



BUILDING MUSICAL INTERCULTURALITY: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE ON PERCUSSION ENSEMBLE TRAINING IN CHINESE HIGHER EDUCATION

Feng Yunfei,¹ Bubpachart Aupatumnarakorn²

Faculty of Music, Bangkokthonburi University¹⁻²
China,¹ Thailand²

Email: pingnaping@gmail.com,¹ 14963188@qq.com²

Received: May 9, 2025; **Revised:** May 11, 2025; **Accepted:** August 18, 2025

Abstract

This article examines the concept of musical interculturality through the lens of percussion ensemble training in Chinese higher education. In an increasingly globalized musical landscape, there is a growing need for educational approaches that embrace both cultural diversity and collaborative musicianship. By exploring the integration of world percussion traditions—such as African drumming, Latin American rhythms, and Western classical percussion—into the Chinese conservatory context, this article highlights the pedagogical and cultural benefits of an intercultural ensemble approach. The discussion emphasizes the importance of repertoire diversity, intercultural competence, and creative collaboration in developing well-rounded percussionists. Drawing on case examples and current practices, the article offers practical suggestions for music educators seeking to internationalize their percussion curriculum while maintaining respect for traditional Chinese musical heritage. The aim is to contribute to ongoing dialogues on innovation, inclusivity, and global perspective in music education.



The Community Enterprise of the Banana Conservation Center in Suphanburi

No.8/3 Suphanburi Railway Station Road, Ruoai Yai Subdistrict, Muang District, Suphanburi Province 72000

Keywords: Musical Interculturality; Global perspective; Percussion ensemble training; Chinese higher education

Introduction

Improvisation in percussion performance, especially in the context of popular and jazz music, has become a fundamental skill for aspiring musicians. In particular, drum set players must not only master basic technical skills but also develop the ability to improvise, reflecting both their musical literacy and emotional expression. While improvisation may seem spontaneous, it is an intentional and structured approach that requires deep musical understanding, cultural knowledge, and technical proficiency. As a crucial aspect of modern percussion education, improvisation plays a central role in fostering creativity, enhancing performance capabilities, and enabling musicians to adapt to various styles and rhythms. This article explores the significance of improvisation in percussion training, focusing on its development, the methods used for teaching it, and the practical approaches necessary to cultivate this essential skill in students (Han, 2019).

Improvisation performance is a necessary skill for popular percussion (drum set) players. In the assessment of various music colleges, the performance of improvisation talent is a compulsory subject. Improvisation seems to be free to play, but it really reflects the music quality of a music lover. A good display of this ability requires a high level of musical cultural knowledge, a deep musical heritage and a high level of musical skills. Therefore, improvisation is not a completely random play, but a rapid analysis of music according to the nature of music, and the best way to express the emotions in music through the form of improvisation. In order to cultivate this ability of improvisation, the first thing to do is to listen to different styles of music, so as to understand the ideas expressed by different styles of music, and then understand their own shortcomings in music understanding, and then watch more relevant performances by professionals. Through some impromptu performance by professionals, we can realize our own mastery of pop music skills. Finally, we should accumulate more understanding of different music, accumulate our own experience of different music by listening



The Community Enterprise of the Banana Conservation Center in Suphanburi

No.8/3 Suphanburi Railway Station Road, Ruoa Yai Subdistrict, Muang District, Suphanburi Province 72000

to different music, so as to age music and improve our own musical heritage. In addition, we must follow a certain "routine", improvisation is not a temporary performance, it still has a certain routine can be followed, and in order to find a routine suitable for their own improvisation, we must first have a solid basic skill, only solid basic skills, in order to have higher requirements for playing skills, followed by constant technical practice. Highly skilled playing techniques are usually more difficult, so it is necessary to continue to practice it, only in this way can you find the feel, and then find a suitable method for your own. It is precisely because this kind of improvisation has no room to play in western percussion, so it is more necessary to cultivate this kind of improvisation ability. Teachers can allow students to try different styles and rhythms of music to increase the improvisation teaching of Western percussion, so that students can constantly consider and modify until they form a unique style of improvisation routine. In this way, students' ability to improvise will be greatly improved (Yang, 2018).

Teaching Percussion Ensemble in the First year of College in China

Whether an ensemble can be perfectly displayed in a performance is directly related to our solidity in teaching rehearsal. The solidity here includes the tacit understanding between the players, the control of the speed and strength of the music and the method of expression of the music image. The key to this series of problems lies in whether our practice is a process from slow to fast, from the leading voice playing alone to the accompaniment voice gradually superimposed. Assuming that the standard speed of this piece is 132, then during our initial practice, we will turn on the speed of 60 or 80 above the metronome for the first time without affecting the beat conversion. Then, according to the feedback from the students, we speed up the metronome in turn until all parts cooperate very well, and then we turn off the metronome and perform the harmony dominated by the tacit understanding. Such a teaching process is not only conducive to students to understand the rhythm and color of each voice part, but also for the style of music and music in each expression mark we can clearly play out, so as to have a



The Community Enterprise of the Banana Conservation Center in Suphanburi

No.8/3 Suphanburi Railway Station Road, Ruoa Yai Subdistrict, Muang District, Suphanburi Province 72000

solid performance condition, we are really not busy in the performance, confident, as far as possible to show the work perfectly (Liu, 2013).

Learning percussion instruments is different from other Musical Instruments. Percussion instruments are diverse and often displayed on the stage in the form of a ensemble. It is necessary to have a sense of cooperation and collaboration when learning percussion instruments at the beginning, and you can learn solo knowledge in the ensemble. After determining the performer, the first point is to learn to analyze the total score, review the rhythm pattern of the piece, changes in intensity, analysis of strength, and symbols of playing techniques. Look at the trend of the development of the music and the line of the theme, figure out what the author wants to convey the emotion, the weight of each voice is what we often say the main melody. Unify the performer's knowledge of the details, such as rhythm, phrase, force, and expression of the piece. With these adequate preparations, you can better implement the next exercises (Wang, 2015).

In the performance of the ensemble, players need to have full psychological preparation, which is embodied in: (1) an overall and comprehensive understanding and grasp of the work; (2) Have a clear understanding of the details of the work - every phrase and phrase; (3) Clear and clear performance methods for each part of the work. In the process of ensemble, since ensemble is a form of performance in which two or more people cooperate with each other, it requires each performer to generate the consciousness of cooperation in his mind and generate the emotions of mutual communication when playing. Since it is played by many people, each performer's psychological state is different. In order to achieve the integrity and unity of the work, each performer is required to have the same or similar psychological concept, that is, tacit understanding, which should be formed in the process of practice. In the performance of a solo, the soloist can exert his subjective imagination according to his own understanding of the music, so that the coordination of his body can be combined with the music performance to better complete the performance of the work. In the ensemble, every tiny movement of each performer - eyes, breathing, speed of movement of the body, etc. - will have an impact on its collaborators. Especially as the "leader" of a certain stage of the work, the correct and clear



indication to the collaborators will play a decisive role in the completion of the work. The first and second years after the admission of 2013 are the stages of solid basic skills and improvement of their playing skills. From the third year of undergraduate teaching, students can learn Western, popular, national and opera percussion cross-over or concurrently according to their preferences. The specific teaching subjects and contents should be tailored according to social needs, combined with the university, the major and the students' own quality and other factors (Zhang, 2022).

Global Perspective on Percussion Ensemble Training in Chinese Higher Education

Improvisation is a necessary ability for drum playing, and is usually one of the important test points in the popular percussion entrance exams of various universities. Improvisation seems spontaneous. It can be played at will, but it requires players to have high musical literacy and deep technical skills. First, understand the rhythmic style of the piece being played. Improvisation is not completely random, but according to the style of the music, the style of the interpretation of the colorful, different styles of music need to add different improvisation, such a mastery of the style requires players to listen, see, accumulate more, only constantly listening, trying, honing, with a certain "height" to make wonderful improvisation. Second, each drummer's improvisation has its own unique characteristics. It can be seen from this that improvisation is also routine, and it is not a "disorderly play" on the spur of the moment, but the essence of the accumulation and accumulation of the performer in the ordinary days. The "experience" and technical level of players determine the "pros and cons" of improvisation. The improvement of basic skills and technical skills promotes the improvement of improvisation skills. Therefore, strengthening the practice of technical skills and forming their own improvisation routines and performance characteristics is one of the abilities that improvisation needs to strengthen (Pan, 2023).



The Community Enterprise of the Banana Conservation Center in Suphanburi

No.8/3 Suphanburi Railway Station Road, Ruoa Yai Subdistrict, Muang District, Suphanburi Province 72000

The improvisation ability of popular percussion music is exactly what Western percussion music lacks most. Because Western percussion music has no obvious division of rhythm style, and most of the music scores have detailed marks on the performance method and intensity expression, so the players have no space for improvisation, so the improvisation ability of Western percussion students is greatly reduced. But at the same time, in the works written by percussion composers in the 21st century, only the main framework and basic playing methods are often marked, and there are many parts that require players to improvise, so the cultivation of improvisation ability is particularly important. The author believes that in the teaching process of western percussion, it is necessary to learn from the cultivation of improvisation ability of popular percussion, so that students, regardless of their major, should listen to and get in touch with music with different rhythm styles and characteristics, accumulate and be familiar with the rhythm patterns and rhythm characteristics of different styles in the teaching process, increase the teaching of improvisation, so that students can make improvisations or colorful passages with different bar lengths and rhythm styles. And constantly consider, modify, make it perfect, form their own improvisation routine. With the accumulation of time, the improvisation ability of western percussion students will be greatly improved (Yang, 2018).

Percussion Ensemble in Popular Music

In popular music works, in order to create a change of stress or rich rhythm effect in the ear, the change of time is a relatively common form. There are roughly three types of variable time: 1. The number of units varies, such as 2/4 and 3/4 time; The change between 6/8 and 4/8 beats. The change of the beat and the beat signal is to change the stress and rhythm of the original beat, and produce a staggered sense of stress displacement. For example, the beat stress of 2/4 is strong and weak, while the beat stress of 3/4 is strong, weak and weak. The 2/4 and 3/4 change of time will inevitably bring about a rich variation of rhythmic stress in the unit time. 2. Change of unit time value, such as 2/4 and 2/8 beats; The change between 3/4 and 3/8 beats. This kind of change in the music is relatively rare, it is more for a large length to change the mood of the music. 3. The unit beat and time value change simultaneously. This is the most used form in music, such



The Community Enterprise of the Banana Conservation Center in Suphanburi

No.8/3 Suphanburi Railway Station Road, Ruoai Yai Subdistrict, Muang District, Suphanburi Province 72000

as the change between 3/4 and 6/8 beats. The total time value of 3/4 and 6/8 beats is the same, that is, each measure has 6 eighth notes, but the difference between them is that 3/4 is one accent per measure, that is, the feeling of a third beat, and 6/8 is two accents per measure, that is, the feeling of two minor three beats, and their rhythm is different. However, because the unit hour value does not change, the measurement standard of the beat is uniform, so it is easy to master in the practice process. More difficult are variations of time with different total time values, such as between 2/4 and 6/8 beats. There are four eighth notes in 2/4, and six eighth notes in 6/8. There are two different forms of this shift in time, the first form: the big beat equals the big beat (i.e. the quarter note equals the dotted quarter note). 2/4 is a quarter note in one beat, each measure has two beats of unit time; 6/8 is taken as an eighth note, with six units beats per measure. There are two ways to practice the 6/8 beat. One is the small beat of the eighth note, and the other is the large beat of the dotted quarter note, which has two beats per measure. In variable time with 2/4, the latter is used. That is to say, the rhythm of the big beat remains the same, and the speed of the equivalent notes increases. In the changing time of the quarter note equal to the dotted quarter note, in popular terms, the student is the changing time ability of two to three, because in the 2/4 beat, the unit time of two eighth notes are played, and the 6/8 beat is the unit time of three eighth notes. From a certain point of view, this is the conversion of eighth notes and triplets (Ma, 2023).

Drum kit (also known as drum kit) is an important branch of modern percussion, in which the four limbs of multidimensional playing, as well as improvisation and dabbling in different musical styles are of great help to percussion professional learning. In addition, every percussion student who comes to work will have some exposure to music related to the Jazzy drum. For example, drums are used in many modern orchestral productions in symphonies, such as Bernstein's West Side Story, Lloyd Webber's classic musicals, and so on. In terms of universal education, the vast majority of percussion classes are also taught drum set playing, which reflects the rigid demand of the market. At present, only some music colleges in China have drum major, most schools have not set up drum major or optional courses, students learn drum jazz often rely on self-



study. The main reason is that most music colleges have no jazz department or popular majors, the lack of relevant professional teachers, so jazz drum performance is not included in the school's recruitment, teaching and examination system. Personally, believe that the relevant departments should strengthen the introduction of related professional talents, promote the discipline construction of related majors (jazz music or pop music), at the same time, under the existing percussion professional system, set up drum optional or compulsory courses, to lay a certain foundation for students' future career development (Wang, 2022).

New Knowledges

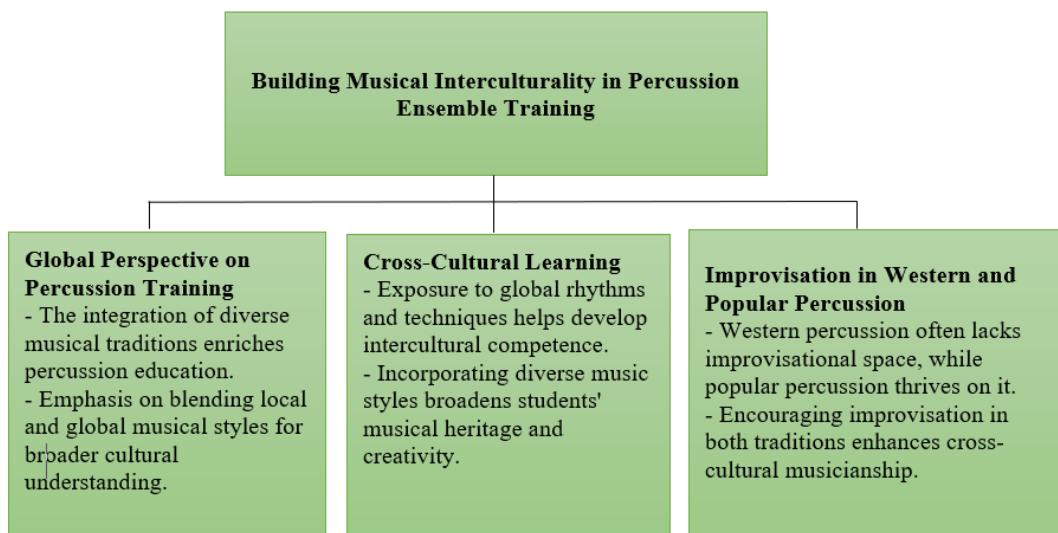


Figure 1. New Knowledges Diagram of Building Musical Interculturality: A Global Perspective on Percussion Ensemble Training in Chinese Higher Education.

Conclusions

The development of improvisation and ensemble performance skills is crucial for percussion students, especially in the context of popular music and Western percussion. As highlighted in the research, improvisation is not a random act but a deliberate, skillful response to musical elements, reflecting a high level of technical ability and musical understanding. This ability can be cultivated through consistent practice, exposure to diverse musical styles, and a strong foundation in basic skills. Improvisation, particularly in popular percussion, offers unique opportunities for musicians to express creativity and emotion, making it a vital component of percussion education. Furthermore, effective ensemble performance requires a solid understanding of musical expression, rhythmic precision, and mutual cooperation among musicians. Ensemble practice should focus on slow and methodical rehearsal processes that ensure players fully understand their parts and the overall structure of the piece. Slow practice, careful attention to rhythmic patterns, and control of musical intensity are essential to achieving cohesion and artistic expression in group performances. The integration of both improvisation and ensemble performance in percussion education contributes significantly to the musical development of students. By focusing on these aspects, students not only improve their technical abilities but also gain a deeper understanding of music as an expressive art form. It is important that educational institutions continue to support the teaching of improvisation and ensemble skills, providing students with the tools and experiences necessary to excel in both solo and collaborative settings.



The Community Enterprise of the Banana Conservation Center in Suphanburi

No.8/3 Suphanburi Railway Station Road, Ruoa Yai Subdistrict, Muang District, Suphanburi Province 72000

References

Han, X. (2019). **How to learn from popular percussion music to develop Western percussion teaching.** Think Tank Times, 2019(4), pp. 180-181.

Liu, S. (2013). **Percussion doubling the teaching research in China** [Master's thesis]. Hebei Normal University.

Ma, L. (2023). **Reflections on the Fusion of Western Percussion and National Percussion.** Artist, 2023(5), pp. 76-78.

Pan, G. (2023). **On the artistic characteristics of national percussion ensemble.** Music Life, 2023(10), pp. 64-68.

Wang, W. (2015). **An overview of the artistic characteristics of National percussion ensemble.** Drama Home, 2015(5), pp. 70-71.

Wang, Y. (2022). **The sky is full of brilliant stars -- Feeling from the percussion concert of "East Chengxi".** Music of the People, 2022 (4), pp. 48-51.

Yang, P. (2018). **My Views on Percussion teaching -- Learning and drawing lessons from Chinese and Western percussion in popular percussion teaching.** Music of Northern China, 2018(10), pp. 167-168.

Zhang, L. (2022). **Strategies for the organic integration of popular percussion and folk percussion.** Art Appreciation, 2022(14), pp. 171-173.