



BOOK REVIEW

Culture, Creativity, and Music Education in China: Developments and Challenges by Wai-Chung Ho, 2023, Pbk, 234pp. £38.99, Routledge, ISBN 9781032397702
doi:[10.1017/S0265051724000263](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051724000263)

Culture, Creativity and Music Education in China: Developments and Challenges is a new publication of significant and timely relevance given the current landscape of technology and education. The gradual integration of AI tools, such as ChatGPT, into various aspects of daily life, work and education, underscores a transformative technological shift. Simultaneously, this evolution underscores the increasing significance of creativity in contemporary societal advancement and educational discourse. Within this dynamic context, the relationship between music and human creativity emerges as one of the central themes in the profession. Music, as a form of art, is intricately linked to creative expression. Despite its significance, utilising music to develop creativity in music education encounters certain challenges, such as constraints of traditional pedagogical methods, and limited resources for innovative teaching approaches. China stands out as one of the most influential countries in terms of economic and technological development, with creativity deeply embedded in its culture and educational development. This publication effectively bridges the existing gap in research on culture, creativity and music education in China, offering a comprehensive exploration of the development of creativity education in China and its challenges.

The structure of this book is thoughtfully planned by the author, starting from philosophical foundations and developmental history, transitioning to empirical studies and concluding with comprehensive discussions. In the first three chapters, the author provides readers with a big picture with a comprehensive history and development of culture, politics, philosophy, economy and history about creativity, education and music education. In the second part of this book, the author reports empirical research, utilising evidence from three schools in three cities to elaborate on the challenges and perspectives of Chinese students and teachers regarding creativity in music education. In the last two chapters, the author provides an in-depth discussion and conclusion based on the background, evidence and materials presented in the previous chapters.

The opening chapter establishes a theoretical framework of creativity, drawing from disciplines such as culture, sociology and psychology. It discusses the concept of creativity in the broader realms of general education and specifically focuses on music education, by examining diverse global contexts. As the chapter progresses, readers are guided through a concise summary of the book's primary themes and structures, assisting readers in understanding the overarching purpose and content of the book.

Chapter two places significant emphasis on the historical perspective of creativity within Chinese culture and education, spanning from Ancient China to modern times. The author explores how the bureaucratic structure, the imperial system and the dominance of traditional Confucian philosophy may have posed challenges to the development of creativity in ancient China. Following this historical exploration, the author analyses the development of cultural and creative industries (CCI) in modern China. The CCI in China was influenced by Western culture and adapted to align with China's governing ideologies; it is intricately linked to the economic and commercial guidelines set by policy. These policies also impact the role of creativity in early

childhood education, school education and higher education, shaping it to meet the needs of the workforce and the broader societal context.

Ho explores the evolution of music education in modern China across various historical periods, influenced by the interplay of Chinese traditional philosophy and governmental ideologies as well as Western cultural influences in Chapter Three. Central to this evolution is a focus on *Confucian harmony*, multiculturalism and creativity within music education. Through descriptive and content analysis of official textbooks in school music curricula, Ho investigates how creativity manifests within structured instructional settings. The findings highlight *Confucian harmony* as a central aspect of school music education and showcase examples of creative activities and content aimed at preserving this *harmony*. *Harmony*, as defined within Confucianism, transcends conformity and conflict avoidance, embracing diversity and synthesising disparate elements for a unified and balanced whole. Without political bias, Ho provides her hypothesis that creativity in music education utilises a “social-political approach, focusing on a collective ideology that includes nationalism, communism, and multiculturalism based on creative activities” (p.83). Furthermore, the cautious approach evident in curriculum, music textbooks and school music education all emphasise the significance of *balance* and *harmony* within the essential Chinese context.

Chapters four, five and six delve into empirical investigations regarding Chinese students’ and teachers’ perceptions of creativity and its cultivation within school music education. Chapter four examines students’ awareness of creativity across three cities (Shijiazhuang, ChangSha and HongKong), revealing that primary and secondary students recognise its importance but approach it differently, with schools, music teachers and extended curricula playing vital roles in fostering creativity. In chapter five, teachers’ perspectives are explored through in-depth interviews, uncovering their efforts to promote students’ creativity despite challenges in reconciling music education with cultural understanding. Chapter six synthesises questionnaire and interview findings, highlighting students’ positive attitudes towards creativity education and the significant role of music teachers.

In the final chapter, the author summarises the foundational roots and challenges in fostering creativity within education policy and practice. The significance of school music education as a platform for discussing Chinese creativity education in the contemporary sociopolitical context is effectively emphasised. Despite structuring the discussion around key areas like students’ and teachers’ perspectives and integrating creativity into music education within the socio-political context, it primarily provides theoretical insights without actionable recommendations that Chinese music teachers and international readers might transfer to their local contexts. Nonetheless, it does provide international music educators with valuable insights into the cultural and social backgrounds of Chinese immigrant students in their classrooms.

The current landscape of creativity education in China is experiencing a gradual transformation, fueled by the recent release of the updated edition of the National Arts Core Standards (2022). Chinese policymakers are actively integrating creative education principles into the music curriculum standards. This integration is prominently reflected in the latest edition of the National Arts Core Standards, which prominently features “创意实践” which is “creativity and practice” as one of the core standards, emphasising the significance of nurturing creativity (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2022). Consequently, music teachers and students are encouraged to infuse creativity into music instruction and learning as a fundamental component. As a result, the landscape of creative music education is poised for significant evolution and advancement in the foreseeable future. It is important to note that the empirical evidence presented in chapters three and four of Ho’s book was collected before the adoption of these Standards in 2022. While these findings were valuable, the introduction of the new Standards (2022) represents a significant milestone. Therefore, readers need to understand the significance of subsequent developments and changes in the educational landscape.

Overall, this book offers a comprehensive analysis, covering the historical and philosophical foundation of creativity in music education while providing empirical evidence of current challenges in Chinese music education. A notable strength lies in the author's unbiased presentation of the material, introducing creativity and music education within the Chinese cultural-political discourse. Moreover, its publication in English expands opportunities for international readers to engage with and understand Chinese culture and educational systems, fostering global academic exchange and cross-cultural understanding. This, in turn, encourages discussions and research on music education in China on a global scale. This book is highly recommended for international scholars, educators and policymakers seeking a nuanced understanding of creativity and music education in China.

XIN XIE¹ AND CANCAN CUI²

¹Macau University of Science and Technology,
Faculty of Humanities and Arts,
Taipa, Macao, China

²College of Music and Dance, Guangzhou University,
Guangzhou, China

Email: CancanCui005@gmail.com