

From Children to Society: A Brief Comparison of Chinese and Korean Music Education

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Abstract: As a unique form of education, music education influences individuals' thoughts, emotions, and overall qualities through the medium of music. It has become an indispensable component of modern educational systems. Whether viewed broadly as an art form that enhances individuals' aesthetic, moral, and humanistic literacy, or narrowly as systematic instruction within school settings, music education plays a crucial role in students' holistic development. It not only cultivates musical literacy but also promotes intellectual, emotional, and social growth. Thus, music education holds significant social and cultural value in fostering creativity, inspiring emotions, and shaping character.

Keywords: Music education; China-Korea music education differences; School music education; Social music education; Social function

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1. Introduction

Society keeps moving forward, and globalization speeds up. Different countries show various features and advantages. This is true for children's music education and social music education. China and the Republic of Korea have different cultures and education systems. When carrying out music education, they have developed different models, goals, and methods. In recent years, China has reformed its music education gradually, but the process still has many problems. Curriculum design, teacher quality, and teaching methods are involved. These aspects are still not as good as the world's best practices. The Republic of Korea's music education system, on the other hand, focuses on cultivating children's interest and creativity in music from a young age. It actively encourages music education to spread across all levels of society. Special attention is paid to protecting and developing traditional music.

This paper looks at how China and the Republic of Korea are alike and different. The focus is on children's music education and social music education. It analyzes their educational aims, teaching methods, curriculum setups, teaching activities, and teacher resources. It studies the Republic of Korea's successful experiences. It also explores possible changes for music education development in China. The hope is that soon, the quality of

music education in China can improve. Then music can play an important part in training all-round talents for the new era.

2. The concept of music education

Music education is an educational activity. It uses the art of music. It has a deep impact on people's thoughts, feelings, and cognitive abilities. It helps people gain knowledge and improve skills. Music education is not just about school-based education in the traditional sense. It includes many forms, including family education and community-based education. This shows how widely and diversely music exists in society. Through music education, individuals not only acquire professional musical skills but also achieve comprehensive development in emotional, cognitive, and social dimensions, thus promoting overall personal growth. Music education can be categorized into two levels: broad and narrow, each with distinct characteristics and functions.

2.1. Broad music education

This refers to all educational activities that impact various aspects of an individual through musical experiences. It goes beyond training in musical skills to include artistic, moral, and ideological education achieved through music. Broad music education emphasizes not only the cultivation of musical skills but also the shaping of emotions, aesthetic appreciation, moral values, and humanistic qualities through music. It aims to develop individuals with rich cultural depth and spiritual awareness by fostering their perception of beauty, pursuit of goodness, and exploration of truth. Ultimately, it enables individuals to comprehend the world and shape their personalities at a higher level, becoming well-rounded members of society ^[1].

2.2. Narrow music education

This specifically refers to music education conducted within structured educational environments and under defined conditions, organized according to societal needs, with explicit goals and plans—namely, school-based music education. This form of education occurs across all levels of the formal education system, including preschool, primary, secondary, higher, and adult education. Compared with the diversity and flexibility of broad music education, narrow music education focuses more on providing systematic and standardized music instruction in school settings. It aims to cultivate students' professional competence in music and mastery of musical skills. Students not only learn basic skills such as performance and composition but also receive training in music theory, aural skills, and sight-singing, which deepens their understanding of musical structure and expressive techniques.

Music education matters for students' all-round growth. It boosts musical skills and helps with intelligence, emotional skills, and social skills. When students create, perform, or enjoy music, they express feelings, build good personalities, and learn to manage emotions. Plus, music education strengthens memory, focus, and creativity. Learning music is not just about getting technical skills. It changes how students think, understand, and express emotions, promoting growth in many ways. In short, music education is a multi-faceted teaching method. Using music as a special tool, it develops musical talent and promotes growth in emotions, thinking, and social skills. Its importance extends beyond classroom learning. Music education greatly helps improve students' overall abilities, encourages creative thinking, and expands emotional expression. As a type of cultural education, it is crucial for building a country's cultural soft power and for passing on and innovating traditional culture. Improving music education can train more people with good musical skills and artistic awareness. This can push society and culture forward and make them thrive.

3. Comparison of music education for children in China and the Republic of Korea

3.1. Educational objectives

3.1.1. China

In the preschool stage, Chinese music education focuses on cultivating children's basic appreciation of music, stimulating their interest in perceiving beauty and enjoying artistic activities, and encouraging them to express art in their preferred ways. At this stage, the emphasis is on sensory experience and nurturing an interest in art through singing, dancing, games, and simple creative activities to develop an initial understanding and recognition of the arts. However, in some kindergartens, these objectives are not fully realized, especially in the area of "artistic expression." Problems such as uneven distribution of teaching resources, insufficient qualified teachers, and monotonous content hinder children's development in expressive abilities.

As students enter primary and secondary school, the revision of the "Guidelines for Music Education" in 2011 marked a shift in focus toward the "humanistic," "aesthetic," and "practical" dimensions of music education. While maintaining traditional elements, greater emphasis is now placed on cultivating emotional sensitivity, attitudes, and values through music. The aim is not just technical training anymore. Now, it centers on emotional connection, aesthetic feeling, and artistic knowledge. It tries to develop students' humanistic attitude and social responsibility. Nonetheless, many schools still face practical challenges, such as limited resources and an exam-oriented curriculum, which hinder the effective implementation of these goals ^[2].

3.1.2. The Republic of Korea

When compared with China, the Republic of Korea's preschool music education puts more stress on using the arts to discover the beauty of nature and the environment. Children are urged to use different ways such as singing, dancing, and painting to show how they understand and feel about art ^[3]. The focus is not solely on music itself, but on self-exploration, the development of innovative thinking, and artistic expression.

Also, the Republic of Korea's educational idea focuses on overall growth. Preschool education wants to do more than teach musical skills. It also wants to develop creativity and good character. By taking part in different art activities, children improve their imagination, creative ability, and emotional understanding. This gives them a strong base for future social life. China's model often focuses more on professional talent. In contrast, the Republic of Korea gives importance to making music education social and widely available. The goal is to make music part of daily life. It helps children build cultural knowledge and overall abilities through music learning ^[4].

Thus, the Republic of Korea's music education goals are not just about training professionals. They focus on overall development, new ideas, and being able to fit into society. Music helps children develop their personalities, express their feelings, and learn social skills. It is an important part of childhood education.

3.2. Teaching approaches

In China, traditional music teaching methods usually stick to strict and set teaching steps. Teaching from textbooks and doing beat-training exercises are common. Lots of teachers put a lot of emphasis on teaching theory and doing technical practice. Their aim is to make sure students learn basic music theory and performance skills well. However, this approach tends to neglect student interest and creativity, leading to monotonous and disengaging classroom environments. For young children in preschool, long periods of theoretical teaching and skill-focused drills are usually not interesting. This makes them less enthusiastic and

less likely to take the initiative ^[5].

With evolving educational philosophies, more schools are adopting innovative ways. Learning based on contexts and projects has been showing up more often in classrooms. These methods create learning environments that draw children in. In these settings, kids explore and find out the appeal of music through real-life situations. Also, schools are making their music courses more varied. They are adding different types of music, like choral singing, dancing, and percussion. This enables students to have a more lively and interesting experience of music.

On the other hand, the Republic of Korea's teaching method has "play" at its core. Music education is provided in a laid-back and pleasant environment. It encourages children to learn by taking part in games and fun activities. Music is seen as something new and fascinating, not just as a skill that needs to be acquired. This greatly lessens the pressure on children. It enables them to freely enjoy, sense, and experience music. As a result, it cultivates a true interest in and love for music.

Music classes in the Republic of Korea are highly interactive. Children take part in singing, dancing, and playing musical instruments. They use a lot of imagination and creativity while doing these activities. Teachers employ games, role-playing, and performances. By doing so, they actively involve the students. This helps in improving the students' aesthetic sensitivity and their ability to express emotions. Music is closely connected to daily life. It does not just stay within the classroom. Instead, it turns into a vital part of children's development.

This method does not just develop children's love and enthusiasm for music. It also helps with their all-round development. This includes expressing emotions, interacting socially, improving motor skills, and fostering creativity. Different from the models that focus on exams, the Republic of Korea's music education, which centers on children, gives importance to their individual growth. Its goal is to assist every child in discovering the joy and value in music. It also builds a solid base for their future development.

3.3. Curriculum design

In terms of curriculum design, while China's preschool education includes designated music textbooks, these materials often present several issues, such as being outdated, lacking innovation, and offering insufficient aesthetic appeal. As a result, the attractiveness and effectiveness of music education are significantly diminished. Many of these materials emphasize basic technical training, neglecting the artistic and emotional dimensions of music, which makes it difficult to stimulate young children's interest. Consequently, the process of learning music can become dull and uninspiring.

At the primary and secondary school levels, although music is a required subject under compulsory education, in practice, music classes are frequently replaced by core academic subjects. Many schools do not assign sufficient importance to music education, resulting in inadequate scheduling and implementation. Furthermore, most music curricula are heavily skewed toward Western music, especially in areas such as theory and vocal training. Classical Western works dominate teaching resources, while local traditional music is significantly underrepresented. Although recent years have seen some attempts to incorporate national cultural elements, overall, the music curriculum remains predominantly Western, lacking both cultural diversity and comprehensiveness ^[6].

In contrast, the Republic of Korea does not employ a unified national textbook for preschool music education. Instead, teachers independently design lesson plans based on the themes and objectives of each academic term. This flexibility allows for curricula to be tailored to students' interests and developmental needs, as well as to incorporate seasonal, festive, or contemporary cultural elements. Educators often select melodically

rich and engaging songs or nursery rhymes that capture children's attention and foster a love for music.

Moreover, from kindergarten through secondary education, the Republic of Korea places strong emphasis on traditional music education. Regardless of the stage, traditional music is an integral part of the curriculum. Education policies explicitly define traditional music education as a key aspect of cultural heritage transmission. Children are introduced to and taught native musical forms from an early age, fostering both musical literacy and a deep sense of cultural identity and pride. This educational design supports students' understanding of diverse musical traditions while promoting the preservation and continuation of national culture.

3.4. Teaching practice

In some Chinese music classrooms, teaching practices often overemphasize discipline management and knowledge transmission. Teachers tend to focus excessively on students' memorization and comprehension of textbook content, neglecting the cultivation of improvisational ability and creative expression. This skill-centric, standardized teaching model can lead to dull classroom experiences, reducing student engagement and motivation. Additionally, many parents regard music learning as a utilitarian tool, often aimed at earning extra points in entrance examinations or enhancing academic competitiveness^[7]. This instrumental approach has contributed to the exam-oriented nature of music education, where the core purpose of cultivating musical sensitivity and creativity is frequently overlooked.

Although some schools and educators have begun recognizing this issue and are exploring more innovative teaching methods, the overall educational philosophy and practices still require further improvement and reform.

In contrast, the Republic of Korea places a strong emphasis on innovation and interaction in its music education practices, particularly in early childhood education. Preschool music classes in Korea integrate singing, dance, and other artistic forms to create a lively and engaging environment. Within this joyful atmosphere, children are encouraged to perceive and express music through multisensory experiences. This approach not only improves their technical skills but also allows them to freely unleash their creativity, fostering both musical interest and aesthetic sensibility.

Moreover, music education enjoys a high level of societal recognition in Korea. Many families actively support their children's musical development by providing ample resources. Children are often introduced to a variety of musical instruments or receive vocal training, which helps them fully explore their musical talents and potential^[8]. The Republic of Korea's educational philosophy and its supportive social environment thus provide a broader platform for musical learning, enabling children to grow and thrive in an enjoyable and expressive musical journey.

3.5. Teaching faculty

The overall quality of teaching faculty in China's early childhood music education sector is uneven. Some educators lack an in-depth understanding of the developmental characteristics and pedagogical principles specific to young learners. Teaching methods are often simplistic and repetitive. In recent years, due to the rising demand for music education, individuals without professional backgrounds have entered the field, leading to a mixed and inconsistent teaching workforce.

On the contrary, the Republic of Korea has a music teaching staff that is of relatively high quality and well-trained. These teachers not only show great professional knowledge and skills. They also attach importance to research and innovation in teaching methods. Music colleges in Korea set rigorous standards for prospective

educators, often requiring demonstrable academic achievements to ensure the quality of instruction.

At present, China's music education for children still has a lot of room to improve. More attention needs to be paid to developing children's creativity and helping them become well-rounded. Teaching methods should focus on getting students involved and having hands-on learning experiences. This will increase students' participation in music classes. Making children the main focus of teaching can help cultivate their real interest in music.

For curriculum design, we need to do more to combine traditional Chinese music better and update textbook content so it matches modern developments. When it comes to teacher training, it is crucial to raise educators' professional standards and their ability to innovate in teaching methods. Opportunities for exchange and collaboration with outstanding domestic and international educators should be actively pursued in order to absorb best practices and refine instructional content.

Government departments, schools, teachers, and parents all have to cooperate with each other to move forward children's music education in China. When they do this, music can turn into a more influential and fulfilling part of children's growth process. It can help in bringing up people who are well-developed and have a good sense of aesthetics.

4. Comparison of social music education in China and the Republic of Korea

4.1. Concept of social music education

Social music education refers to musical education activities that extend beyond the realm of formal school instruction and are directed at a broad social demographic. This form of education includes not only traditional classroom-based learning but also music-related instruction within families, community activities, programs organized by cultural institutions, and various music events led by social organizations. The core objective of social music education is to enhance cultural literacy, emotional expression, and social capabilities—both at the individual and collective level—while fostering a sense of social responsibility.

The fundamental goals of social music education are to provide wider access to music learning opportunities and to support the overall development of participants^[9]. While imparting theoretical knowledge and technical skills, it also focuses on cultivating aesthetic awareness and emotional intelligence.

The key characteristics of social music education include:

- (1) **Universal accessibility:** Unlike traditional school-based music education, social music education targets all segments of society. Regardless of age—children, adolescents, adults, or the elderly—and regardless of social status, everyone is eligible to participate. This inclusiveness promotes musical engagement across diverse demographics, fostering shared interests and communal identity while enhancing social inclusivity and diversity.
- (2) **Diversity and flexibility:** Social music education encompasses a wide variety of formats, such as community choirs, music interest groups, music therapy, and online music courses. These programs are not bound by conventional classrooms or rigid methodologies; instead, they emphasize learners' interests, interactivity, and experiential learning. For example, community music events prioritize group participation and communication, while online programs break down temporal and geographic barriers, allowing individuals to study music at their convenience^[10].
- (3) **Cultural and emotional functions:** Beyond technical training, social music education serves as a powerful medium for emotional expression and cultural identity. Through learning and performance,

participants develop a deeper understanding of their own emotions. Music's inherent ability to transcend language and geography allows it to act as a bridge between cultures. Collective performance activities, such as ensemble playing or choral singing, help strengthen community cohesion, promote cultural exchange, and enhance aesthetic taste and cultural appreciation.

- (4) Social integration and public service: Social music education facilitates social integration, particularly in multicultural societies. It provides a platform for individuals of different cultures, backgrounds, age groups, and social classes to interact and collaborate. Music education fosters empathy, mutual understanding, and communication, helping reduce societal divides and encouraging cooperation. It contributes to social harmony and supports sustainable social development.

As a broad-based educational model, social music education not only teaches musical skills but also emphasizes emotional connection and social interaction. Through engagement in such programs, individuals and communities alike benefit from enhanced emotional well-being, richer cultural experiences, and stronger social cohesion.

4.2. Comparative analysis of social music education in China and the Republic of Korea

Firstly, regarding the degree of popularization, social music education in the Republic of Korea enjoys a high level of engagement. Approximately two-thirds of children participate in some form of music education. Some families get private teachers to teach. Other families use free classes from churches or community groups. Kids in Korea often join various performance events when they are young. Korea's music education at first aims to help students understand theory better. It also works to boost their overall skills. It helps ease school stress and lets them show their feelings. To a lot of Koreans, music is not just about learning. It is a way to have fun and is a big part of their everyday life.

In addition, as a country that places great emphasis on national pride, the Republic of Korea actively protects and promotes traditional music culture, ensuring its deep roots in society. Starting from kindergarten, kids learn traditional music. Many special schools have early music teaching plans. These plans want to pass on and keep cultural traditions ^[11].

In China, it is different. Social music education is mainly an additional cultural learning. Some parents see it as a chance to live out the dreams they could not achieve as kids. Other parents want their children to develop interests or learn to interact with others through music. However, there is also a significant number of parents who focus on quantifiable outcomes such as examination certificates—seeking recognition and achievement through comparisons with peers—rather than emphasizing musical cognition or aesthetic development. Additionally, many parents consider music education a stepping stone toward university admission via art-track examinations, aiming to gain admission to prestigious institutions through special talent recruitment programs.

As music certificate exams have gradually become part of the evaluation system for high school and college admissions, an unhealthy trend of competition has emerged in social music education. This has led to a distortion of its original purpose.

Although China has also made efforts to protect and promote traditional music, policy support and public awareness remain insufficient. While calls for the preservation of traditional music are widespread, effective implementation is still lacking. As a result, society has yet to fully recognize the importance of traditional music and music education more broadly. To fix this, we really need to help people understand better how valuable traditional music is for culture and education. We should get more support from institutions. We can also look at what the Republic of Korea did right in social and traditional music education. This can make music education

in China easier for people to access and help it fit better into our culture.

4.3. Qualifications of social music educators

In the Republic of Korea, the requirements for social music teachers, especially those in teaching or professor jobs, are very strict. People who apply have to give detailed resumes, lists of the academic papers they have written, and their research results. Often, applicants also need to have studied music in another country or they need to be well-known people or leaders in the music field. After professors get the job, they must show their qualifications, what they have achieved in academics, and what they specialize in. This helps students choose courses, knowing all the facts. When students drop a course or lacking students, the course gets canceled. Then, the professor might lose their job. Also, at the end of every semester, students rate their teachers on the internet. These ratings help check how well teachers are doing their jobs.

Even within private social music training institutions, instructors often hold master's or doctoral degrees from prestigious international conservatories. This strict standard makes Korean music education match what is done around the world. It makes sure music teachers reach a certain professional level. This creates a good setting for music education. It also helps raise the musical knowledge and sense of beauty of everyone in society.

China is different, there are big differences in the skills of social music teachers. Lots of teachers do not have enough experience. Also, the quality of teaching, the ways of teaching, and the academic rules are different everywhere. Many institutions do not hire professionals who graduated from good music colleges or conservatories. Instead, they choose people who majored in education at teacher-training universities. Even if these people are not as good at teaching and performing as other, more qualified applicants.

Plus, China lacks a clear system for certifying and overseeing social music education. Many people who taught themselves and have no proper training have started their own private studios or schools. Because of this, there are a lot of low-quality music training places. These problems stop social music education from growing well and need to be fixed right away.

China is huge with a large population. Getting most of the teaching staff to have master's or doctoral degrees from foreign schools is hard. It will take a long time to make this happen. To deal with this, the country needs to build better infrastructure and raise living standards. This way, young people can get more chances to study. Meanwhile, it is important to help children develop a strong sense of cultural identity and a dedication to education from a young age. This can make sure that students who study overseas have the ability and the will to use their knowledge and skills to help their home country.

4.4. Performance culture in social music education

The Republic of Korea has a very good social music culture. In big cities, there are many places to perform. There are big theaters and small community stages. All these places have professional music gear and workers. They make sure the shows are good. Even in smaller cities, music lighting systems and audio-visual technicians are readily available. Furthermore, ticket prices span a wide range—including affordable options—making it feasible for the public to regularly attend performances. This accessibility allows Korean citizens to experience live music from a young age, nurturing an early appreciation for the art form and fostering a vibrant performance culture.

In such a social environment, music becomes an indispensable part of personal growth. Participation in musical performances, both as audiences and performers, subtly enhances the population's artistic sensibility, cultural literacy, and aesthetic understanding. Music education is thus not limited to formal instruction—it

becomes embedded in everyday life, contributing meaningfully to the cultivation of national aesthetic values and overall social harmony.

While China also places considerable value on social music, most performance venues are concentrated in first-tier cities. In second- and lower-tier cities, limitations in policy support and funding result in a relative scarcity of music theaters, professional-grade equipment, and service personnel. Consequently, the spread and accessibility of music performance experiences are limited.

Ticket prices for performances in China have also risen significantly in recent years. Affordable tickets—once available for as low as several dozen yuan—have become increasingly rare. In many cases, the lowest ticket prices now exceed 100 RMB, with no clear upper limit. Moreover, audiences for music performances in China are still largely composed of performers, educators, students, or dedicated enthusiasts. True popular participation remains limited, and the notion of “music for all” has yet to be fully realized.

5. Recommendations for improving music education in China

First and foremost, national and local governments, along with higher education institutions, should elevate their recognition of the function and significance of social music education. This can be achieved by optimizing macro-level policies, establishing clear evaluation standards, supporting training institutions, defining qualifications for operation, strengthening regulatory oversight, and implementing reasonable pricing structures. These measures would help establish education providers that meet actual societal needs and promote the balanced development of social music education across regions. Local governments, in particular, can make better use of resources from universities, art troupes, and performance venues by publicly recruiting and supporting projects focused on intangible cultural heritage with distinctive ethnic features. This would provide platforms for traditional artists to perform, contribute to the dissemination and revitalization of traditional music, and support the inheritance of national cultural identity. Besides, adding various performance styles can liven up local cultural activities. It can improve how the public enjoys art. It can also help social music education spread more widely.

Next, we should create qualification and assessment rules for music teachers. These rules should match the features of social music education. We can base them on the current teacher certification systems used in schools. We have to create a good system for hiring and assessing music teachers. This system will boost the professional skills and teaching abilities of music educators. As a result, it will raise the quality and trustworthiness of social music teaching. Meanwhile, teaching methods ought to concentrate on building students’ interest. They should also build a strong base in music theory, improve students’ aesthetic judgment, and encourage creative ability. Students should be encouraged to discover and create beauty through music. Music assessment systems, especially music grading exams, should be reformed starting from the foundation of general education. This includes diversifying instructional content, organizing public performances, and optimizing evaluation methods to move beyond rigid and standardized formats. Ultimately, the aim is to guide learning motivation appropriately and implement people-centered education that fosters well-being through meaningful musical experiences.

Thirdly, China should actively draw on successful international experiences in social music education while tailoring strategies to its own national context. Research should be conducted to develop age-appropriate, culturally relevant pedagogical theories and methodologies for music instruction. Traditional music grading materials must break away from outdated models and keep pace with the times through continual innovation,

ensuring that social music education evolves in a healthy and sustainable direction. Furthermore, efforts must be made to broaden access to music education. Music should become a vehicle for emotional connection, moral cultivation, spiritual enrichment, and community cohesion. Through the moral and cultural functions of music education, the comprehensive quality of the general population can be significantly improved.

By analyzing both children's music education and social music education, it is evident that with the ongoing development of politics, economy, and culture—and the corresponding improvement in material and spiritual well-being—music is gradually becoming an integral and sustainable component of society, everyday life, and education. As a prevailing educational trend, it is of far-reaching importance to understand the similarities and differences between China and the Republic of Korea in social music education, learn from other countries' successful practices, and develop a uniquely Chinese model of social music education that enhances aesthetic literacy and contributes to the all-round development of children.

Disclosure statement

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