

***Harmonising Traditions:
An Ethnographic Exploration of Nanyin Pedagogy in Singapore***

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Abstract

The study explores how Nanyin as a traditional Chinese music art form originating in China is taught and learned in Singapore. Educational materials and historical contexts highlight variations in ideologies, learning methods, and teaching approaches for Nanyin across regions, which can be attributed to socio-cultural differences. The practice of Nanyin is intricately tied to traditions, rituals and Confucian values that have always been part of Chinese culture. In a multi-cultural society like Singapore, its endeavour to establish a distinct and unique musical identity has led to the development of cultural policies which have shaped the practice of Nanyin in the country. This research employs an ethnographic approach to uncover the disparities between the historical, aesthetical and mythological perspectives of Nanyin to discover the driving factors behind its learning and teaching practices. In doing so, it documents the evolution of Nanyin education in Singapore, emphasising its significance as an important aspect of the Chinese culture. This paper presents insights gathered from interviews with practitioners from China, Taiwan and Indonesia, providing valuable perspectives on pedagogical models. By examining these diverse approaches, it offers a framework for the continued learning and teaching of Nanyin in Singapore, contributing to the preservation and appreciation of this musical heritage.

Keywords: Nanyin, Arts Pedagogy, Traditional Chinese Music, Culture, Heritage

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Introduction

Nanyin also known as “music of the south”, originated from Fujian in the southern part of China during the Han dynasty: 206 B.C. – A.D. 220 (Wang, n.d., p. 1). Depending on the location where the art is practiced, it may also be referred to as *Nanguan*, *Nanyue*, *Nanqu*, *Xianguan*, among other common names of this traditional art form (*Quanzhou Shi Jiao Yu Ju & Quanzhou Wen Hua Ju*, 2009, p. 3). However, as Singapore practices *Nanyin*, this term will be used throughout the study.

Nanyin is practiced mainly by the *Hokkiens*, a Chinese dialect group in the south-eastern part of Fujian province in China and Taiwan (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, n.d., para. 1). It is sung in the Southern Min language otherwise known as the *Minnan* dialect and follows the traditional *Nanyin* score otherwise known as *Gong Che Pu* 工尺谱 (Cai, 2018). Serving as the lingua franca amongst most Chinese communities in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, *Nanyin* was slowly brought over by immigrants to Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Philippines (National Heritage Board, 2018, para. 1).

The incorporation of *Nanyin* into the Chinese culture is evident in *Fujian*, where the government has integrated it into the curriculum of all arts schools and universities. Students have the options to major in *Nanyin*, undergoing practical examinations as a prerequisite for advancing to the next level. *Nanyin* can also be found practiced in associations, where members join to participate in club activities or to pursue their hobby in *Nanyin* (Lim, 2014; Chou, 2002). To promote *Nanyin* on an international level, the Chinese government has officially recognised entities such as ‘Xiamen *Nanyin* troupe’ and ‘Quanzhou *Nanyin* ensemble’ as representatives of this traditional art form, providing financial support for their daily operations (Lim, 2014, p. 22).

In Singapore, three non-profit organisations engage in the practice of *Nanyin* and rely on grants and donations to keep these organisations running. Those interested in learning this music form have the opportunity to do so at Siong Leng Musical Association, Singapore Traditional Southern Fujian Music Society and Sheng Hong Arts Institute (Siong Leng Musical Association, 2014). While there are no specific prerequisites for joining any of these organisations, each organisation has its own vision. Sheng Hong Arts Institute focuses on educating locals in Chinese culture (Taoist Federation, n.d., p. 12, 14), the Singapore Traditional Southern Fujian Music Society serves as a space for members to practice and share their knowledge of *Nanyin* (Huang, 2010, p. 90), while Siong Leng Musical Association places a priority on outreach, education and development of *Nanyin* productions (Siong Leng Musical Association, 2015; 2017).

Various educational resources on *Nanyin* are currently available, although they may not be easily accessible. These resources cover a range of content, including *Nanyin* repertoires (Su, 2005; *Xiamen Shi Nan Yue Tuan*, 2005), introductions of instruments (*Quanzhou Shi Jiao Yu Ju*, 2009, p. 22-39; Huang, 2010) and historical studies created by *Nanyin* enthusiasts hailing from different cities of Fujian, Taiwan and Singapore (Huang, 2010; Cai, 2018; Zhuo & Lin, 1999). In recent years, particularly amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a notable increase in the presentation of *Nanyin* through video platforms and social media. Importantly, these educational resources present various aspects of *Nanyin* in distinct ways, influenced by the authors’ respective places of origin.

The preservation and transmission of *Nanyin* faces a significant challenge due to the lack of and inconsistent documentation of its learning and teaching processes. The absence of a structured record of learning methods invites misinterpretations, dilution of the form's authenticity and even face the risk of losing essential elements and traditions. The broader impact this challenge risks *Nanyin* not being appreciated or integrated into the evolving identity of Singapore. Addressing this challenge could bring about a sense of community cohesion within *Nanyin* practitioners in Singapore. It is critical not only for the vitality of *Nanyin* itself but also for the preservation of a cultural heritage within a diverse society like Singapore.

Subsequent sections of this paper will explore existing literature on this topic, offering insights into the connection between *Nanyin* and Singapore. After the literature review, the methodology section will outline the approach adopted for conducting the study. Finally, the collected data will be analysed across three key themes: the impact of Chinese culture, *Nanyin*'s teaching methodologies and temporal dynamics.

Local Identity and Culture

In exploring this broad topic, the intricate relationship between culture, traditions and learning in music becomes apparent. Singapore, a fifty-nine-year-old multicultural nation, strategically prepares for global challenges by emphasising its cultural heritage and arts education system. Government initiatives, spotlighted since the inception of the Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts (ACCA) in 1989, underscore a commitment to 'cultural reforms' (Wong, 2012, p. 234).

The formation of the National Arts Council in 1991 and National Heritage Board in 1993 were implemented in hopes of achieving (i) personal enrichment, (ii) quality of life (iii) nation- building and (iv) economic impact for the arts (Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts, 1989). It was only after the transformation in this cultural landscape that the time has come to focus on 'national identity and belonging' as reported in the Renaissance City Report (Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, 2000, p. 4). Despite the strategies in the Renaissance City Report, the discourse on creating a cultural identity continues. The definition of national identity in Singapore remains ambiguous. The diversity of languages, cultures and ethnicities in Singapore poses a challenge in defining a cohesive national identity for the country. If the intention of the local government was to produce one identity out of four dominant ethnic groups and the plurality of cultures residing in Singapore, Singapore loses its charm of its own 'multiculturalism' (Nur, 2017, para. 15).

Despite reports on Singapore being a 'cultural orphan' (Chan, 2003), Singapore has still produced many cultural works that made Singapore shine, showcasing its vibrant artistic landscape and heritage to the world. Late Chairman of Siong Leng Musical Association, Teng Mah Seng's search for a local identity was through newly composed *Nanyin* repertoires in the 1980s. Throughout his lifetime, he composed 300 *Nanyin* songs, each infused with innovative elements to enhance its appeal to contemporary audiences. He conveyed his perspectives through poems, when *Nanyin* was struggling to break free from colonial influences. Teng's most popular *Nanyin* piece, '东方花园' [Garden of the East] addressed various issues relevant to Singapore in the 1980s, particularly focusing on the quest for a distinct Singaporean identity. In his song, Teng delved into themes like cultural heritage, societal transformations and the struggles Singapore faced in defining its identity amidst colonial history and modernisation. His initiatives were what Chan sees as a 'Singaporean

Voice' (2003, p. 33), the collaboration between a traditional genre of music in the context of Singapore.

Due to Teng's significant contributions to Singapore's cultural landscape, he was recognised by the Singapore Ministry of Culture and awarded the Cultural Medallion Award in 1987 (Chor, 2014), a prestigious recognition of his efforts in revitalising and promoting *Nanyin* within the Singaporean context. His innovative approach of composing *Nanyin* repertoires not only breathed new life into the traditional art form but also helped to establish a sense of cultural identity, earning him a stamp of acknowledgement for his contributions. Teng's piece 东方花园, subsequently got selected as part of the repertoire for the arts education programme in primary and secondary schools (Chor, 2014), in line with the local music curriculum emphasis on understanding Asian musical traditions as a reflection of our multicultural context (Ministry of Education Singapore, 2019). This emphasis further highlights the significance of comprehending the transmission and practice of music within different cultural communities. Interestingly, this approach finds its relevance to *Nanyin* pedagogy, where these concepts share similarities in the learning and teaching of the art form.

Research Methodology

In order to effectively investigate the development of *Nanyin* education in Singapore, the methodology and design employed over this course of study adopted an ethnographic approach. In alignment with Ingold's perspective, this approach involves a detailed and sensitively honed description of the lives of individuals beyond the researchers themselves, obtained through observation and first-hand experience (2008, p. 69). The research methodology employed in this study aimed to identify two crucial aspects, firstly the pedagogical frameworks of *Nanyin*, and secondly, the social conditions on which these frameworks were built.

This study incorporated Rice's research model from "Toward the remodelling of ethnomusicology" (1987) as a guiding framework. By adapting and revising both Rice's model and the Merriam model, interview questions were carefully crafted at three analytic levels, fostering a comprehensive understanding of "music in culture" (Rice, 1987, p. 470). Rice emphasised exploring music in terms of its historical construction, social maintenance, and individual experiences (p. 475).

Interviews were held with *Nanyin* practitioners from China, Taiwan, Indonesia and Singapore, primarily in Mandarin and English. The participants comprised 8 *Nanyin* experts and teachers, as well as 8 students affiliated with various organisations, educational institutions and governmental bodies. To be eligible for participation in the study, experts were required to possess at minimum of 40 years of experience, teachers at least 20 years, and students at least 5 years in *Nanyin*, ensuring the authenticity and depth of their perspectives. In particular, the participants included 8 from China, 3 from Singapore, 3 from Taiwan, and 2 from Indonesia.

The study utilised narrative inquiry to code and analyse interview results, linking specific concepts to observed phenomena. This approach involves a focus on intersubjectivity, emphasising shared experiences and meanings shaped by social contexts. The study includes stages such as categorising data, self-reflexivity and comparing results with *Nanyin* practitioners in Singapore, providing diverse perspectives.

The subjective nature of data generalisation is acknowledged as a limitation. For transparency in approach, it is emphasised that “autoethnographies must not only use methodological tools and research literature to analyse the experience but also, consider how others may experience similar epiphanies, to make characteristics of a culture that is familiar for both insiders and outsiders.” (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011, p. 276). To achieve this objective, the study involved comparing and contrasting personal experiences with existing research and examining relevant cultural artefacts of *Nanyin*.

An additional challenge is associated with the language utilised in *Nanyin* which is predominantly *Minnan* dialect, reflecting its roots in the Hokkien community. Most of *Nanyin*'s literature is written in Mandarin, and most of the interviews with practitioners were conducted in the same language, with the occasional use of the *Minnan* dialect. Translation challenges arise, especially with specific musical terms unique to *Nanyin*, which may impact the accurate transmission of the genre's nuances in English. Concerns are raised about the potential alteration of the original message during translation, in line with Maclean's observation that, “words in another language and context may impose another conceptual scheme on their thoughts.” (2007, p. 784). To address this concern, the study has to establish clear definitions and distinguish the differences between the original terms and corresponding words in the same language.

Influence of Chinese Culture

The analysis of the collected data has identified recurring themes, namely, the impact of Chinese culture on *Nanyin*, the widespread reliance on oral traditions and the influence of time on the current learning methodologies of *Nanyin*.

The term ‘culture’ was commonly mentioned by participants, prompting an inquiry into the specific definition of the cultural influence on *Nanyin*. The sociological perspective on *Nanyin* strongly suggests that it has been shaped by the fundamental teachings of Confucianism. The emphasis on core Confucian philosophies such as *Ren* 仁 [benevolence and compassion], *Li* 礼 [Ritual Propriety] and *Xiao* 孝 [filial piety] is evident throughout the learning practices of *Nanyin*.

Learning *Nanyin* entails a process where aspiring students must seek out a willing teacher. However, gaining acknowledgement as a student carries a specific set of expectations. Beyond musical aptitude, prospective students are required to embody the principle of “*ZuoRen* 做人” (Lin, Personal Communication, November 10, 2018). This translates to a way of behaving that is considered virtuous or commendable in the cultural and social context. It encompasses qualities such as humility, filial piety and respect which are all important prerequisites for a teacher's acceptance of a student. Within the framework of most traditional arts genre, this relationship aligns with the concept of *ShiTuZhi* 师徒之, also known as the Master-Disciple system (Lim, 2014, p. 249). Affirmed by participants like Cai, Wang, Hong, Chen and Wu (Personal Communications, September 8, 2018), the Master-Disciple system is a reciprocal exchange, resembling a parent-child relationship. This involves the sharing of knowledge, skills and physical space.

In his interviews, Wang extensively discussed his commitment to embodying the values he identified as part of the Chinese culture, or in mandarin, *HuaRenWenHua* 华人文化. He clarified his refusal to accept financial gains in return for a *Nanyin* performance, despite

facing challenging living conditions in the past (Personal communications, June 24, 2018). Upon delving into scholarly material, particularly Ames and Herschok's book on Confucianism (2018), it became apparent that Wang's intended meaning of Chinese culture encompassed the practice of *Lian* 廉, equated to having integrity (Nguyen, 2018, p. 144). Nguyen defined integrity as refraining from desiring status or wealth, steering clear of a comfortable life, and rejecting flattery from others. The only acceptable eagerness lies in the pursuit of studying, working, and making progress (p. 145).

The customary observance of *Nanyin*, such as serving tea to a teacher or participating in a tea ceremony, as acknowledged by Hong, Cai, Wu and Lin (Personal communications, September 8, 2018) is evident as a demonstration of respect. Supported by Bamana, the act of serving tea serves as an expression of gratitude, respect, or apology (2015, p. 205). While tea and its ceremonies originated in China, several other East Asian countries including Japan and Korea has its own historical and cultural connection to tea. In the fifteenth century, Japan regarded tea as a form of aesthetic religion, now referred to as 'Teaism' (Okakura, 1906, p. 1). Teaism was not merely a method of drinking or making tea but founded on the "adoration of the beautiful among the sordid facts of every existence... a worship of the imperfect, an attempt to accomplish something possible..." (Ibid). In Japan, the art of tea encompasses beauty, where the Japanese take pride in exquisite traditional arts and crafts such as tea bowls, flowers, hanging scrolls, and cup settlements, all integral to a tea ceremony (Murai, 2012, p. 70). The considerable effort required to prepare a tea ceremony is perceived as an expression of sincerity, interpreting the act of serving tea as a form of respect. Comparable customs exist in Confucianism, *Cheng* 诚, which also means whole-hearted engagement, allows individuals to demonstrate commitment, which is why *Nanyin* students serve tea to their teachers.

The cultural revolution in 1966 played a role in the decline in the Confucian practices today. Initiated by Mao Zedong, the Cultural Revolution aimed to consolidate power and eliminate perceived capitalist influences in China. Mao asserted the necessity of this revolution to purge China of the 'four olds', namely old culture, old customs, old habits and old ideas (Ho, 2011, p. 690). all of which were integral elements of the Chinese culture. Consequently, Confucian practices, including tea ceremonies were gradually suppressed. Confucianism, with no specific methods for learning or teaching, was more about its self-cultivation and the facilitation of cultural identity (Lee, 2018, p. 36).

Delving into another facet of cultural practices, the bi-annual prayers to *Nanyin* deity, *MengChang LangJun* 孟昶郎君 stand out as notable example frequently mentioned by interviewed participants. Revered as *Nanyin*'s patron of saint, the practice involves paying homage on the deity's birth and death anniversaries. It is believed to bless and protect individuals and groups of *Nanyin* (Ibid). While many practitioners hold firm beliefs in this tradition, scholarly sources suggest that the narrative of *MengChang* remains more of a myth (Huang, 2010, p. 108-109). Despite its specific association with *Nanyin*, the worship of deities is not confined to this tradition and is observed in various parts of the world (Lim, 2014, p. 119). The appreciation of this religious yet mental state of mind as a form of communication was evident through what Audi deemed as 'objectual belief', where it is either believing a thing to have a property or believing of a thing (2008, p. 88). Even if *MengChangLangJun* does not actually exist, assertions about them would not be true. Similarly, in other context, Berliner, an American ethnomusicologist who expounded on the Shona people of Zimbabwe believed in the worshipping of deities and spirits. He said, "[they] play an important role in the process of learning... pave the way and guide him in teaching" (1993, p. 137). Almost similar to the teaching practices of Confucius, praying to

MengChangLangJun seemed more like a human construct where practices of human behaviors and experiences facilitate in the learning of *Nanyin* through the motivation of personal beliefs. The act of offering incense and performing a *Nanyin* piece in front of the altar finds similar symbolisation to the earlier mentioned relationship of a master-disciple system.

Therefore, rituals play a dual role in not only establishing and fortifying connections but also acting as a channel for the transmission of a value system. These rituals embody implicit practices seamlessly integrated into the learning processes of *Nanyin*. Considering the substantial Chinese representation among *Nanyin* practitioners, the assimilation of practices from diverse theorists and the organic evolution of *Nanyin*'s own practices have led to a blending where distinctions gradually blur. Although these unspoken norms in *Nanyin* culture may not directly contribute to the technical prowess of a musician, there is a discernible impact on the assimilation of these rules over time, influencing the process of embracing *Nanyin* as a cultural form.

Instructional Teaching Methodology

Understanding the correlation between what participants considered the most significant musical aspects of *Nanyin* and the instructional methods employed proved to be complex. The insights derived from participants' responses suggests that a *Nanyin* musician's personal expression and the unity of the ensemble stand out as crucial elements in defining excellence in this musical tradition. Participants has also found the most effective teaching method to be the traditional approach of *Kou Chuan Xin Shou* 口传心授, in other words, oral transmission. This approach involves the direct, personal transmission of knowledge from a teacher to student through verbal communication, demonstration, and personal engagement. This preference finds support in various literature works on *Nanyin* and Chinese music genres (Chou, 2002, p. 116; Lim, 2014, p. 231; Witzleben, 1987, p. 248).

The results highlighted the intuitive and instinctive nature of personal expressions and unity. In response of inquiries regarding the grading system for *Nanyin* practical exams in schools, *Nanyin* veteran Wang Da Hao emphasized the absence of a standardised rubric. He explained that grading in *Nanyin* relies heavily on expressions, dynamism and how students 'feel' the music, making it challenging to establish fixed criteria. Wang adds, "This question is exceptionally hard to answer... Sometimes, for students who are not doing well, I will increase their grade to motivate them" (Personal communications, October 25, 2018).

This immediately raises two pivotal questions central to the investigation of this topic: firstly, how does oral tradition contribute to the development of personal expression, and secondly, how can personal expressions be objectively measured?

Wang's grading methodology may offer insight into the functioning of the *Nanyin* musical system. He suggests that *Nanyin* surpassed the limitations of conventional score sheets, emphasising the integration of personal emotions. His conception of beauty in *Nanyin* resonated with the aesthetic subjectivism advocated by the Sophists, who believed that "since man is the measure of the true and the good, he is all the more the measure of beauty" (Tatarkiewicz, 1963, p. 158). The distinctiveness of *Nanyin*, particularly its flexibility on the skill of embellishments can too, be attributed to the lack of dynamic notations or explicit signs guiding a student's performance style in a traditional *Nanyin* score, otherwise known as the *GongChiPu* 工尺谱. The design of a *GongChiPu* disallows one to be objective as the

Pythagorean’s argument for aesthetic objectivity inferred that there is a need for proofs of ‘Harmony’, ‘Proportion’ and ‘Number’ (Ibid), which cannot be comprehended visually.

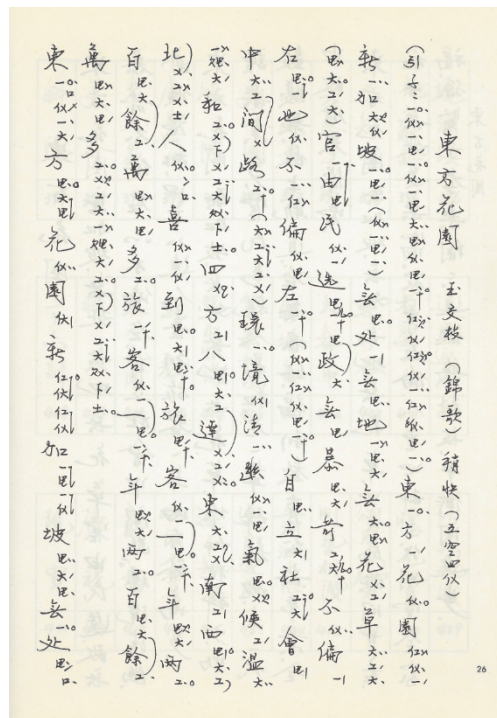


Figure 1: Gong Chi Pu 工尺谱 (Teng, 1982, p. 26)

Present in scores, arranged from right to left and top to bottom, are the title of the piece, a *QuPai* 曲牌 [a set of melody found across Chinese instrumental repertoires], key signature, lyrics and musical notations (*Quanzhou Shi Jiao Yu Ju & Quanzhou Wen Hua Ju, 2009, p. 12*). Scholarly works on *Nanyin* musicology have proposed that understanding the ‘presumed’ dynamics or expression of *Nanyin* can be achieved through interpreting the poems in the score (Lim, 2010, p. 61). However, mastering this requires strong language skills in mandarin and the *Minnan* dialect, along with a comprehensive study of the poems and the immersion of the Chinese history to convey the closest possible emotion through musical performance.

What captivated both the visual and auditory senses gradually became ingrained, influencing others to emulate, leading to the understanding that “there are no definite rights or wrongs in any *Nanyin* variation” (Chen, personal communications, September 8, 2018). Lin, the artistic director of Siong Leng, expressed his concerns regarding *Nanyin* students in Singapore forming their own interpretations. He emphasised that the infrequent use of dialects by Singaporean youth is detrimental to the growth of *Nanyin* in the country, stating, “Without them being able to read the main components of the *Nanyin* score, they will never be interested, let alone interpreting it” (personal communication, November 9, 2018).

Temporal Dynamics

Considering the evident support for oral traditions in the collected data, it is apparent that this method must hold inherent value in the teaching of *Nanyin*. This traditional teaching method of *Nanyin* appear to align with the approach described by ethnomusicologist Rice as a learning process involving observation and imitating, which he labelled as, ‘aural-visual-tactile’. The process is characterized by being learned but not explicitly taught (Rice, 2003, p.

65). While oral traditions have proven valuable in knowledge transmission, it is acknowledged that “there are things that cannot be readily understood” (Cai, personal communications, June 21, 2018). It has been suggested that personal expressions with the practice of imitation and rote learning have taken up a lot of time. Cai revealed, “...the young learners of *Nanyin* music have successfully picked up the skills in every aspect, except the nuances... The quality can only be attained from the quantity of accumulated time and experience” (Cai, personal communications, June 21, 2018).

Cai’s statement yields two key points. Firstly, oral tradition is not directed at instructing students in the development of personal expressions. Instead, it efficiently imparts knowledge to students through direct, face-to-face communication, presenting the teacher’s interpretations and potentially defining what constitutes perfect *Nanyin* music as shown on the musical score. Drawing on Hood’s perspective on the impact of oral traditional, he asserted that only elements such as the “continuation and development of musical instruments, traditional tuning system and scale pitches, modal practices... musical and poetic forms...” can benefit from imitation and rote (Hood, 1959, p. 202). However, there were no comparable definitions found for personal expressions or what Cai refers to as ‘nuance’. Interview participants utilised similar expressions such as ‘*Yun* 韵’ [Charm] or ‘*YunWei* 韵味’. Through careful observation, it becomes apparent that *Yun* encompasses more than the interplay of melodies, pitch, intonation, pace and ornaments. It also involves the musician’s artistic selection of transitional phrasing, influencing the essence of the music (Lim, 2014, p. 299). This explains how *Yun* is often not immediately apparent and will require refined understanding. It is the subtle details or intricacies that contribute to a more comprehensive interpretation. While the concept of *Yun* is universally acknowledged among *Nanyin* musicians, few can articulate its specific properties. Lim, drawing an analogy to cooking soup, stated, “The longer you cook, the better [the flavour] ... Those with stronger *Yun*, delve deeper into the music” (Li, 2017, para. 25).

This brings us to Cai’s second highlight point, which centers on the temporal dimensions of the learning process. Zheng echoed a similar sentiment regarding time as a pivotal factor in mastering *Nanyin*, asserting that, “Quantity will lead to quality...” (personal communications, June 26, 2018). It is recognised that learning is not a static process but rather one that evolves over time. This involves the concept of learning trajectories, that time could serve as a remedy for bridging the learning gap associated with *Yun*, a view point supported by Lin (personal communications, June 26, 2018), Cai, (personal communications, June 21, 2018) and Chen (personal communications, June 24, 2018).

In exploring the concept of time in this context, it becomes evident that its significance extends beyond the mere growth of *Nanyin* experiences. Rather, it serves as a period for students to ascertain their level of commitment and dedication required for mastering this art form. It is plausible that teachers entrust their students to discover a passion for their craft, aiming for a quality standard through what Frymier termed a demonstration of belief (1969, p. 38), rather than viewing time solely as a developer of experiences. Chen states, “... if you hope that they will reach the goal you set for them, that’s not realistic. But find one who is willing to stay committed, they will ultimately progress in their learning” (Personal communications, June 24, 2018).

Conclusion

Overall, *Nanyin* pedagogy reflects a holistic approach to music education that integrates cultural heritage, ethical values, emotional expression, and the gradual accumulation of experience. It represents a unique and rich tradition of musical learning that contributes towards the understanding of the Chinese culture and heritage, fostering a deep connection between students, teachers and the art form itself. The relationship between student to teacher and practitioner to *Nanyin* undergoes a nuanced evolution, and transforms into an unspoken emotional bond that resonates with the dynamics of the master-disciple system. This connection is further enriched by the ritualistic aspects associated with the *Nanyin* mythical figure. This finds itself in a cycle of trust, belief and interpersonal relationships. The depth of this bond extends beyond the mere transmission of musical knowledge, it becomes a holistic experience that intertwines with the practitioners' lives. The analysis highlights a learning approach grounded by the cultivation of theoretical, historical, cultural and psychological understanding integrated into its teachings. This approach lies beyond western pedagogies which often prioritises technical proficiency and theoretical knowledge over cultural context and emotional depth, enriching the education landscape with a more comprehensive understanding of *Nanyin* and its cultural significance.

With the aging *Nanyin* community, establishing a framework becomes important to prevent misinterpretation, dilution of authenticity, loss of essential traditions to promote the vitality of *Nanyin*. This paper, originally aimed at uncovering differences between countries, ultimately shifted its focus to uncovering commonalities. This shift explains that the process of teaching and learning are not isolated within national boundaries, but rather linked to broader cultural and preservation efforts. This perspective underscores the importance of understanding *Nanyin* within a global context and recognizing its significance beyond Singapore's borders.

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