# The Game of Aesthetics and Ideology: An Inquiry into the Nature and Application of Basic Education in Chinese Music Aesthetics

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#### **Abstract**

Music psychological aesthetics constitutes a philosophical contemplation of music within the realm of art. It represents a new interdisciplinary field that melds music aesthetics with insights from music psychology, thus presenting a fundamental departure from traditional music aesthetics. This synthesis of musicology and psychology enables the examination of music aesthetics from a psychological perspective, dispelling the abstractness of conceptual discourse and providing a solid academic foundation. China, as an objectively compatible entity in terms of artistic and cultural development, has not only preserved classic musical works of global renown but has also made significant strides in the realm of music psychological aesthetics education. While current research in China has yet to coalesce into a unified theoretical framework within the field of art aesthetics education, the value and significance of Chinese music psychological aesthetics thought and the establishment of a theoretical framework for Chinese music cognition and behavior cannot be overlooked in the annals of Chinese musical scholarship and education. In contrast to the linear thinking prevalent in the Western tradition, which emphasizes conceptual analysis, judgment, and reasoning, Chinese thought tends towards intuitive empathy and holistic perception. This intuitive inclination, coupled with the macroscopic nature of socio-political and economic ecology, has contributed to a certain degree of insularity in Chinese intellectual discourse. Building upon the development and conceptualization of basic music education in contemporary contexts, this study focuses on establishing the core literacy framework within the discipline of music and implementing music aesthetics education in practice. Its aim is to address the gaps in the development of music psychological theories and the practical application of music aesthetics education in China.

## Keywords

Music aesthetics, Education, Cultural psychology, Disciplinary construction, Nature.

#### 1. Introduction

Spanning over a century of evolution, the trajectory of music education in China intricately intertwines with the nuanced development of music psychoaesthetics education[1]. The symbiotic relationship between conceptual evolution and practical application underscores a profound connection, wherein delving into the evolution of music education concepts essentially unveils the historical tapestry of China's foundational music education over the past century[2]. Indeed, the historical flux of music education concepts serves as a microcosm, encapsulating the multifaceted journey of music education throughout this epoch. A comprehensive elucidation of the significance of Chinese music psychology and aesthetics education not only roots out the origins of Chinese music psychology thought but also enhances the framework of disciplinary systems[3]. Furthermore, it continually enriches the theory and

pedagogy of artistic discipline education amidst the globalizing wave. While Chinese musical practices and theoretical frameworks harbor rich music psychology underpinnings, they grapple with the enduring influence of traditional Chinese societal norms[4]. Moreover, compared to Western counterparts, the establishment of modern music disciplines in China commenced relatively late, with formalization only beginning in the early 1960s. Consequently, a substantial portion of contemporary research in music psychology and aesthetics is anchored in Western scholarship, furnishing a comprehensive theoretical scaffold and research paradigm. This influence, to some extent, colors the perspectives of Chinese music scholars and practitioners, leading to a perceived absence of modern music psychology and aesthetics within China[5].

As a result, some scholars turn towards Western paradigms or engage in comparative studies, relegating Chinese music psychoaesthetics to a supplementary role vis-à-vis Western music disciplines[6]. Yet, beyond being a question of musical historiography, this phenomenon necessitates a historical compass to navigate present realities[7]. Rooted in ancient China and further cultivated alongside the emergence of Western musicology and psychology, the contemporary exploration of Chinese music psychological aesthetics demands a nuanced understanding, bridging Eastern traditions with Western insights. Such an approach not only augments traditional music pedagogy but also aligns more seamlessly with modernized teaching methodologies and innovative practices[8]. Moreover, this perceptional bias subtly obstructs the advancement of basic music education, impeding the holistic development of aspiring musicians and educators.

## 2. Reflections on Formulating a Foundational Literacy Framework for Fundamental Music Aesthetics Education

Psychology of aesthetics, also referred to as aesthetic psychology, stands as a pivotal facet within the trinity of aesthetic inquiry alongside philosophical aesthetics and sociological aesthetics[9]. Its roots trace back to the modern West, where German scholar Fechner pioneered its establishment through empirical psychological experiments, unraveling the intricate psychological dynamics underlying aesthetic experiences. This pioneering work solidified Fechner's status as the progenitor of modern scientific aesthetics, marking the inception of psychological aesthetics as a distinct domain within the broader field of aesthetics. Throughout modern history, psychological aesthetics has seamlessly woven itself into the fabric of music education evolution. Delving into the essence and intrinsic principles of music within the broader artistic realm, music aesthetics emerges as a foundational theoretical discipline[10]. From a sociological perspective, the study of music aesthetics delves into the societal functions of music, echoing sentiments articulated as far back as the pre-Qin period by Confucius, who advocated imbuing music with the ethical spirit of benevolence and recognized its profound educational role[11].

Yet, the pivotal question persists: How can the principles of music aesthetics be harnessed to realize educational objectives? This enduring query underscores the critical nexus between music aesthetics and the educational function of music. Only through a meticulous analysis of this relationship can specific educational strategies be formulated to fully harness the educational potential inherent within music aesthetics. In recent years, China's discourse on 'educational development core qualities' has garnered widespread attention in the realm of basic education. The unveiling of the Ministry of Education's 'Opinions on Comprehensively Deepening Educational Reform and Implementing the Fundamental Task of Establishing Virtues in People' in 2018 marked a watershed moment, catapulting the concept of core literacy into the forefront of academic discourse within the Chinese education landscape. As articulated in the 2018 consultation draft released by the Ministry of Education, core literacy epitomizes

the indispensable character traits and essential competencies cultivated throughout the educational journey, equipping individuals with the adaptability and prowess necessary for lifelong and societal development. Amidst this discourse, the integration of art education frameworks proposed by psychoaesthetics, centered around the notion of 'core literacy,' has emerged as a focal point, capturing public attention and stimulating fervent academic debate[12].

## 3. Exploring the Essence and Distinctive Traits of Aesthetic Education in Music

In its expansive guise, music aesthetics education endeavors to mold individuals' cognition, emotions, and intellectual acumen through the transformative power of music. As a quintessential form of abstract art, music serves as a conduit for encapsulating the myriad emotions intrinsic to human existence. Its profound melodies possess the capacity to refine individuals' aesthetic sensibilities, elevate their spiritual essence, and instill within them lofty aspirations. Consider Beethoven's Symphony of Fate, resonating with the indomitable spirit of resilience amidst adversity. Delving into its compositional genesis, listeners are stirred by its poignant narrative, spurred to emulate its valorous ethos[13]. Conversely, music of inferior quality threatens to erode aesthetic appreciation and may even exert pernicious influences on individuals' cognitive frameworks, necessitating steadfast resistance against its proliferation.

In its narrower sense, music aesthetics education assumes a more structured and goal-oriented form within the institutional framework of formal schooling, aligning with societal imperatives. Nevertheless, its ultimate raison d'être remains steadfast: the cultivation of individuals' aesthetic acuity and the inculcation of ethical values. Central to the ethos of music aesthetics lies its intrinsic attribute of subtle influence, operating imperceptibly yet potently on the human psyche. As recipients engage with music within the tapestry of their lived experiences, they embark on an introspective journey, plumbing the depths of its emotional reservoirs and charting a course towards personal enlightenment. Indeed, music aesthetics education possesses the remarkable ability to foster resonance between listener and composition, facilitating a symbiotic fusion of individual sentiment and melodic expression[14].

Moreover, music aesthetics boasts the distinctive trait of emotive resonance, wherein masterful compositions endure the test of time by virtue of their universal resonance. Serving as a poignant testament to the human condition, these timeless melodies transcend temporal constraints, leaving an indelible imprint on successive generations. Indeed, music possesses the unparalleled capacity to orchestrate a symphony of emotions, ushering listeners into the sociocultural milieu of its genesis. Against this evocative backdrop, individuals are afforded a panoramic vista of emotive expression, catalyzing the cultivation of personal aesthetics and ethical mores. In essence, the realm of music aesthetics serves as a fulcrum for the convergence of individual introspection and societal zeitgeist, forging a profound nexus between personal enlightenment and collective ethos[15].

### 4. The Ubiquitous Reach and Seamless Integration of Music Pedagogy

In the present epoch, the landscape of societal dynamics is largely shaped by the ascendancy of post-90s and post-00s youths, traversing a historic juncture teeming with societal metamorphosis, rapid economic proliferation, demographic flux, and hastened globalization. Amidst the opulence of material abundance and the burgeoning of the middle class, the emergence of interest factions has catalyzed a palpable shift towards what is colloquially termed as "low desires" among the post-90s cohort. This phenomenon, underscored by a palpable inclination towards materialism and superficial gratification, poses a formidable challenge to the ideological integrity and cultural fabric of the nation[16]. The pervasive

proliferation of the "star-making machinery" across film, television, and digital platforms has engendered a cultural zeitgeist characterized by a fervent pursuit of celebrity spectacle and trend-driven consumerism. While this phenomenon caters to the entertainment predilections of the masses and yields substantial economic dividends, it concurrently ushers forth a milieu replete with icons espousing "vulgar" proclivities and vapid trends devoid of substantive depth or innovation(see figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Wide-ranging Applications and Integration of Teaching Music Aesthetics. Source: Author's Field Photographs

Indeed, the realm of music, as a quintessential embodiment of human spirit, stands as both a salve and a potential source of spiritual malaise. The proliferation of "low desire" tendencies within contemporary youth culture necessitates a concerted effort towards comprehensive education and self-improvement initiatives. In this vein, the promotion of traditional music culture and the refinement of music aesthetics emerge as epoch-defining endeavors aimed at instilling high-value orientation within the youth demographic. The burgeoning landscape of social music engagements and media ecologies not only serves as a rich tapestry for music scholars but also heralds a litany of practical challenges. The disparate aesthetic sensibilities among music creators, performers, and consumers, coupled with the incongruities between cultural development and economic growth, pose a formidable conundrum. In this context, bridging the chasm between music education practices and the theoretical underpinnings of music psychoaesthetics emerges as a pressing imperative, heralding a transformative paradigm shift in music pedagogy and public accessibility[17].

In delineating the scope of pedagogical endeavors, it is essential to discern the disparate foci of professional music education and basic music education. While in the contemporary Chinese landscape, these two domains have ostensibly shed their erstwhile fragmentation to embrace a semblance of integration, the depth of this amalgamation still pales in comparison to its Western counterparts. Within the hallowed halls of music colleges and universities, the ethos of "creation" reigns supreme, with paramount emphasis placed on the innovation of lyrics and melodies, and the cultivation of unique performance styles[18]. Regrettably, the pivotal role of music education is often relegated to the periphery, overshadowed by the pervasive professional mindset. This skewed prioritization not only undermines the efficacy of music education but also impedes the practical advancement of music psychoaesthetics.

A fundamental lacuna in the landscape of music education in China lies in its disjunction from the foundational tenets of music aesthetics and psychology. Globally, the purview of music education research has traditionally revolved around the essence of "music" itself, rather than the pedagogical methodologies employed therein. For educators in the realm of music, the cardinal objective remains the acquisition of musical knowledge through educational channels, and the cultivation of aesthetic discernment through immersion in the artistic realm. It behooves music educators to recalibrate their focus, centering their pedagogical praxis around the societal function, cultural significance, and aesthetic profundity of music[19]. The prevailing issue within the Chinese pedagogical milieu lies in the inversion of priorities, wherein the practical application of music pedagogy often supersedes a comprehensive understanding of its theoretical underpinnings.

As society continues its inexorable march towards evolution, the intersection of anthropology and aesthetics is poised to usher forth novel exigencies for the advancement of music psychoaesthetics in education. Indeed, this emergent paradigm shift constitutes a primary research objective, endeavoring to bridge the chasm between theoretical frameworks and pedagogical practices within the realm of music education.

## 5. Perceptions and Implications of Music Psycho-Aesthetics for Music Education

In his seminal work, "The Republic," Plato expounds upon the intricacies of ideal governance and education. Central to his philosophical discourse is the notion that a nation's attainment of an ideal political state hinges upon the alignment of its educational paradigms with the utopian ideal. Plato advocates for the incorporation of two pivotal forms of education: gymnastics and music. Notably, Plato dedicates considerable discourse to the profound significance of music education[20].

Indeed, music education in China has been a cornerstone of personality development since the pre-Qin era, epitomized by the tenets of Confucianism. Confucius, the luminary figure of pre-Qin Confucianism, espoused a holistic approach to moral education, wherein rites and music held paramount importance. He underscored the transformative power of music in nurturing virtuous individuals, thereby fostering societal harmony through the cultivation of personal benevolence. Zhu Guangqian, in his treatise "On Cultivation," equates Confucius's advocacy for poetry and music to modern notions of aesthetic education, thereby affirming the enduring relevance and indispensability of music education across cultural and political spheres[21]. The trajectory of music education in both Chinese and Western pedagogical frameworks underscores its intrinsic necessity and enduring relevance. While nuances may exist in curricular content and instructional methodologies, the centrality of music as a catalyst for human development remains unequivocal. Indeed, whether viewed as a potent tool or an indispensable discipline, music education occupies a pivotal role in shaping societal ethos and fostering political transparency and cultural enrichment.

Furthermore, historical inquiry serves not as a mere exercise in retrospection but as a means to inform and guide contemporary praxis. The overarching aim of historical research is to glean insights from the past to navigate the present and forge a path towards a brighter future. Accordingly, the research endeavor embarked upon in this paper is propelled by the overarching goal of fostering the wholesome and innovative evolution of contemporary music education.

From a biological standpoint, our primordial ancestors embarked on a quest to discern the inherent laws governing sound vibrations in nature. These rhythmic and cyclical sound vibrations served as potent conduits for conveying changes in the surrounding environment or facilitating interpersonal communication amongst kin. Over time, as our species forged

enduring connections with these auditory phenomena, we ascribed meaning to them, thereby laying the groundwork for the emergence of language[22].

Amidst the backdrop of nature's symphony, humanity found fertile ground for enhanced communication. The resonance of natural sounds elicited diverse emotional experiences within us, prompting endeavors to internalize and articulate these sentiments. Thus, activities akin to musical communication began to take shape. As our species evolved, so too did our capacity to exert dominion over our surroundings, affording us the ability to carve out safe havens amidst ever-changing landscapes. Yet, amid this flux, the profound emotional gratification derived from rhythmic sound vibrations remained undiminished. Consequently, music gradually evolved into an autonomous art form—an embodiment of psychological introspection and subjective expression.

Drawing from the Marxist theory of art, which posits that art serves as a subjective reflection of objective reality within the human psyche, music emerges as a profound testament to the musician's existential perception of the world. It is a visceral articulation of the artist's interpretation of reality, encapsulated artistically and conveyed through the medium of music. The discerning listener, attuned to the nuances of the musician's interpretation, embarks on a journey of empathetic resonance—a multifaceted process encompassing the realms of music composition and appreciation. In this light, music stands as a poignant testament to aesthetic subjectivity—a realm inexorably intertwined with the nuances of psychological perception. Understanding the developmental trajectory and intrinsic characteristics of music at the level of psychological cognition is imperative, as it furnishes invaluable insights to inform contemporary musical praxis and dissemination[23].

Epistemologically, the exploration of music's psychological aesthetics in ancient China constitutes a pivotal facet of the broader discourse on music psychology within the Chinese milieu. This return to discursive inquiry heralds a reevaluation of empirical sciences within the prevailing paradigm, offering a nuanced lens through which to glean insights from the philosophical musings of our ancient forebears on the essence of music and its aesthetic import. This reexamination of music's essence serves to elucidate its multifaceted significance in the human experience[24]. It underscores music's transcendence beyond mere artistic expression to embody a profound spiritual journey—a quintessential component of holistic education encompassing morality, intellectuality, physicality, aesthetics, and labor. By cultivating generations of individuals imbued with a deep appreciation and engagement with the arts, music educators play a pivotal role in shaping a society steeped in cultural enrichment and artistic vitality[25].

### 6. Methodological Modalities in the Pedagogy of Music Aesthetics

China's trajectory in music education, spanning from foundational to tertiary levels, from institutional to extracurricular contexts, and from conventional pedagogical paradigms to the nuanced realm of music aesthetics, underscores significant strides in educational structure, methodological approaches, and resultant achievements(See table1). However, amidst this commendable progress, it is imperative to acknowledge a lingering disparity in the prominence accorded to music and arts vis-à-vis the traditional bastions of language, mathematics, and foreign studies within the sphere of basic and familial education. Indeed, the recalibration of educational priorities and societal perceptions necessitates a concerted effort towards incremental reform at both the educational and societal levels. While this transformation is by no means an overnight endeavor, it is incumbent upon music educators to spearhead this paradigmatic shift. As torchbearers of cultural enrichment and artistic enlightenment, music educators wield considerable influence in reshaping societal attitudes towards the holistic development of individuals.

In essence, the journey towards a more equitable educational landscape—one that affords music and arts their rightful place alongside traditional disciplines—requires steadfast dedication, collaborative effort, and unwavering advocacy[26]. It is through the collective endeavors of educators, policymakers, and societal stakeholders that the transformative potential of music education can be fully realized, heralding a new era of cultural appreciation and artistic vibrancy in China's educational ethos.

**Table 1:** Aesthetics in Chinese Music Education Implementing Teaching and Learning in the Standing (2020-2022)

| Region (Province) | Vintage: 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
|-------------------|---------------|------|------|
| Henan             | 16            | 26   | 35   |
| Zhejiang          | 21            | 35   | 66   |
| Shandong          | 17            | 25   | 53   |
| Jiangsu           | 26            | 45   | 76   |
| Guangdong         | 25            | 37   | 68   |

Source: Research Report on the Development of Aesthetic Education in China (2020-2022) Zhejiang Dongqianhu Institute of Educational Research (https://news.eol.cn/yaowen/202212/t20221213\_2261033.shtml). [accessed on Jan 13, 2024].

At the vanguard of modern music education in China, educators are tasked with a pivotal responsibility: to recalibrate their cognitive paradigms and unearth the intrinsic essence of music from a multifaceted perspective. Emphasizing the utilitarian aspects of music within contemporary society may inadvertently obfuscate its profound cognitive significance—a pitfall that educators must vigilantly avoid. In the Chinese context, a lucid comprehension of the evolution of music aesthetics and an appreciation of its psychological underpinnings serve as linchpins in the cultivation of a robust framework for modern music education[27]. By elucidating the subtle nuances of Chinese music's essence, educators can empower students to navigate its intricacies with finesse, thereby fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of their musical heritage(See figure 2).



Figure 2: The Classroom of Aesthetic Practices in Music Teaching

Source: Author's Field Photographs

Moreover, this cognitive recalibration holds profound implications for the cultivation of a thriving music education ecosystem. By imbuing pedagogy with a nuanced understanding of music's psychological import, educators serve as catalysts for the benign evolution of music education—a transformative endeavor that holds the promise of enriching the cultural tapestry of China and nurturing a generation of enlightened music aficionados [28].

Delving into the realm of psychological aesthetics within the domain of Chinese music offers a profound vista, enabling scholars to traverse the annals of music history through a vertical lens. This analytical framework not only sheds light on historical categories within music but also delves into the psychological intricacies that underpin musical phenomena. By scrutinizing the genesis and impact of aesthetic psychology through the lens of the discerning appreciator, scholars gain invaluable insights into the depth of emotional investment and cognitive resonance engendered by music[29]. Transposing the psychological evolution of music appreciators into the realm of music education yields a rich tapestry of research material, particularly in elucidating the audience perception levels of music learners in creative endeavors. Armed with this theoretical underpinning, educators and students alike are equipped to navigate the labyrinthine pathways of musical pedagogy with newfound clarity. This symbiosis between pedagogical artistry and audience perception levels bestows a heightened acumen for discerning the subtle nuances and inherent laws of music—a boon, especially in the intricate terrain of traditional Chinese music learning. Traditional Chinese music, steeped in the ethos of "the unity of heaven and man," diverges from the individualistic ethos espoused by ancient Greek sculpture, seeking instead to harmonize cosmic perspectives with the natural order[30]. Consequently, a holistic exploration of traditional Chinese music theory, juxtaposed with Western music psychology's holistic paradigm, engenders a fusion that transcends temporal and cultural boundaries. This convergence lays the foundation for creators and performers to embark upon a transformative journey of reinterpretation and innovation—a synthesis of tradition and innovation that begets a novel artistic ethos for the discerning audience. For appreciators, this fusion of traditional and contemporary musical elements resonates deeply with the collective psyche, evoking a profound sense of cultural continuity and renewal. It is within this harmonious union of tradition and innovation that the allure of music appreciation truly manifests, inviting aficionados to embark upon a transcendent journey of rediscovery and renewal—an odyssey wherein tradition and novelty converge to kindle the flames of musical enlightenment.

In the contemporary landscape of music scholarship, the critique surrounding the establishment of music disciplines has evolved into a robust and comprehensive discourse, far surpassing the depth and breadth witnessed in the initial fifty years following the establishment of the People's Republic of China. The modern critique of music discipline construction is characterized by a steadfast focus on elucidating the manifold dimensions of plurality and fostering its developmental trajectory—a trajectory that resonates harmoniously with the dynamic exigencies of contemporary society. A plethora of contemporary academic inquiries into music discipline construction place paramount emphasis on pragmatic problem-solving methodologies, eschewing the erstwhile fixation on doctrinal "isms" or ideological fervor[31]. Instead, these inquiries pivot towards a meticulous examination of practical challenges, with a singular aim: the formulation and implementation of efficacious solutions. Indeed, the zenith of scholarly endeavor lies in the formulation and dissemination of pragmatic measures that redound to the enhancement of music education at its core. Central to this paradigm shift is the recognition of basic music education as the quintessential locus for the application and validation of pragmatic methodologies. It is within the crucible of basic music education that the efficacy of theoretical insights is tested and refined, paving the way for the implementation of best practices. Thus, the contemporary discourse on music discipline construction

transcends mere theoretical conjecture, converging instead towards a pragmatic ethos rooted in the advancement of music education at its foundational level.

In his seminal academic treatise titled "The Primacy of Preservation and the Subsequence of Innovation," esteemed music theorist Zhao Songguang delineates a compelling blueprint for the urgent imperatives necessitated in the advancement of Chinese music and cultural disciplines. Central to his thesis are the "seven imperatives," each of which bears profound implications for the preservation and propagation of traditional music heritage[32]. Notably, five of these imperatives underscore the pivotal role of folk music in this endeavor, advocating for initiatives such as the "reconstruction of zither science" and the "leveraging of folk instrumental music's inherent strengths." Concurrently, the remaining imperatives accentuate the imperative of conserving ancient musical scores, signifying a concerted effort towards the restoration and compilation of historical musical archives. This discernible emphasis on traditional music within the framework of modern music disciplines underscores its intrinsic significance and indispensability in shaping a comprehensive and enduring musical legacy in China. It elucidates the unwavering commitment of music theorists towards fostering an inclusive and sustainable music discipline, one that seamlessly integrates the rich tapestry of traditional cultural heritage with contemporary theoretical paradigms. Indeed, this holistic approach serves as the cornerstone of methodological practice in music aesthetics education in China, elucidating the imperative for cultivating Chinese youth as multifaceted talents adept in navigating both the nuanced intricacies of their cultural heritage and the precepts of Western music theory. By nurturing a generation of well-rounded musical artisans, such pedagogical endeavors aspire to forge a continuum of musical excellence that transcends temporal and cultural boundaries, resonating with the ethos of artistic and intellectual enrichment.

### 7. Conclusion

This study employs qualitative literature analysis to explore the evolving landscape of basic music education in contemporary contexts. It specifically delves into the construction of a core literacy framework within the discipline of music psychoaesthetics, aligning with the prevailing cultural and psychological perspectives in music education. By leveraging the emerging requisites set forth by core literacy, we probe into its essential connotations and conceptual origins. Additionally, this study assesses the value, significance, and transformative potential of this novel paradigm, emphasizing its impact and inspirational implications. It advocates for music psychological aesthetics education to be intricately intertwined with specific sociocultural contexts, highlighting the nuanced interplay between cultural psychology and behavioral characteristics.

A noteworthy contribution of this study lies in its elucidation of the inherent developmental trajectory unique to Chinese music psychoaesthetics. By delineating its impact on the practical realm of music aesthetics education, it reshapes the disciplinary landscape and fosters a novel source of theoretical underpinnings. This epistemological innovation constitutes a significant milestone, heralding a paradigm shift in the domain of Chinese music psychoaesthetics.

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