

Educational Perspectives on the Literacy of Chinese Folk Music Recomposed for Saxophone

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ARTICLE INFO ABSTRACT

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Conflicts of interest: None Funding: None Chinese folk music, rich in cultural and historical significance, represents a vital element of the nation's intangible heritage. This study investigates the educational perspectives on the literacy of Chinese folk music recomposed for saxophone. Recomposing such music involves adapting traditional melodies for modern instruments like the saxophone, blending cultural authenticity with contemporary techniques. Through a qualitative research approach, the study explores how recomposed Chinese folk music fosters technical proficiency, cultural literacy, and creative expression in students. Data were collected through interviews with three key informants, document analysis, and performance observations. Thematic analysis revealed four key findings: recomposed music enhances cultural literacy, supports technical and artistic development, fosters pedagogical innovation, and balances tradition with modernity. Despite these benefits, challenges persist in preserving the core identity of traditional music while innovating for modern audiences. The study highlights the role of educators in designing curricula that integrate historical context and cultural narratives alongside technical skills. Recommendations for future research include exploring the use of recomposed music with other instruments, examining student perceptions, and leveraging digital tools to enhance accessibility. This research contributes to cultural preservation and the evolution of music education practices by addressing these areas and offering insights for educators, composers, and performers.

Key words: Chinese Folk Music, Saxophone Education, Musical Literacy, Cultural Preservation, Recomposition Techniques

INTRODUCTION

Chinese folk music's rich and diverse tradition is a cornerstone of the nation's cultural heritage, reflecting its history, values, and artistic expressions. However, in an era of rapid globalization and modernization, these traditional musical forms face the challenge of remaining relevant to contemporary audiences (Tang, 2021; Xiaozhi, 2024). One innovative approach to preserving and revitalizing Chinese folk music is its recomposition for the saxophone, an instrument traditionally associated with Western classical and jazz traditions. This fusion of Eastern heritage with Western instrumental techniques offers new artistic possibilities and provides a platform for exploring cultural and educational intersections (Brown et al., 2023; Guo, 2024). This study investigates the role of educational perspectives in shaping the literacy of Chinese folk music when recomposed for saxophone, delving into how this approach can enrich modern music education.

The growing popularity of the saxophone in Chinese music education marks a shift towards blending global influences with local traditions. As an accessible and versatile instrument, the saxophone serves as a bridge that connects the traditional and the modern, making Chinese folk music more relatable to contemporary learners. Despite its potential, the educational integration of recomposed Chinese folk music for the saxophone presents unique challenges (Deng, 2023; Hasegawa, 2022; Li, 2024). Balancing the preservation of cultural authenticity with adapting folk melodies to the saxophone's tonal and technical characteristics requires careful consideration. This tension raises critical questions about the role of music educators in ensuring that students not only develop technical proficiency but also gain a deeper understanding of the cultural significance of the music they study.

The objective of this study is to investigate the educational perspectives on the literacy of Chinese folk music recomposed for saxophone. Musical literacy in this context refers to the ability to understand, interpret, and express music that spans cultural and stylistic boundaries. This study seeks to identify the pedagogical strategies, teaching materials, and assessment methods that can best support students in acquiring a holistic understanding of recomposed Chinese folk music. By doing so, it aims to contribute to developing music

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education practices that foster technical excellence and cultural appreciation (Creech et al., 2020; Xiao et al., 2023). The research also examines how educators can integrate historical and cultural context into their teaching to provide students with a more comprehensive learning experience.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to enrich the field of music education by highlighting the value of integrating traditional Chinese folk music into contemporary curricula. By focusing on the recomposition of these works for saxophone, the research underscores the importance of cultural preservation in an age of globalization. It also emphasizes the role of innovation in keeping traditional art forms relevant and engaging for new generations of learners. Through its findings, this study aims to offer practical insights for music educators, composers, and performers, encouraging them to embrace the educational opportunities presented by recomposed Chinese folk music. It hopes to inspire a deeper appreciation for the interconnectedness of cultural heritage and modern artistic expression, fostering a more inclusive and dynamic approach to music education.

Research Question

 How do educational perspectives influence the literacy of Chinese folk music when recomposed for saxophone in modern music education?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The intersection of Chinese folk music and modern music education offers fertile ground for exploring how traditional music can be preserved, adapted, and taught in contemporary settings. The recomposition of folk music for instruments like the saxophone revitalizes the music and broadens its accessibility and appeal. This process emphasizes the importance of musical literacy, which encompasses understanding, interpreting, and performing music in a culturally and technically informed manner. This literature review delves into three interconnected areas: the essence of Chinese folk music and its role in musical literacy, the recomposition process for instrumental adaptation, and the educational perspectives that inform integrating these works into modern curricula.

Chinese Folk Music and Musical Literacy

Chinese folk music significantly enhances musical literacy, as evidenced by various studies focusing on different regions and musical forms. Integrating folk songs into educational curricula has improved language acquisition, critical thinking, and cognitive skills in Southern Shaanxi (Gong et al., 2024). However, challenges such as the loss of traditional environments and economic constraints persist (Wang & Thotham, 2024). Similarly, the Si Zhu Yue music from the Yangtze River basin emphasizes the importance of cultural values in literacy studies, advocating for innovative approaches to preserve this intangible cultural heritage amidst modernization (Li et al., 2024). The Gu Shi Ci art songs, which blend ancient Chinese poetry with music, highlight the necessity of combining vocal techniques with cultural and literary education to enhance performance authenticity and emotional resonance (Zhang & Chonprirot, 2024). The Putian coastal folk songs in Fujian Province catalyze education and literacy promotion, reflecting diverse cultural influences and historical development (Wu & Bhengsri, 2023). Furthermore, the Qin Zheng playing techniques, as taught by Zhou Wang, underscore the potential of traditional Chinese music to enrich students' language skills, cognitive abilities, and emotional intelligence, thereby fostering musical literacy (Fanbo & Thotham, 2024). Collectively, these studies illustrate the multifaceted role of Chinese folk music in promoting musical literacy, emphasizing the need for integrated educational approaches that preserve cultural heritage while adapting to contemporary challenges. Traditional music, deeply rooted in oral traditions, significantly promotes literacy and education across various global contexts. In African settings, folk songs and oral literature have historically been instrumental in preserving cultural heritage and imparting moral lessons. This is especially true in Nigeria, where oral traditions and folklore have been foundational to educational development since pre-colonial times (Okediji, 2017).

Recomposition and Instrumental Adaptation

Recomposing Chinese folk music for modern instruments like the saxophone involves a delicate balance between preserving cultural authenticity and embracing artistic innovation. This creative endeavor is akin to the innovative music composition in "Reboisasi," which integrates traditional elements with new ideas, demonstrating how traditional music can be adapted to modern contexts while maintaining its essence (Anggayanto & Haryanto, 2023). Similarly, adapting the Guqin's timbre through the transplantation of the violin's bass bar highlights the potential for cross-cultural musical innovation, suggesting that traditional Chinese instruments can be enhanced by incorporating elements from Western instruments (Tang, 2023). The recomposition process also parallels the multi-genre influence in songwriting, as seen in "Rearranging," where diverse musical styles are blended to create a novel piece, reflecting the fluidity and adaptability of music across genres. Furthermore, exploring 12-tone techniques in fugal writing exemplifies how traditional forms can be reimagined through modern compositional methods, offering a new perspective on established musical structures (Harkiolakis, 2020; Venn, 2017). The recomposition of traditional music into contemporary forms is a global phenomenon that reflects the dynamic interplay between cultural heritage and modern innovation. In Ireland, the fusion of traditional Celtic music with modern instruments like the electric guitar exemplifies how traditional melodies can be preserved while introducing new textures, making the music more accessible to contemporary audiences (Smyth, 2002).

Educational Perspectives on Recomposition

Recomposed Chinese folk music fosters cultural literacy, technical skills, and creative thinking in education. It allows learners to engage with traditional music while exploring its modern applications, enhancing their understanding of historical and contemporary musical expression. This approach aligns with broader goals of cross-cultural understanding and interdisciplinary learning. Students develop technical proficiency in their instruments by studying and performing these works while gaining insights into cultural narratives and compositional techniques (Dobson & Littleton, 2016; Lau & Grieshaber, 2018). This approach encourages learners to view music as a dynamic medium that evolves through collaboration and reinterpretation. However, challenges arise in aligning traditional values with modern music education demands. Educators must design curricula emphasizing authenticity and innovation, encouraging students to analyze the recomposition process, reflect on cultural significance, and experiment with interpretations (Gaunt et al., 2021; Parkinson & Smith, 2015; Olvera-Fernández et al., 2023). This approach enriches students' learning experiences and equips them with the skills to adapt to diverse artistic and cultural contexts. Integrating recomposed traditional music into educational curricula globally is a powerful tool for cultural preservation and education, as evidenced by various pedagogical efforts across different regions. In Latin America, educators utilize recomposed folk music to teach rhythm and harmony while instilling cultural pride, a practice that aligns with the broader educational goals of fostering cultural confidence and innovation in traditional culture, as discussed by Qian in the context of art education (Qian, 2024).

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to examine how educational perspectives influence the literacy of Chinese folk music recomposed for saxophone in modern music education. A descriptive design captures the complexity of perspectives from educators, composers, and performers (Hollister, 2019; Jian et al., 2024; Lulu et al., 2024). Data were collected through interviews, document analysis, and performance observations, providing a holistic understanding of the subject.

Research Design

A qualitative descriptive approach was selected to investigate educational perspectives on the literacy of Chinese folk music recomposed for saxophone. This design emphasizes understanding real-world practices and perceptions, aligning well with the exploratory nature of the research question. The study utilizes a triangulation method, combining interviews, document reviews, and performance observations to ensure comprehensive data collection and analysis, as shown in Table 1.

Participants

The study engaged three key informants selected based on their expertise and significant contributions to the field of recomposed Chinese folk music for the saxophone. These informants included a composer, a saxophonist, and an educator, ensuring diverse perspectives, as shown in Table 2.

Table 1. Research design

Key Features	Details
Approach	Qualitative descriptive
Focus	Educational perspectives, musical literacy, and cultural integration
Methods	Interviews, document analysis, and performance observations
Rationale	To explore the intersection of traditional Chinese folk music and modern saxophone education

Table 2. Key informants selection criteria

Criteria	Details
Professional Experience	Over 20 years in saxophone performance, composition, or music education
Academic Contributions	Published at least 10 articles in international journals
Recognition	Recipient of national or international awards for contributions to music
Involvement in Recomposition	Significant experience in recomposing Chinese folk music for the saxophone

Data Collection

A multifaceted data collection strategy was employed to gather rich and diverse data from multiple sources. As shown in Table 3, the primary methods included interviews, document analysis, and performance observations.

Data Analysis

A thematic analysis was conducted to identify key themes and patterns in the collected data. This process included several structured steps, as shown in Table 4, to ensure reliability and depth of analysis.

RESULTS

Integrating recomposed Chinese folk music into saxophone pedagogy offers a multifaceted platform for enhancing musical literacy and fostering educational growth. This study examines the interplay between cultural heritage and modern music education, highlighting the perspectives of educators, composers, and performers. The results provide valuable insights into how adapting folk music for the saxophone enriches cultural literacy, technical skills, and pedagogical practices while addressing the challenges of preserving authenticity. The findings are presented across four key themes: cultural literacy enhancement, technical and artistic development, pedagogical innovation, and the balance between tradition and modernity.

Cultural Literacy Enhancement

The study highlights the significant role recomposed by Chinese folk music in enhancing cultural literacy, as articulated by the key informants. This literacy involves more than

Methods	Details
Semi-structured Interviews	Conducted with key informants to explore their experiences and perspectives
Document Analysis	Reviewed educational materials to identify pedagogical themes and practices
Performance Observations	Analyzed live and recorded performances for insights into interpretative and technical aspects

Table 3. Data collection methods

Table 4. Data analysis

Step	Description
Familiarization	Initial review of interview transcripts, documents, and observation notes
Coding	Systematic categorization of data into specific themes
Theme Identification	Grouping of codes into overarching themes to address the research question
Interpretation	Analysis of how themes relate to the influence of educational perspectives on musical literacy

just the ability to play or interpret the music; it encompasses a deep understanding and appreciation of the cultural and historical context embedded within the melodies. Informants stressed that exposing students to recomposed works allows them to engage with traditional Chinese heritage in a contemporary and accessible manner.

Music educators emphasized the saxophone's adaptability in bridging traditional folk music with modern pedagogical frameworks. One participant explained that the saxophone's versatility enables it to emulate the emotive expressions of traditional Chinese instruments while offering the tonal range needed to captivate contemporary learners. This adaptability allows students to connect with folk melodies as musical constructs and carriers of cultural narratives and values.

The informants also noted that the transcription and recomposition process introduces students to the intrinsic literacy skills required for interpreting these works. For example, "Little River Flows," an analyzed piece, explains how traditional melodies can be preserved while reinterpreted for the saxophone. In the adaptation of "Little River Flows," shown in Figure 1, the original melody remains intact while the saxophone's tonal qualities enhance its resonance. Informants explained that analyzing such pieces teaches students to discern musical transformation's nuances while respecting the original composition's essence.

One educator shared that traditional folk music's melodic flow and rhythmic patterns, as seen in works like "Little River Flows," cultivate students' ability to internalize and interpret cultural subtleties. This fosters literacy that transcends technical skills and nurtures an understanding of music as a cultural expression. Students can read and contextualize Chinese musical traditions through recomposed music, even when performed on a Western instrument like the saxophone.

Ultimately, the research underscores the potential of recomposed Chinese folk music as a cultural bridge in modern education. By engaging with these works, students gain technical musical proficiency and cultivate a cultural literacy that enables them to appreciate, preserve, and reinterpret the rich heritage of Chinese folk music within a global musical framework. This technical and culturally dual-layered literacy demonstrates music education's transformative power in connecting tradition with modernity.

Technical and Artistic Development

Recomposed Chinese folk music often includes complex techniques such as vibrato, slap tonguing, and harmonic improvisation, essential for mastering the saxophone's unique characteristics. Participants emphasized that these technical demands improve technical proficiency and deepen students' understanding of how these techniques enhance musical expression. One informant noted that performing recomposed folk music pushes students to explore the saxophone's full potential, enabling them to internalize advanced techniques in the context of culturally significant music.

For example, the piece "Lovely Red Flowers" incorporates slap tonguing to mimic the percussive elements of the original folk music, requiring precision and rhythmic accuracy. Similarly, "Little River Flows" employs vibrato to evoke the emotional nuances of the melody, challenging students to convey both technical finesse and expressive depth, as shown in Figure 2. Mastering these techniques allows students to develop a nuanced technical literacy beyond conventional saxophone repertoire.

Artistic literacy is crucial to engaging with recomposed Chinese folk music. By interpreting these works, students gain insight into the cultural narratives and emotional expressions embedded in the music. An informant shared that recomposed folk music requires performers to connect with the story and emotions of the original piece, encouraging them to move beyond technical accuracy and embody the music's artistic intent.

Recomposed works fuse traditional Chinese music with contemporary saxophone performance, bridging cultural and stylistic boundaries. This synthesis challenges students to integrate traditional melodic elements with modern technical innovations. One participant explained that learning recomposed works helps students appreciate the balance between preserving the authenticity of the original music and bringing their artistic voice to the performance.

Many recomposed works are designed for ensemble performance, requiring students to collaborate effectively with their peers. This context not only hones technical skills such as timing and synchronization but also promotes artistic collaboration and shared interpretation. One informant observed that performing in an ensemble setting teaches students to listen actively and respond sensitively, essential skills for technical precision and artistic expression.

Pedagogical Innovation

Recomposed Chinese folk music is a dynamic resource for developing music curricula that engage students in a holistic learning experience. Informants noted that these works



Figure 1. Transcription of little river flows Source: Haoyun Guo, transcription from fieldwork in 2024



Figure 2. Notation of slap tonguing Source: Laboratorio de Artes Mixtas

provide opportunities to introduce traditional Chinese culture through a modern lens, aligning with educational goals to enhance cultural and musical literacy. One informant stated that including recomposed folk music in the curriculum ensures students connect deeply to Chinese cultural heritage while learning contemporary saxophone techniques.

The interdisciplinary nature of recomposed music allows educators to design lessons that combine history, culture, and performance. For example, "Little River Flows" will enable educators to teach melodic transcription alongside the cultural narratives embedded in the original folk melody. Instructors cultivate technical and cultural literacy by engaging students in discussions about the origins and evolution of music.

The integration of recomposed works in education bridges theoretical concepts with practical applications. Participants emphasized that recomposed music facilitates teaching key musical concepts such as harmony, rhythm, and form within the culturally meaningful repertoire. An informant explained that recomposed pieces provide a real-world context where students can apply theoretical knowledge, making learning more relevant and impactful.

Recomposed music encourages students to think creatively and critically, challenging them to interpret traditional melodies in new ways while maintaining their cultural essence. Informants highlighted how students are encouraged to explore artistic interpretations and experiment with techniques, enhancing their musical literacy. One participant remarked that recomposed music prompts students to question, innovate, and find their voice within the framework of cultural tradition.

For instance, in "Lovely Red Flowers," students are asked to interpret the folk melody through the lens of a saxophone quartet. This requires critical thinking about balancing individual expression with ensemble cohesion, fostering creative independence and collaborative skills. Additionally, educators use the recomposed works to prompt discussions about preserving authenticity while embracing innovation, helping students navigate the tension between tradition and modernity.

The interdisciplinary nature of recomposed Chinese folk music opens avenues for learning beyond music performance. Educators reported using these works to explore connections between music, history, literature, and visual arts, promoting a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural context. One informant explained that students can investigate how art forms interact and influence each other through recomposed music, broadening their perspective and literacy.

For example, teaching "Little River Flows" can incorporate lessons about the historical and geographical background of Yunnan Province, where the original folk melody originated. Students might also analyze the lyrical themes of love and longing in the song's narrative, connecting these emotional elements to their performance interpretation. Such interdisciplinary approaches enrich the learning experience and enhance students' ability to relate to the music on multiple levels.

Challenges in Balancing Tradition and Modernity

Participants consistently voiced concerns about preserving the core identity of Chinese folk music during the recomposition process. A music educator explained that the literacy of these works requires a deep understanding of traditional melodies and their cultural context. Without this foundation, the essence of the music risks being diluted. Informants stressed that preserving authenticity goes beyond retaining the melody—it also involves maintaining the cultural and emotional depth embedded in the original compositions.

For example, in "Little River Flows," the original folk song's melodic contours and emotional narrative must remain discernible, even when adapted for the saxophone. Participants argued that failing to honor these elements could lead to a superficial representation of Chinese folk traditions, undermining the educational value of these recomposed works.

While maintaining authenticity is paramount, participants also acknowledged the necessity of innovation to make traditional music accessible and relevant to modern audiences and learners. One composer noted that musical literacy involves understanding tradition and finding ways to reimagine it for contemporary contexts. Recomposed works like Lovely Red Flowers demonstrate how innovative arrangements can preserve the spirit of the original while introducing new textures and dynamics suited to the saxophone's capabilities.

However, informants highlighted that innovation requires sensitivity and restraint. Overly experimental approaches risk alienating music from its roots, making it less effective as a tool for fostering cultural literacy. Striking the right balance, as participants explained, involves thoughtful decisions about instrumentation, harmony, and rhythm that respect the original while enhancing its appeal to modern audiences.

The challenge of balancing tradition and modernity extends into the classroom, where educators must navigate conflicting priorities. Participants reported that students often gravitate toward the modern aspects of recomposed works, such as the technical and expressive possibilities offered by the saxophone. While these elements are engaging, educators must ensure that students also develop an appreciation for the historical and cultural significance of the original folk melodies.

One informant, a saxophonist and educator, stated that teaching literacy in recomposed works involves more than technical mastery; it requires fostering a connection to the music's heritage. This dual focus can be challenging, especially when students are more attracted to the innovative features. Educators must find ways to integrate historical context and cultural narratives into their lessons to ensure that students develop a comprehensive understanding of the music. Participants stressed that maintaining balance requires aligning educational objectives and artistic practices. While recomposed works are valuable for developing technical and creative skills, they must also serve as vehicles for cultural education. Informants emphasized the role of educators in guiding students toward an appreciation of both the traditional and modern aspects of these works. One educator remarked that our role is to help students navigate the complexities of tradition and modernity, ensuring they gain a holistic musical literacy that honors both.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of this study align with existing research on musical literacy and the integration of cultural heritage into modern music education. As prior studies (e.g., Wang & Thotham, 2024; Li et al., 2024) have shown, traditional Chinese folk music fosters cognitive and cultural literacy. This research confirms that recomposing Chinese folk music for the saxophone preserves its cultural authenticity and adapts it to modern educational contexts, thus enriching technical proficiency and cultural understanding. The saxophone's adaptability to emulate traditional Chinese instruments reflects Guo's (2024) insights into blending Eastern and Western musical traditions. Globally, similar efforts in adapting traditional music to contemporary instruments demonstrate the universal value of such recompositions in bridging cultural heritage with modern artistic practices.

Moreover, the study highlights how interdisciplinary approaches to teaching recomposed music foster creative pedagogy. For example, integrating history, performance, and technical learning allows students to connect theoretical knowledge with practical applications, aligning with the principles emphasized by Creech et al. (2020) and Lau and Grieshaber (2018). Techniques such as slap tonguing and vibrato, which are required in pieces like "Lovely Red Flowers," enhance technical literacy while maintaining the cultural narrative, a concept supported by Fanbo and Thotham (2024). Globally, interdisciplinary approaches are similarly reflected in Irish music education, where recomposed Celtic melodies teach historical and musical concepts (Smyth, 2002).

However, the study also reveals significant challenges. Balancing the preservation of traditional music's essence with the need for modern innovation remains a delicate process. While recomposed works like "Little River Flows" successfully merge these elements, participants expressed concerns about the risk of diluting the cultural authenticity of the original compositions during the adaptation process. These tensions echo observations by Tang (2021), who noted that globalization pressures often challenge the integrity of traditional music. Educators, therefore, play a crucial role in ensuring that students appreciate the technical and cultural dimensions of recomposed works. This is consistent with Parkinson and Smith's (2015) findings on the complexities of fostering authenticity in music education. Other cultural contexts also reflect concerns about ensuring authenticity in adapting traditional music to contemporary frameworks.

Recomposed Chinese folk music is a dynamic pedagogical tool that bridges cultural traditions and contemporary practices. Its interdisciplinary nature promotes cross-cultural appreciation and technical mastery, supporting Gaunt et al.'s (2021) argument that music education must equip students to navigate diverse cultural and artistic contexts. By engaging with recomposed works, students develop technical skills and gain a deeper understanding of the cultural narratives embedded in music, fostering a holistic approach to music education.

This study demonstrates the potential of recomposed Chinese folk music for saxophone to enhance musical literacy and bridge traditional and modern educational paradigms. It confirms that integrating traditional music into modern curricula promotes cultural appreciation, technical proficiency, and creative thinking. At the same time, the findings highlight challenges, particularly in balancing cultural authenticity with innovation to appeal to contemporary learners. Addressing these challenges requires thoughtful curriculum design and a commitment to preserving the cultural essence of traditional music. Moreover, the small sample size in this study, while providing depth through the expertise of the informants, limits the generalizability of the findings. Future studies should include a larger and more diverse group of participants to capture broader perspectives.

The implications of this study extend beyond Chinese folk music, offering a model for integrating traditional art forms into global education systems. The fusion of Eastern musical heritage with Western instrumental techniques underscores the importance of cross-cultural collaboration in maintaining the relevance of traditional music in a globalized world. Educators can cultivate a more inclusive and dynamic approach to music education by incorporating historical, cultural, and technical perspectives into pedagogy.

Future research could expand this study by exploring how other instruments, such as the piano or violin, interact with recomposed Chinese folk music to foster cultural and technical literacy. Additionally, investigating students' perceptions of recomposed works would provide valuable insights into their educational impact. Comparative studies between Chinese recomposed music and similar initiatives in other cultures could reveal universal principles in integrating traditional music into modern education. Research on using digital tools and platforms to teach recomposed music could address accessibility and engagement in diverse learning environments. Lastly, longitudinal studies examining the long-term effects of learning recomposed folk music on students' technical skills and cultural literacy would deepen our understanding of its educational value.

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