

Research on the Application of Chinese-Style Songs in the Field of Chinese Second Language Teaching

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In recent years, traditional Chinese culture has been continuously revived, integrated into the times and entered people's daily lives. Chinese-style songs, as a combination of traditional cultural connotations and emerging song forms, have gradually emerged on the music stage in China and even around the world. In the field of teaching Chinese as a second language, the research on teaching Chinese songs has received increasing attention. This article combines the theory of the association between music and language to summarize the research results of Chinese-style songs and their application in the field of teaching Chinese as a second language in the past 30 years. The current research problems are discussed, and suggestions are proposed in order to provide some reference value for teaching Chinese as a second language.

Keywords: teaching Chinese as a second language, Chinese-style songs, teaching, review

Introduction

Being referred to as “the universal language”, music shares a commonality with language. Chinese songs are a common auxiliary teaching content in teaching Chinese as a second language, which can greatly enhance the motivation of second language learners.

Chinese-style songs integrate lyrics with Chinese classical poetry and traditional culture, and use Chinese traditional instruments combined with popular music arrangements to form the most distinctive part of Chinese songs. Chinese-style songs have unique application value in the field of teaching Chinese as a second language. On the one hand, Chinese-style songs conform to the mainstream artistic aesthetic taste of the Chinese-speaking, and are easy to evoke emotional resonance, with relatively high popularity and acceptance worldwide. On the other hand, Chinese-style songs are based on Chinese traditional culture, and the lyrics often contain Chinese allusions, literary imagery, and rhythmic rhetorical knowledge, which help second language learners understand Chinese language and culture.

This article will explore the theory and practical application of introducing music into language teaching, the interpretation and multidimensional development of Chinese-style songs, and the application of Chinese songs in teaching Chinese as a second language from three perspectives. It will review relevant theories and teaching achievements in the past 30 years and lay a foundation for the in-depth application of Chinese-style songs in the field of teaching Chinese as a second language.

Theoretical Exploration and Practical Application of Introducing Music Into Language Teaching

Language and music are two systems of human behavior that use sound as a medium to express ideas and emotions. Chomsky (1965) pointed out in his book *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* that language and music share common structural mechanisms and developmental foundations. Marten Zijlstra (2011) mentioned in his book *Top 100 in Western Music History* that Plato believed that certain musical modes enhance spiritual power because they sound similar to noble language. Scholars have explored the use of music in language teaching from the perspectives of psychology and linguistics.

The Psychological Theoretical Foundation of Using Music in Language Teaching

Bulgarian psychologist Georgi Lozanov proposed the “Suggestopedia Method” in 1966, which applied music to language classroom teaching. He analyzed the rationality of using music in language teaching from a psychological research perspective. His research showed that background music with 50-70 beats per minute can help learners enter the “optimal learning state” faster. In experiments, students who learned with Baroque-style music in the background were able to remember a large number of new words, and they could retain 80% of the memory even months later. This experiment supported the facilitating effect of music on language learning from a psychological research perspective. The Orff Music Education Method, proposed by German music master Carl Orff, refers to fully tapping and mobilizing learners’ initiative in a musical atmosphere. Orff found that guiding students to participate in learning with various body functions, such as singing loudly, clapping rhythmically, and playing games, can cultivate students’ sense of music. This not only makes students happy but also improves learning efficiency. Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky pointed out in his book *Psychology* that “the most developed part of the human brain is its two hemispheres, which consist of a pair formed by the right and left hemispheres. The two hemispheres have different functions and ‘control’ opposite halves of the body” (1984). The language center of human brain is located in the left hemisphere, while the right hemisphere is mainly responsible for artistic contents such as music and art. Therefore, applying music in language teaching can enable the functions of the left and right hemispheres of the brain to work together, and their combination can achieve complementary effects. At the end of the 20th century, scholars Frances H. Rauscher and Gordon Shaw at the University of California proposed the “Mozart Effect”, suggesting that music cognition involves four brain areas, including the temporal, frontal, parietal, and occipital lobes on both sides of the brain, which are interconnected. They believed that Mozart’s music can enhance spatial reasoning ability and can reflect common neural mechanisms, proving that music and language have intertwined commonalities in their developmental processes and can contribute to language learning and intellectual improvement.

The Language Application Practice of Introducing Music Into Language Teaching

In 1920, Zhao Yuanren created the “five-degree tonal value marking method” for Chinese phonetics, which applied music theory to language research and used the results of language research in music composition. He was the first person to combine Chinese language with music in modern China. The tones in Chinese phonetics and the arrangement and reorganization of various factors in syllables can give people a unique sense of rhythm and melody. The musicality of the Chinese language is demonstrated by the combination of its basic units and the colors of music, showing diverse tonal changes and providing a theoretical foundation for teaching international Chinese through music. Yang Yinliu believed that the tonality of the Chinese language is a crucial

factor in musical art. In 1963, he established a professional course in language musicology at the Central Conservatory of Music, using knowledge of phonetics to illustrate the expression of language characteristics in musical melodies. In his book *Language and Music* (1983), Yang Yinliu studied the relationship between music and language from the perspective of Chinese phonetics and sentence intonation, proposing that the sound and rhyme of the Chinese language are reflected in pronunciation, and that the Chinese tone has a significant impact on melodic development. Chinese sentence intonation affects the composition of musical phrases and can help express the content of musical lyrics. Huang Borong and Liao Xudong (2007) pointed out in their book *Modern Chinese* that Chinese phonetics has distinct syllable boundaries, a large number of musical sounds, and high and low tone changes and intonation contours, making it highly musical. Luo Haijuan (1997) proposed in her book *An Initial Exploration of Integrating Kindergarten Language and Music Teaching* that language and music can be integrated in teaching by mutually permeating and effectively blending them together to design comprehensive teaching activities. Jiang Xiaodi (2006) proposed in “Music and Language” that music and language share similarities in their service purposes, production processes, and ways of existence. Wang Pei and Zhang Lanxin (2013) presented evidence of neural activity from syntax, semantics, and tone rhythm perception in both music and language, suggesting that music and language share significant neural resources for sentence processing and tone perception.

These studies all demonstrate the close relationship between music and language, and to some extent, affirm the role of music in assisting and promoting language learning. The musicality of Chinese phonetics cannot be ignored and should be given corresponding attention in Chinese language teaching.

Connotation Interpretation and Multi-dimensional Development Research of Chinese-Style Songs

The Chinese-style songs that have become popular in China since the beginning of the 21st century are a unique form of music style that covers ethnic culture and regional culture. As a newly proposed concept in recent years, there have been relatively few studies on Chinese-style songs, and the content is mainly focused on textual analysis and appreciation, which can be divided into three main aspects: interpretation of connotation, analysis of musical dimension, and interpretation of literary dimension.

Interpretation of the Connotation of Chinese-Style Songs

In her book *A Guide to Appreciating Chinese Pop Songs*, Shi Yong (2017) provided a broad interpretation of Chinese-style pop music, pointing out that “Chinese-style” songs are a type of Chinese pop music with distinctive characteristics of Chinese ethnic music. Huang Xiaoliang (2002), a musician from Guangdong, provides a more specific explanation of “Chinese-style” in his book *History of Chinese-Style Music*, which is currently widely accepted in academic circles. He believes that “Chinese-style” refers to the use of lyrics deeply rooted in Chinese classical culture, as well as modern popular music melodies, singing techniques, and arrangement skills. It perfectly combines the nostalgic Chinese background with modern rhythms, creating a song style with implicit, melancholic, elegant, and light atmospheres. This is a unique genre that combines “three ancient” elements, including ancient poetry, culture, and melodies, with “three modern” elements, including modern arrangement, singing style, and concepts. “Chinese-style songs” are an innovative form of music based on Chinese traditional culture, which not only follows the trend of popular music but also retains the essence of culture. They are a unique artistic carrier that embodies the charm of Chinese culture.

Analysis of the Musical Dimensions of Chinese-Style Songs

Some scholars have analyzed the musical attributes and song composition of “Chinese-style” songs from the perspective of musicology. In his article “A Preliminary Exploration of the Phenomenon of ‘Chinese-Style’ in Pop Music” (2008), Wang Zhihui analyzed the style of “Chinese-style” songs from the perspectives of arrangement and accompaniment, singing and melody, and subject matter and lyrics, using the works of Jay Chou and Leehom Wang as examples. Cao Moqiang (2018) analyzed the use of traditional Chinese musical instruments in the arrangement of “Chinese-style” songs, such as the use of the erhu, guzheng, and dizi in the song “Chrysanthemum Terrace” to create a melancholic atmosphere, and the final hulusi solo expressing a desolate feeling. Yan Jiashu (2021) proposed in “The Integration of Folk Music and Pop Music: The Example of ‘Chinese-Style’ Songs” that pop music is also a form of ethnic music, and “Chinese-style” songs are a type of pop music with entertainment and commercial characteristics. The application of ethnic music elements can make pop music more prominent, and the integration of ethnic music elements into pop music can promote the development of ethnic music. This fusion makes Chinese pop music more inclusive under the influence of diverse musical trends, and the development of both ethnic and pop music is necessary to promote the development of Chinese music.

The Interpretation of the Literary Dimension of Chinese-Style Songs

In “The Creation of ‘Chinese-Style’ Popular Songs Under the Context of the New Era”, Cao Moqiang (2018) analyzed the creative characteristics of “Chinese-style” songs. Using Fang Wenshan’s lyrics as an example, he demonstrated the Chinese elements in the song’s creative theme, the use of imagery in the lyrics, the pursuit of sound and rhyme, and the creation of a sense of atmosphere throughout the entire song. In “A Preliminary Exploration of the ‘Chinese-Style’ Phenomenon in Popular Music”, Wang Zhihui (2008) pointed out that the lyrics of “Chinese-style” songs mainly use colloquial language, contain imagery with Chinese characteristics, and integrate classical expressions and classics. Some scholars have conducted multidimensional analyses of the lyrics of “Chinese-style” songs. For example, Chen Jing’s (2009) “The Formal and Emotional Characteristics of Fang Wenshan’s ‘Chinese style’ Lyrics” and Liu Fangzhi’s (2011) “Study on Fang Wenshan’s ‘Chinese-Style’ Lyrics” focus on the works of representative figures in the “Chinese-style” genre or a specific work, providing a detailed introduction to the lyricist’s creative background, characteristics, and techniques, as well as a specific analysis of representative works, exploring the characteristics and charm of the lyrics and the reasons for the popularity of the songs. In “The Transmission of Classical Poetry in the Lyrics of ‘Chinese-Style’ Songs”, Li Xiaoqing (2016) analyzed the inheritance of classical poetry elements in the lyrics of “Chinese-style” songs from the perspectives of themes, imagery, and rhetoric, demonstrating the positive role of “Chinese-style” songs in the dissemination of Chinese literature.

In summary, “Chinese-style” songs have unique genre characteristics and contemporary features, combining the characteristics of Chinese classical music and modern composition. They are also currently in a period of rapid development. The lyrics, melody, and composition of these songs contain rich traditional cultural and literary knowledge, making them an important lesson for Chinese language learners and students of Chinese culture.

Research on the Application of Chinese-Style Songs in the Field of Teaching Chinese as a Second Language

Although the concept of “Chinese-style” songs had not been specifically applied to Chinese language teaching, the higher-level concept of Chinese songs entered the research field of Chinese as a second language

teaching as early as the 1990s. In 1994, Zhao Shouhui and Luo Qingsong first proposed the use of Chinese songs in international Chinese language classrooms, specifically focusing on the connection between language and music, the way to introduce music into Chinese language teaching, the rationality and significance of its use, and summarized a research approach that combines music culture with specific lesson types, integrating classroom teaching with cultural and recreational activities outside of class. They affirmed the feasibility and value of using folk songs in Chinese language teaching which had a significant influence on future research. In addition, scholars have also discussed the feasibility of introducing Chinese songs into Chinese language teaching, the language elements that can be combined, the different lesson types that can be integrated, the teaching models that can be applied, and the localization of teaching from various perspectives.

The Feasibility of Introducing Chinese-Style Songs Into Chinese Language Teaching

Tan Fangli (2013), Chen Baolin and Guo Shaoting (2018), and Ma Siqi (2021) proposed that according to Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, using songs as teaching materials can increase students' interest and intrinsic motivation, and cultivate their sense of sound and rhythm. Chinese songs are ideal language input materials that conform to Krashen's "I + 1" principle and are conducive to developing language intuition. Learning songs can achieve cooperation between the left and right brains, enhance memory, and meet the psychological development needs of learners, in line with the multiple intelligence hypothesis.

Chinese-Style Songs Can Be Combined With Chinese Language Elements

Long Ye and Lei Yingjie (2007) analyzed the impact of Chinese songs as phonetic materials on international students' pronunciation, vocabulary, rhetoric, and cultural knowledge, and proposed corresponding teaching strategies. Wang Yanjing (2011) defined "Chinese-style" songs and gave examples of their lyrics in international Chinese vocabulary, rhetoric, writing, and cultural teaching. In terms of the use of rhetoric and grammar, corresponding grammar points and rhetorical features can be selected and retrieved to match the corresponding songs. Qiu Shanshan (2015) discussed the significance of pop songs in international Chinese vocabulary teaching, aiming to address the existing problems in vocabulary teaching. From the perspectives of lyrics and melody, she elaborated the principles of song selection and applied them to Chinese language teaching design.

Chinese-Style Songs Can Be Integrated Into Different Classes

Zhao Fangyu (1998) suggested introducing Chinese folk songs into international Chinese listening teaching, starting from using song lyrics as dictation materials. Folk songs are rich in material sources and language structures, and are culturally significant. However, the use of dialects and colloquial expressions in folk songs can pose difficulties for international students. Long Ye and Lei Yingjie (2007) analyzed the impact of folk songs on international students' pronunciation, cultural knowledge, and other aspects, and advocated for a variety of micro-skill training. Li Junqing (2011) explored the use of Chinese songs as a primary teaching form in short-term Chinese language summer camps, constructing a unique and effective teaching model. Chen Shuaiyi (2019) proposed the application of "ancient Chinese-style" songs in international Chinese cultural courses, using the cultural elements in the songs to provide specific explanations. For example, Li Yuchun's "Mulan" can tell the story of Mulan joining the army, allowing "Chinese-style" music to effectively promote traditional Chinese culture.

The Applicable Teaching Model of Chinese Songs

Chen Baolin and Guo Shaoting (2018) proposed four modes of teaching Chinese songs: introduction mode, insertion mode, extension mode, and independent mode. They pointed out that traditional Chinese songs contain

a wealth of phonetic, lexical, grammatical, pragmatic, and cultural knowledge, and can be used as listening materials, comprehensive course topics, and other purposes. Chinese songs are a preferred form for second language learners, who can learn language and appreciate culture while enjoying music. Li Yan (2017) suggested that song learning has both explicit and implicit functions, which not only help students master pronunciation and language rhythm, but also subtly penetrate Chinese culture and reduce learner anxiety and learning difficulty.

The Nationalization Teaching of Chinese Songs

In the article by Li Mimi and Xia Yu (2008), the positive significance of song-based teaching activities in Chinese language classrooms abroad was described. These activities include games such as sorting song lyrics, matching English and Chinese words, and writing song reviews. In studies focused on national differences, South Korea and Thailand have a relatively high proportion of representation. Ma Huixin (2013) and others applied the teaching design to Korean teaching practice, while Li Hua (2017) applied the teaching design to Thai teaching practice. Tao Ye (2016), from the perspective of cultural transmission, selected the eight themes of “filial piety, fraternal duty, loyalty, honesty, etiquette, righteousness, integrity, and shame” to classify and list Chinese songs, and combined them with Indonesian students’ actual situations for teaching.

From the overall trend of research, the application of Chinese songs in the field of Chinese as a second language teaching is becoming more and more widespread. The initial research focused mostly on phonetic elements and listening skills, and later gradually expanded to vocabulary, grammar, pragmatics, culture, and other aspects. In recent years, research on the teaching practice of Chinese songs has become more focused in academia. It should be noted that the term “Chinese-style songs” is a new concept, and has rarely been mentioned in previous research. However, most of the Chinese songs applied to teaching in existing research conform to the definition characteristics of “three old and three new”, so the discussion in this section is essentially about the application of Chinese-style songs in the field of Chinese as a second language teaching.

Discussion

In the past 30 years, research on Chinese-style songs in the field of Chinese as a second language teaching has shown that Chinese-style songs are rich in cultural connotations and lively in form, which are suitable for arousing the learning enthusiasm of second language learners and promoting their Chinese language skills and cultural literacy. However, there is still room for improvement in research. The following briefly explains from three perspectives: teaching theory, curriculum design and teaching resource development, and teaching methods.

In terms of teaching theory, in view of the current research situation where there are more studies on teaching practice and fewer theoretical discussions, the intrinsic value and linguistic significance of Chinese-style songs should be fully explored. Although the lyrics of Chinese-style songs contain rich cultural knowledge of China, not all lyrics are suitable for teaching. Some lyrics may have the phenomenon of word and phrase inversion for the sake of rhyme and colloquialism, which can easily mislead second language learners; some songs are sung in dialects and have operatic tunes, which increase the comprehension difficulty of second language learners. Therefore, researchers should comprehensively consider factors such as Chinese proficiency, cultural background, acceptance of Chinese culture, and interest preferences in various styles of songs to classify and study Chinese-style songs.

In terms of curriculum design and teaching resource development, the current research on Chinese-style song teaching is limited, largely due to the lack of relevant courses for second language learners. Therefore,

universities and overseas Chinese language promotion institutions should appropriately increase the number of courses on Chinese-style song appreciation and improve supporting teaching materials. In addition, Chinese-style songs can also be applied to more related language and cultural courses for second language learners, such as literature courses.

In terms of teaching methods, the syntax, artistic conception, and rhythmic rhetoric of Chinese-style songs are difficult points in teaching. Therefore, it is necessary to actively explore teaching methods suitable for teaching Chinese-style songs, such as reducing students' comprehension difficulty through classroom games and multimedia aids. Various teaching methods, such as drama teaching method, can also be integrated into teaching. The creation background and emotions of the songs can be made into small scripts, and the lyrics can be integrated into the scripts, so that students can sing and perform at the same time, maximizing their sense of participation and enthusiasm.

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