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Diasporic Chinese *Xianshi* Musicians: Impact of Enculturation and Learning on Values relating to Music and Music-Making

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Abstract

This qualitative study presents a group of five diasporic Chinese *xianshi* musicians in Hong Kong as an example, illustrating how they learnt and value their music throughout their lives, and examines the possible link between learning-practices and values. It is hoped that the lesson learnt from these *xianshi* musicians may alert music educators to the possible far-reaching effects of enculturation and learning-practices on forming an individual's values relating to music and music-making. The data were drawn from semi-structured in-depth interviews, non-participant observations and a trip to the musicians' homeland. It revealed that they value music for aesthetic and personal enjoyment, and for the purposes of bonding and identity building, as well as for building an imagined community. It appears that their musical enculturation (from homeland) and informal learning-practices (from both homeland and Hong Kong) may have

contributed to their lifelong devotion to making music and to how they value their music and music-making on both personal and collective levels.

Background

Guiding students to establish a lifelong interest in music and to value music in their lives is undoubtedly one of the goals of music educators around the world. The Music Curriculum Guide of Hong Kong also states that music education helps students “to gain enjoyment and satisfaction through participating in music activities; and pursue a life-long interest in and the valuing of music” (Curriculum Development Council, Education and Manpower Bureau, 2003, p.11).

Yet the situation in learning the Arts at school is not at all enjoyable, as revealed in McPherson’s report (2005) on “Factors affecting primary and secondary school children’s motivation to study music and the visual arts” in Hong Kong. This report indicates that “...student enjoyment for Music and the Visual Arts in school *decline* [sic] (italics added) across the years of schooling” (p. 2). The implication is that school learning in the Arts does not facilitate students’ enjoyment of the subject, let alone establish their lifelong interest in music and their valuing of music. Also, the situation gets progressively worse as they receive more formal education in this area. This finding is neither new nor surprising and it applies not only to the situation in Hong Kong. It is therefore also unsurprising Jorgensen (2008) states that “...one of the most challenging aspects of musical instruction individually and in groups is how to maintain our students’ interest in and devotion to their study of the subject at hand” (p.228). Further research is therefore necessary in order to meet the challenge of enabling students to value music and cultivate a lifelong, sustainable interest in music.

When we look around the world, we find that large numbers of indigenous music makers and popular musicians who learn music in other ways have acquired a sustainable interest in the subject (Finnegan, 2007; Green, 2002, 2005; Ng, 2006). It seems that people who do not learn in a formal way may also develop a lifelong interest in and devotion to music and music-making. Although much research has been conducted into informal and non-formal learning-practices, the possible effects learning-practices may have on a person’s values appears to have been overlooked in the area of music education. This was the starting point for the investigation described in this paper: to investigate how people’s learning experience may affect their values concerning music and music-making throughout their lives.

In this paper, a group of diasporic Chinese *xianshi* musicians in Hong Kong is presented as an example, illustrating how they learnt their music, in what ways they value their music throughout their lives, and the possible link between learning-practices and values. The time has come for music educators to consider that we might have overlooked the issue of the

possible far-reaching effect of learning-practices on forming values relating to music and music-making. It is hoped that the lesson learnt from the *xianshi* musicians may shed new light on and provide insights into issues of concern to the music education sector in order to review the learning-practices currently used in schools, so as to inculcate higher values in students concerning music and music-making, and a sustainable lifelong interest in music.

The Study

Chaozhou *xianshi* is a form of string ensemble folk music from the Chaozhou region in mainland China (Dujunco, 1994). Diasporic Chaozhou *xianshi* musicians have continued to maintain their practices, performances and musical traditions since settling in Hong Kong more than 20 years ago. *Xianshi* musicians are usually male, and belong to the tradition of amateur music-making, and although they come from diverse social backgrounds and occupations they are known to be closely linked by their sense of identity as Chaozhou people. These *xianshi* musicians value their music and musical practices to the extent that they have retained their authentic learning and performance practices as far as possible throughout the period since arriving in Hong Kong.

The aims of the study were, firstly, to investigate how the *xianshi* musicians learnt their music through informal learning-practices and a rich enculturation process. Secondly, as Aubert (2007) explains, “all music is a bearer of a set of values, at the same time ethical (by use of a set of references to which it appeals and expresses according to appropriate means) and aesthetic (through codes put to work and their effects on the senses and the psyche)” (p. 2). Therefore, an inquiry was made into the set of values expressed by them relating to their music and musical practices. Lastly, the study also examined the possible effects of enculturation and learning-practices, with a focus on formal and informal learning, on the values of these *xianshi* musicians concerning music and music-making. The term “values” is employed here to reflect the general and common usage of the term in everyday life. As Jorgensen (2008) puts it, “a value is an idea that one treasures and lives by” (p.16). In brief, “values” refer to what we consider to be good, bad, important, useful, beneficial etc. People’s values also underpin the moral principles which influence the way in which they live their lives.

Although a few studies have been conducted on *xianshi* musicians’ enculturation and learning-practices (Dujunco, 1994; Ng, 2006), the values they hold concerning music and music-making have not been widely discussed. Furthermore, the current investigation represents the first inquiry into the possible relationship between the enculturation, learning-practices and values of these musicians. It is hoped that the findings from this study will enable educators to re-think issues relating to learning-practices in music, and to rekindle people’s enthusiasm regarding the value of music and music-making in their lives.

The Place and Its People

The hometown of *xianshi* musicians is Chaozhou 潮州 (Mandarin pronunciation and spelling), which is spelled *Chiu Chow* (Cantonese pronunciation and spelling) in Hong Kong. It is located in the coastal region of Guangdong Province in South China, where the people of Chaozhou and their dialect are called “Teochew”. As Chaozhou has a rich musical heritage and its music has been popularized by the local people, it is known as the “Metropolis of Music” (Chen, 2004, p. 15).

Many overseas Chinese were originally from Chaozhou. People from nearly every town have a relative who lives overseas. In the early period of overseas migration, they relied on the formation of voluntary associations and other groups for support because there was no embassy to represent them. There has been a long history of guilds and associations (*huiguan* 會館) being formed in the rural areas, the functions of which were “protection, recreation, and economic gain” (Dujunco, 1994, p. 23). It should be noted that nearly all these early Chinese immigrants were male because they needed to “earn enough money to live, support their families in China, and eventually return home as wealthy men” (ibid., p. 24).

The Musical Scene

Xianshi music is one of a number of Chaozhou musical genres, which include Chaozhou Gong-and-Drum Music, Chaozhou Flute-Suite Music, Chaozhou Temple Music and others (Chen, 2004, p. 3). It is believed that Chaozhou *xianshi* music is the oldest and the most popular among Chaozhou’s various musical genres, and can be dated back to the Southern Song 南宋 Dynasty (1127-1279 AD) and even as early as the Tang 唐 Dynasty (618-907 AD) (Chen & Cai, 1989, p. 19; Chen, 2004, p. 12; Dujunco, 1994, p. 34).

Xianshi music belongs to the Chinese folk category of *sizhu* 絲竹 (silk and bamboo) music, which is played indoors on a variety of stringed and wind instruments (Dujunco, 1994). The name “*xianshi*” literally means “string poems”, which suggests that in the past, the repertoire included accompanied songs, yet none of the lyrical or vocal traditions survive nowadays (Jones, 1995, p. 324). Generally speaking, Chaozhou *xianshi* musicians learn their instruments and practice their music for the purpose of self-cultivation, which is highly valued in traditional Chinese society (Chen, 2004; Dujunco, 1994; Ng, 2006).

Transmission of Xianshi Music: Music Clubs

A music club is the traditional and main venue for the transmission of *xianshi* music, and it is also the main performance setting for this music, where musicians meet regularly to perform their favorite pieces (Dujunco, 1994; Ng, 2006). Chen (1989) mentions that “there were music

spaces in every corner of the city and the villages; they were a kind of “low-level” organization for popularizing activities” (p. 10). Here, “low-level” means that the music clubs are organized and participated in by common people: that is, the villagers. There could have been as many as twenty music clubs in a single village, so people could belong to more than one music club. In their music-making, “...there [in the music club] was a constant flow and exchange of musical ideas and performance styles and experimentation with different interpretative techniques” (Dujunco, 1994, p. 37).

In conclusion, *xianshi* music is transmitted by enculturation and in an informal way through a process of listening and imitation (Ng, 2006). It is performed as private entertainment in an intimate indoor setting where people gather together during their leisure time. These performance settings are still in existence in and outside mainland China, in places such as Hong Kong and Thailand (Chen, 2004; Dujunco, 1994; Ng, 2006).

Method

The purpose of the study was to explore how these diasporic *xianshi* musicians were enculturated and learnt their music, and how these experiences may have affected their values regarding music and music-making in order to provide insights to the music education field. The study was concerned more with acquiring in-depth information than with obtaining a large quantity of data on the topics in question, therefore, a qualitative research method was chosen, since qualitative methods are characteristically exploratory, fluid and flexible (Mason, 2002).

Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviews

With regard to the methods of data collection, it was important to select those methods which would produce data relevant to the aim of the study, which was to investigate and, where appropriate, examine the relationships between the enculturation, learning-practices and values of these *xianshi* musicians. In light of the nature of the study, the semi-structured in-depth interviewing method, with the questions having been carefully planned in advance by the researcher, was chosen as the main method of data collection. By this means, the interviews were structured in such a way that the researcher was able to take the lead with the questions in mind, while remaining open to follow the flow of the informants’ responses and was prepared to probe into areas that would give a better understanding of the message they were conveying (Hatch, 2002).

Non-Participant Observations

In addition, non-participant unstructured observations were made of the informants’ rehearsals and performances in their natural settings. The use of observations in this study made it

possible for me to collect data on non-verbal behavior, "...including some behaviors of which the respondent himself or herself may not be aware" (Bailey, 1994, p. 244), and also to cross-check the validity of the data obtained from the interviews and widen the scope of my understanding of how the informants interacted and responded in a real-life situation (Bailey, 1994; Robson, 1993). I was also able to ask informal questions during the observations: that is, to carry out unstructured, on-the-spot interviews, in order to allow the informants to explain their perspectives and views on what I had observed (Hatch, 2002; Maykut, 1994).

Sampling Decision

The members of the *xianshi* music club, which belongs to and is sponsored by the "Hong Kong Chiu Chow Merchants Mutual Assistance Society Limited", were chosen as the informants. The group consists of around six to eight active players and the researcher interviewed five of them who were born in Chaozhou and came to Hong Kong when they were adults. They are all aged around late fifties to sixty years old. This information is presented in the following table (Table 1); however, some of the data were not given. I did not wish to ask the informants to supply a lot of personal details as this would have seemed very impolite and offensive to Chinese people. For example, some *xianshi* musicians told me exactly what their jobs were, while others simply said 'I'm still working'. Some of the data shown below therefore represent information given to me voluntarily by the informants. The names given below are pseudonyms.

Table 1.

Background information on the informants:

Name	Year of arrival in HK/their age now	Working
Lu	1958/60s	Working half-time as accountant
Zhou	Late teens/mid-50s	Working
Yang	At the age of 20/mid-50s	Working
Fu	1984/mid-50s	Working
Chen	1983/mid-50s	Working half-time in a printing company

Research Procedure

All the semi-structured interviews were carried out immediately before rehearsals. When a player arrived at the music club, Master Lu (the contact person for the group) would help me to invite him to take part in the interview. All five informants were asked the same set of questions in order that comparisons could be made. Although the questions had been prepared beforehand, digressions, following the direction in which the informants were heading, were still possible. Sometimes the sequence and the wording of the questions would be varied depending on the informant. Occasionally, informal conversations took place before leading

the informants into the interview. The main aim of the interviews was to ask the musicians about their learning experiences in Chaozhou and the reasons why they have continued to hold their weekly rehearsals for more than 20 years.

The non-participant observations were carried out when attending the informants' music-making, rehearsals and performance session. I observed three of the Chaozhou *xianshi* musicians' regular rehearsals, which took place on Friday nights shortly after the interviews, and attended one live public performance given by them in the hall of a community centre. The purposes of these observations were to observe the way they rehearsed and how the members of the group related to each other in this context. The kind of music they chose to play, as well as their performance standard, was also taken note of. Besides these observations of the weekly rehearsals in Hong Kong, a 3-day trip was also made to Chaozhou in mainland China, and observations were made of a performance during a visit to one of their music clubs. During the trip, special attention was paid to the musical environment of the city.

Data Analysis

The data were processed and analyzed by the use of the idea of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). According to Strauss & Corbin (1998), it is a theory that was:

Derived from data, systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process. In this method, data collection, analysis, and eventual theory stand in close relationship to one another. A researcher does not begin a project with a preconceived theory in mind. Rather, the researcher begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data (p. 12).

Strauss and Corbin go on to explain that, as grounded theories are drawn from data, they are better able "to offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action" (p. 12).

However, what I mean by "the idea of grounded theory" is that the analysis did not strictly follow every single step and procedure of grounded theory as the theory itself has been developed and modified over the years. Glaser (1992) reminded us that the theory "grew up from the same research as grounded theory, but at the hands of a different research analyst" (p. 123). In this sense, it seems that there is no one strict, standard and authentic approach to what is called grounded theory.

The data of the present study were processed and analyzed in three steps: inductive coding and categorizing; constant comparisons, and integration. The data relating to the ways in

which the *xianshi* musicians had been encultured and learnt their music could be obtained directly from interviews and observations, and analyzed under the categories of enculturation, and informal and formal learning. The categories which emerged relating to their “values”, however, were revealed from the data. Different categories will be related and integrated, resulting in a ‘unified whole’ (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 109) as presented in the following sections.

Findings and Discussions

How They Learn

For the informants’ principal musical enculturation experiences and learning-practice processes, the categories under each of these themes are organised mainly according to the contexts or situations where enculturation and learning took place. These include the informants’ homes and relatives, the community they lived in, as well as learning on their own in an informal way. One of them also learned from school music classes.

Enculturation: Home and Relatives

Two out of five of the informants made specific reference to how they experienced music at home. From the researcher’s observation in Chaozhou, it was evident that there existed a rich musical culture and tradition of playing Chaozhou music in the music clubs, which will be discussed in the coming section. With regard to musical enculturation at home, Lu mentioned that his father and neighbours knew how to play their music:

At that time I was studying at primary school in [my] village... I learnt from many of my neighbors who knew [how to play Chaozhou music]. My father knows too. He knew how to play Chaozhou music. He knew how to play, yet [his technique] was not refined... (Lu)

Another *xianshi* musician, Chen, also mentioned that his brother knew how to play the *yangqin* 揚琴 (a Chinese hammered dulcimer) and sometimes they would play together in their younger days.

Enculturation: Hometown Music Club

In addition to home and relatives, the informants also received musical enculturation from the community in which they lived or in which they now live. Their hometown music club played an important role in shaping their musical enculturation. In their interviews, three of the *xianshi* musicians explicitly mentioned that they listened to and played their Chaozhou music in a music club when they were in their hometown of Chaozhou. This confirms the findings of Ng’s (2006) study, which also revealed that *xianshi* musicians observed and listened a great

deal to music played in settings such as music clubs, on festive occasions and at private home gatherings (p.79).

Zhou recalled that when he was a child, *xianshi* musicians played music every night in every village in places called *xianjian* 閒間 (leisure rooms) in Chaozhou.

[I] went to, what I said before, the *xianjian* (leisure rooms). Every night right there [they played *xianshi* music]. In the village every night [we] have [people playing *xianshi* music]. [If you] have time [you] can go, [If you] don't have time, [you] don't have to go. That's it. (Zhou)

Leisure rooms are also called *yuejian* 樂間 “music rooms”, yet the term “music clubs” is more commonly used in the literature. Chen recalled how in the old days adults would play music in the music club while the children listened:

It was like this: at night, people would go there, like the one here [HK], to the music club. A group of friends would play then, while the children were listening. I listened and listened and then I immersed myself in the music (Chen).

Besides listening to and playing music in music clubs, Lu said that Chaozhou folk opera and folk music were popular in every village as there was not much entertainment in the old days. This indigenous musical experience in the early days helped to develop Lu's fondness for music. Lu recalled that the villagers played the music during their leisure time but that some of them stopped playing for financial reasons. Since playing music and joining music clubs was free, this may mean that some had to work longer hours and thus had less spare time available for playing music.

In addition, from the researcher's observations in their hometown of Chaozhou, there is a famous place by the promenade along the river for people to gather and play music. During the time of my visit, a group was singing and playing Chaozhou opera (Figure 1) and other groups were playing *xianshi* music along the promenade while people walked around at their leisure (Figure 2). These groups are self-organized, not tourist attractions, and they meet regularly at the same place nearly every day. Besides going to music clubs, therefore, Chaozhou people can immerse themselves in their music in this open area along the promenade in Chaozhou city.



Figure 1. A group was playing and singing Chaozhou opera in public



Figure 2. People walked along the promenade at their leisure

Informal Learning: Self-regulated Learning through Listening

Four *xianshi* informants explicitly said that they had to listen to Chaozhou music whenever they had time and opportunity in order to learn and to remember. Yet three of them did not indicate specifically whether they listened to live or recorded music. The other *xianshi* musician, Fu, said that he listened to live music performed by others: “I listened to the playing of the others. I watched them [play] music and I followed. Then I practiced on my own”. Lu explained the importance of listening in his learning of Chaozhou music, which involved attentive and intensive listening:

Whenever you learn music, whether vocal or otherwise, you have to listen to it for a long time. Whether you’re listening to your own or to another’s music, you can still absorb the music and you will not forget it. By listening to the music frequently, oh, listen to it once, twice, you will memorize it, and you will recognize the piece of music as you listen to it. People can recognize what the song is as they listen to it... (Lu).

Chen stated clearly that he listened a lot to recorded music, although the data did not indicate whether this listening habit started from his early life in Chaozhou or in Hong Kong. Now he listens to recordings of music all the time, even when he is working in his own printing company while the machines are running. He also mentioned that he recorded his own playing and listened back to it, which helped him to improve his performance ability.

Although Lu and Chen listened to recorded music a great deal, they pointed out that it is dependent on the availability of resources since in Chaozhou, musicians may not have the opportunity to own many recordings. This was the case for Fu, who only started listening to recordings when he came to Hong Kong. He never had a chance to listen to recordings when he was in Chaozhou, possibly because recorded music was not widely available at that time. Nevertheless, in that period Chaozhou did have numerous *xianshi* ensembles playing live in music clubs every night. Listening to others play might have been enough for him. Furthermore, when he was practicing with other people every day, he was already engaging in intensive listening. With regard to two of the other *xianshi* musicians, Zhou and Yang, although they did not talk specifically about learning through intensive listening, one may assume that they also listened purposively by observing live performances given by older musicians in order to get to know the pieces and their techniques of playing the instruments, as this is the way they generally learn. Yang explained that in the past he watched how the older masters played and then he learnt from each of them. This is obviously a kind of intensive listening with lots of observation in addition.

Informal Learning: Self-learning by Trial and Error

Four of the *xianshi* informants said that they had learnt their instrument(s) by watching the older masters play when they were young. After watching, they would imitate and join in playing with the group. Chen said that he was mainly self-taught and that he had followed the example of others in learning to play *xianshi* music. He had also taught himself to play a new instrument:

I mostly [learnt to play the instruments] by a process of self-learning. For instance, when I was learning the *xiao* 蕭 (Chinese bamboo flute), I bought a *xiao*, a book [on learning how to play the *xiao*], and some other books from different publishers. I read them at night and followed [the instructions on] how to play. I followed [the instructions] and played without taking any lessons because I didn't have time. I followed them on my own because I was interested in it (Chen).

Yang explained that it was important to “keep on trying” and to exchange one’s learning experiences with others at night. Fu stated that he did not follow any mentor when learning to play his *pipa* but that he was entirely self-taught. He would listen to and watch how others played, then he would follow their example and practice on his own. Whilst Yang stressed the importance of trial and error in learning how to play *xianshi* music in his own way, Zhou simply said that you just need to be interested in music, follow other people’s example and play, in order to learn. There is no need to pay any tuition fee!

Formal Learning: School Music Classes

Lu was the only *xianshi* musician who mentioned that he had received music lessons at primary school. However, he did not give a very clear account of his school music learning experience. He just said that during music lessons the teacher did not teach them Chaozhou music. Instead his teacher taught songs in *putonghua* (Mandarin Chinese, the official language of the People’s Republic of China). He therefore did not have the opportunity to learn Chaozhou music at school but learnt it after school. The other four *xianshi* musicians did not even have music lessons.

What They Value

As mentioned above, the term “values” is employed here according to its general and common usage in everyday life. By using the idea of grounded theory, four categories relating to values were found to emerge from the data: for aesthetic and personal enjoyment; for bonding; for identity building; and for building an imagined community. These data are presented and discussed in relation to the relevant literature in the following paragraphs.

For Aesthetic and Personal Enjoyment

Pitts (2005) found that in most parts of the world, “those engaging with music in their everyday lives did so predominantly for the sheer pleasure of musical participation, and the closeness this brought with the repertoire and with others who shared their enthusiasm” (p. 119). This sheer pleasure in simply making the music was shared by the informants in the present study. The theme, “I’m interested in music”, was expressed repeatedly by the *xianshi* informants, who were found to regard music and music-making as forms of aesthetic and personal enjoyment.

All five informants expressed their enthusiasm for making music. Fu expressed that he was very interested to play his *yangqin* 揚琴 (a Chinese hammered dulcimer):

I was interested [to play]. Sometimes...when I returned from work, I was tired. [But if my *yangqin*] was placed outside the house, I did not go in to eat, [I] just played [the *yangqin*]... (Fu).

During the interview, Fu stated six times that he was very interested in *xianshi* music. Yang also explained that because of his interest in music, he was willing to learn from others in order to improve his techniques:

That’s those elders, we learnt from them, their techniques. If you make an effort to learn, and receive comments from the older mentors, you get a little from this one, a little from that one, eventually you can “accumulate” a lot (Yang).

Chen stated that he was so interested in playing *xianshi* music that he played it day and night, even when he was at work. Pitts (2005) found that “enjoyment was the critical factor, sustaining participants in activities which could at times be demanding, expensive and frustrating, but which always yielded some element of satisfaction and pleasure” (p. 120). Besides the enjoyment of playing his music, Chen also said that one must be passionate about *xianshi* music in order to learn how to play it. Whilst Lu said that he started to have an interest in *xianshi* music when he was in primary school, Zhou said that playing *xianshi* music is his interest, and that this cannot be forced.

For Bonding

Music can perform a special function at a group level. As Hallam (1998) notes, music can be a social activity which serves “to provide shared experiences and understandings which assist in binding together social groups” (p. 159). When musicians play music in a group, besides sharing a musical experience together, this helps to develop a sense of belonging and bonding

among them. In this study, from the researcher's observations, this experience of bonding was found to be the case especially for the *xianshi* musicians. Playing music together is a method of bonding, or a way of crystallizing and maintaining the brotherhood for them.

Yang said that the most valuable thing for them as lay workers in their workplace is to help each other. It is this feeling of brotherhood which has held them together for such a long period of time. I observed that they ate together every Friday night; they had played music together for more than twenty years. Also, they cooked for themselves, which is unusual for a Teochew (Chaozhou man), since it is normally considered to be "women's work". However, they are willing to do it because of the close bond between them. Also, while they were playing the music, I could see that there was a tacit understanding among them. Although they sat in a circle while playing, there was no need for them to look at each other (Figure 3). They seemed to be completely immersed in the music. Yet I could hear that they played together without any conductor to give them a cue at every music entry point. Even when certain musical phrases had slowed down or accelerated, everybody had already "internalized" the musical pulse.



Click to listen to an example of *xianshi* music.

They could use their bodies to feel the music and they knew the music and each other so well that it seemed like breathing. Playing music together helps them to maintain their lifelong friendship.

This brotherhood also developed because of their learning-practices. Chen said that when he was in Chaozhou, whenever they were playing *xianshi* music together, the group of "brothers" would take turns playing different instruments. Sometimes he played the *qin* while others played bowed strings, but then in another piece they swapped positions so that he was playing the strings while they played the *qin*. Yang confirmed this. He said he never stayed in the same position for very long. This is possible because they all know how to play different instruments. By taking turns and changing positions, they increase their interest in playing as well as foster their cooperative spirit.

The existence of this strong bond among them helps to explain why their *xianshi* music club in Hong Kong is flourishing. Even the name of the association – "Hong Kong Chiu Chow Merchants Mutual Assistance Society Limited" - contains a very important message: mutual assistance. It may be assumed that when they came to Hong Kong, they would have found it difficult to adapt to a new environment and a new job, but this spirit of brotherhood has held them together and enabled them to maintain a lifelong commitment to the group.



Figure 3. Playing *xianshi* music as a kind of bonding among members

Therefore, besides having a love of music which draws them together, playing *xianshi* music also contains a deeper message of mutual assistance. Now, as master Yang said, although in their professions they have changed from being workers to being bosses, they still have a sense of belonging to the group. In Chinese, we have a proverb: *xiangshi yuwei* 相識於微 “Knowing each other when we were insignificant”, which implies that people especially treasure friendships which were established when they were just “small potatoes”, rather than those they make when they are rich.

For Identity Building

Can “music” and “identity” be related to each other? DeNora (2000) explains that “...the sense of ‘self’ is locatable in music. Musical materials provide terms and templates for elaborating self-identity—for identity’s identification” (p.68). Through playing music, therefore, one can “find” one’s identity in music through the musical materials and consolidate that identity. Also, Blacking (1974), in explaining the relationship between the one who creates the music and the one who listens, says, “it [music] is useful and effective only when it is heard by the prepared and receptive ears of people who have shared, or can

share in some way, the cultural and individual experiences of its creators” (p. 54). It is therefore unsurprising that music is effective for the *xianshi* musicians because they have ears that are receptive to hearing their shared experience as Teochew (Chaozhou people) as explained below.

In the present study, a strong link was found to exist between *xianshi* music and the identity of the musicians. The Chinese people’s strong sense of national identity is derived from more than six thousand years of history, which includes the upheaval of the “scramble for concessions” by Western countries and the invasion of the Japanese. This “weeping” history may have pushed the Chinese closer together and enhanced their sense of national identity.

As mentioned in a previous section, *xianshi* music is very much a part of the Chaozhou people’s lives. One can find Chaozhou music clubs in nearly all their communities in different parts of the world (Dujunco, 1994). Therefore, *xianshi* musicians learn *xianshi* music because it is “their music” (*ibid.*, p. 129). As DeNora (2000) makes clear, music has become a useful device “for the reflexive process of remembering/constructing who one is... it is a device for the generation of future identity and action structures, a mediator of future existence” (p. 63). Furthermore, the music division of the Hong Kong Chiu Chow Merchants Mutual Assistance Society Ltd. served as an important place for their regular weekly music gathering. From the 1950s up to the present, they have held their weekly rehearsal in this music club on Friday evenings (except for public holidays) (Ng, 2006, p. 104). In the present study, Lu was eager to tell the researcher a lot about their Chaozhou tradition, which shows that he is proud of being a Teochew. Together with a rich heritage of music, Chaozhou also has a special cultural heritage famous in many parts of the world, such as Chaozhou cuisine, Chaozhou *gongfu* tea and Chaozhou embroidery.

However, the story of one of the *xianshi* informants illustrates the difference between those who have a strong link to the Chaozhou identity and those who have not. Chen, who has been a member of the *xianshi* musical group for as long as the other members, was not born in Chaozhou but lived in a nearby town in the same province. The villagers from where he lived also played and listened to Chaozhou *xianshi* music, and the instruments and music were exactly the same as those from Chaozhou. However, he is very different from the other four informants, who were all born in Chaozhou. Chen stated openly that he is a Christian and that he attends Sunday Service every week at a church in Hong Kong. Although he did not mention anything about his musical learning in church, he is the only member of the *xianshi* group who is interested in playing Western instruments, such as the clarinet and saxophone. In our conversation and interview, he was the only informant from this group who was able to speak fluent Cantonese without an accent, showing that he is more open to learning new things and has been able to immerse himself in the Hong Kong community, rather than

holding on to his mainland Chinese identity, even though he is the same age as most of the other informants.

For Building an Imagined Community

In a discussion of how members of a diaspora retain their memories and keep their far-away homes present in their thoughts, Daynes (2004) notes, "...food and music are the easiest tools to transport memories, and they also have an immediate and forceful power of evocation" (p. 25). It is clear that both music and food are powerful tools for such people to remember the familiar places where their roots are but in which they are no longer living. It is therefore understandable that the *xianshi* musicians who participated in the present study play *xianshi* music, drink *gongfu* tea and have dinner together before their weekly music session. Daynes goes on to say that when people move to another place, they "bring music with them, before anything else" (ibid., p. 25). Music thus becomes an important tool for the transmission of a collective memory and a way of unifying the diaspora:

Music therefore becomes a medium of transmission, which reveals the truth concerning history, determines who are the enemies, and creates a continuity between past and present. And this transmission clearly considers the diaspora to be unified and, therefore, an expression of this continuity (Daynes, 2004, p. 37).

This is the case with the members of the *xianshi* musicians group who migrated to Hong Kong, bringing their music with them as a means of preserving their collective memories of their history and culture. Playing their indigenous music, as Daynes notes, can create a bridge between past and present for the diaspora. This point also resonates with DeNora's (2000) opinion that "music is a medium that can be and often is simply paired or associated with aspects of past experience" (p. 66). The *xianshi* musicians are living here in Hong Kong as if they were still in Chaozhou, even though they have been settled in Hong Kong for more than twenty years. They still speak their dialect among themselves, whereas migrants from other provinces may have already learnt how to speak Cantonese fluently and to use it naturally in their daily lives. The way they play their music and their continued use of their own dialect seem to remind them of their motherland or their identity as Teochew (Chaozhou people). In Hong Kong, they seem unconsciously to have created an "imagined community" - a miniature Chaozhou. This is what DeNora (2000) means when she states, "music is part of the material and aesthetic environment in which it was once playing, in which the past, now an artifact of memory and its construction, was once a present" (p. 67). In this way, they maintain a strong sense of identity, which creates a bond among them.

In their practice sessions, the *xianshi* ensemble played some repertoires repeatedly. They explained that these standard repertoires had been played for a very long period of time. When the researcher returned to visit Chaozhou on the mainland, they also played the same pieces. This means that they play the same sets whether they are in Chaozhou or in Hong Kong, and that the decades they have spent in Hong Kong have not resulted in any change in their musical taste. When they are playing the music, it somehow looks to the researcher as though they *are* back home in mainland China rather than in Hong Kong. Playing in the group may give them a sense of brotherhood, of togetherness and a strong sense of nostalgia. Another point to note is that their Friday dinners before the rehearsals are free of charge, as some members donate money to be used for this purpose. The significance of a free dinner, however, extends beyond its value as a meal or its monetary value, and lies in its cementing of this sense of coherence and brotherhood among the Chaozhou people in this *xianshi* musical group.

Furthermore, two informants mentioned that they travelled to the mainland to play *xianshi* music every week. It takes around 5 hours by coach after crossing the Hong Kong border to travel to Chaozhou. Fu explained that the *xianshi* music in Hong Kong is the same as that played on the mainland. He speaks Cantonese with a much stronger accent than any of the other informants, and sometimes one can only guess at what he is saying. This shows that he has not blended into Hong Kong society. It is reasonable to suppose that he has communication problems in his daily life.

Nevertheless, no matter how hard they try to maintain their authentic music tradition, the process of change seems to be inevitable. As Ramnarine (2007) explains, while diaspora has something to do with “history”, it is also about “newness” (p.2). In recent years, at a number of large-scale performances, the *xianshi* group used a cello as well because *xianshi* ensembles do not have a lower register instrument. Lu admitted that *xianshi* music is going through a process of change. In one of their performances in a community hall that the researcher observed, they used a cello in the performance of Chaozhou Opera. The use of a lower register instrument, especially the cello, is also common in other Chinese music ensembles. In addition to the introduction of a Western instrument, the ensemble also used microphones to amplify the voices of their Chaozhou operatic singers, something which was unlikely to have happened in a public performance in rural China in the old days.

Conclusion

Regarding the possible effects of enculturation and learning-practices on their values, it seems that the *xianshi* informant’s musical enculturation may have cultivated in them an active approach towards making music throughout their lives. It appears that the musical enculturation that took place in the music clubs, and the environment of Chaozhou they

experienced in their homelands, where they were able to see, hear and participate in making their vernacular music, may have affected their personal values regarding music and music-making. Generally speaking, the values and meaning they attached to music may be divided into the categories of personal and collective. At a personal level, they value music for aesthetic and personal enjoyment. Yet from a collective point of view, music is far more valuable in their lives than sheer entertainment, and is entrusted with several missions: for bonding, identity building, and creating an imagined community. It is possible that their “live” musical enculturation experience is deeply rooted in their hearts, and has had an impact on how they value music which will last all their lives. One of the reasons why they attached such explicit and specific values to music was that they had very clear ideas regarding why they needed music and also concerning the position of music in their lives.

In addition to the enculturation process, *informal learning-practices* may also help to define the way in which an individual or group of individuals value music and music making. Whilst, as mentioned above, the *xianshi* musician informants value music highly on both personal and collective levels, they learn their music mainly in an informal way through a process of listening, and by using a trial and error method. As they were self-motivated and their learning was not driven by others but from their own intentions and at their own pace, this learning experience may also have helped them to sustain a lifelong interest in making music and to attach a special meaning to music. By contrast, *formal learning* seems to have had a minimal impact on these informants as only Lu had music lessons at school. In summary, it is reasonable to postulate that the values someone attaches to music may also be influenced by the learning-practices they have adopted and by their enculturation background.

Implications for Music Education

In light of the above, it is recommended that music educators be aware of the possible effect that enculturation and informal learning-practices may have on teachers’ and students’ values concerning music and music-making. Firstly, it should be noted that the *xianshi* musicians did not learn their music from formal school music lessons. On the contrary, these layman music lovers mainly learnt their music through a rich enculturation process and informal learning-practices; yet they have been shown to value their music and music-making throughout their lives! It is therefore possible that as educators we may attach too much importance to formal learning, believing that valuable learning is only possible with a professional and inside an institution. This may have far-reaching implications as music and music-making may become an art craft which is too high to be reached by the layman music lover.

Secondly, we may not be aware of the achievements of people who have learnt in other ways, nor do we value their efforts and the contributions they make to society. In light of this, educators are advised to become conscious that their students have the ability to learn and

experience music through other learning methods, such as those employed by the *xianshi* musicians described in this study. Therefore, a move from an exclusive focus on one type of learning to making available to members of the public more diverse yet meaningful and effective ways of learning is needed. In this way, people can be exposed to other forms of learning that may bring about a positive motivation to learn, and music has a more profound significance in people's lives.

Thirdly, it is advised to foster a musically encultured environment in an authentic setting for music-making so as to kindle a passion for lifelong involvement in music in the everyday lives of people. As Hesmondhalgh (2002) explains, much of our everyday experience of music is as "background" music (p.125). This background type of music enculturation, however, may have become the main musical enculturation experience for Hong Kong people and for people from developed countries. When we look at the lifelong devotion to music-making of the *xianshi* musicians, we can see that it is essential to cultivate a more "alive" musical enculturation environment for members of the public, as well as to acknowledge the importance of informal learning. In light of the above, although it is good to invite world-class orchestras and other performing companies to perform in Hong Kong, resources should also be allocated to promoting indigenous music-making groups. In this way, more diverse and varied live music performances by different ethnic and even school music groups should be welcomed.

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