

Integrating Chinese and Foreign Musical Rhythms, Cultivating Humanistic Envoys—Cross-Cultural Practice and Innovation in the Basic Music Theory Course

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Against the backdrop of inter-civilization exchanges and globalization, Beijing International Studies University has addressed the issues of “Sino-Western dual opposition”, “single classroom-based practice”, and “superficial interdisciplinary integration” in the traditional Basic Music Theory Course. With the goal of “integrating Chinese and foreign musical rhythms and cultivating humanistic envoys”, the university has conducted six years of exploration to build a cross-cultural practice system. By reconstructing a three-dimensional curriculum system of “Chinese foundation + Western theory + global diversity”, establishing a three-level practical platform of “classroom—campus—society”, deepening the interdisciplinary integration of “music + foreign languages/communication”, and adopting the “experience—collaboration—creation” three-stage teaching method, the course has transformed from mere music knowledge imparting to cross-cultural competence cultivation. After the reform, students have significantly improved their multicultural awareness and practical abilities, won multiple awards in competitions, and their multilingual musical works have been widely disseminated by the media. Additionally, the course has provided talent support for the “Belt and Road Initiative” and the construction of Beijing’s “Four Centers”. However, challenges remain, such as insufficient development of digital resources and an imperfect teaching evaluation system. In the future, efforts will be made to promote the integration of “music + digital intelligence” and optimize the evaluation system.

Keywords: Basic Music Theory Course, cross-cultural practice, three-stage teaching method, interdisciplinary integration, humanistic envoys, the Belt and Road Initiative

Introduction

In the era of inter-civilization exchanges, music, as the “common language of mankind”, plays an increasingly prominent role in cross-cultural communication. As a university featuring foreign languages and tourism, Beijing International Studies University undertakes the special mission of cultivating “humanistic exchange envoys”. However, the traditional Basic Music Theory Course has long been constrained by the knowledge structure of “Sino-Western dual opposition”, the limitation of “single classroom-based practice” scenarios, and the educational bottleneck of “superficial interdisciplinary integration”, making it difficult to meet the demand for interdisciplinary talents in the context of globalization. Therefore, with the goal of “integrating Chinese and foreign musical rhythms and cultivating humanistic envoys”, the course has undergone six years of

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exploration to build a cross-cultural practice system for the Basic Music Theory Course with distinct characteristics of foreign language universities, achieving a paradigm shift from “music knowledge imparting” to “cross-cultural competence cultivation”.

Drivers of Reform: Three Structural Contradictions in Traditional Courses

Conflict Between “Dual Imbalance” in Cultural Cognition and Diversified Needs

The traditional course mainly focuses on Western music theory and Chinese traditional music, while lacking systematic attention to the music cultures of regions such as Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Central and Eastern Europe. For example, contents like the “Muqam” mode in Arabic music and the polyrhythmic system of African drum music are only mentioned sporadically as marginal knowledge, leading students to form a “either Chinese or Western” cultural cognition framework. Students believe that the course “lacks in-depth interpretation of global music cultures”, making it hard for them to adapt to the actual needs of cultural exchanges with countries along the “Belt and Road”.

Disconnection Between “Scenario Segmentation” in Practical Teaching and Application Competence

Most of the existing practical sessions are limited to single vocal or instrumental practice in the classroom, which is seriously disconnected from real scenarios such as international exchanges and foreign affairs activities. Although students can skillfully perform classic pieces like “The Butterfly Lovers”, they generally face three difficulties in cross-cultural scenarios: difficulty in explaining Chinese music terms in target languages (e.g., accurate translation of “Gongche notation” and “Jianzi notation”), difficulty in improvising with foreign musicians, and difficulty in spreading Chinese music culture on international stages. A six-year teaching survey shows that only a small number of students have participated in cross-cultural music practices, and most students express that they “do not know how to transform music skills into cross-cultural communication capabilities”.

Absence of “Superficial Grafting” in Interdisciplinary Integration and Comprehensive Literacy

The integration of music courses with foreign languages and communication remains at the level of “terminology translation”, failing to form a collaborative education mechanism. For instance, although Japanese majors learn Japanese folk songs like “Sakura”, they lack in-depth understanding of the “mono no aware” (pathos of things) aesthetics behind the songs and have not received systematic training on spreading Japanese music culture through multilingual media. This phenomenon of “music and language being separated” makes it difficult for students to undertake the mission of “international expression of music content” and unable to demonstrate the comprehensive literacy of “music perception + cultural interpretation + language communication” required for “humanistic envoys”.

Reform Path: Innovative Practice of Cross-Cultural Education

Cross-Cultural Reconstruction of the Curriculum System: A Three-Dimensional Integrated Knowledge Map

Knowledge dimension: Systematic integration of multiculturalism. The course content has shifted from “Sino-Western opposition” to “multicultural coexistence”, constructing a pyramid-shaped knowledge structure:

- Base of the pyramid: Chinese music foundation (30%):

Deepen the cultural interpretation of traditional music such as guqin (seven-stringed zither), pipa (four-stringed lute), and Kunqu opera. For example, in guqin teaching, students are guided to understand the

interpersonal wisdom contained in the “culture of bosom friends” by interpreting the allusion of “High Mountains and Flowing Water”.

- Middle of the pyramid: Western music theory (30%):

Retain core contents such as harmony and musical form, add a modern music analysis module, and compare the differences between Chinese and Western music notation. For example, when explaining the staff notation, the symbolic logic of Gongche notation is introduced simultaneously to help students understand the abstract expression paths of music in different civilizations.

- Top of the pyramid: Global diverse music (40%):

Offer special courses such as “Arab-Islamic Music”, “African Black Music”, and “Latin American Music” based on geographical regions. Each special course includes three modules: “theoretical analysis + instrumental appreciation + cultural origin tracing”. For example, in the African music course, students not only learn to appreciate the performance of djembe drums but also explore their social functions in tribal rituals through oral history materials, realizing the leap from “method learning” to “cultural decoding”.

Practical dimension: Scenario-based education on a three-level platform.

- Classroom micro-practice: Cross-cultural music activities:

Design projects such as “multilingual music adaptation and translation” and “Chinese-foreign instrumental ensemble”. Typical cases include English majors translating Peking Opera materials and Arabic majors improvising accompaniment for Arabic poems with the oud (a stringed instrument).

- Campus medium-practice: Participation in multilingual musical performances and cover of classic Chinese songs:

Students participate in multilingual musical performances, such as the Japanese Drama Festival and the “Silk Road Elegance” Middle East Art Festival; join the university art troupe and create the musical “Watching Begonia Blossom”. They also cover classic Chinese songs in multiple languages: for example, students covered “The Crossroads Where Phoenix Flowers Bloom” in 20 languages, “The Wind in the Blossom” in 10 languages, “When Will We Meet Again” in 10 languages (with the total number of views on Weibo topics exceeding 41 million), the Song Ci poem “Qingyu’an—Yuanxi” (Lantern Festival Night) in five languages, and “Unforgettable Tonight” in 10 languages (with the total number of topic views reaching 76.55 million and the total video views on various online platforms approaching nine million).

- Social macro-practice: Music diplomacy and international exchanges:

Cooperate with various theaters to carry out Chinese-foreign music practice and appreciation activities; establish off-campus internship and practice bases. Students participate in international cultural exchange activities, such as the China-Ecuador Youth Cultural and Art Exchange Activity, undertaking tasks like music translation and cross-cultural communication with foreign symphony orchestras, and participating in performances at embassies. In the past three years, an average of dozens of performances involving Chinese and foreign students have been organized annually. The university also participates in Beijing’s “Jingcai Culture” Art Tour and cooperates with the Beijing Song and Dance Theater, realizing the transformation from “passive learning” to “active communication”.

Disciplinary dimension: In-depth interdisciplinary integration of “Music + X”.

- Music + Foreign Languages: Cultural activation of professional terminology:

Collect multilingual music terminology and combine concepts such as “mode” and “polyphony” with cultural contexts. For example, when explaining the Italian term “ritardando” (gradually slowing down), the

lyricism of opera is compared with the urgency of “Cuiban” (accelerated beats) in Chinese opera to help students understand the differences in the interpretation of musical temporality across different cultures.

- Music + Communication: Cultivation of cross-media narrative ability:

Carry out music short video creation activities. The work “Multilingual Performance of the Beautiful Song Ci Poem for Lantern Festival—Qingyu’an—Yuanxi” ranked third on Beijing’s trending list on the day of its release, and the topic was reposted by 105 professional media platforms including People’s Daily, Guangming Daily, and China Daily. It won the first prize in the variety show category at the 2024 University Film and Television Works Exchange and Screening Activity, demonstrating the innovative communication of music culture in the internet era.

Innovation in Teaching Methods: The Three-Stage Teaching Method

The three-stage teaching method promotes the ability progression from experience to creation:

1. Immersive music culture experience: Guide students to deeply perceive the charm of Chinese and foreign music through diverse forms such as appreciation, singing, and performance, laying a solid foundation for artistic perception.
2. In-depth cross-language collaborative practice: Organize students of different language majors to jointly complete “cross-cultural music performance” projects, such as adapting and performing Chinese songs in multiple languages, to strengthen language application and teamwork abilities.
3. Driving innovative output: Encourage students to design creative schemes around “cross-cultural music communication” and participate in practice by creating multilingual audio and short videos. Examples include the themed short video “Me and Beijing” and the cultural audio “Youth Dialogues With the World”. This transforms achievements into feedback for learning efficiency, realizing the dual improvement of knowledge application and innovation abilities.

Reform Effects: Multi-Dimensional Breakthroughs From Ability Improvement to Social Impact

Educational Effects: “Three-Dimensional Leap” in Students’ Abilities

1. Knowledge breadth: After the reform, students’ awareness of non-Chinese and non-Western music cultures has significantly improved, and their multicultural cognitive ability has been remarkably enhanced.
2. Practice depth: In the past three years, the participation rate of students in cross-cultural music practices has increased steadily. They have completed multilingual music adaptation and translation, and four works have won municipal-level or higher awards.
3. Value height: Most students agree that “music is a bridge for inter-civilization exchanges” and express their “willingness to actively spread Chinese music culture”, effectively achieving the ideological and political education goal of the course.

Practical Achievements: Radiating Effects From Campus to Society

1. Awards in art competitions: From 2021 to 2023, students won three gold awards, four silver awards, 13 bronze awards, five best performance awards, and two online exhibition awards in events such as the Beijing University Student Music Festival and Drama Festival.
2. Contributions to social services: Students have participated in translation work for foreign symphony orchestras and Peking Opera materials, as well as hosting Chinese-foreign art exchange activities.

3. Media communication impact: Using multilingual music short videos as a carrier, the course has innovated the international communication path of excellent traditional Chinese culture, and related works have achieved good results. Works such as “BISU Students Perform When Will We Meet Again in 10 Languages” have won awards in events like the “University Film and Television Works Exchange and Screening Activity” and the “100 Reasons to Love Beijing Short Video Competition”. Among them, “Multilingual Performance of Qingyu’an—Yuanxi” won the first prize in the variety show category at the 2024 University Film and Television Works Exchange and Screening Activity, becoming a typical example of the international communication of traditional culture.

Social Value: A “Music Solution” Serving National Strategies

The curriculum reform is deeply integrated into the construction of Beijing’s “Four Centers”: As the youth force for the construction of the cultural center, students showcase Chinese music culture at embassies in China; as the talent support for the construction of the international exchange center, the course cultivates “music + foreign language” interdisciplinary talents for countries along the “Belt and Road”. Graduates have entered institutions such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, providing a unique educational solution for international cultural exchanges and the “Belt and Road Initiative”.

Reflection and Outlook

Existing Challenges

1. Insufficient development of digital resources: The cross-cultural music teaching resource database has not yet realized full multilingual online sharing, and the application scenarios of VR technology in teaching (such as virtual international music festivals) need to be expanded.

2. Imperfect teaching evaluation system: The current evaluation mainly focuses on students’ work achievements and competition performance, with insufficient quantitative evaluation of the process-based ability development (such as cross-cultural communication ability and dynamic teamwork performance) in the “experience—collaboration—creation” three-stage teaching method. There is a lack of scientific and comprehensive assessment indicators and feedback mechanisms, making it difficult to accurately measure teaching effects and students’ growth.

Future Directions

1. Deepen the integration of “music + digital intelligence”: Develop an AI multilingual music translation system to realize real-time translation between Chinese guqin music and Arabic Muqam; build a metaverse music classroom to enable students to conduct cross-temporal ensemble with virtual international musicians.

2. Improve the diversified evaluation system: Introduce the standards of the International Society for Music Education (ISME) to enhance the international recognition of educational achievements.

Conclusion

The cross-cultural reform of the Basic Music Theory Course at Beijing International Studies University is a beneficial attempt by foreign language universities to address the bottlenecks of traditional art courses. Over six years of exploration, with the goal of “integrating Chinese and foreign musical rhythms and cultivating humanistic envoys”, the course has broken the cognitive opposition between Chinese and Western music, connected classroom and social practices, and realized the in-depth integration of “music + foreign languages +

communication” through the three-dimensional curriculum system, three-level practical platform, and three-stage teaching method.

The reform has not only significantly improved students’ multicultural awareness and cross-cultural practical abilities but also produced achievements such as multilingual music works, which have attracted media attention and won competition awards. It has provided interdisciplinary talents for the “Belt and Road Initiative” and the construction of Beijing’s “Four Centers”, and fulfilled the ideological and political education goal of the course.

Although there are challenges such as insufficient digital resources and an imperfect evaluation system, the plan to promote the integration of “music + digital intelligence” and introduce international evaluation standards has clarified the path for curriculum optimization. In the future, the course will continue to iterate, taking music as a bridge to cultivate more humanistic envoys who promote inter-civilization exchanges and provide educational support for enhancing China’s cultural soft power.

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