

Early Exploration and Practice of Professional Music Education during China's Modern Period 1912-1919

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Abstract: Cai Yuanpei, the first Minister of Education, attached great importance to "aesthetic education", which was a key part of the new education aims developed under his guidance. It was Cai's focus on "aesthetic education" and "education" that Beijing University Music Research Society and National Beijing Girls' Higher Normal School and the like began to explore and practice the modern Chinese professional music education.

Keywords: Cai Yuanpei; Professional music education; Beijing University Music Research Society

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1. Introduction

In 1912, the Republic of China was established. Cai Yuanpei, the first Minister of Education, attached great importance to "aesthetic education", which was a key part of the new education aims developed under his guidance. While he was studying in Germany, he was most impressed by aesthetic education, and he once said, "I am deeply impressed by the aesthetic education in Germany, and I am willing to advocate such education to the best of my power." Since we have the more scientific, reasonable and efficient research methods, research means and research patterns, it is possible to know and understand the history more clearly and comprehensively and thus more research achievements will be achieved.

2. Aesthetic Education and Professional Music Education

Despite long history of the thought and practice of aesthetic education, there has not been a universally recognized definition of "aesthetic education", and in China, Cai was the first to define it. In the "Aesthetic Education" entry in the Encyclopedia of Education, he stated, "Aesthetic education is to apply aesthetic theories to education with an aim to cultivate feelings." This definition summarized the relations among aesthetic education, aesthetics, and education. However, it did not specify the unique nature of aesthetic education, which led to such a misunderstanding that "aesthetic education" was the education of aesthetics.^[1]

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Then what is "aesthetic education"? It refers to the education that cultivates students' ability to understand, love, and create beauty. It is also called in Chinese "Meigan (sense of beauty) education" or "Shenmei (aesthetic) education", and it has become an indispensable part of comprehensive development education.

It was precisely because of Cai's advocacy for "aesthetic education" and "education" that in July 1912, the Ministry of Education changed regular schools' Music and Singing class from an "elective subject" to a "required course", and later in December, it issued the Regulations for Normal Schools. In December 1912, the Ministry of Education issued the Regulations for Normal Schools. Then in February 1913, the Ministry issued the Regulations for Higher Normal Schools and the Curriculum Standards for Higher Normal Schools, which stipulated that Music and Singing class should be a required course in the foundation year (one year) and an elective subject in undergraduate years (three years). Following the promulgation of such regulations, the Zhejiang Official Secondary Normal School established the Specialized Division of Drawing and Handicraft in the fall of 1912; the Sichuan Higher Normal School established the Specialized Division of Music, Singing, and Sports in 1915; the Beijing Higher Normal School successively offered elementary and advanced music master classes in 1916.^[2]

3. Cai Yuanpei (1868-1940)



Cai Yuanpei was the first Minister of Education of the Republic of China, and an educator, revolutionary, and politician in modern and contemporary China. In 1912, he guided the formulation of the first decree of modern Chinese higher education, the "University Decree".

He always regarded education as the fundamental approach to save the country, and he promoted ideological

and academic freedom. Besides, as the principal of Beijing University, he also developed a deep understanding of how government bureaucracy impeded and damaged education. Therefore, Cai was an active advocate and supporter of educational independence, and he offered theoretic guidance for this cause. In March 1922, he published the article "A Discussion of Educational Independence" in the *New Education*, explaining basic viewpoints and approaches of educational independence, and the article has become an important part of the educational independent thought.

To achieve true independence of education, Cai developed specific measures including ones that sought independence of educational funding, independence of educational administration, and independence of education from religion. Among these measures, the plan to achieve independence of educational administration divided the country into a number of university districts, each of which established a university to organize and handle affairs concerning higher specialized education, primary and secondary education, social education, and other cultural and academic issues in the district. As for the university affairs, they would be chaired by an education committee consisted of university professors, and this committee would also elect the principal for the university. Then the principals of the universities in all districts would establish a higher education conference to handle affairs in these university districts. The Ministry of Education would be only responsible for affairs deemed by the higher education conference as related to the central government, as well as education statistics and reports. It would not interfere with the affairs of university districts, and the Minister must be approved by the conference. This idea served as the underlying framework for the Nanjing National Government's early implementation of the "university district system".^[3]

Cai believed that universities should become institutions where people study profound knowledge. This was the guiding ideology of his guidelines of running the school, and also the starting point of his university education thought. As early as May 16, 1912, when he attended the opening ceremony of Beijing University as the Minister of Education, he proposed in his speech that "university is a place where profound knowledge is studied." After assuming the post of the principal of Beijing University, he repeatedly expressed this idea. On January 9, 1917, in his inaugural speech as the principal, he explained clearly to the students, "All of you gentlemen who come here to learn must have objectives in mind. In finding out whether your objectives are righteous or not, you must understand

the nature of university. A person nowadays who goes to vocational schools would get a job after graduation as a matter of course, but going to university is different. Those who go to universities as the students are supposed to study the profound knowledge. University is a place where profound knowledge is studied."

In February 1912, Cai published his famous paper on education titled "Opinions on the New Education", in which he systematically expounded the idea of combining "five concepts", namely "national military education," "pragmatic education," "civic moral education," "world-view education," and "aesthetic education". Among these concepts, "aesthetic education" was considered the most important approach of conducting worldview education, a bridge that connected the phenomenal world and the substantial world for people. The importance of aesthetic education originated from its characteristics, and there was nothing else but two kinds of awareness that stood in people's way from the phenomenal world to the substantial world: one was the awareness of the difference between others and oneself, and the other was the awareness of seeking happiness.

Pragmatic education was considered by Cai as a means to make the country rich, for he believed that the competition among countries in the world boiled down to not only military power, but also financial resources. Therefore, to survive in this competitive world, a country must strengthen its science and technology education to increase productivity and develop its national economy to become rich and powerful.

He also compared "liberty, equality, fraternity",^[4] the moral concept of the modern Western bourgeoisie, to the "justice, tolerance, benevolence" promoted by the ancient Chinese Confucian school. He advocated drawing on foreign cultures and at the same time, that "we must choose and learn from those that can be 'digested'," and that "they must be 'eaten' and 'digested' by 'me', instead of assimilating to one another." He criticized some weak-willed people who would immediately "discard their 'me-ness' and assimilate to others" once they studied abroad.

Cai Yuanpei made indelible contributions to modern and contemporary Chinese education and revolution. First, only since Cai Yuanpei has China formed a relatively complete education system and that of bourgeois education thoughts. Second, his promotion of "freedom of thought and acceptance of diversity" made Beijing University the birthplace of the New Culture Movement, creating conditions for the New Democratic Revolution. Third, he protected a group of talented scholars with ad-

vanced ideas for the Chinese nation. He not only laid a solid foundation for the formation of bourgeois university education theories in the modern and contemporary China, but also contributed many penetrating insights including attaching importance to scientific research work of universities, advocating "freedom of thought and acceptance of diversity", emphasizing the development of students' personalities, and advocating "communication between arts and sciences",^[5] as well as "allowing learned experts who understand education to conduct democratic management of universities". These insights have exerted major impact on later generations.

4. Beijing University Music Research Society (1919-1922)

The Beijing University Music Group is the earliest established music association among China's higher education institutions. In early 1916, Beijing University established the Beijing University Music Group, which soon expanded into two groups, Chinese music and Western music. It was then renamed "Beijing University Music Theory Research Society" on June 6, 1918, and on December 20, its name changed to "Music Seminar". Then on January 27, 1919, it was again renamed "Beijing University Music Research Society" and Cai Yuanpei served as the president alongside his post of the principal of the university.

Beijing University Music Research Society was a music association for amateurs. It aimed to "study music, cultivate temperament, and develop aesthetic education", and its main activities were to spread Chinese and foreign music knowledge and skills. The society successively invited well-known Chinese and foreign musicians in Beijing at the time, such as Xiao Youmei, Chen Zhongzi, Wang Lu, Zhao Zijing, Zha Shijian, Wu Zhuosheng, Niulun (British), and Madam Hashimen (Netherlands) as mentors to give specialist guidance to society members.^[6] In April 1922, it also invited Liu Tianhua as the Chinese music mentor. According to statistics, by the fall of 1920, the society had more than 200 members, and there were groups for Sizhu (silk and bamboo music), Kunqu opera, Guqin (ancient Chinese zither), piano, bowed stringed instruments, singing, and others, and attached to this society was also a 50-member Sizhu Improvement Society. Members of the Music Research Society were mainly Beijing University students at the time, and in addition to a small number of regular teachers who were paid by the university, there were some other honorary mentors who were not the university's regular teachers and did not get paid.

In addition to providing music learning guidance for its

members, the society also successively held several public concerts in Beijing. The contents of these music performances basically followed the principle of "combining the strengths of China and the West",^[7] setting a precedent for the co-appearance of Chinese folk music and Western music in a performance. During the society's three-year active period, it edited and published fifteen issues of the music journal *Music Magazine*. Prior to this, it was probably that only Li Shutong had edited and published one issue respectively for the *Little Music Magazine* in Japan and the *White Poplar* in Shanghai. Therefore, it is safe to say that this magazine is the earliest music periodical that has been officially published in China, and it had an important social impact in terms of introducing music theories, advocating music education, and promoting music activities.

In 1922, after it was renamed "Institute of Music", the society's influence of it further expanded. It not only cultivated a certain number of singing and performing talents and music teachers, but also brightened the social music life of the time and played a positive role in creating a new social atmosphere and promoting social music education.

5. Other Important Universities and Organizations

In addition to the "Beijing University Music Group (Music Seminar)", other music education institutions/groups during this period include:^[8]

The National Beijing Girls' Higher Normal School was renamed Beijing Girls' Normal School after the founding of the Republic of China in 1912.

Chengdu Higher Normal School, Specialized Division of Music, Singing, and Sports:

The Specialized Division of Music, Singing, and Sports

of Chengdu Higher Normal School established in Chengdu in 1915.

6. Conclusion

We are living in the era that modern Chinese professional music education is being explored and practiced. Guided by Cai's idea of "aesthetic education" and practice of "education", Beijing University Music Research Society, National Beijing Girls' Higher Normal School and Chengdu Higher Normal School established subjects related to music, making Chinese professional music education enter the early exploration and practice period from the enlightenment period. Cai was the vital leader of the development of Chinese professional music education in the era.

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