



# The Impact of "School Songs" on Modern Music Education in China

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**Abstract:** "School Songs" (*XueTangYueGe*) marks the inception of modern music education in China. This signifies a gradual transition from traditional methods of oral instruction and personal transmission to a more systematic approach. The emergence of "School Songs" holds milestone significance in the history of music education in China, making an epoch-making contribution to establishing the framework for contemporary school music education. Through an exploration of teaching materials, pedagogical approaches, and other aspects related to school songs, this paper posits that the influence of school songs on contemporary music education can be summarized in the following points: First, the transformation of creative modes; Second, the provision of insights into teaching material compilation; Third, the evolution of instructional methodologies; Fourth, the promotion of advancements in professional music education.

**Keywords:** School songs; Creation; Music education.

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School songs are a kind of singing culture that arose with the establishment of new schools, and its origins can be traced back to 1898, when Kang Youwei wrote to the Guangxu Emperor "Memorial on Requesting the Establishment of Schools", which clearly proposed that "please go far to Germany and near to Japan to determine the school system, ask for Ming edits, and spread the provinces, counties and townships to develop schools." Set up a new type of school and set up "music lessons". After that, Liang Qichao and other reformist scholars actively advocated learning western science and culture, abolishing the feudal education system, setting up new schools, and spreading music and songs with new content to the masses. School music songs generally refer to the music lessons offered by schools in the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China, and also refers to the songs composed for school singing. In 1909, the Qing Dynasty Department stipulated that the primary and secondary schools should set up music and song classes in the "Petition for the Modification of the Statutes of Elementary Primary Schools" and "Memorial of the Ministry of Education on Changing the Curriculum of Middle Schools and Dividing it into Liberal Arts and Practical Courses". Music and song classes gradually appeared in the schools, and the influence of school music songs on modern music education in our country is more important. Through the collection, collation and reading of relevant reliable documents and historical materials, this paper discusses the influence of school songs on modern music education from the following perspectives, based on previous studies.

## 1. Transformation of creative methods

School songs large-scale learning, imitating Western composition methods to adapt and create songs. In the early stage of school songs, Japanese scholars who studied abroad, such as Shen Xingong, Zeng Zhimin and Li Shutong, composed the tunes of early school songs from Japanese melodies, and most of these Japanese songs were imported and adapted from Europe and America during the Meiji Restoration, with their roots in Europe. After this, there are also direct lessons from European and American folk songs, children's melodies, western song filled in the words adapted into a part of the song. School songs is a musical form with distinctive Chinese characteristics. Its creative methods and contents reflect the realistic problems and cultural characteristics of the Chinese society at that time, and it has high artistic value and practical significance.

### 1.1 Lyrics of school songs

School songs were produced in the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China, under the background of domestic troubles and foreign aggression, and were endowed with the mission of The Times. Different from previous lyrics, its lyrics mainly reflected the practical problems of Chinese society at that time, and its main contents included patriotic education, military and civilian education, which was used to awaken the patriotic feelings of Chinese people. Encouraging the people to keep fit and join the army to serve the country's ambitions also involves some aspects of youth education, new cultural propaganda, liberation of the mind, democracy and equality, natural lyric expression, and philosophy, such as: Shen Xingong's "Gymnastics - Military Exercises" is closely related to the social reality at that time. It is a song that calls on young people to learn to do military exercises and educate them to fight for the motherland in the future. This song is Shen Xingong's first work in creating school songs. It is almost a household name, and it is enduring. Qiu jin lyrics "to encourage women's rights" is the earliest school lyric songs, to advocate the women's liberation and in the lyrics as well as preaching "love freedom" and the thought of "equality between men and women", will also be the liberation of women thought associated with the fate of the democratic revolution, encourage women to "restore Jiang Shanlao hand", become a "national heroine period without negative", fully expressed the qiu jin lofty revolutionary ideals and beliefs.

## 1.2 Tunes of school songs

The melody of school songs is simple and bright, the melody is beautiful, easy to be sung, the lyrics are concise and straightforward, easy to be understood and accepted by the audience, and most of them use the melody of Japanese school songs, including Japanese songs, European and American songs, which are mainly imported into China by students studying in Japan. Most of the songs are composed by adding new words to the melodies of these songs. For example, one of the Japanese songs is "Chinese Boy" composed by Xin Han, which is based on the tune of the Japanese school song "Old Bucket in the Dormitory" (assisted by Koyama Sakuyuki). Ye Zhongleng's "Geographical History of Eighteen Provinces" is based on the tune of the Japanese military song "Japanese Navy" (Koyama Sakusuke). Shen Xingong wrote "Revolutionary Army" and composed lyrics to the tune of the Japanese military song "Brave Sailors" (Ohaoyiki). Most of these songs are march-style songs and military songs, the tone is strong and powerful, the music language is easy to understand, full of appeals, and promotes the spirit of patriotism and the consciousness of national self-improvement. Second, the choice of European and American song tunes are written by Li Shutong "Farewell", based on the American popular songwriter Ordway "Dream of home and mother" tune lyrics; The Dance Club, written by Ye Zhongleng, is based on the tune of the British national anthem; These songs have beautiful tunes and vivid prose, which are deeply loved by teenagers. Finally, the lyrics are filled with Chinese national tones. The number of such songs is small, and the representative songs are: Shen Xingong's "Foot-bound Suffering" and Hua Hangchen's "Female Revolutionary Army" (both adapted from folk key "Dressing Table"), Shen Xingong's "Flower Picking Song" (adapted from Anhui folk song "Fengyang Flower Drum"), and "National Folk Song" sung at the 1904 Yaya concert in Japan, are adapted from folk tune "Old Six Plate" and so on.

Chinese school songs have been developed by imitating the singing of Japanese schools. In the development process, they are combined with the language culture of our country, the progress requirements of society and the people's aesthetic interest, while absorbing the factors of European and American songs. The way of its creation is mainly to choose songs and fill in words. The songwriter must select the most suitable tunes for the new lyrics from many Japanese and Western songs, which requires a high ability of musical aesthetic judgment and musical accomplishment to create good works that meet the needs of society at that time. It has promoted the development of Chinese modern music creation to a certain extent<sup>[5]</sup>. At that time, school songs were published in newspapers and periodicals at home and abroad, and a large number of musicians edited and published these works, which provided teaching content for music education teaching materials and promoted the development of music education in our country.

## 2. Experience in compiling textbooks

The emergence of school songs provides a choice for music education textbooks in modern times of our country. It has a very important guiding significance to the school music education up to now by paying attention to the educational and ideological nature of textbooks and the "educating" of music education activities. Since the first textbook was published, the number of music teaching materials in our country has increased. For example, since 1904, Shen Xingong has edited and published the "School Singing Collection", published the "Ministry of Education approved the School singing Collection" in 1912 (that is, the general "recompilation of school singing

collection"), and published the "Republic of China singing Collection" 14 sets in 1913. Most of the songs written by him are composed according to the psychological characteristics of children. The combination of lyrics and songs is moderate, catchy and vivid, and they are deeply loved by teenagers. The "School Singing Approved by the Ministry of Education" he wrote basically achieved the teaching principle of "step by step" from the selection of materials to the terminology. This set of six books was compiled according to the 6-year school system stipulated by the state at that time to adapt to the growth of school age and the improvement of grades. <sup>[6]</sup>The difficulty of singing songs gradually increased with the grade. It has greatly improved the scientificity and systematicness of school singing teaching materials. In 1905, Li Shutong edited and published a collection of Chinese Studies Songs. The songs he wrote and created focused on the smooth and beautiful tunes, beautiful prose, the perfect combination of artistic images and lyrics, with a strong nature of art songs, which was a prominent representative of the importance of school songs having artistic aesthetic value at that time. In 1903, Zeng Zhimin wrote "General Principles of Music" and "Teaching Method of Singing". In 1904, she edited and published her "Music Textbook" and "Music Encyclopedia" in 1905. "Music Textbook" is one of the earliest music theory textbooks in China, which is relatively complete and systematically introducing the western music system. The textbook edited by Zeng Zhimin provides reference for the basic theory of music in China's music education. At the same time, there were published in 1906 Singhan edited "Singing textbook", "Middle School singing collection". In 1922, Xiao Youmei was the first person to publish a collection of personal works in China, and published the First collection of Jin Le (21 pieces) in 1923, and the First collection of New Songs (25 pieces) in 1923.

In order to adapt to the learning of primary and secondary school students, the "Middle School Singing Collection" and "High School Singing Collection" at that time used the notation method of staff to compose, the song melody is relatively simple, the rhythm and tempo are also clear and easy to understand, which provided a simpler notation form for primary and secondary school students to read music at that time. From creation to compilation, school music songs became song collections, and eventually became textbooks. They have been applied in the music teaching of Chinese modern primary and secondary schools, and the content of these music textbooks has appeared in the modern music classroom in a simple, vivid and intuitive way, which has promoted the development of music education to a certain extent.

### 3. The change of teaching mode

Music education in our country has a long history. According to relevant historical records, the earliest music education in China has been produced in ancient times."Shang Shu · Shun Dian" said: "Kui! Order Rudian music, teach the nobles. Kui was the musicians of Yao and Shun period. His task was to educate the sons of princes and nobles. <sup>[7]</sup>It shows that there were already professional music teachers in the period of Yao and Shun, and music education arose accordingly. As early as the Five Emperors period, there appeared to implement music education "Chengjun learning", "Spring and Autumn Fandlu" cloud: "Chengjun, are the five emperors learning." Zheng Xuan also said in the commentary of "Zhou Rites" and "Li Ji" : "Even, tune also." The musician plays the key. From this, it can be inferred that "Chengjun" was a school based on music education, which initially started in the "Chengjun" period, until the "Six Arts" in the Zhou Dynasty established music education secondary to "rites". The rulers used music to strengthen their rule, and also set up educational institutions specializing in the cultivation of music for the children of the state and the children of the nobility, namely "Dassi Music". The content of music education included various "music virtues", "music language" and "music and dance". Mainly from these three aspects of music education, became the most influential early music education institutions, but the common people did not have the right to receive music education. China's ancient music education model, the scope of education and the group is narrow, to a certain extent is not conducive to the promotion of social groups to learn music upsurge, music education usually only as a means to the society failed to play a real teaching role. With the development of school music and song activities, school music and song changed the previous education mode, truly incorporated music into classroom education, and highlighted the advantages of music in cultivating national quality and socialized teaching. In 1907, the state promulgated the "Regulations of Girls' School", women can enter the classroom is the progress of music education in our country. Before the school music, China did not have a complete set of modern school music education system and system. In order to change this situation, musicians such as Shen Xingong, Zeng Zhimin and Li Shutong brought back some music knowledge and materials from Japan, and their teaching mode was introduced into the music education system of European schools. Set up music classes, teachers, textbooks and equipment, etc., the knowledge and materials are actually applied to the music class, such as the form of collective singing has become a main teaching form of school music class, accompanied by wind (steel) piano, teaching music theory knowledge, simple score, staff, etc.; The value, rhythm and strength of music can be shown in written form, which makes the teaching of music more efficient. It makes the music

education in our country gradually move from the way of "oral instruction" to specialization and systematization. The first batch of music teachers in modern China will continue to improve and perfect in this teaching method, and form a teaching method that conforms to the characteristics of Chinese students and is suitable for Chinese students' understanding ability, which promotes the development of Chinese music education. In this period, the musicians have systematically standardized the singing methods and vocalization of the songs, which laid a good foundation for the development of modern professional music education in our country. The development of school music makes music lessons become an important part of the school education system, which lays a solid foundation for the later development of music education. The emergence of music teaching materials in the period of school music songs provided us with the use of music teaching methods, changed the traditional Chinese education model, and made music education move towards a professional road.

#### **4. Development of professional music education**

The development of school songs has changed the situation that there was no music equipment or special music teacher in the music classroom in the past, making Chinese music education gradually embark on the road of professional music education. In the early music education teaching of school music, our country's music education teachers are very short. Min Tseng makes a great contribution to the training of music teachers. She is committed to developing and popularizing social music activities; In his "Music Education Theory", he emphasized on the popularization of music education in our country, proposed to "train local teachers", "hire foreign teachers", "write music textbooks", "set up music halls in public places" and "select music students to stay in Japan", etc., which laid a good foundation for the development of modern music education. With the extensive development of school music activities, China began to establish a number of new music associations, such as the famous Shanghai Chinese Aesthetic Education Association and Peking University Music Research Association, which played an important role in training music talents and building music teachers, laying a good foundation for the comprehensive development and popularization of "school music songs" in the future. It has also made a good example for our modern music education and accumulated a wealth of music teaching experience. In 1919, Wu Mengfei, Feng Zikai and others founded the Music Department of Shanghai Junior Normal School, which has cultivated nearly 1,000 talents in art education in China. In 1922, Peking University set up a Music Study Institute with CAI Yuanpei as president and Xiao Youmei as academic director, which mainly trained music teachers in primary and secondary schools, taught basic music theory and skills courses and corresponding pedagogy courses, and made full preparation for the training of teachers in China. Since then, Xiao Youmei founded the National Conservatory of Music, marking that modern music education in China has embarked on the direction of specialization and systematization. The school has learned from the western curriculum system and systematic music education mode, and has set up relevant courses such as composition, vocal music, orchestral music and piano, so as to teach students according to their talents and cultivate the first batch of outstanding professionals for modern music education in China. It has been used for reference for the professional setting and teaching mode of music education in our country.

#### **5. Conclusion**

From the point of view of the development of school songs, its initial stage mainly followed the western countries' music theory knowledge, performance methods, school system, teaching mode, music course materials and creative themes, which has positive significance for the innovation of modern music education in China. It has changed the teaching mode of music education in our country, making us gradually move from oral teaching to systematization. Through the spread of songs and the music education in schools, the Chinese public, especially the students, began to systematically import western music knowledge, such as teaching simple music, introducing staff music, and establishing the form of collective singing; Through a series of development of music education activities, the first group of new music educators in the history of modern music in China was brought up, which greatly promoted the development of modern music culture in China. The development of "school songs" has greatly promoted the development of modern professional education in our country, so that the importance of music education has been paid attention to, and is an important symbol of the initial stage of the development of modern music in our country.

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