



CHILDREN'S SONGS IN CHINA: DEVELOPMENT, TEACHING, AND CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

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Abstract

Children's songs in China have evolved alongside the country's cultural, educational, and political transformations, serving as both a means of musical education and a reflection of Chinese traditions. Historically, these songs were transmitted orally, reinforcing moral values, social norms, and collective memory. During the 20th century, formal compositions emerged, influenced by political ideologies, educational reforms, and artistic development. In contemporary China, children's songs incorporate diverse musical elements, blending traditional Chinese poetic structures with modern genres such as pop and folk. Advances in digital media have further facilitated their distribution, making them widely accessible and integral to early childhood education.

The teaching of children's songs in China extends beyond vocal training, fostering aesthetic appreciation, emotional expression, and social collaboration. Educators employ innovative methods such as storytelling, movement-based learning, and digital tools to engage students. However, challenges such as outdated pedagogical approaches and disparities in resource distribution persist, highlighting the need for continuous reform in music education. Prominent

composers like Gu Jianfen have played a pivotal role in modernizing children's music, preserving elements of Chinese culture—such as traditional values, Confucian ethics, and artistic expression—while adapting to contemporary educational needs. As an essential medium of cultural transmission, children's songs in China continue to shape national identity, reinforce Chinese ways of life and belief systems, and adapt to modern societal trends.

Keywords: Children's Songs in China; Development; Teaching; Cultural Significance

Introduction

Children's songs in China have undergone significant development, reflecting the nation's cultural, educational, and political changes. Traditionally passed down orally, these songs served as an early form of musical education, with simple melodies and poetic lyrics that helped instill moral values and cultural knowledge. The 20th century saw the emergence of formally composed children's songs, often influenced by political and social movements, promoting themes such as patriotism and collective identity. In modern times, educational policies have emphasized the role of children's songs in fostering creativity and cultural appreciation, integrating traditional and contemporary musical styles to enhance artistic development. Advances in digital technology have further expanded the accessibility of children's songs, making them a vital tool in music education and cultural preservation.

The teaching of children's songs in China extends beyond vocal training to include emotional expression, aesthetic appreciation, and teamwork. Educators employ interactive teaching methods, such as storytelling, movement-based activities, and digital tools, to engage students and enhance their musical perception. However, challenges such as outdated teaching methods and unequal access to resources persist, necessitating ongoing innovations in pedagogy. Composers like Gu Jianfen have played a crucial role in shaping the landscape of children's music, blending traditional elements with contemporary styles to create

songs that are both educational and culturally enriching. Her "New School Songs" project exemplifies efforts to modernize children's songs while preserving their historical and artistic value. Today, children's songs continue to serve as a bridge between generations, reinforcing cultural identity and adapting to contemporary societal trends (Zhang & Huang, 2012).

Development of Children's Songs in China: Historical Evolution of Children's Songs, Children's songs in China have a rich historical background, evolving alongside the country's educational and cultural shifts. Traditional Chinese nursery rhymes, often passed down orally, served as early forms of musical education for children. During the 20th century, formal children's songs emerged, influenced by political and social movements. Songs composed during the revolutionary period carried themes of patriotism and collective identity, while later compositions focused on educational and artistic development.

Influence of Education and Policy: The Chinese government has played a significant role in shaping children's music education. The inclusion of children's songs in school curricula highlights their importance in fostering artistic development. Policies promoting music education ensure that children are exposed to both traditional and modern compositions, allowing them to develop a broad musical understanding. In particular, reforms in the 21st century have emphasized the integration of creativity and innovation in children's music education (Gong, 2004).

Modern Trends in Children's Song Composition: Contemporary Chinese children's songs incorporate elements from various music genres, including pop, folk, and classical influences. Advances in digital technology have also facilitated the production and distribution of children's songs, making them more accessible through online platforms and multimedia resources. Songwriters now prioritize themes of creativity, emotional expression, and cultural identity, reflecting China's modern educational objectives.

Teaching Children's Songs in China

The teaching of children's songs in primary schools extends beyond vocal training to include aesthetic appreciation, emotional expression, and teamwork. Educators employ interactive teaching methods such as games, storytelling, and movement-based activities to engage young learners. These strategies help cultivate a child's musical perception and rhythmic awareness (Zhao, 2003).

Innovative Teaching Methods: Teachers in China are increasingly incorporating modern and traditional elements into their teaching approaches. Some utilize digital tools, such as multimedia presentations and music software, to enhance engagement. Others emphasize hands-on experiences through music performances, group collaborations, and improvisational activities. By integrating play and creativity into music lessons, educators ensure that children remain interested and motivated in their musical studies.

Challenges and Recommendations: Despite advancements in teaching methods, several challenges persist in children's music education. These include a lack of sufficient interaction between teachers and students, outdated teaching techniques, and disparities in resource distribution among schools. To address these issues, educators should focus on fostering a participatory learning environment, continuously exploring innovative teaching strategies, and ensuring equitable access to teaching materials and resources.

Cultural Significance of Children's Songs

Prominent Composers of Chinese Children's Songs, one of the most influential composers of Chinese children's songs is Gu Jianfen, whose work has left a lasting impact on music education. Her compositions, such as "New School Songs," blend traditional literary elements with contemporary musical styles, helping preserve China's cultural heritage while making it accessible to younger generations. Other notable composers have similarly contributed to the rich

repository of Chinese children's songs, crafting melodies that resonate across generations (Wang, 2014).

Themes and Artistic Features: Chinese children's songs often emphasize themes of nature, family, friendship, and national pride. Lyrics are typically simple, rhythmic, and easy to memorize, making them suitable for young learners. Many songs incorporate traditional Chinese poetic elements, enhancing their educational and cultural value. Additionally, the melodies are designed to be catchy and engaging, encouraging children to participate actively in singing and performance.

Role of Children's Songs in Modern Society: Children's songs in China continue to play a vital role in cultural education and national identity formation. They serve as an effective medium for passing down traditional values while also adapting to contemporary social trends. Music competitions, concerts, and digital platforms have further popularized children's songs, ensuring their continued relevance in modern Chinese society.

Gu Jianfen and Her Influence on Children's Songs

Gu Jianfen, a famous contemporary Chinese composer and retired artist of China Oriental Performing Arts Group, was born on March 21, 1935 in Osaka, Japan. Her ancestral home is Weihai, Shandong Province. She is a contemporary Chinese female composer, a lifetime achievement music artist, a retired artist of China Oriental Performing Arts Group, an outstanding representative of returned overseas Chinese, a member of the 8th and 9th Central Committee of the China Zhi Gong Party, a member of the 6th and 7th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, and a member of the Standing Committee of the 8th, 9th and 10th National People's Congress (Wang, 2012).

Gu Jianfen's classic works such as "Young Friends Come to Meet", "The Love of Green Leaves to Roots", "That's Me", "Today is Your Birthday, My China", and "I am Chinese" use affectionate melodies to sing the people's love and nostalgia for the motherland. Gu Jianfen has won the Special Conductor

Award at the 2nd China Golden Disc Awards, the Lifetime Achievement Award at the New Millennium Global Chinese Music Chart, the Lifetime Achievement Award at the 10th China Music Golden Bell Awards, the Lifetime Achievement Award at the China Pop Music Awards, the “2019 Global Chinese Person of the Year”, and the Special Contribution Award for the 40th Anniversary of the North Malaysia Music Festival (Yao, 2015).

Gu Jianfen is a renowned composer whose contributions to Chinese music, particularly children's songs, have been widely recognized. Her works are characterized by their melodic beauty, emotional depth, and cultural significance. She played a significant role in modernizing children's music by incorporating both traditional Chinese elements and contemporary influences. Through her compositions, she has introduced children to a diverse range of musical styles, making her a pivotal figure in music education (Zheng, 2012).

One of Gu Jianfen's most notable contributions is her "New School Songs" project, which aimed to revive and reinvent classic Chinese children's songs for modern generations. These songs blend historical literary works with engaging melodies, allowing children to appreciate their cultural heritage in an accessible and enjoyable way. Her influence extends beyond composition, as she has also been involved in advocating for improved music education standards and inspiring young musicians to pursue creative expression through song (Lin, 2015).

New Knowledges

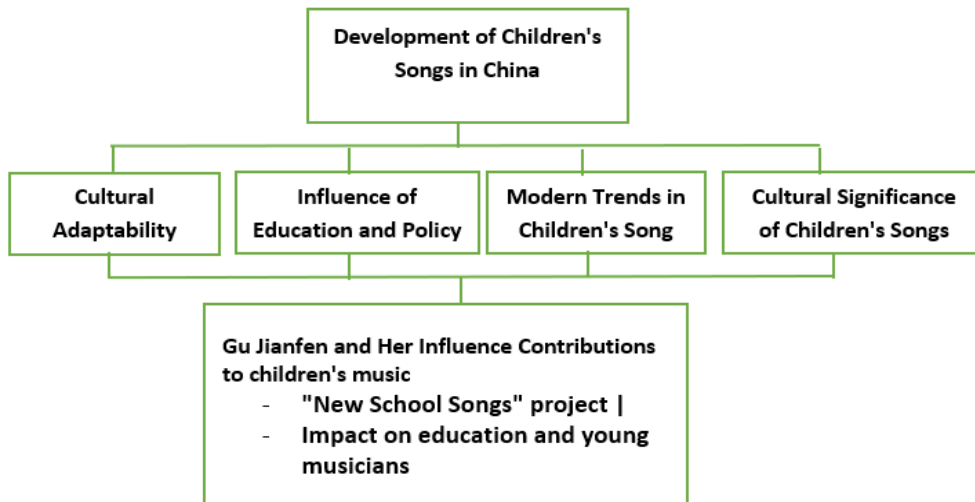


Figure 2.8: New Knowledges Diagram of Children's Songs in China: Development, Teaching, and Cultural Significance.

Conclusions

Children's songs in China have undergone significant transformation over the years, reflecting the country's cultural, educational, and technological developments. The integration of traditional and contemporary elements in children's song education ensures that young learners can appreciate their cultural heritage while exploring new musical possibilities. As music education continues to evolve, children's songs will remain an essential component of fostering creativity, emotional expression, and national identity among Chinese youth.

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