



# Li Shutong's Contribution to Modern Music Education in China

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**Abstract:** *Since modern times, Chinese music culture and education have embarked on a historical process of transition from tradition to modernity. At the beginning of the 20th century, with the introduction of Western music and the establishment of new-style schools, pioneers of music art represented by Li Shutong made many pioneering contributions to the development of music culture in modern China through music education and music creation practice, and had a profound impact on it. Previous studies have conducted preliminary research on Li Shutong's music education activities and contributions, but further exploration is needed in certain areas. This article takes Li Shutong's music practice as the starting point, sorts out the music education activities related to Li Shutong since modern times, and explores Li Shutong's contributions to the enlightenment music education of modern China.*

**Keywords:** Modern China; Music Education; Li Shutong.

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## 1. Introduction

At the end of the Qing Dynasty and the beginning of the Republic of China, our country was in a crisis of internal and external difficulties. Many knowledgeable people went abroad to study and learn advanced Western culture and technological knowledge in order to return to serve their country and make their own contributions to the country. Many intellectuals bring what they have learned to China for reform, and their efforts have to some extent enhanced national cohesion and improved social atmosphere. Li Shutong was a pioneer in practicing music education in China among this group of people. He imparted his knowledge of music learning and creation concepts to his students. As a renowned music educator in modern times, he has a high level of expertise in the field of music art. He played an enlightening role in modern music education, which was in a conservative and neglected state, by publishing music publications for the first time in China and introducing choral singing for the first time. At the same time, he has made outstanding contributions to music education in China by integrating theory with practice, caring for and nurturing students, and emphasizing the cultivation of their personalities. He pioneered the formal implementation of music education in Chinese schools, forming a group of music educators in the process of music education in China since the 20th century, and making outstanding contributions to the enlightenment and development of modern music education in China. Under the influence of Li Shutong's music practice and music ideology, a group of successors in China's modern and contemporary music education industry have been created, who are rich in patriotic enthusiasm, educational sentiment, conscientious, and dare to be pioneers. They practice Li Shutong's music education philosophy and contribute their own strength to the music education cause in our country.

## 2. The development trajectory of Li Shutong's music education theory and practice

Li Shutong was a famous musician, art educator, calligrapher, and drama activist in modern China. He was one of the pioneers of Chinese drama and a renowned enlightenment music educator in the history of modern Chinese music, as well as one of the founders of school music songs. Especially the school songs he created and adapted played an important role in music education in the early 20th century. Li Shutong was born into a wealthy family in Tianjin, with ancestral roots in Pinghu, Zhejiang. After returning from studying in Japan, he worked as a teacher and editor, and was later hired as a music and painting teacher at Zhejiang Second Normal School (later renamed Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School). Starting from 1915, he concurrently served as a music and painting teacher at Nanjing Normal University and composed the first school song in the history of Nanjing University.

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After being ordained as a monk, he was revered as Master Hongyi. Li Shutong gradually developed a comprehensive music education philosophy through these activities. Li Shu's achievements in music have deeply influenced the development of music education in Chinese schools in the 20th century and provided useful references for mass music creation and dissemination. In his short career as a music teacher, he deeply influenced a group of students who aspired to engage in music work with his diligent work and rigorous academic research. He cultivated the first batch of professional music talents for China and had a profound impact on China's enlightenment music education.

### **3. The role of Li Shutong's school music songs in early music education in China**

Li Shutong was the initiator of the school music movement and one of the important representatives. His music composition represented a high level of that era and made important contributions to the later creation and development of new music in China. Li Shutong's school music songs use Western musical language to promote the spirit and ideological connotations of traditional Chinese culture. While absorbing the basic rules of foreign music creation, they inherit and develop China's traditional culture. This concept and technique laid a solid foundation for the formation and development of modern music education in China. For example, Li Shutong's three part choir "Spring Outing" boldly uses the melodic structure techniques of the European major and minor tone system for orchestration, and attempts to use choral methods for music composition. At the same time, the lyrics of this song strictly adhere to the requirements of Chinese poetry and fully demonstrate the simple and elegant language and artistic style of classical Chinese poetry. In terms of content, it is also full of unique and serene, simple, distant, and clear artistic conception beauty. While absorbing the characteristics of Western music, its music also incorporates elements of traditional Chinese music. It is the first choral work written in modern Chinese music using Western composition techniques, and has milestone significance. Li Shutong's other work "Farewell" is a school music song adapted by him during his stay in Japan. This musical work has a profound meaning, and the combination of music and literature is perfect. The lyrics are written in short and long sentence structures, with concise language, sincere emotions, profound artistic conception, and gentle music fluctuations. It depicts the evening scenery of Changting, ancient road, sunset, flute sound, etc., and sets off a certain atmosphere of silence and neglect. After the emergence of "Farewell", it became a school song taught in modern schools, widely sung and loved by the public. It still occupies an important position in people's music life and provides an ideal model for the music creation of modern Chinese composers. Li Shutong's school music songs were an innovative move in the history of Chinese music, marking the beginning of the emergence of China's democratic new culture in the field of music. At the same time, the emergence of school songs has established a new art form, and the knowledge and skills of western music culture have gradually been recognized by countrymen. School music played a pivotal role in promoting and popularizing line notation and simplified notation, laying the foundation for early music education in China.

### **4. The exemplary influence of Li Shutong's music teaching practice on Chinese music education**

After returning from studying in Japan, Li Shutong worked as a music and art teacher in Tianjin, Shanghai, Nanjing, and Zhejiang First Normal University. Especially during his time engaged in music education activities at Zhejiang First Normal University, Li Shutong gradually formed a music education ideology with unique theoretical significance and practical value through his personal practice of music education. For example, "first recognize and then create art", "student-centered", "patriotic dedication", "music and song creation", etc. These music education ideas have had a profound impact on his disciples, successors, and younger music educators. In his book "The Endless Li Shutong," Mr. Chen Xing summarized Li Shutong's four contributions to art education at Zhejiang Provincial First Normal School: "Firstly, he made groundbreaking achievements in art education; secondly, he created a number of campus songs that can be regarded as exemplary of Chinese school music; thirdly, he closely integrated personality education with art education, reflecting the style of a true art educator; fourthly, he cultivated a group of excellent artists and art education talents for China. Li Shutong's music education philosophy, which aims to cultivate students' noble character, not only has a profound influence on students, but also has theoretical significance and practical value in the history of Chinese music education. It was under the drive of this ideology that his disciples were accomplished, such as the famous artist and music educator Feng Zikai, music educator Liu Zhiping, Wu Mengfei, and so on. Especially the earliest private art normal school in modern China, Shanghai Vocational Normal School, founded by Wu Mengfei, Liu Zhiping, and Feng Zikai with self raised funds, can be seen as a music education behavior influenced by Li Shutong's music education ideas, which is a continuation and development of Li Shutong's music education theory and practice.

## 5. Conclusion

In summary, as a pioneer in early music education in China, Li Shutong imparted his music knowledge and skills to students, which had a groundbreaking impact on modern Chinese music education. Li Shutong pioneered the formal implementation of music education in Chinese schools, cultivating a group of music educators in China's music education and making outstanding contributions to the enlightenment and development of modern music education in China. Li Shutong's music education philosophy and practice have had a sustained and profound impact on the development of music education in China in the 20th century.

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