniques, and fostering an understanding of both Western and Chinese artistic expressions. This fusion not only enriches the technical and emotional depth of cello performance but also enhances the educational experience by connecting students





with the profound cultural heritage of China. Ultimately, the paper aims to provide valuable insights into how cello teaching in China can evolve by embracing both global musical practices and local cultural traditions, fostering well-rounded musicians who are skilled in both technical execution and artistic expression.

**Keywords:** Development and challenges; Cello teaching; Integration; Traditional Chinese music; Pedagogical Innovations

## Introduction

The cello, with its unique and rich timbre and performance ability, occupies a pivotal position in the history of music. From the Baroque period to modern times, the cello has experienced a long development and evolution. The cello's timbre is warm and vivid, like human tones, and can deeply express complex emotions, so it is known as "the closest instrumental music to the human voice." From classicism to Romanticism to modern music, the cello has always maintained its irreplaceable position. With the popularization and development of music education, cello, as one of the important teaching contents, has attracted more and more attention and love, and the number of students learning cello is also increasing. Many music schools and orchestras have cello majors or sections, which provide strong support for the cultivation of professional cello performance talents. In recent years, the popularity of cello has soared, attracting more and more beginners. However, the process of learning cello is full of challenges, especially for beginners. Beginners often encounter many difficulties in the process of learning cello, such as holding posture and finger position as well as bowing skills and intonation. Therefore, it is particularly important to explore scientific and reasonable solutions through various problems of beginners (Liang, 2024).

Despite the large number of cello teaching materials, there is still a clear lack of comprehensive exercise books designed specifically for cello beginners. In order to solve this problem, it is necessary to thoroughly analyze the specific problems faced by beginner cellists and compile an exercise book that is both comprehensive and suitable for the needs of beginners. This study aims to solve the most difficult problems for beginners, such as holding posture, bowing



application, fingering skills, bow control, rhythm, left and right-hand coordination, and music theory knowledge. By synthesizing previous research and expert interviews, this study aims to create a targeted workbook that addresses these issues (Chen, 2022).

In recent years, with the improvement of the public's aesthetic level, people's appreciation of cello performance is also increasingly enhanced. This not only puts forward higher requirements for the players but also poses new challenges to the cello teaching. Therefore, optimizing the cello teaching, stimulating the students' interest in learning and improving the teaching quality has become an important way to promote the sustainable and healthy development of the cello art in China. Cello teaching needs to find a balance between science and artistry. Cello players need not only exquisite skills, but also a strong artistic appeal to attract the audience in the performance. Similarly, cello teaching should not only teach playing skills but also cultivate students' musical appeal. From a scientific point of view, the learning of cello playing skills requires scientific teaching plans and methods. However, the current cello teaching methods in professional colleges and universities are still relatively old. Due to the lack of innovation consciousness and the limitation of teachers' teaching ability, they often rely on the past teaching experience to make teaching plans, resulting in the lack of scientific teaching plans. Therefore, when making teaching plans and implementing teaching activities, teachers must improve their professional knowledge and skills through various ways to ensure the scientific and effective teaching plans (Sun, 2019).

Cello teaching not only aims to cultivate students' musical skills but also needs to pay attention to improving their musical literacy, which is of vital significance for the overall development of students. The cultivation of musical literacy is not achieved overnight, but a long-term accumulation process, which needs to be gradually formed in continuous practice and training. This process not only requires learners to have excellent understanding and comprehension ability but also puts forward higher requirements for teachers to strengthen and improve students' quality in the teaching process. In the initial stage of cello teaching,



teachers should focus on guiding students to carry out the basic training of vocal range and fingering, which is the cornerstone of follow-up learning. By combining the theoretical knowledge and practical operation of the finger board, teachers should help students to construct a clear cognitive framework in their minds and deepen their understanding of the vocal range and fingering. With the gradual improvement of the practice intensity and the increase of the practice frequency, the teachers should timely improve the difficulty of the practice repertoire and the works and guide the students to gradually master and improve their performance skills (Zhao, 2024).

## Cello Teaching in China

In recent years, with the vigorous development of China's economy and the continuous progress of society, especially the increasingly frequent international cultural and artistic exchanges, people's material living standards have been greatly improved, and at the same time, people's demand for spiritual life has become increasingly vigorous, and their yearning and pursuit of elegant art have become increasingly enthusiastic. From the perspective of cello creation, performance, appreciation, research and education, the cultural exchanges and performance activities of various performance schools in China and the West have not only stimulated people's deep interest in cello performance but also played a great role in promoting the vigorous development of cello education in China. In music academies, the cello has become an indispensable major, and a systematic teaching and talent training mechanism has been formed over the years. However, in the specific teaching process, I found that cello learners often have two main problems: first, in terms of playing skills, the left hand often seems stiff, stiff, and not skilled enough, for example, some students often press the strings too tightly with their left hand when playing, resulting in excessive bending of the hand, which is not only easy to cause fatigue, but also may affect pronunciation, intonation, and even directly hinder the improvement of the technical level of the left hand. Second, many cellists are often intimidated by the composer's classic works, and when faced with these works, they are like "a tiger eating the sky, and they don't know how to analyze and perform". In my opinion, on the one hand, the basic training of the performers is not solid enough, and the research and



analysis of the works are not deep enough; On the other hand, they do not understand that their thoughts, feelings, and the meaning of the work should be understood and expressed in the context of the composer's time, so they cannot interpret the musical work perfectly (Feng, 2012).

As a musical instrument from the West, the cello has taken root in the soil of Chinese music culture and blended with it. Today, it is part of the music education system. Despite this, there are schools where cello teaching needs to be improved. Under the trend of music education reform, teachers need to integrate traditional Chinese music elements into cello teaching to promote teaching innovation. Therefore, this paper studies how to integrate traditional Chinese music culture into cello teaching, and puts forward corresponding strategies, such as focusing on the display of performance skills, flexibly using the timbre of musical instruments, adapting classic songs, analyzing the characteristics of solo and ensemble, realizing the combination of cello and traditional Chinese instrument teaching, and enriching the teaching resources of traditional music culture, so as to promote the improvement of students' musical literacy. The cello came to China with the arrival of Western missionaries. When it comes to the performance of music and the expression of emotions, the cello plays an irreplaceable role. The cello is loved by Chinese for many reasons, among which the sound characteristics are particularly important. The cello's timbre is warm and soft, very different from the delicacy and sharpness of the violin and the mournful grace of the huqin. Among all the stringed instruments, the cello has the most generous and restrained timbre, revealing a noble temperament and unique connotation, which resonates with traditional Chinese music culture and provides the possibility for the integration of cello teaching and traditional music culture. Music teaching is the foundation of every music practitioner, and with the country's emphasis on aesthetic education, more and more students will devote themselves to the study of cello, and basic teaching is the key to this process. The author first reviews the spread of the cello in Europe and China and analyzes the advantages and challenges of developing in China. Then, some key elements in basic teaching are discussed, such as the posture of holding the piano, the training of left- and right-hand skills, and other details. Finally, by analyzing the



advantages and disadvantages of various teaching methods, and combining with practical cases, the application and importance of Alexander's technique in cello teaching are emphatically expounded. It is hoped that these studies can provide valuable reference and guidance for the development of cello basic teaching in China (Zhao, 2024).

In traditional Chinese music, it is not uncommon for the original work to be adapted and performed using different instruments. For example, the Chinese Folk Song Suite, originally composed for cello, horn and piano, was later adapted into a solo cello work. This adaptation retains the original style while expressing the emotions of the work more deeply. Especially in the chapter "Flower Lanterns", the use of the cello succeeds in creating a lively atmosphere.

In the teaching process, teachers need to guide students to flexibly express the timbre of the instrument according to the characteristics of the work. For example, when teaching the work "Travels in Gus", the teacher should guide the students to achieve the integration and complementarity of the three-stringed tone and the cello performance. Through the rapid rhythm and the form of ensemble, a scene like the storytelling field in Gus City is created. There is a close connection between the cello and traditional Chinese music culture, especially after the founding of New China, this connection has become even closer.

"Lin Hai Xue yuan" is one of the classics of Chinese literature and was later adapted into a drama and film work, which was deeply loved by the audience. In the model play "Outwitting Tiger Mountain", the cello played an important role. Whether it is the rhythm and speed of the orchestra, or the emotional expression of the characters in the play, it all depends on the control of the cello. For example, in the-for-tat scene between Yang Zigong and the characters of Wilusan, the cello successfully shows the diverse inner emotions of different characters.

Examples of the incorporation of traditional Chinese music culture into Western instruments such as the cello abound. In the process of teaching cello, teachers need to guide students to adapt famous pieces according to classical

classics, so that they can play cello works according to the characteristics of the genre and the emotional expression of the musical works, to show the rich connotation of the music in detail. For example, in the process of playing the traditional Mongolian music work "Gadamerian", the teacher needs to guide the students to maintain an appropriate bow speed to achieve a balance between fast and slow. In this process, the cello tries to imitate the horse-head fiddle, and the player needs to learn the playing technique of the horse-head fiddle. Specifically, for the upper glissando, the fingers need to be weighted and steady, and the fingers of the left-hand slide in the direction of the fretboard so that the notes remain in a low chanting state, so that the posture of a horse galloping. At the same time, during cello playing, students need to pay attention to bursts and be able to effectively deal with the relationship between rests and musical accompaniment. In addition to this, students are also required to maintain a steady mood in a progressively intensified and accelerated tempo, and to highlight the characteristics of ethnic music through the rational use of portamento techniques in harmony with the outbursts of harmony (Sun, 2024).

For instrumental performance, artistic expression is the fundamental goal pursued by every musical work, and it is also the pinnacle of the art of performance. In the interpretation of cello music, the comprehension of artistic expression can be discussed from two levels: first, the artistic expression of the form of the instrument itself; Secondly, it is the artistic communication of the performers themselves. Under normal circumstances, whether it is the artistic expression derived from the creation of musical instrument techniques, or the artistic communication generated by the performer's rich emotions through the fusion of skills, the key is to achieve excellent artistic effects and make the musical work more charming and infectious. Therefore, it is very difficult for a cello player to play an outstanding musical work if he only has a well-made and high-quality cello but does not have superb playing skills and rich playing experience, or lacks technique and emotion when playing, and fails to master and use performance techniques (Wang, 2014).

During the development of Chinese music and art, the cello, a foreign instrument, has been deeply implanted in the artistic soil of the Chinese nation. In recent years, through the exploration and innovation of countless music creators, Chinese cello works have skillfully infiltrated a variety of rich traditional Chinese music elements such as traditional folk tunes, national instrument performance skills, opera singing methods, etc., while maintaining Western cello playing techniques, and the fusion of these elements has made the cello, a distant instrument, glow with vigorous vitality in China and form a unique artistic style. Since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the field of cello teaching and interpretation has emerged with outstanding Chinese works such as "Saliha", "Why Are Flowers So Red", "Autumn Thoughts", and "Romance". With their novel artistic style and profound cultural connotation, these works have won high praise from the audience and artists, fully demonstrating the unique charm of Chinese cello works.

The exchange and collision of Chinese and Western music cultures is reflected in the fusion of Chinese and Western musical elements in Chinese cello works. This fusion not only enriches the expressive power of the cello, but also injects new vitality into traditional Chinese music, giving birth to a unique and diversified musical style, making it have distinctive characteristics and emotional resonance of the times, and at the same time, it can also make people feel the unique charm of Chinese culture.

Chinese cello works often integrate the dual styles of Western classical music and Chinese folk music, which not only retains the structural characteristics of Western classical music but also incorporates the melody and customs of Chinese folk music. For example, the work uses the traditional Chinese pentatonic scale and Western harmony theory to create works that not only have national characteristics but also show the fluency and logic of Western music. At the same time, cello playing techniques such as portamento, vibrato, and kneading are used to show the subtle emotions of traditional Chinese music. In addition, the performers will also refer to the performance techniques of traditional Chinese bowed string instruments to present the melodic characteristics of national music. For example, the timbre, portamento and vibrato techniques of the horse-head fiddle are simulated to reflect the charm of Mongolian music. This reference to



other musical instrument performance skills not only enriches the cello playing skills, but also makes it better integrated into Chinese music culture.

In recent years, the creation of Chinese cello works has shown a trend of diversification. On the one hand, the composers draw inspiration from the elements of traditional Chinese folk music to create cello works with national characteristics. On the other hand, they also adapted some existing traditional Chinese works into solo cello or concerto works, such as the Mongolian folk song "Gadamerian" into a cello concerto (Liang, 2024).

The researchers are committed to exploring the cross-cultural aesthetic elements contained in cello music and their communicative role. Through the four perspectives of "Auditory Feast: The Clash of Beauty and Movement", "Emotional Interaction: Beauty and Soul Touch", "Cultural Inheritance: The Convergence of Music and Tradition" and "Resonance Beyond Aesthetics: The Harmony between the Piano and Human Nature", this paper comprehensively analyzes the cross-cultural aesthetic elements of hearing and emotion in cello music, and analyzes the specific manifestations and deep meanings of cross-cultural aesthetic communication from the perspective of cultural integration and aesthetic transcendence, which provides an academic reference for the research of cello music and cross-cultural aesthetic communication.

Cello music, as an art form full of historical and cultural accumulation, has broken through the limitations of national borders, languages and cultures, and has become a harbor where people from all over the world meet. Between the cello's bowstrings, notes and emotions intertwine into intoxicating melodies that often carry deep cross-cultural aesthetic elements. These aesthetic elements include not only melody, rhythm and timbre, but also the emotions, stories and traditions of different cultures, making cello music a global artistic language. A deeper understanding of how cello music is a language that transcends borders, builds bridges between cultures, and promotes the interaction and integration of global cultures is a topic worthy of further study (Wan, 2024).

## **Problems in Cello Teaching**

Cello initiation teaching plays an extremely important role in cello teaching, as it is a key stage for beginners to learn the most basic knowledge and skills and lays the foundation for subsequent in-depth learning. In recent years, with the development of China's economy and the advancement of quality education, the number of people learning cello has been increasing, and the performance level of cello has also been significantly improved. However, the teaching of cello still faces many problems, which to a certain extent restricts the further development of cello in China.

Cello initiation teaching is not only the starting point for learners to get in touch with musical instruments, but also a critical period for cultivating interest and shaping good learning habits. The quality of teaching in the initiation stage has a direct impact on students' interest in learning and their future performance potential. For young learners, teachers need to stimulate their interest through gamification and fun teaching methods, so that they can touch the cello in a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere. In addition, the initiation teaching should also focus on cultivating students' musical literacy and basic performance skills, such as correct posture, fingering and bowing.

In recent years, China's cello industry has made remarkable progress, more and more people have begun to learn cello, and the performance level of cello has also been greatly improved. However, compared to popular instruments such as piano and violin, the cello is still relatively low in popularity and has a small number of learners, which limits its development to some extent. In addition, the systematic and scientific nature of cello enlightenment education is insufficient, and there is a lack of a complete teaching system for different age groups and learning goals.

Cello learners have a wide age distribution, covering all stages from toddlers to adults. In recent years, the trend of learning cello has shown obvious characteristics of young age, more and more parents choose to let their children start to contact the cello at an early age, and even in some cello competitions,

there are participants under the age of 5, which shows that the starting point of cello enlightenment education is constantly advancing.

Cello beginners of different ages have their own characteristics and needs. For younger children, their bones are not yet fully shaped, and their bodies are soft and elastic, which provides favorable conditions for learning the posture and technique of the cello. However, since they are in the bone growth stage and their muscle strength is relatively weak, muscle contraction may be difficult. In addition, young children have shorter attention spans and lower comprehension and self-control, but they are highly malleable, which is a critical period for developing good study habits and musical literacy.

Adolescent beginners have relatively mature physical development, comprehension and self-control, and are able to better understand and master cello techniques. However, if there is not enough time to practice, it may lead to a lack of physical flexibility and affect the performance effect. Therefore, teenagers learning cello need to pay attention to the systematic training of technique while ensuring the practice time.

Middle-aged people learn cello mostly for personal interest or recreational purposes, they have strong self-control and comprehension skills, and have clear learning goals, but as they grow older, their physiological functions gradually decline, and learning cello may face certain challenges. Therefore, middle-aged learners need to pay attention to scientific practice methods in teaching and avoid overwork.

For beginners of different ages, the teaching methods need to be different from person to person. For younger children, classes and practice should be strictly controlled to avoid physical fatigue or loss of interest caused by too long practice. As you get older, gradually increase the duration of your practice. In terms of basic skills training, learners of all ages must participate, but the difficulty should be adjusted according to the actual situation. Teachers should teach students according to their aptitude in the teaching process, and develop



personalized teaching plans according to learners' age, physical conditions and learning goals, to ensure that each learner can make progress at their own pace. (Zheng, 2024).

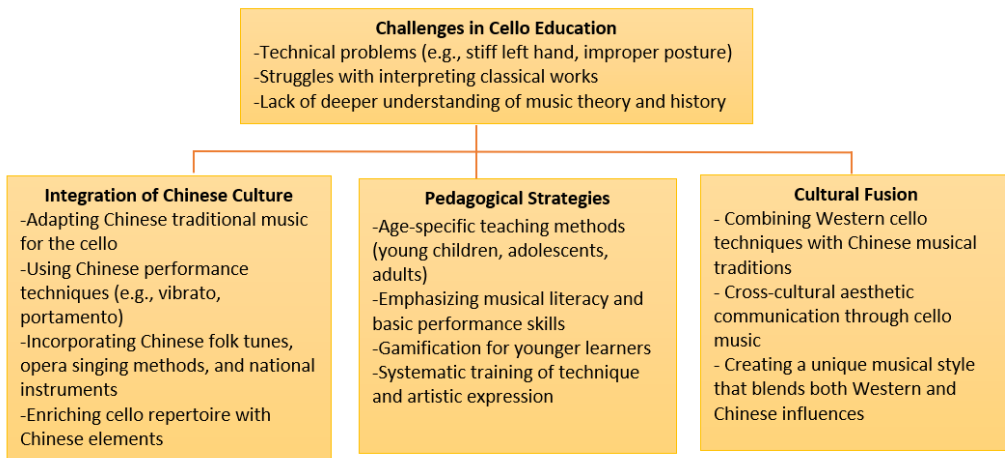
In the advanced learning of music reading ability, students also need to learn to analyze the musical expressive marks in musical scores, such as strength and weakness marks, crescendo, legato lines, staccato lines, etc. These markers are the composer's indication of the emotional expression of the piece, and students need to accurately convey these emotions through reading and playing. For example, when playing a Beethoven piece, students need to read music to understand the strong contrasts and emotional tensions in the piece, and to express them through bow movement and string pressing techniques. This combination of in-depth understanding of sheet music and performance ability will enable students to reach a higher level in their music learning (Wu, 2014).

Students who are new to the cello often encounter a series of technical, psychological, and habitual problems. On the technical side, the most common problems include unstable bow control, intonation problems due to inaccurate finger placement, and loss of rhythm. Psychologically, beginners may feel frustrated or lack self-confidence due to slow progress. In addition, many students also have trouble adjusting to the weight and posture of the instrument, resulting in physical fatigue while practicing. If these issues are not addressed in a timely manner, they may seriously affect students' interest and progress in learning.

For beginners, suitable exercises should start with basic posture and bow holding exercises to help students get used to the instrument and establish proper playing habits. Open string practice is essential, and through long, short, and repeater exercises, students can become familiar with bow-to-string contact and master the technique of carrying the bow. Scales and arpeggios practice can help students become familiar with the fretboard layout and improve finger dexterity and independence. In addition, simple repertoire and etudes can help students feel the charm of music in practice and enhance the fun of learning. Rhythm practice is also important for beginners, and using a metronome can help students gradually build a steady sense of rhythm.



## New Knowledges



**Figure 2.8:** New Knowledges Diagram of Development and Challenges of Cello Teaching in China: Integration of Traditional Chinese Music and Pedagogical Innovations.

## Conclusions

Cello teaching in China must focus on both technical training and artistic expression, integrating scientific pedagogy with elements of traditional Chinese music. By incorporating diverse teaching methods, such as gamification for young learners, structured technical training for adolescents, and flexible approaches for adult learners, educators can cultivate well-rounded musicians. Furthermore, fostering an appreciation for the cello's cross-cultural significance enhances students' interpretative abilities and strengthens their connection to both Western and Chinese musical traditions. Ultimately, refining cello pedagogy through systematic and age-appropriate teaching strategies will contribute to the continued growth of cello education in China, ensuring that students develop both technical proficiency and artistic sensitivity.



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