

Book Reviews

doi:[10.1017/S0265051715000285](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051715000285)

Creative Arts in Education and Culture:

Perspectives from Greater China edited

by Samuel Leong & Bo Wah Leung.

Dordrecht: Springer, 2013. 251 pp.,

hardback. £90. ISBN 97894007077286.

eBook, 2014 (German and English), £90.

ISBN 9789400777293.

Creative Arts in Education and Culture is volume 13 of a series entitled *Landscapes: The Arts, Aesthetic and Education* edited by Liora Bresler and this volume is especially well-edited. Greater China is identified as China, Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan with a population of approximately 200 million. This volume is much more than an introduction to another culture; one gains an understanding of an emerging educational system in music and visual arts through the eyes of teachers. Traditional music education is enriched by both Confucian and colonial legacies. Content includes Lingnan culture, Cantonese opera, Canto-jazz, Hakka and Xibo music, Mana, and Sun Tze as a model for choral music education. The inclusion of five authors from China provides an authenticity that is unusual in many texts designed to encourage multi-cultural education.

Music is required in each of the four geographic areas with considerable local content freedom. Regulations and guidelines emphasise aesthetic education with learning areas of Experience and Appreciation, Expression, Creation, and Music and Related Cultures.

The focus provided by 10 authors from Hong Kong and three from Taiwan in addition to the five Chinese authors is a rich description of the present ‘unified’ educational status of this area usually thought of as marked more by financial and

language unity. Each chapter has sufficient depth that the novice reader can understand the policies and pressures which have an impact on curricula in each country. The authors admit that music and art teachers have challenging situations accompanied by signs for a better future with an increased emphasis on nationalism and local culture. The beliefs of China’s president, Xi Jinping, are reflected in the emphasis on education, Chinese culture and on creativity.

The first chapter, authored by Shengjian Guo of South China Normal University in Guangzhou, provides the reader with the philosophy for music education stipulated by the ministry of education in China. The language of providing a spiritual home for all Chinese is based on aesthetics. The reform movement in China (all countries are undergoing educational reform) is designed to make full use of local cultures, collect folk songs, and publish instructional guidelines. Although the reform movement in China began around 2001 progress has been slow. It was 2011 before the first 49 middle and primary schools, including the Beijing Xiyi elementary school, began a curriculum focused on Chinese arts and culture. The stated purpose for these specialised schools was to uphold civilisations and value a heritage of excellence in the fine arts. The focus was on quality. At the same time, additional funds were provided for local culture and heritage commissions, an encouraging sign that there was a unified plan. Local advocacy groups, however, have complicated the establishing of any overall cultural policy plan or plans to correct deficiencies. Despite the stated importance of creativity, creativity in the arts has fallen out of favour in recent decades (p. 47), participation in the arts is declining in Hong Kong, creating is not a separate identity in

the learning and teaching of music (p. 111), and aesthetic creativity is absent in Taiwan school education. Music composition in Hong Kong is about perfection and excellence more than originality.

One can identify with many of the substantive teaching/learning issues facing these four centres due to the same marginal opportunity to learn. There is no single memorable teaching moment described in the text. One must interpret multiple interesting ideas described in each of the four educational situations. Visual arts is often based on Eisner's discipline-based education along with the introduction of pop culture, television, movies and digital technology while, in theory, visual art is based on spirituality and a holistic premise. In music Canto-jazz was native to Hong Kong but peaked in the 1970s. Jazz continues to be important especially in festivals designed to attract visitors. Festivals include the Moon cake–Lantern festival and the festival of the Hungry Ghosts. The humanities provide a basis for elective music in the secondary schools with varied options. Secondary school students are focused on college entrance exams with music taking a back seat. Secondary schools in Hong Kong have 13 learning outcomes that are similar to US voluntary national standards (p. 103). Music examinations are being developed for junior high school although not mandatory. The HKDSE exam in Hong Kong became available in 2012 with an accompanying competency certificate.

After-school programmes remain essential in China with Cantonese often taught in such programmes. In Northeast China, Xibo is known for its diligence, valour, and courage on the battlefield and the accompanying Xibo dancing and singing is incorporated into the music curriculum. Hakka music is used in Southern China by Han Chinese who speak their own dialect.

My impression is that these Asian music educators recognize the need for strong leaders, for teachers who have good ears, and who show their hearts and ideas about music to their students. Transmitting the local culture along with music instruction is best demonstrated by a chapter on choral music. Choral music education is to be based on the ideas of the Chinese general, Sun Tzu. Although this seems a bit of a stretch to this Western reviewer, I realise Sun Tzu's military genius based on the six principles: moral cause, climate conditions, terrestrial conditions, generalship of commanders, organisation and discipline. Four public school choral conductors were interviewed who interpreted these military principles into knowing one's strength, personal beliefs, mission and vision, motivation, administrative support and development. With choral singing one of the major extra-curricular activities in Hong Kong and singing in every curriculum, having guidelines for present weak teachers provides a valid reason for Asians and Western scholars to read this book and to cherry-pick interesting ideas.

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doi:10.1017/S0265051715000297

The Musician's Journey: Crafting your Career Vision and Plan by Jill Timmons. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. 166 pp., paperback. £11.99. ISBN 9780199861347.

This is a bold book that aims to offer an inspirational and practical resource for musicians embarking on their careers, or perhaps re-evaluating and making changes in their professional portfolio. Its tone is