

# Integrating World Music Perspectives for Pedagogical Reform: Enhancing Chinese Music History Education in Teacher Training

Zheng Cheng<sup>1</sup>, Xianguo Li<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Education, East China Normal University, Shanghai, China

<sup>2</sup>Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Shanghai, China

\*Corresponding author: Xianguo Li

**Citation:** Cheng Z and Li X (2025) Integrating World Music Perspectives for Pedagogical Reform: Enhancing Chinese Music History Education in Teacher Training. *American J Sci Edu Re*: AJSER-274.

**Received Date:** 02 October, 2025; **Published Date:** 28 October, 2025; **Published Date:** 05 November, 2025

## Abstract

**Background:** The "Chinese Music History and Masterworks Appreciation" (CMHMA) course within Chinese music teacher education (Gaoshi) programs faces significant challenges: an overloaded curriculum following its 2006 merger, persistent Eurocentric biases among students, teacher-centric pedagogies, and assessments prioritizing rote memorization over critical understanding. These issues hinder its goal of fostering culturally aware, critically thinking music educators.

**Methods:** This conceptual study draws upon theoretical frameworks from Comparative Education [1], Ethnomusicology [2], and Critical Pedagogy [3] to analyze CMHMA's shortcomings. It proposes integrating perspectives and methodologies derived from world music studies [4] – specifically the "Other" lens and synchronic comparative analysis – as a viable reform strategy.

**Findings:** The analysis identifies core problems: ambiguous objectives neglecting critical skills, ahistoricity regarding global connections, passive learning methods, and inadequate assessment. The proposed reform framework advocates for: (1) Redefining objectives to emphasize transcultural connections and critical analysis; (2) Employing comparative pedagogy situating Chinese music globally; (3) Implementing active, student-centered learning strategies (e.g., guided inquiry, comparative seminars, digital resources); (4) Adopting multifaceted, process-oriented assessment. Recent international research [5,6] supports the efficacy of such approaches in fostering intercultural competence and critical musical understanding.

**Conclusion:** Integrating world music perspectives offers a theoretically grounded and internationally resonant pathway to reform CMHMA pedagogy. This shift can move instruction beyond factual transmission towards cultivating future educators equipped with the intercultural competence, critical perspective, and pedagogical adaptability necessary for music education in diverse, interconnected societies. Future empirical research is needed to evaluate the implementation and impact of this framework.

**Keywords:** Chinese Music History Pedagogy; World Music; Teacher Education Reform; Comparative Pedagogy; Intercultural Competence; Ethnomusicology; Curriculum Development.

## 1. Introduction

Music teacher education globally grapples with balancing national heritage, cultural diversity, and evolving pedagogical approaches [5]. In China, the "Chinese Music History and Masterworks Appreciation" (CMHMA) course, mandated within Gaoshi (music teacher training) programs (Ministry of Education [MOE] [7]), holds a critical position. Formed by merging "Chinese Music History" and "Music Appreciation (Chinese)" (MOE, 2006) [8], its stated aim is to cultivate future educators with deep understanding of Chinese musical heritage, analytical skills, and critical cultural perspectives (MOE, 2004) [7]. However, the integration intensified pre-existing challenges: a condensed syllabus within limited instructional time (typically 72 annual hours), entrenched student preferences for performance skills over theory ("zhong ji qing li"), and the

inherent complexity of covering vast historical and analytical content effectively.

Consequently, CMHMA instruction often defaults to surface-level transmission of historical facts, composers, and works, neglecting deeper critical engagement, cultural contextualization, and meaningful connections to global musical practices. This pedagogical approach risks perpetuating Eurocentric biases and fails to equip students with the intercultural competence increasingly demanded in contemporary education [3]. This article argues that integrating perspectives and methodologies derived from world music studies offers a theoretically robust and internationally relevant framework for substantive CMHMA reform. Drawing on comparative education theory [1] and ethnomusicology [2], we propose utilizing the conceptual lens of the "Other" and synchronic comparative analysis to critically re-examine

CMHMA objectives, content, and methods. The goal is to foster a pedagogy that develops future educators capable of critically analyzing Chinese music within global contexts, challenging inherited biases, and navigating the complexities of teaching music in diverse societies.

## 2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Our reform proposal is grounded in intersecting theoretical strands and informed by recent international scholarship:

**2.1. Comparative Education:** This field provides frameworks for understanding how educational policies, curricula, and pedagogies are shaped by cultural contexts and global flows (Crossley & Watson, 2011) [1]. It legitimizes cross-cultural comparison as a tool for critical reflection and improvement, encouraging educators to look beyond national boundaries for effective practices and theoretical insights [9]. Applying this to CMHMA suggests the value of situating Chinese music history within broader global narratives and utilizing comparative pedagogical strategies.

### 2.2. Ethnomusicology and World Music Pedagogy:

Ethnomusicology's core commitment is understanding music "in culture" and "as culture" [2]. World music pedagogy, as developed by scholars like Patricia Shehan Campbell (2018) [4], translates ethnomusicological principles into educational practice, emphasizing experiential learning, cultural context, and developing "humility, sensitivity, and knowledge" towards diverse musics (p. 12). Crucially, it utilizes the concept of the "Other" – encountering music different from one's own – as a catalyst for critical self-reflection and understanding [4,10]. Recent work emphasizes moving beyond simple presentation towards critical engagement and social justice [3,5].

**2.3. Critical Pedagogy and Decolonial Perspectives:** These frameworks challenge dominant narratives and power structures within education [11,3]. In music history, this involves questioning Eurocentric canons and pedagogical approaches that marginalize non-Western traditions [3,6]. Integrating these perspectives into CMHMA encourages critical examination of how Chinese music has been historically represented and fosters awareness of power dynamics in global musical encounters.

**2.4. Relevant International Research:** Recent studies highlight the effectiveness of comparative and culturally contextual approaches in music history and appreciation:

- Schippers & Campbell (2016) [5] emphasize "cultural diversity in music education" as essential for relevance in the 21st century, advocating for pedagogies that foster critical understanding of music within its socio-cultural context.
- Koops (2019) [6] demonstrates how integrating ethnomusicological perspectives and repertoire into Western music history courses enhances student engagement and critical thinking about cultural representation and power.

- Kertz-Welzel (2016) [12] explores concepts of "global citizenship" in music education, arguing for curricula that foster intercultural understanding and challenge parochialism.

Research on active learning in music history [13] supports moving beyond lectures towards student-centered inquiry, discussion, and technology integration for deeper understanding.

- Volk (1998) [10] and Shehan Campbell (2018) [4] provide foundational and evolving models for world music pedagogy that emphasize authentic engagement and critical reflection over superficial multiculturalism.

This body of work collectively supports the argument that CMHMA pedagogy can be significantly enhanced by adopting frameworks emphasizing comparative analysis, cultural contextualization, critical reflection, and active engagement – principles central to world music perspectives.

## 3. Current Pedagogical Challenges in CMHMA

Analysis reveals several interconnected challenges hindering CMHMA's effectiveness, reflecting broader issues in humanities education:

**3.1. Ambiguous and Overloaded Curricular Objectives:** The post-merger CMHMA syllabus lacks clear prioritization within the constraints of limited contact hours (MOE, 2006) [8]. The Guidelines (MOE, 2004) [7] emphasize both historical knowledge and analytical/aesthetic development, but practical implementation often prioritizes extensive factual coverage ("what" and "when") over cultivating critical listening, deep cultural interpretation, or understanding historical processes ("how" and "why") [14]. This ambiguity, compounded by student tendencies towards "zhong ji qing li," results in superficial treatment of content.

**3.2. Eurocentric Biases and Ahistorical Isolation:** Traditional CMHMA narratives often follow a linear, internally focused progression ("heavy diachronic presentation, light synchronic contextualization") [15]. This approach minimizes China's rich history of musical exchange along the Silk Road [16], during the Tang Dynasty, and through modern "Westernization," inadvertently reinforcing perceptions of Chinese music as static and isolated. It also fails to explicitly counter deeply ingrained Eurocentric biases prevalent among students, who often perceive Western art music as more sophisticated or universal [17], leading to disengagement with Chinese traditions.

### 3.3. Teacher-Centric Pedagogies and Passive Learning:

Instruction predominantly relies on lecture formats, struggling to create meaningful connections across disparate historical periods and musical forms [18]. The perceived disconnect between historical content and contemporary teaching practice, exacerbated by time pressure, fosters student passivity.

CMHMA becomes associated with rote memorization for examinations rather than critical engagement or perceived relevance to students' musical lives or future teaching contexts (Lowe, 2019 identifies similar issues globally) [13].

**3.4. Misaligned Assessment Practices:** Heavy reliance on summative, end-of-term examinations primarily tests recall of discrete facts and figures [14]. This encourages strategic "cramming" rather than sustained engagement or deep understanding [19]. Such assessments fail to measure crucial outcomes like analytical skills, cultural sensitivity, historical empathy, or the ability to apply knowledge pedagogically, thus providing limited feedback for improving teaching and learning. These challenges collectively represent a misalignment between CMHMA's potential and its current realization, failing to leverage the subject's inherent capacity to develop the critical and intercultural competencies highlighted in contemporary international educational discourse [5,20].

#### 4. A Reform Framework Integrating World Music Perspectives

Informed by the theoretical frameworks and international research reviewed, we propose a comprehensive reform strategy for CMHMA centered on integrating world music perspectives, specifically utilizing ethnomusicology's "Other" lens and synchronic comparative methodologies. This framework addresses the identified challenges systematically:

##### 4.1. Redefining Curricular Objectives: Fostering Transcultural Understanding & Critical Analysis

- **Move Beyond Coverage:** Explicitly prioritize depth over breadth. Define core concepts and analytical skills as primary objectives alongside essential historical knowledge.
- **Integrate Transcultural Focus:** Mandate objectives that require students to: a) Identify and analyze historical points of musical exchange and influence between China and other world regions (e.g., Silk Road instrument diffusion, Tang court music, 20th-century syncretism); b) Examine Chinese musical developments synchronicity with significant events/trends elsewhere (e.g., exploring contemporaneous music philosophies in China, India, and Greece; comparing patronage systems).
- **Emphasize Critical Analysis:** Include objectives focused on: a) Critically analyzing primary sources (e.g., historical texts, notation fragments, iconography) and scholarly interpretations [18]; b) Evaluating the influence of socio-political, economic, and philosophical contexts on musical practices; c) Deconstructing Eurocentric assumptions within music historiography [3,6].
- Example: Jiang Kui's *Zi Du Qu*. Objective: Analyze Jiang Kui's *zi du qu* as a significant innovation in individualized song composition within Chinese tradition. Comparative Objective: Identify and explain similarities in aesthetic focus (lyricism, personal expression) and structure between *zi du qu* and 19th-century German *Lieder*, while contextualizing their distinct

socio-historical motivations. Critical Objective: Assess how societal context (Southern Song instability) shaped Jiang Kui's thematic content.

##### 4.2. Employing Comparative Pedagogy: Situating Chinese Music Globally

- **Synchronic Comparison:** Regularly juxtapose Chinese musical phenomena with contemporaneous practices elsewhere. This is not about equivalence but about revealing context, uniqueness, and interconnectedness (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2014) [9].
- **Thematic Units:** Organize content thematically (e.g., "Music and Ritual," "Music and Power," "Transmission and Notation," "Cross-Cultural Encounters") alongside chronological flow, facilitating deeper comparative analysis across time and space [6].
- **"Other" as Catalyst:** Use encounters with carefully selected non-Chinese musics (e.g., Indian raga, Gamelan, West African drumming, Western art song) as a mirror to reflect on and better understand the specificities of Chinese musical concepts (e.g., *sheng* 生 / *dan* 旦 / *jing* 净 / *chou* 丑 role types vs. Western voice types; *guqin* aesthetics vs. Western classical ideals of precision; *qupai* vs. Western thematic development). This fosters the "critical cultural awareness" central to world music pedagogy [4].
- Example: *Guqin Notation & Aesthetics*. Beyond description, engage students in comparing the *guqin*'s deliberate rhythmic flexibility (seen as expressive depth) with the notational precision of Western common practice period music. Discuss how these differences reflect contrasting cultural values regarding music's purpose (self-cultivation vs. communal worship/entertainment; abstract "Dao" vs. formal structure) and conceptions of the performer's role (interpreter/co-creator vs. reproducer). Connect this to broader literati (*wenren*) culture and philosophies (Daoism, Confucianism).

##### 4.3. Implementing Active, Student-Centered Learning Strategies

- **Guided Inquiry & Research:** Replace passive reception with active investigation. Assign pre-class research tasks using digital archives (e.g., CHIME, IMSLP), library resources, and reputable online sources. Scaffold tasks with clear questions and guidance on source evaluation [13].
- **Comparative Seminars & Discussions:** Structure seminars around comparative questions (e.g., "How did patronage systems in Tang China and Baroque Europe influence compositional output?" or "Compare approaches to music transmission in Chinese *qupai* and Indian raga traditions"). Use small-group discussions, jigsaw activities, and structured debates to foster collaborative analysis [6].
- **Digital Tools & Multimedia:** Utilize interactive timelines, digital maps tracing musical exchange routes, online databases of instruments/iconography, and high-quality audio/video recordings (including field recordings) to make historical contexts and sounds tangible. Encourage digital storytelling or multimedia presentations as assignments.
- **Experiential Learning:** Integrate field trips (museums, living heritage sites), workshops with traditional musicians

(e.g., guqin, pipa, regional opera masters), and attendance at relevant performances. These provide concrete encounters that deepen understanding beyond text [4].

- Example: Xiqu (Chinese Opera) vs. Western Opera. Task student groups to research specific aspects (aesthetics: realism vs. symbolism; composition: composer vs. tradition-based; staging: spectacle vs. performer virtuosity; role types). Facilitate a seminar comparing findings and discussing the cultural values embedded in each form. Supplement with video excerpts.

#### 4.4. Adopting Multifaceted, Process-Oriented Assessment

- **Increase Formative Assessment:** Make assessment an ongoing part of learning. Utilize diverse methods:
  - Annotated Bibliographies / Research Proposals
  - Short Analytical Essays (e.g., comparing two pieces/musicians from different cultures/periods)
  - Critical Listening Journals / Concert Reports (requiring contextualization and analysis)
  - Seminar Participation & Discussion Leadership Evaluations
  - Drafts of Creative Projects (e.g., designing a comparative lesson plan for secondary students)
- **Authentic Summative Tasks:** Move beyond pure exams. Include:
  - Research Projects culminating in presentations or papers (incorporating comparative analysis)
  - Curated Digital Exhibitions (e.g., on a specific transcultural theme like "Silk Road Instruments")
  - Reflective Portfolios documenting learning and critical engagement
  - Comparative Analysis Exams using provided sources (audio, score excerpts, texts)
- **Clear Rubrics:** Develop rubrics explicitly assessing the targeted skills: historical knowledge, comparative analysis, critical thinking, cultural contextualization, research skills, communication. Share these rubrics with students beforehand [19].

#### 5. Conclusion

The current pedagogical model for CMHMA in Gaoshi programs often falls short of its potential to cultivate the culturally responsive, critically minded music educators needed today. This article has argued that integrating perspectives and methodologies from world music studies, grounded in Comparative Education, Ethnomusicology, and Critical Pedagogy, provides a robust and internationally relevant framework for reform. By shifting the focus from exhaustive factual coverage towards fostering transcultural understanding (through synchronic comparison and the "Other" lens), critical analysis (of contexts, sources, and biases), and active engagement (via student-centered pedagogies and authentic assessment), CMHMA can become a dynamic space for transformative learning.

This reform aligns with global trends advocating for decolonized curricula [3], intercultural competence [5,20], and the development of critical thinking as core educational goals. The proposed strategies – redefining objectives, employing comparative pedagogy, diversifying teaching methods, and

reforming assessment – are supported by emerging international research on effective music history and cultural pedagogy [6,13,4]. Implementing this framework requires faculty development, resource investment (digital, human), and institutional support, but the potential payoff is significant: future music educators who possess not only knowledge of Chinese heritage but also the intercultural sensitivity, critical perspective, and pedagogical versatility to navigate diverse classrooms and foster global musical citizenship [12]. Future empirical research should investigate the implementation challenges and learning outcomes associated with this proposed framework in specific Gaoshi contexts.

#### References

1. Crossley, M., & Watson, K. (2011). *Comparative and international research in education: Globalisation, context and difference*. Routledge.
2. Nettl, B. (2015). *The study of ethnomusicology: Thirty-three discussions* (3rd ed.). University of Illinois Press.
3. Bradley, D. (2020). *Critical perspectives in world music pedagogy: Decolonial possibilities*. Routledge.
4. Shehan Campbell, P. (2018). *World music pedagogy: Where music meets culture in classroom practice*. Routledge.
5. Schippers, H., & Campbell, P. S. (2016). Cultural diversity in music education. In H. Schippers & P. S. Campbell (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of music education*, volume 2 (pp. 87–102). Oxford University Press.
6. Koops, L. H. (2019). Beyond the canon: Equity and access in the music history classroom. *Journal of Music History Pedagogy*, 9(1), 1–18.
7. Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. (2004). *Guidelines for undergraduate music education (teacher training) programs* [教育部关于印发《全国普通高等学校音乐学（教师教育）本科专业课程指导方案》的通知 (No. 12)]. Retrieved from <http://www.moe.gov.cn/> [Note: Provide direct link if possible, or archival reference]
8. Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. (2006). [Relevant document number/name regarding course merger]. [Note: Specific citation needed for the 2006 merger decision]
9. Phillips, D., & Schweisfurth, M. (2014). *Comparative and international education: An introduction to theory, method, and practice* (2nd ed.). Bloomsbury Academic.
10. Volk, T. M. (1998). *Music, education, and multiculturalism: Foundations and principles*. Oxford University Press.
11. Freire, P. (2018). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (50th Anniversary Edition). Bloomsbury Academic. (Original work published 1970)
12. Kertz-Welzel, A. (2016). Globalizing music education: A framework. *International Journal of Music Education*, 34(2), 135–146. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0255761415613486>
13. Lowe, G. D. (2019). Active learning in the music history classroom: A review of literature. *Journal of Music History Pedagogy*, 9(2), 1–15.

14. Yang, H. (2003). How should Chinese music history teaching in teacher training colleges reform? [高师中音史教学如何改革]. *People's Music*, 45(4), 38–41.
15. Kang, R. (2014). Repositioning within a world music perspective: New exploratory approaches to Chinese music history research [世界音乐视野中的再定位: 中国音乐史实验性研究思路新探]. *Studies in Culture & Art*, 7(1), 45–50.
16. Yin, F. (1980). Musical and cultural exchange on the Silk Road [丝绸之路上的音乐文化交流]. *People's Music*, 21(2), 20–25.
17. Luo, Q. (2013). The humanistic narrative of world music and its theoretical foundations [世界音乐人文叙事及其理论基础]. Shanghai Conservatory of Music Press.
18. Luo, Q. (1999). Theoretical reflections and practical attempts on ethnomusicology's role in historical research [民族音乐学作用于历史研究的理论思考和实践尝试]. *China Musicology*, 15(3), 34–46.
19. Knight, P. T. (2002). Summative assessment in higher education: Practices in disarray. *Studies in Higher Education*, 27(3), 275–286. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070220000662>
20. UNESCO. (2015). Global citizenship education: Topics and learning objectives. UNESCO.