

On Taoist Music Education: Based on *General Education of Taoism*

CHEN Wen'an^{[a],*}

^[a]Ph. D. Candidate, School of Music, Southwest University, Chongqing, China.

*Corresponding author.

Received 15 April 2015; accepted 22 June 2015
Published online 26 August 2015

Abstract

General Education of Taoism was compiled by a Helin Taoist in the South Song Dynasty, Lü Taigu and is a comprehensive teaching material for the education and training of Taoists. It covers the systematical knowledge and skills that Tongmengs who just enter the door of Taoism and Masters who have developed maturely should have. The singing of rhymes and instruments and tunes are essential content of each stage of the education and training. Interpreting this book from the perspective of music education, we can find that it reflects the following characteristics: a) The pursuit and practice of Taoism is the fundamental goal of the education of Taoist music. b) The content of education is the organic integration of rhyme and tunes. c) Echoing and individual teaching are two major teaching methods. d) The teaching process also reflects the specific growth process of a Master. These characteristics initially reflect the basic features of Taoist music education from different aspects.

Key words: *General Education of Taoism*; Taoist music education; Characteristics

Chen, W. A. (2015). On Taoist Music Education: Based on General Education of Taoism *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 11(8), 44-47. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/ccc/article/view/7373> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/7373>

INTRODUCTION

Taoism, a world religion originated in China with nearly two thousand years of history, with Buddhism and

Confucianism is called the three pillars in the formation and development of traditional Chinese culture, as Mr. Lu Xun once said: "China's foundation is in Taoism. If we read history from it, many problems can be solved." (Pu, 2013, p.231) Meanwhile, Taoism is a "hybrid and multi-terminal" comprehensive system. It contains the knowledge of education, philosophy, medicine, chemistry, architecture, painting, music and other subjects. However, the faith of Taoism is the fundamental religious property. Within Taoism, Taoists' belief pursuit is reflected through a variety of ceremonies. For Taoists in different practice stages, their mastery level and their roles in the ritual implementation are not the same for each. That is, the path from entering the door of Taoist to "becoming Master and immortal" is in a different ritual environment to practice the pursuit and practice of Taoism. In the history of Taoism, *General Education of Taoism*¹ (referred to as *GEOT*) is the first educational text book which has recorded the detailed specific process of Taoist rites. This book contains two prefaces and eight chapters. The first preface mainly describes the origin of the book, namely Jiangyuanpu Temple Taoist Lü Yuansu "Zong Cheng Two Rivers Li Gongyou has collected hundreds of volumes of Taoist books and all of them are what Shu lacks. Meanwhile, Technical rites are the main contents. Master Taigu is requested to edit and proofread it to compile a whole book to benefit the descendants."² The second preface indicates the relationship between ceremonies and music, namely "if Taoists are in compliance rites, they usually do not have the knowledge of music; those who have knowledge of music usually miss the preparation of regulatory rites."³ In fact, the specific content of Taoist rites is lectures of different

¹ *Taoist Collections. Book 32.* (1988, pp.1-52). Beijing Cultural Relics Publishing House, Shanghai Bookstore, Tianjin Ancient Books Publishing House.

² *General Education of Taoism* (p.1). All the quoted text is divided and interpreted by the author.

³ Ibid.

performances and they are lection songs which are read, recited and sung as well as instrumental tunes integrated with them. This relationship of such rites and music is a relationship between form and content, or internal and external relationship. Taoists are also using these motets in the implementation of rites to achieve their different religious aspirations. These motets and instrumental tunes are a treasure in China's traditional music. Taoists' acquisition theory and practice of this kind of music in the field of religious music education is worth developing and it is unexplored music educational experience.

Different from school, family and social secular music education, Taoist music education contains a distinct personality color in terms of educational objectives, content, methods, processes, etc. because of its particular belief characteristics. This paper is based on *GEOT*, combines with the cultural background that Taoist rooted in our traditions, focuses on rites and lection rhymes, tries to explain the basic content of the following four aspects: Taoist music educational goal with the pursuit of mystical Taoism, lection rhyme centered Taoist educational content, the education methods of echoing and individual teaching and Taoist music education process which is in the order of the growth process of a master.

1. GOAL: PURSUIT AND PRACTICE OF TAOISM

Taizhenke says: "At the beginning of the world starts, all the holy immortals advocate Taoist Qi and establish rules to pass it down. Taishangs in the same generation are all called Xueshi. If they take Taoism as their career and have contributed a lot, they will be promoted to Taoists." He also says: "When Taoists learn and practice Taoism, they should first learn *Dao De Jing*. They discuss and interpret the text to help others as well as themselves. Those who can understand the infinity are great people."⁴ This section of citation shows that whether they are just entering the door of Taoism or refining the most holy truth, they all advocate and serve Taoism and they are their fundamental responsibilities. The five thousand words of *Dao De Jing* are the basis to advocate and serve Taoism. This kind of scripture is not only a magic instrument for Taoists to help living beings but also an essential ladder to save and improve themselves. However, for the form of practice, whether it is the self-cultivation of the Master or the teaching and learning of scripture, they both use three musical performance methods of singing, reading and reciting; meanwhile, they are accompanied by mysterious and secluded sound from Taoist instruments. In other words, the teaching of the rhyme of scripture is an approach to advocating Taoism. Classics such as *Tao De Jing* are the specific content to advocate and serve Taoism and "becoming Masters and immortal" is the fundamental goal.

In practice, the learning and teaching of Taoist music between the master and the apprentice manifests such

goal orientation. *GEOT* is divided into three stages in terms of teaching aspect of the music: start Taoism, practice Taoism and cultivate Taoism. That is "to seek standards at the beginning of Taoism, vowing, precepts and training. Since the Han Dynasty till now, masters are all models."⁵ This stage sets up the practice standard of Taoist apprentices by praising Taoist masters, and in a respectful attitude and imitating manner they are gradually entering into the door of Taoism. However, the practice process is hard and long and it is necessary to keep hold willing and disciplines. They also must chant complicated rhymes. The specific content contains Cizan, Zanyong, Qizou, Zhizuom Zandao and Weiyi in *GEOT*. Cizan and Zanyong mainly teach commonly used mono light rhyme, which means independently learning of some basic motets. Qizou, Zhizuo and Zandao are in the ritual environment to experience the aesthetics of rhymes and tunes through imitating and meanwhile to experience and master the truly inspired function of this kind of music by combining with the specific rites. The last section of *GEOT*, Jingsi, manifests the specific characteristics of Taoist music education in Taoist practice, as Jianji Master Lu says: "Taoism firstly is about vegetarian; vegetarian is firstly about scripture. Practice vegetarian and rites are firstly about carefully thinking. To express the admiration of the scripture, quietly reciting is the basis."⁶ As the saying goes, "Masters can only lead you into the way and the cultivation really depends on yourselves." Carefully thinking is the self-cultivation after Taoist apprentices have passes the process of starting Taoism and practicing Taoism and developed into masters. From the citation we can see that they still take Taoism as the essence. Scripture and vegetarian are the content of practice. Carefully thinking and quietly reciting are specific methods. In short, whether the learning at the very beginning or the teaching of mature masters, the fundamental goal of the learning and teaching of scripture rhymes is always "immortal".

2. CONTENT: RHYMES AND TUNES

GEOT is a comprehensive textbook which indirectly records the learning of music of Taoist apprentices in the way of text, namely an album recording the lyrics of scripture songs. The musical differences of these scriptures are mainly based on three criteria: First is the style of scriptures. These titled Zan, Song, Jie, Zou and other genres are musical scripture rhymes and they also are often in verse format; second is the scripture which is titled with the manifesting way of singing, chanting, reciting and reading and other methods, and they are often musical rhymes; third is to use existing music to infer similar rhymes recorded in *GEOT*. These rhymes can be

⁴ Ibid., p.4.

⁵ Ibid., p.2.

⁶ Ibid., p.48.

divided into singing tunes, reading tunes and reciting tunes based on the musical level of the rhymes. In general, singing tunes are mainly used to express religious sentiments, while reciting tunes and reading tunes are good at Taoist narration.

Of course, scriptures recorded in *GEOT* are unusually rich, and the learning and teaching of scriptures is mainly based on two principles: The first one is that singing goes first and chanting follows, that is, the fifty verses in Cizan mainly use the expression of singing and chanting and the learning and teaching of more than a dozen verses in Zanyong is clearly marked as chanting verses. The second principle is that the learning of verses goes first and then ceremonies are added. In *GEOT*, through the preparatory study of Jinshi, Cizan and Zanyong, Taoist apprentices not only have some basic knowledge, but also learned dozens of rhymed tune lyrics. This has established the necessary foundation for the implementation of ceremonies. The study of Taoist instruments also follows the procedure and approach of learning individual ceremonies first and then full ceremonies. That is, Qizou, Zhizuo, Zandao in *GEOT* are mainly based on the individual ceremonies, and Weiyi completely and systematically teach the two ceremonies of *Chitan Yi* and *Huanglu Jiushi Qijingwen*. In fact, the practice level of Taoist apprentices is largely to express scriptures in the way of singing, chanting and reading and to reflect the “immortal” religious demands in the process of ceremonies.

Tunes are musical tunes played by musical instruments. The reason why they are called instruments is that within Taoism those instruments are considered to have some kind of magic. For example, “magic drums collect magic Qi inside and threaten devils outside; they always go first in ceremonies,”⁷ which is a description of the role and function of the instrument, drum. Opposite to scripture masters who chant verses, instrumental masters who play tunes are called musical masters. Among a variety of magic instruments, bells, drums, chimes and wooden fishes are necessary in the implementation of ceremonies. The post of Zhiqing is a musical master who plays the instrument Qing while performing a ceremony.

In fact, Taoist apprentices’ learning of verses and tunes is just like opera actors’ learning of singing and accompaniment. Meanwhile, the Taoist instrumental performance is also very like a magic national musical. In terms of the learning method, the two also have a certain similarity.

3. METHOD: ECHOING AND INDIVIDUAL TEACHING

In the learning process of folk music, oral teaching is a typical method of transmission. Taoist music is not exactly the same. In addition to its extensive use of this

method, its more featuring methods are echoing and individual teaching. That is, “when children start practicing Taoism, they should echo first. Starting from Qitanf and ending at Cisheng, they all can be chanted.”⁸ The method of echoing refers to the non-deliberate echoing of Taoist apprentices when the implementation of the ceremony. Over the time, they will remember some commonly used rhymes or verses, including *Qi Tang Song* at the beginning of the ceremony and *Ci Sheng Song* at the end of the ceremony. This method of teaching in Taoism and academia is also known as “nimble learning” (Pu, 2002). In the acquisition process of Taoist apprentices, there is neither the specific mentoring relationship, nor conscious motivation to learn. It is just a casual, comfortable learning approach. Of course, this method can reach a large number of rhymes, verses and tunes, but it still needs Masters to provide individual teaching in order to master the art and theological function. That is, “when children are growing, teach them thymes and verses. Individual chanting helps them to practice Taoism. They might make mistakes and need to be corrected to become precise.”⁹ Thus, individual teaching has a clear mentoring relationship. In the implementation process of the ceremony, the Master deliberately carries out practice of thymes and verses in accordance with the text and listens and corrects carefully, striving to rigorously “chant according to the text and explain things according to the scriptures.” Meanwhile, in the artistic expression, it achieves the result of “clean and elegant rhythms.

In fact, the music acquisition of Taoists, on the one hand is to master a skill in the art, and more importantly, through this skill, they can talk to God and act as God’s spokesperson. Echoing is mainly used at the beginning so that Taoist apprentices may have a taste of the charm of Masters in a religious atmosphere and take them as models in the practice of Taoism, and then through chanting scriptures to practice Taoism, and gradually establish the religious ideal of “being immortal”. Individual teaching is based on the perceptual experience of Taoist apprentices after the acquisition of echoing. Masters guide and teach the theory, and inspire and instruct apprentices to understand the theological functions of rhymes and tunes. This organic combination of emotional and rational approaches not only tracks Taoist apprentices enter the solemn theological hall, but also points out the direction of their conscious practice. It is a natural process of education, but also an initiative to adapt to the growing process of Masters.

4. PROCESS: THE GROWTH PROCESS OF A MASTER

In *GEOT*, eight learning contents are: Jinshi, Cizan, Zanyong, Qizou, Zhizuo, Zandao, Weiyi and Jingsi. Jinshi

⁷ Ibid., p.49.

⁸ Ibid., p.2.

⁹ Ibid.

is mental preparation for Taoist apprentices to practice Taoism to become immortal and it includes two parts: ancient monk training verses and the biography of generations of masters. Learning of training verses is designed to help Taoists to keep hold of the original concepts and precepts of Taoism. Masters' biography is to encourage Taoist apprentices to establish the religious ideal of "advocating Taoism, serving Taoism and acquiring Taoism" through the exemplary role of the Taoist masters. It also establishes the fundamental goal of Taoist music education to get "immortality". Cizan mainly uses echoing method and is a detailed record of free acquisition of fiftyish thymes and verses of Taoist apprentices. Zanyong and Qizou are specific applications of individual teaching. Masters guide and inspire apprentices of the artistic and theological features of these thymes and verses so that they can apply what they have learned into actual ceremonies to achieve the theological function of "speaking to God and praying for all". Zhizuo and Zandao are to combine representative rites with the individual teaching of masters to allow the apprentice to use the acquired thymes and verses. That is "at the beginning of Guanjian, Zanzuo must go first. The internal and external ceremonies are not a paper of text. They might not go through with it perfectly or make some mistakes. At the beginning, they should be careful and choose the right things to be done." That is to say, relying on the assistance of masters, apprentices combine with ceremonial rites with serious attitude and selectively apply representative thymes and verses to achieve the artistic effect and religious function of "winning people and touching audiences". Weiyi is also under the guidance of masters to allow apprentices to drill the complete rites of *Chitan Yi* and *Huanglu Jiushi Qijingwen*. This is both the periodic summary of apprentices' learning and an assessment standard to promote a Master. The latter one is Jingsi which is a guidance of the self-cultivation of masters.

Through the learning of the above mentioned eight chapters, Taoist apprentices gradually grow into qualified masters in the ritual environment of singing and chanting of thymes and verses and echoing tunes. In this process, the rhyme and rituals are at the heart contents of the practice. The acquisition of these contents, on the one hand, conforms to the understanding logic of Taoist apprentice of Taoism and meanwhile fits the growth

process from apprentices to dominate. In fact, it is a "Taoism of nature".

SUMMARY

Since the creation of Taoism in the Eastern Han Dynasty, the rhyme and the tune have traditionally been the means of advocating and serving Taoism. Meanwhile, with the implantation of instrumental ceremonies, it has been lasted until now. This kind of music has such vitality and that is truly linked to the internal educational methods of Taoism. From *GEOT*, the fundamental goal of Taoist music education is subject to the highest ideal of "immortality" of Taoism. In order to achieve the pursuit of this belief, Taoist apprentices need to learn and apply artistic and theological thymes, verses, instruments and tunes on the actual scene of the ceremony. Meanwhile, Masters' guidance and teaching are also crucial because apprentices' echoing can only accumulate some preliminary rhyme and tune material and only through Masters' guidance and inspiration of the scripture can apprentices master the artistic role and theological function of the thymes and tunes. Although the classics that apprentice learn are various and the teaching of the ceremonies is also varied. However, the teaching and learning of scripture rhymes follows the progressive logic of apprentices of Taoism morality and the natural process from apprentices to master, making Taoist music education process follow the religious principle of "following the nature". In this way, the characteristics of the goal, content, method and process have been preliminaries revealed.

Of course, as secular music education, Taoist music education is also a huge educational system. We shall be still dig and accumulate raw materials to reveal its original appearance with gradual peering. This exploration work is difficult and challenging; however, it contains numerous academic values. Theoretically speaking, Taoist music education and secular music education should have inevitable connections.

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