

A comparative study of the use of popular songs in school music education in Taiwan and Mainland China

Ho Wai Chung*

(Abstract)

This paper presents a comparative study of extra-musical learning of popular songs in the music classes in schools in Taiwan and Mainland China, where education is geared towards citizenship as a characteristic of national identity and social harmony for both communities. By analyzing official documents, selected music textbooks, and other relevant literatures, it is argued that the transmission of extra-musical learning of popular songs is essentially a response to the particular needs of these two Chinese historical-social contexts, which has witnessed a music curriculum that is securely grounded as part of the gradual recuperation of the concept of "the citizens." As reflected in song lyrics, Taiwan and Mainland China have attempted to promote a sense of national identity with a Confucian set of moral values to educate students in learning to live together as a central goal of school music education in the new global age.

1. Introduction

A substantial body of literature concerning social change and music education (e.g., see Henley, Caufield, Wilson, & Wilkinson, 2012; Ho, 2011) has argued that social transformation is an impetus for, and is reflected in, educational change in different cultural contexts. The influence of popular culture on today's youths has long been a subject of intense debate and public interest in response to social change and school education. By integrating the study of popular music into the education of our youths, we can better provide a means for them to learn subjects relevant to the world in which they are familiar (see Fain, 2004; Green, 2002). Recent studies on this topic include Driscoll's (2010) key themes of popular music in cultural studies, Leck's (2006) student analysis of their own popular song choices that contain elements of personality theories, and Harris's (2004) use of blues to enhance history education among secondary school students.

With reference to the Chinese societies of Taiwan and Mainland China, questions of how schools will introduce changes in music culture, particularly popular songs, into the curriculum will be discussed and compared in response to their socio-political contexts in this paper. Besides selected school music textbooks, other sources of data include government documents concerning educational and cultural policies and curricula, and other relevant studies. Popular songs in this paper are referred to those written in a basic format with melodic tunes that

* The Graduate School of East Asian Studies, Yamaguchi University

are found across different stages of the two localities, and they are not limited to the students' experiences with their preferred popular songs. These popular songs may not carry economic value in the music market but are instead circulated by the two Chinese governments to promote their national ideologies and love for their nation. Students are also familiar with these songs in their daily lives. I shall argue that on the one hand, selected popular songs in music education intends to provide the basis for the formation of national consciousness, whilst on the other hand, it also attempts to bind people together to achieve social harmony by means of Confucian educational principles or traditional Chinese values, as expressed in the song lyrics.

Social transformation of education in Taiwan and Mainland China

Taiwan (also called the Republic of China, hereafter ROC) extended compulsory education from six to nine years (i.e., Grades 1 through 9)¹ in the 1968 academic year, whilst a nine-year compulsory education law was enacted in China (called the People's Republic of China, hereafter PRC) in 1986 to declare the importance of universal education. Music education is included in the school curriculum as part of arts education in China and as a component of arts and humanities education in Taiwan in their respective nine-year fundamental education programs.

Since the establishment of the PRC in 1949, with the guidance of Marxism-Leninism and the beliefs of Mao Tse-tung, education has been constructed along the theories of socialism with Chinese characteristics as a means to promote high moral ideals, including rules of conduct and the civic virtues of love for the motherland. In December 1978, Deng Xiao-ping (1904-1997) announced a new "open door" policy that expanded the PRC's existing foreign ties, once limited to mainly Communist countries, to include capitalist countries. As a result, China was once again exposed to Western culture and music, including rock, pop, and reggae. For example, as Farrer (2000) observed, Shanghai and other large Chinese cities were swept up in a Western disco dance and music craze, which became an important part of nightlife in discotheques and dancing venues. The policy of opening China to the world also enabled, among Chinese young people, the promotion of popular music from other Asian societies, including Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea (Law and Ho, forthcoming). Since the 1990s, Mainland China's modernization and globalization, together with its transition to a market economy, have created new imperatives for, and challenges to, the school curriculum (Law & Ho, 2009). Students are now encouraged to develop a broader sense of aesthetics through learning diverse musical cultures, including popular and world music, and to learn about the quantity and richness of other countries' musical cultures (Fang, 2012; Ministry of Education, PRC, 2011). With the spread of English through globalization, English learning has become a more valued skill, with impacts on cultural and educational developments in China (Chang, 2006; Zhao & Coombs, 2012). The use of English songs is regarded as an enjoyable and effective way of introducing English language

learning in China, particularly in the activities conducted in English clubs beyond the classroom (Shen, 2009).

Similarly, school education in Taiwan faces the challenges of cultural globalization and the search for national identity. Taiwan's national identity and musical cultures suffered from various stages of colonization, such as Spanish and Dutch occupation, Chinese immigration, Japanese colonization, and the Kuomintang's (KMT) rule.² After a two-decade civil war between the KMT and the Communist Party of China (CPC),³ led by Mao Tse-tung (1893-1976), Chiang Kai-shek (1887-1975) was defeated and forced to retreat to Taiwan in 1949. Though Taiwan was returned to China after the Second World War, Japan's influence on Taiwan remained rooted in the daily life of Taiwanese people. In 1954, the Armed Forces Network Taiwan (AFNT)⁴ radio station was set up to broadcast in English only. Taiwanese students found it easy to buy records featuring English songs, as the import of American records grew increasingly by that time (Hsin, 2012). After the lifting of martial law in 1987, the issue of Taiwanese identity⁵ shifted from focusing on Chinese culture to Taiwanese culture, and even toward global cultures (see Council for Cultural Affairs Executive Yuan, 2004). Today, Taiwanese students are expected to be tri-lingual in English, Mandarin, and a local language, such as Hakka, Southern Fujianese, or an aboriginal dialect. The use of English popular songs is believed to enhance elementary school students' motivation for learning English and to sustain their long-term learning processes (Chen & Chen, 2009). Many Taiwanese nursery rhymes are now based on versions of English ones. In coping with globalization and localization, students are required to learn about and respect various cultures, and to know about and appreciate local and world history and culture (Ministry of Education, 2008, 2009).

Despite the promotion of diverse musical cultures in the school curricula, students in Taiwan and Mainland China experience their most preferred learning of popular music in school. According to Ho and Law (2006), the most favorable activity, as perceived by Taiwanese and mainland secondary school students, is the study of popular music in school music courses. Among the various musical styles, including traditional Western instrumental music, traditional Chinese instrumental music, traditional Chinese opera, Taiwanese opera, Western folk music, Mandarin popular songs, Western popular songs, and other world music, the three most preferred types amongst the Taiwanese students were Taiwanese, Western, and Japanese popular music, whilst mainland students preferred Hong Kong, Western, and Japanese popular music (Ho & Law, 2006). Although the study of culture is nothing new in various disciplines of the humanities and social sciences, relating popular songs to music education in Chinese communities is still rare. The Taiwanese and mainland music education systems transmit their cultures' demands for an education reflecting national identity and other values of education along two axes:

- (1) To what extent has the political context influenced the transmission of nationalism through popular music education in the two Chinese communities?

- (2) How is Confucian education integrated into the learning of citizenship in popular music education?

The transmission of nationalism through popular music education

The definition of “nationhood” in this paper is narrowed to the sense of belonging to either Mainland China or Taiwan. By thinking about the contrasting “discourses of nationalism and identity,” we can compare the meanings of including popular songs in the school curricula of Taiwan and Mainland China. The realm of popular songs (disregarding the popularity of the old times and the present day) is considered an important facet of nationalism that has been introduced in school education.

The singing of the PRC’s and the ROC’s national anthems is a sign of how nationalization is emerging to various degrees in their respective school music education programs. By means of nationalistic or patriotic education, mainland students are indoctrinated to experience publicly expressed musical meanings and to “celebrate prescribed political values through singing the national anthem and other political and patriotic songs” (Ho & Law, 2004, p. 162). The singing of the PRC’s national anthem “March of the Volunteers,” composed by Nie Er in 1934 for the patriotic movie *Children of the Storm*, which was about an intellectual who left to fight in the Second Sino-Japanese War, is still encouraged in Mainland China’s school curriculum. The nationalistic or patriotic songs found in their music textbooks are drawn from popular Chinese movies and television dramas, such as the theme song “I Love You, China” (*Wo Ai Ni Zhongguo*) composed in 1979 for the popular movie *A Loyal Overseas Chinese Family* (*Haiwai Chizi*) (People’s Music Publisher, 2010a, p. 4). There are also a few patriotic songs included that were once very popular in enlightening the spirit of Chinese people to fight against their Japanese enemies during the Sino-Japanese Wars, such as “We Are Not Afraid of Fighting” (*Zhipa Bu Dikang*) (People’s Music Publisher, 2010b, p. 46) and “Song for Saving the Nation” (*Jiuguo Junge*) (People’s Music Publisher, 2010b, p. 47). Moreover, the song “Pearl of the Orient” (*Dongfang Zhi Zhu*), written by Taiwanese singer and songwriter Luo Da-you, in one music textbook praises the return of Hong Kong’s sovereignty from the United Kingdom on 1 July 1997 (People’s Music Publisher, 2010c, p. 6). Another popular song, “Chinese People” (*Zhongguo Ren*), composed by Taiwanese songwriter Chen Yao-chuan and sung by Hong Kong popular artist Andy Lau, is featured in the mainland’s music textbooks (Shanghai Educational Publisher, 2012, p. 4).

A rather different process of musical nationalization through school education has been occurring in Taiwan. In 1997, the Taiwanese government introduced a new textbook for secondary schools titled *Getting to Know Taiwan* (*Renshi Taiwan*). This textbook marked a shift from China-centric historiography, in which Taiwan was viewed as a peripheral part of China, to that of Taiwan as a maritime island linked with various cultures, including the former

Western colonial powers and Japan (Amae & Damm, 2011; Wang, 2005). Songs composed in Communist China and those composed for anti-Japanese movements are not included in Taiwan's school music education curriculum. The Taiwanese government has redefined the meaning of "national identity" by building "the spirit of Taiwan" into the school music education curriculum through the introduction of local and ethnic identities in Taiwanese songs (Ho, 2012). To celebrate the ROC's centenary, which began on 10 October 2011, the Government Information Office launched a series of videos based on the ROC's national anthem, including pieces highlighting the freedom and happiness of the people of Taiwan, tourism, and Taiwan's national development, to showcase the innovation and prosperity that Taiwan has achieved. The tourism videos feature singing performed by Taiwanese aborigines.⁶ Taiwanese music and its history have emerged as key learning areas, as more emphasis on Taiwan as the "homeland" has been promoted in the school curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2008). Local songs that express loyalty to the homeland, woven with love, memory, dreams, and imagination, are now recommended. For example, the song "Taiwan Is a Good Place to Live," is a declaration of devotion to the blessed homeland and its four seasons, the sweet home of the soul, and good economic development (Editorial Board of the Han Lin Publisher, 2007a, p. 161). "I Love My Home Village PUYUMA"⁷ expresses one's sorrow at leaving the home village of Puyuma (Lin, Yang, Wu, Lin & Tang, 2012a, p. 140). Moreover, "Heart Beats from Taiwan" (*Taiwan Xintiao Sheng*), a theme song of the Taiwan Pavilion at the 2010 Shanghai World Exposition, is based on the concept of the spiritual city of Taiwan that imitates images of Taiwan's local culture (Editorial Board, Kang Hsuan Educational Publishing Group, 2012, p. 161).

The transmission of traditional Chinese values and social harmony in school music education

For thousands of years Confucianism has shaped the ethical, political, and social aspects of Chinese cultures, stressing the achievement of social harmony through the practice of individual moral conduct in a hierarchical society (Huang & Gove, 2012; Park & Chesla, 2007).⁸ One tenet of Confucianism is that family is the center of an individual's life and everyday practices, including education. Confucian ethics is believed to bring harmonious family rapport that will incontestably "lead to a harmonious society and a peaceful state" (Yao, 2000, p. 33).

The nuclear family remains the basis for citizenship education in these two Chinese localities. Popular songs found in the mainland and Taiwan emphasize piety and the recognition of one's role in the family, such as being responsible for taking care of one's parents. Despite the emphasis on a mother's love (rather than a father's love) in the two Chinese communities, the encouragement of filial piety is one of the paramount guiding ethics regulating students' social behavior in school music education. Many music textbooks include songs written by contemporary Taiwanese songwriters that praise mothers, parents, and good children (e.g.,

see Editorial Board, Han Lin Publisher, 2011, p. 126; Editorial Board, Kang Hsuan Educational Publishing Group, 2011a, p. 68). "Listening to Mothers' Words," written by Taiwanese popular artist Jay Chou, is the most popular song about mothers' love (Editorial Board, Kang Hsuan Educational Publishing Group, 2011b, p. 18). Similarly, many music textbooks in the mainland include songs written by Chinese songwriters that express the magical feelings of mothers' love for their children (e.g., see Editorial Board, Jiangsu Youth and Children Press, 2013, p.5; Lei, 2008, p. 28; Shanghai Educational Publisher, 2010, p. 10).

Confucianism also reminds us that the familiar ideal of friendship is also far from trivial, as the friend-friend relationship is based on mutual trust and faithfulness. Song lyrics that delineate kindness to others or empathy, such as "Boys and Girls" (*Nanhai Nuhai*) (Shanghai Educational Publisher, 2011a, p. 11) and "Where Are My Friends" (*Wo De Pengyou Zai Nali*) are found in mainland textbooks (People's Music Publisher, 2010c, p. 50). In addition, "Auld Lang Syne" (originally a traditional Scottish folk song but popularized as the theme song of the movie *Waterloo Bridge* released in 1940), a song about love and friendship in times past, is included in Chinese music textbooks (e.g., see Lei, 2008, pp. 29-30; People's Music Publisher, 2009, pp. 36-37). Moreover, the selection of the English song "You Raise Me Up," a song about love and honor written by Norwegian composer Rolf Løvland and included in one Taiwanese textbook, speaks of a person being so close to another person that everything they do inspires one another (Lin et al., 2012b, pp. 215-219).

Popular song lyrics selected from both local and foreign literatures affirm peace-building and social and international harmony in school music education. "Tomorrow Will Be Better" (*Mingtian Hui Genghao*), by the Taiwanese songwriter Luo Ta-yu, calls on students to make the world a better place full of hope and love, and this song is found in music textbooks in both Taiwan and the mainland (Lin et al., 2012a, pp. 231-234; Shanghai Juvenile and Children's Publishing House, 2004, p. 15). The song "We Are the World," written by Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie and billed as the United Support of Artists for Africa, is recognized as a politically important peace-making song on the international scene and is included in Taiwan's music textbooks (Editorial Board, Kang Lin Publisher, 2007b, p. 203). In the mainland curriculum, there are some Chinese songs, such as "Let the World Be Filled with Love" (*Rang Shijie Chongman Ai*), a Chinese charity song dedicated to the "International Year of Peace" in 1986, (Shanghai Educational Publisher, 2011b, pp. 22-23), and other English songs, such as "Hand in Hand," the theme song for the 1988 Olympics, and "Power of the Dream," the closing song for the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, that are included for the promotion of world peace and understanding (Editorial Board, Hunan Literature and Art Publishing House, 2012, p. 7; Law & Ho, 2009).

Conclusion

Taiwan and Mainland China share a common historical culture and their populations are mainly Chinese, but their recent socio-political experiences have been diverse. This paper has attempted to examine how popular songs taught in the curricula of these two communities adopt a stance of greater reconciliation with nationalistic and citizenship education. The examples of Taiwan and Mainland China depict their similar and different ways in which political culture has been demarcated and defined in relation to popular music education. The PRC's music education curriculum emphasizes social and collective values that serve as a mechanism for political indoctrination, particularly in selecting anti-Japanese popular songs that praise the reconstruction of the nation, even after the end of 68 years of Japanese aggression. Taiwan's music education curriculum has attempted to include local popular songs to reflect the beauty of their homeland and harmony in society and in everyday life. However, family values delineated in popular song lyrics are the driving force behind the two Chinese communities, and they provide the structure wherein students develop a sense of ethical responsibility. Through the introduction of some popular song teaching, more emphasis is also placed on the importance of the peaceful coexistence and mutual respect for different cultures in both Chinese contexts. How a quest for popular music education, nationalistic education, and citizenship education will play out in curricular discourse remains to be seen in the future development of the two Chinese regions in the years to come. This leaves the question of how to devise extra-musical teaching and learning of popular songs that can help the students of these two Chinese localities achieve more meaningful educational and musical values through studying both national and global cultures in the curriculum.

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Notes

- ¹ The legislature recently voted in favor of the Chinese Nationalist Party's (KMT) proposal for a 12-year national education program.
- ² The KMT (also translated as the Chinese Nationalist Party) is a political party founded by Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925) following the Chinese revolution of 1911.
- ³ The CPC is the founding and ruling political party of the PRC. It was founded in Shanghai in July 1921.
- ⁴ The Armed Forces Network Taiwan radio station terminated its operations on 15 April 1979 with the departure of US Military Forces from Taiwan.
- ⁵ Since 1987, Taiwan's identity has developed from culture and history shared with Mainland China. Along this line, it is a multi-dimensional and multi-layered collective identity in response to different historical stages in Taiwan. Localization (or indigenization, or Taiwanization) is a political term used within Taiwan that supports the view of Taiwan as a unique place, rather than as solely an appendage of Mainland China. Localization is regarded as a way of de-sinicization. This involves the teaching of Taiwanese history, culture, and geography from a Taiwan-centric perspective, and the promotion of native languages such as Taiwanese Hokkien (Taiwanese), Hakka, and aboriginal languages.
- ⁶ Though the origin of aboriginal (or indigenous) Taiwanese is still debated, it is believed that they belong to the family of Austronesian peoples. Presently, they account for only 2 per cent of the population. The Taiwanese government officially recognizes 14 tribes, each of them different in culture and language.
- ⁷ The Puyuma tribe (also known as the Peninan or Beinan tribe) is concentrated in Taitung County, along Taiwan's East Coast. It is the sixth largest tribal group in Taiwan.
- ⁸ The distribution of power among people in ancient China was reflected in the five pairs of human relationships that were integral to public stability: sovereign and subject, father and son, elder and younger, husband and wife, and between friends.

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