

# Research on the Restructuring of Teaching Models for Traditional Chinese Instruments Based on Cultural Heritage

Jinxing Mu\*

Hainan Vocational University of Science and Technology, Haikou, 570000, China

\*Corresponding author: 18641195022@163.com

**Abstract:** Within the contemporary globalized context, the teaching of traditional Chinese instruments faces the challenge of diminishing cultural distinctiveness, with the pressure exerted by technical rationality on cultural heritage being particularly prominent in modern institutionalized models. From the perspective of cultural heritage, this study systematically examines its theoretical foundations, elucidates the intrinsic cultural value of traditional Chinese instruments and the mechanisms for transforming their core essence. By analyzing the inherent limitations of both the traditional master-apprentice system and institutionalized models, the research demonstrates the necessity of restructuring. Subsequently, focusing on teaching objectives, content, processes, and evaluation systems, it constructs a pedagogical approach centered on cultural understanding, integrating aesthetic experience with active practice. The aim is to achieve an organic unity of skill transmission and cultural identity, thereby forming a new teaching model characterized by cultural consciousness.

**Keywords:** teaching of traditional Chinese instruments; cultural heritage; restructuring of teaching models; cultural understanding; aesthetic experience

## Introduction

As a vital carrier of ethnic culture, traditional Chinese instruments entail a pedagogical practice whose essence extends far beyond the mere transmission of technical skills. It should represent a profound continuation of the meaning systems and modes of emotional expression generated within specific cultural contexts. However, in the process of institutionalization and standardization, modern teaching of traditional Chinese instruments, predominantly guided by technical rationality, has increasingly exhibited a tendency to prioritize skill training over cultural immersion. This has led to a weakened connection between performance practices and their cultural matrix, challenging the culturally constitutive function of the teaching model. Under such circumstances, restructuring the teaching model for traditional Chinese instruments with an orientation toward cultural heritage is not only crucial for enhancing pedagogical efficacy but also fundamental to the continuity and revitalization of ethnic cultural lineage within contemporary educational discourse. This undertaking possesses the necessity and urgency of preserving cultural subjectivity and cultivating artists endowed with cultural consciousness. This study aims to provide systematic theoretical support and a practical framework for this restructuring process through theoretical exploration, contextual analysis, and the construction of pathways.

## 1. The Theoretical Foundation of Traditional Chinese Instrument Teaching from the Perspective of Cultural Heritage

### 1.1 Cultural Heritage as the Ontological Value of Traditional Chinese Instrument Teaching

Traditional Chinese instruments are not merely isolated sonic symbols or carriers of pure technique. Their essence lies in being meaning systems and modes of emotional expression generated within specific cultural contexts. Establishing cultural heritage as the ontological value of teaching traditional Chinese instruments signifies that the fundamental purpose of pedagogical activities transcends the transmission of skills and the reproduction of musical scores. It points toward the understanding and continuation of the cultural logic, aesthetic concepts, and attitudes toward life embedded within the instruments, the musical repertoire, and the performance practices themselves.

This positioning requires teaching practice to shift from instrumental rationality to value rationality, recognizing that traditional instruments are materialized forms of a nation's cultural lineage and spiritual character. Consequently, the teaching process becomes a cultural practice wherein learners engage in dialogue with a profound cultural tradition and achieve identity formation. The refinement of skill and the internalization of culture constitute two facets of the same process. The affirmation of this ontological value provides the philosophical point of departure and ultimate purpose for restructuring the teaching model.

### ***1.2 The Composition of the Cultural Core of Traditional Chinese Instruments and the Potential for Pedagogical Transformation***

The cultural core of traditional Chinese instruments is a multi-layered, interconnected composite structure. Its surface layer is the material system, encompassing the physical form, materials, craftsmanship of the instruments, and the unique timbre, tonal systems, and performance techniques they produce<sup>[1]</sup>. The middle layer consists of the behavioral and institutional system, involving specific performance conventions, lineages of master-disciple transmission, repertoire structures, as well as the performance contexts and functions associated with traditional festivals, rituals, and folk customs. The deep layer is the spiritual and conceptual system, covering categories such as "resonance" (yun), "lingering charm" (wei), "conceptual idea" (yi), and "artistic conception" (jing), which are nurtured by specific philosophical thoughts, ethical concepts, and aesthetic ideals. It also includes artistic pursuits such as "meaning beyond the strings" and "using imagery to fully convey meaning."

The potential for pedagogical transformation lies precisely in the systematic analysis and targeted design based on this cultural core. The material layer can be transmitted through direct sensory contact and hands-on practice. The behavioral and institutional layer requires contextualized, ritualized teaching activities for its recreation and experiential learning. The spiritual and conceptual layer necessitates theoretical explanation, the accumulation of aesthetic appreciation, and the permeation of cultural metaphors to guide learners from the physicality of technical operation to the metaphysical level of spiritual comprehension.

### ***1.3 The Infusion of Aesthetic Spirit and Philosophical Thought in Instrument Pedagogy***

The artistic expression of traditional Chinese instruments is deeply rooted in the intellectual soil of traditional Chinese aesthetics and philosophy. The Daoist concepts of "the greatest music has the faintest notes" and "emulating nature and valuing genuineness" advocate for natural, unadorned artistic expression and the authentic revelation of inner spirit. This enlightens pedagogy to transcend mere technical virtuosity and pursue the conveyance of artistic conception and spiritual resonance beyond the literal sounds. The Confucian ideas of "the beauty of harmony and moderation" and "the connection between music and governance" emphasize the function of music in harmonizing individual emotions and maintaining social cohesion, which has influenced the measured expression of emotion and the socially embedded nature of meaning in instrumental compositions.

The Chan (Zen) Buddhist concept of "sudden enlightenment" provides a framework for understanding the psychological mechanisms of intuition, inspiration, and the instantaneous grasp of holistic essence in instrumental learning. These aesthetic spirits and philosophical thoughts are not external theoretical labels applied to teaching, but should be internalized as aesthetic orientations and value standards within the pedagogical process. They are concretely infused into the understanding of a musical piece's artistic conception, the refinement of tonal quality, the mastery of performative vitality and flow, and the shaping of the overall artistic style. This integration ensures that technical training and aesthetic cultivation proceed in tandem.

### ***1.4 The Convergence Point Between Contemporary Educational Theory and Traditional Teaching Modes***

The restructuring of the teaching model does not entail a simplistic return to tradition but seeks an effective connection between the essence of traditional instruction and contemporary educational theory. The traditional mode of "oral transmission and mental comprehension" emphasizes the highly personalized transfer of skill and tacit understanding between teacher and student. Its value lies in grasping the ineffable subtleties and respecting artistic individuality, which inherently resonates with the emphasis on the situated nature of knowledge, individual construction in contemporary constructivist theory, and the concept of cognitive apprenticeship. Simultaneously, the traditional

educational perspective of "the unity of knowledge and action" and "the unity of art and the Way" aligns with the philosophy of holistic education.

The point of convergence lies in using the systematic and scientific nature of contemporary educational theory to refine, interpret, and structure the effective experiences found in traditional instruction. For instance, this involves transforming personalized mental comprehension into operable teaching strategies, translating the pursuit of ambiguous artistic conception into guided stages of aesthetic experience, and expanding simple technical imitation into a comprehensive learning process that includes cultural inquiry, critical thinking, and creative expression. This integration aims to construct a modern pedagogical paradigm for traditional Chinese instruments that is deeply rooted in tradition yet oriented toward the future, one characterized by cultural consciousness<sup>[2]</sup>.

## **2. The Evolutionary Trajectory of Traditional Chinese Instrument Pedagogy and the Imperative for Restructuring**

### ***2.1 A Historical Overview and Characteristic Analysis of the Traditional Master-Apprentice Transmission Model***

The traditional master-apprentice transmission model constituted the historical mainstay for the continuity and development of traditional Chinese instruments. This model typically operated within specific geographical regions, familial lineages, or artistic schools, functioning in closed or semi-closed social networks. Its transmission activities centered on the master's personal skill and artistic attainment, with the teaching process exhibiting a highly individualized and contextualized character. The transfer of knowledge and skill did not follow standardized teaching materials or fixed syllabi but was achieved through prolonged shared daily life and artistic practice, involving observation, imitation, repeated refinement, and immediate feedback.

The defining characteristic of this model lay in the holistic and tacit nature of its pedagogical process. The master not only transmitted specific fingering techniques, repertoire, and playing methods but also integrated their understanding of music, aesthetic sensibilities, and even insights into life into the teaching interactions. The transmission of artistic essence often relied on a wordless rapport and tacit understanding between master and apprentice. The concept of "oral transmission and mental comprehension" precisely emphasizes the passing down of stylistic nuances, expressive "flavor," and subtle interpretative approaches that are non-codifiable and difficult to precisely notate in written scores. While this model made significant historical contributions to profoundly shaping a performer's unique artistic identity and preserving the authenticity of artistic schools, the contingent and non-standardized nature of its knowledge transfer also constituted its historical limitations.

### ***2.2 The Establishment and Institutional Development of the Modern Academic Teaching Model***

Since modern times, with the introduction of contemporary music education systems, the teaching of traditional Chinese instruments has gradually entered the track of academic development. This transformation signifies a shift in the pedagogical setting from private, folk spaces to public educational institutions, and a change in the primary teaching agents from individual artists to professional teaching faculty. The academic model has established a systematic curriculum structure, graded training materials, standardized assessment mechanisms, and a teaching format that combines group instruction with individual lessons. Its goal is to achieve the scalability, standardization, and efficiency of talent cultivation.

Institutional development has brought about the systematic organization of pedagogical knowledge and the preliminary standardization of teaching methods. A vast number of traditional pieces have been notated, compiled, and published, forming a relatively stable teaching repertoire. Foundational skill training has been broken down into progressive practice systems. This process has significantly elevated the general technical proficiency and fundamental musical literacy of performers, laying a solid foundation for the professionalization and modernization of traditional Chinese instrument performance. However, the inherent demand for standardization within institutionalization has also, to a certain extent, begun to distance the pedagogical approach from the highly flexible, student-centered essence of personalized instruction that characterized traditional mentorship.

### ***2.3 An Examination of Cultural Deficiencies in the Teaching Model Under the Guidance of Technical Rationality***

During the deepening development of the modern academic education system, technical rationality has gradually become the dominant logic in teaching practice. The teaching evaluation system increasingly focuses on quantifiable technical parameters such as intonation, rhythm, tempo, and dynamics, as well as the difficulty and completion level of performed pieces. This orientation has led to a high concentration of teaching resources on the refinement and enhancement of explicit, outwardly visible performance skills, with teaching objectives being somewhat simplified into the pursuit of technical precision and complexity<sup>[3]</sup>.

When technical training is placed at the core, the cultural bearing and transmission functions of the teaching model face the risk of marginalization. The historical context, cultural connotations, and aesthetic significance upon which musical pieces depend, along with the sense of ritual and spirituality inherent in the performance practice itself, struggle to be fully developed and deeply integrated within a technical teaching process emphasizing efficiency and standardization. The potential consequence is a weakening of the connection between performance practice and its cultural matrix. While learners may acquire proficient skills, their understanding of the cultural identity and deeper aesthetic value of the music they perform may remain distant, potentially leading to a tendency of "cultural hollowing-out."

### ***2.4 The Intrinsic Impetus for Restructuring the Teaching Model: The Return to Cultural Subjectivity***

The current call for cultural heritage within the field of traditional Chinese instrument pedagogy is, in essence, a manifestation of the awakening consciousness of its cultural subjectivity. Cultural subjectivity refers to a cultural formation's self-awareness, confidence in, and adherence to its own core values, internal logic, and distinct identity during its development and evolution. Against the backdrop of globalization and intertwined cultural diversity, traditional Chinese instrument education faces an intrinsic demand to establish its own cultural coordinates and avoid losing its distinctive identity traits in the process of modernization.

This return to subjectivity constitutes the fundamental driving force behind restructuring the teaching model. It demands that teaching practice not stop at cultivating technicians who can skillfully operate traditional Chinese instruments, but should strive to nurture artists endowed with profound cultural literacy and a clear cultural stance. Consequently, the restructuring of the teaching model is viewed as a practice of cultural consciousness. Its goal is to rebuild the organic connection between instrument pedagogy and the cultural tradition to which it belongs, reintegrating the transmission of skill, aesthetic education, and the formation of cultural identity into a unified whole. This intrinsic impetus transcends mere methodological adjustments, pointing toward a fundamental reflection on and reevaluation of the educational philosophy underlying traditional Chinese instrument pedagogy.

## **3. Restructuring Pathways for a Culture-Heritage-Oriented Pedagogy of Traditional Chinese Instruments**

### ***3.1 Constructing a Teaching Objective System Centered on Cultural Understanding***

The profound transformation in restructuring the teaching model begins with the re-evaluation of pedagogical objectives and the systematic reconstruction of their framework. A prevalent tendency in current traditional Chinese instrument teaching is to prioritize technical proficiency and repertoire accumulation as the core evaluation criteria. This instrumental rationality in teaching objectives urgently needs to shift towards a value rationality centered on cultural understanding. The restructured objective system should establish the dominant position of cultural understanding, deconstructing it concretely into the systematic knowledge and profound comprehension of the instrument's material cultural history, the characteristics of its musical forms, the principles of its compositional structures, and the underlying philosophical and aesthetic thoughts. This shift propels teaching objectives beyond the limitations of singular skill training, forming a multi-dimensional framework that integrates cognitive development, aesthetic cultivation, and the shaping of cultural identity<sup>[4]</sup>.

Constructing such an objective system requires establishing a clear hierarchical structure for cultural understanding. The foundational level focuses on the systematic mastery of factual knowledge, such as the history of the instrument, the origins of musical genres, and the cultural background of canonical repertoire, thereby establishing a necessary base of cultural cognition. The intermediate level

is dedicated to cultivating the ability to analyze and interpret the aesthetic paradigms, stylistic features, and expressive techniques embedded within the music itself, fostering a deeper understanding of the musical culture. The highest level aims to guide learners, through the medium of the instrument as a cultural vehicle, towards forming a deep identification with their national cultural tradition, and to cultivate their cultural consciousness in creatively transforming and expressing this tradition within a contemporary context. This clearly stratified objective system provides a clear value orientation and implementation framework for the subsequent selection of teaching content and innovation of teaching methods.

### ***3.2 Renewing Teaching Content by Integrating Cultural Context and Aesthetic Experience***

A systematic renewal of teaching content is the crucial material vehicle and foundational basis for achieving the objective of cultural understanding. Existing textbook systems often present decontextualized technical exercises and compiled scores, lacking the necessary presentation of the music's cultural lineage. The restructuring pathway demands that specific musical works be repositioned within their original historical, cultural contexts, and social functional settings, thereby shifting from mere score transmission to a holistic presentation of culture. This entails organically integrating historical background, literary allusions, folk customs, and aesthetic pursuits closely related to the musical pieces while imparting performance techniques and musical expression, thereby re-establishing an organic connection between technical elements and cultural connotations.

The organizational framework of the content should break through the traditional linear model of technical progression and shift towards a modular integration centered on cultural thematic units or aesthetic categories. For example, representative works from different historical periods and artistic schools could be gathered around cultural themes such as "natural imagery," "the fusion of poetry and music," and "regional character." These would be accompanied by relevant historical-literary materials, audiovisual archives, and academic research findings to construct a multi-dimensional teaching resource system. This mode of content organization based on cultural themes not only maintains the necessary sequence of technical training but also enables learners to simultaneously develop a deep understanding of the music's cultural significance while acquiring performance skills. It transforms the technical training process into an immersive aesthetic experience and a process of cultural cognition, achieving an organic unity between skill acquisition and cultural immersion<sup>[5]</sup>.

### ***3.3 Designing the Teaching Process to Emphasize Active Participation and Cultural Practice***

The substantive innovation of the teaching process is reflected in a profound shift from the passive reception of knowledge and skills towards the active participation of learners and engagement in cultural practice. This requires a fundamental change from the predominantly unidirectional transmission model of teacher demonstration and student imitation towards creating pedagogical situations that stimulate students' active inquiry, critical reflection, and creative expression. Instructional design should systematically integrate in-depth discussions on musical-cultural phenomena, comparative analysis of the cultural interpretations in different performance renditions, and components that encourage students to provide reasonable interpretations and creative expressions of traditional repertoire based on their personal cultural understanding, thereby cultivating students' cultural critical thinking skills and sense of innovation.

The organic incorporation of cultural practice serves as a vital bridge connecting classroom learning with the essence of cultural transmission. The teaching process should consciously create or integrate authentic contexts of cultural activities, guiding learners to personally experience the practical function and modes of emotional expression of instrumental performance within specific cultural settings such as traditional rituals and festival customs. This practice-based instructional design emphasizes the firsthand experience and subjective construction by the learners. Through contextualized, participatory learning activities, learners not only master the technical know-how of "how to play" but also gain a deeper understanding of the cultural logic behind "why to play this way," as well as the profound meaning of the performance practice within specific cultural contexts. This achieves a hierarchical progression from technical mastery to artistic expression, and ultimately to cultural understanding.

### ***3.4 A Diversified Evaluation Mechanism Integrating Cultural Literacy and Artistic Expressiveness***

Restructuring the teaching evaluation mechanism is a crucial safeguard to ensure the effective implementation of cultural heritage objectives throughout the entire pedagogical system. The currently

prevalent unidimensional evaluation method, which centers on the level of technical completion, struggles to comprehensively reflect learners' holistic growth in areas such as cultural cognition, aesthetic judgment, and artistic expressiveness. The new evaluation mechanism needs to establish diversified criteria encompassing technical competency, cultural literacy, and artistic expressiveness. It must incorporate levels of cultural cognition, aesthetic discernment, and the depth of interpretation regarding the musical-cultural significance into the evaluation scope, thereby forming a comprehensive assessment system that measures students' overall artistic development<sup>[6]</sup>.

The innovation in evaluation methods should achieve a shift from summative assessment of technical skills towards a combination of process-oriented and performance-based assessments. Process-oriented evaluation focuses on the quality of learners' participation, the depth of their thinking, and the developmental trajectory of their cultural understanding during activities such as cultural inquiry, aesthetic discussions, and creative practice. Performance-based evaluation, conducted through comprehensive formats like thematic concerts, cultural research reports, or creative arrangements, assesses learners' practical ability to synthesize technical skills, cultural knowledge, and artistic insight into complete artistic expression. This diversified evaluation mechanism can not only more fully reflect students' comprehensive artistic literacy but also exert a positive washback effect on the teaching process. It guides both teachers and students to jointly focus on the cultural depth of artistic expression and the capacity for creative transformation, thereby providing stable institutional support and sustained momentum for improvement for the entire restructuring of the teaching model.

## Conclusion

This study, through systematic argumentation, establishes cultural heritage as the ontological value of teaching traditional Chinese instruments. It clarifies the gains and losses in the evolution from the traditional master-apprentice system to the modern academic teaching model, and provides a critical examination of the cultural deficiencies arising under the guidance of technical rationality. On this basis, the research constructs a holistic restructuring pathway centered on the goal of cultural understanding, encompassing teaching content, teaching processes, and teaching evaluation. This pathway emphasizes the internalization of aesthetic spirit and philosophical thought within pedagogy and promotes the creative integration of contemporary educational theory with the essence of traditional instruction. Its aim is to achieve the synergistic development of technical refinement, aesthetic cultivation, and cultural identity. Future research and practice need to further focus on the development of specific curriculum systems, the enhancement of teachers' cultural literacy, and the evaluation of the applied efficacy of the restructured model across different pedagogical settings. This will enable the continuous advancement of traditional Chinese instrument education towards achieving a dynamic equilibrium between adhering to cultural roots and responding to contemporary demands.

## Fund Projects

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