

# A Historical Review on Theories of Sequential Learning in Music and Related Documents for Textbooks from Late Qing Dynasty to 1970's Reform in China

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**Abstract:** It has been an appealing topic in the academic and practical fields pertaining music education that music learning should obey a proper sequence in regard of contents and skills so that children will be allowed to learn music in the way suitable to their mental and physical growth without abrupt encounters causing frustration and extra difficulty. This means that sequential learning in music involves two facets, requiring music educators to be careful when dealing with curriculum and textbooks. One is to pay attention to the general logic of music to be learned as a school subject – from the easy to the difficult, from the near to the remote, from the surface to the inner sophisticated, from the sensational experiences to the intellectual understanding or abstract thinking, etc. Since early ages of human endeavors, educators have been expressing opinions about this issue; some were concerned with general orientations while others provided specific strategies which might be applied to the learning of school subjects. Among these giant people, Confucius expressed his conclusions about the former, and with latter pertaining to music, the learning sequence seemed to be cared in two lines. One was practical exploration in real setting doing curriculum design for schooling, while the theoretical construction was carried out systematically by a few scholars among whom Edwin Gordon stood out as the most eminent. This article touched these two lines of work by tracing back from ancient Chinese classics to the “*Great Didactic*” established by Comenius, the founder of modern theory for school teaching. All these men contributed significantly to the ideas and conceptions for a proper order or sequence for learning, including learning in music to certain extend. In addition to the early ideas and modern theories on this topic, this article found that from late Qing dynasty (1904) to early Reform time (1979) in China, a practical endeavor pursuing sequential learning in music was consistently carried out and written by generations of music educators in more than a dozen of official education documents in the forms of national standards or syllabus for school music. Because sequential learning is a strong factor which inevitably influences the logical layout of music textbooks and the way of teaching and learning thereafter, a historical review seems necessary to run through these education documents to depict some experiences and lessons for the national curriculum design and textbook development of today.

**Keywords:** Sequential Learning, Music, Curriculum Standards or Syllabus, Textbooks, China

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## 1. Introduction

There has been a consensus in educational community that effective learning should follow a sequential manner. In addition to the sophisticated aspects on learners, sequential learning, or learning sequence interchangeably, requires that the layout of teaching and learning materials, like those presented in textbooks or other forms, ought to comply with

two-faceted considerations. One is to fit with students' learning that is in accordance with their physical, mental, and social-emotional development as well as the knowledge and skills previously learned as the starting basis for further progress; the other is to follow, closely paralleled to subject matters, the inherent logic of what students learn, such as the art of music.

Viewed from the process of music textbook design,

sequential learning calls for the music knowledge and skills to be organized along these two lines of thinking. Before a series of music textbooks is developed or revised, especially the texts for the grades of elementary school, the concept of sequential learning appears critically imperative because it reminds the textbook writers that children's growth during these early school years progresses dramatically and dynamically in music. As known to parents and educators, the general growth and relevant skills of body, mind, emotion, and social interaction of elementary graders are fluxing in the most flowable and changeable process compared with other stages of human development. In the case of music, the learning potentials of primary school children at different grades are intriguingly different from their learning in mathematics and sciences. Apparently, the sequence of music learning must be regarded as a foundation on behalf of students' learning, deserving close observation and special care before developing or revising a series of music textbooks. Challenged by these considerations to meet the needs for revising a series of music textbooks in which the author has involved as part of the project to start with personal contribution, this article tracks through the general beliefs and ideas held by early masters and contemporary scholars as well national policies and standards pertaining to school music from late Qing dynasty (1904) to Reform time starting from 1979 in China. This work might find out meaningful lessons and experiences and provide useful directions for developing or revising school music textbooks so that the teaching and learning materials might better suit students' learning.

## 2. Early Ideas and Contemporary Theory

### 2.1. Early Chinese Ideas on Sequential Learning

Historically, the idea of learning sequentially was dimly felt by ancient educators. Not expressed in the terminology as today, the beliefs to follow certain kind of order in learning did appear in scattered classics. A typical example loosely related to the sequence for one's learning or development was Confucius' self-reflection on his life-long growth (Confucius lived from 551 to 479 B.C., a time in late Spring and Autumn Period roughly from 770 to 476 B.C.). In *The Analects*, he said that "at fifteen I set my heart on learning; at thirty I was never in two minds; at fifty I understood the Decree of Heaven; at sixty my ear was attuned; at seventy I follow my heart's desire without overstepping the line [1]." The reflection of Confucius described a general order pertaining to learning and development, unlike the sequence of learning narrowly defined by contemporary educators. However, from this plain description, one might have observed the earliest awareness which revealed a truth for learning. There must be an "order" that learners should obey. More detailed claim about the order or "sequence" for ancient schooling was elaborated in *Xue Ki* by transliteration for the Chinese pronunciation, or *The Notes of Learning* which was the

earliest monograph in the world devoted to important topics of learning and education. This classical work appeared in Warring States Period (from 476 ? to 221 B.C.) after Spring and Autumn Period. According to the textual investigation conducted by Guo Moruo (郭沫若), the eminent writer, historian and archaeologist in China, the author of *Xue Ki* was Yuezheng Ke (乐正克) though it was generally recognized to be compiled by Si Meng School (思孟学派). Anyway, this classical work clearly stated that

*According to the system of ancient teaching, for the families of (a hamlet) there was the village school; for a neighbourhood there was the xiang; for the larger districts there was the xu; and in the capitals there was the college. Every year some entered the college, and every second year there was a comparative examination. In the first year it was seen whether they could read the texts intelligently, and what was the meaning of each; in the third year, whether they were reverently attentive to their work, and what companionship was most pleasant to them; in the fifth year, how they extended their studies and sought the company of their teachers; in the seventh year, how they could discuss the subjects of their studies and select their friends. They were now said to have made small attainments. In the ninth year, when they knew the different classes of subjects and had gained a general intelligence, were firmly established and would not fall back, they were said to have made grand attainments. After this the training was sufficient to transform the people, and to change (anything bad in) manners and customs [2].*

More detailed than the rough periods plotted out in Confucius' personal reflection on his lifelong growth, the developmental requirements and expectations throughout this nine-year learning were concretely settled and regularly assessed. This system of learning was doubtlessly an early example purposefully considered for sequential learning with the arrangements neatly created and carried out by Chinese scholars during pre-Qin period. They were the forerunners contributing to the idea of learning in an ordered way.

### 2.2. Western Theories of Sequential Learning: General and Specific

Among the westerners who contributed systematically to the theory of teaching and learning, John Amos Comenius (1592-1670), the great Czech educator, is recognized as the first to establish a theory of teaching by writing *The Great Didactic*. In this world-known classic, he postulated a significant "ORDER" for children's growing and knowledge seeking. However, the word "order" in his mind should not be understood simply as something contained in things themselves. His idea for ORDER was much wider and deeper of mind-vista than what might be haunting in ordinary people's thinking. This was claimed vividly in the sub-titles of his *Didactic*, the theory of teaching and learning. In *The Great Didactic* Comenius put his ideas of ORDER in subjects of chapters IV, VIII, IX and XXXII respectively:

*There are three stages in the preparation for eternity: to know oneself (and with oneself all things); to rule oneself; and to direct oneself.....The basis of school reform must be exact order in all things.....The exact order of instruction must be borrowed from nature.....Of the Universal and perfect order of instruction.*

As summarized by M. W. Keatinge, the translator of this classical book and an education scholar at the University of Oxford, in his lengthy introduction that “the knowledge of things is perfect when it is full, true and ordered.” An education based on ORDER was what Comenius cared most for the knowledge to be learned by pupils while the ORDER of pupils’ mental and physical growth inborn naturally must be observed by this education. As for the order or learning sequence for arts including music, Comenius did not say much about detailed order or sequence for learning, but his suggestions on the method of arts in chapter XXI, has been enlightening to the present day as he pointed out that

*Art primarily requires three things (1) A model or a conception that is to say, an external form which the artist may examine and then try to imitate. (2) The material on which the new form is to be impressed. (3) The instruments by the aid of which the work is accomplished.*

And, as far as instruments are concerned, he added that

*Three more things are necessary before we can learn an art: (1) a proper use of the materials; (2) skilled guidance; (3) frequent practice [3].*

Judged by today’s criteria for learning sequence, the last sentence is very close to the everyday teaching experienced by teachers of music and other performing arts. Comenius was concerned with general order for the knowledge to be learned and the learning order inside pupils’ mental work. He did not mean to depict in great details for specific areas or disciplines of learning. It was not until the appearance of “Music Learning Theory” constructed by Edwin Gordon (1927-2015), the world-known American music educator, that a vigorous system of sequence of learning in music was established though he was modest to claim that “it is impossible to say who first was concerned with the proper sequencing of music. Music teachers generally defer to Lowell Mason in that regard, realizing that he was influenced by the practices of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi.....[4]” By mentioning Mason (1792-1872), the father of music education in U.S.A., Gordon was apparently talking about his contribution to the seven principles in early singing instruction such as to teach sounds before signs; to lead to observe; to teach one thing at a time; to practice each step of each division; to give theory after practice; to analyze and practice the elements to apply them to music, and to have the names of the notes correspond to those used in instrumental music. [5] It has been recognized by many Americans that these requirements formulated the earliest principles for teaching and learning music in the United States summarized by Mason as early as 1834. However, the seven principles are not, by today’s criteria, concrete musical learning sequences because they are too general, not a systematic layout based on detailed logics of

students’ inner mental working and of musical essentials. The work was awaiting someone who was patient enough to test and retest the very nature and details of how children learn music and how music should be learned sequentially based on the inner logic of music.

Throughout this field of investigation, there was no one else like Edwin Gordon whose lifetime devoted to a learning theory of music in which learning sequences of music consumed most of his energy. It was his firm belief for children to learn music in a strictly arranged order so that music knowledge and skills could be structurally arranged and covered without key points and essentials missing. Though he was aware of criticisms that the beauty of music might be impaired by breaking the whole into elements, he insisted on testing ten thousand children to figure out proper sequences as to which tonal and rhythmic patterns should come to children earlier and which should be presented later. Starting from the 1960’s, while he was working on the famous measuring instrument of *Musical Aptitude Profile* [6], a sequential learning of music had already been brewed in his mind. As a result, he compiled an unpublished booklet -- *How Children Learn When They Learn Music* -- for his undergraduate class at Iowa University. The work was then becoming his first published book *The Psychology of Music Teaching* in 1971 [7]. According to Gordon himself,

*these texts were precursors to Learning Sequence and Patterns in Music, a book I myself had published in 1976. A year later, GIA published an enlarged version bearing the same title and a companion volume, Pattern Sequence and Learning in Music. In 1980 the title became Learning Sequences in Music: Skill, Content, and Patterns, and every successive edition published in 1984, 1988, 1990, 1993, 1997, and 2003 bears that title. In the 2007 edition, and now in this latest edition in 2012, the title has boldly been changed to Learning Sequences in Music: A Contemporary Music Learning Theory.....the foregoing will truly be my final effort to shed clarity on the music learning process [8].*

Gordon’s theory of learning sequences in music should be highly cherished because the content and skills of western music are orderly arranged as tonal and rhythmic patterns from easy to difficult for learners. It must be noted that these patterns were not conjectured by Gordon sitting on the armchair but accurately based on reliable testing data collected from a huge sample of children. Gordon is perhaps the only one person so persistent and patient doing this precise research and making his learning sequences in music applicable for textbook series. The most influential text is *Jump Right In: The Music Curriculum* [9] with consequent series such as *Music Play: The Early Childhood Music Curriculum Guide for Parents, Teachers & Caregivers (Jump Right in Preschool)* [10], *Jump Right In: The Instrumental Series* [11], *Jump Right In: Soprano Recorder* [12] and many more. Admired by majority in music education community worldwide, Gordon’s work secures almost every detail not to be missing for the music textbooks which in turn make sure on students’ learning orderly and structurally.

### 3. Chinese Policies and Standards Pertaining to Sequential Learning of Music in First Half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

#### 3.1. Official Documents Appearing in Late Qing

The modern school system officially promulgated and implemented throughout China started in 1904 with the *Constitution of the School* presented to and authorized by Emperor Guangxu. This epochal document had been prepared earlier and revised by Zhang Baixi, Rong Qing and Zhang Zhidong, the representative official figures advocating political reform and learning from the West. The *Constitution* stipulates:

*The purpose of learning, no matter what school, is based on loyalty and filial piety, focused on the study of Chinese classics and history, so that the students' mind and skills can be pure, and then use western learning to govern their knowledge and practice their artistic skills, expected to become useful, suitable and practical in the future, and worship the state to cultivate generalists and fear corruption [13].*

Concerned with music, the document provided brief instructions on the general aim, content, and method for the schools on primary, secondary, and higher levels. It pointed out that in western primary and secondary schools, a course of singing was provided which was equivalent to the Chinese concept of “Learning Tao from String with Songs (弦歌学道)”, like the way of Chinese ancients. To suit with the situation in China, only elegant Chinese music-poem was allowed in school classes. The writers of the *Constitution* believed that children would refresh from tiring work while chanting a chapter of poetry. To be specific, the five-character and then seven-character quatrains in the Tang and Song dynasties having both meaning and beauty might be sung and read, which were in line with the aspirations of the ancients’ purpose of natural and societal law and harmony.

Unfortunately, sequential learning for music was not explicitly pronounced except a few hints leading to which kind of poetry might be accompanied with chanting of antient Chinese style, not in a sense of western musical making to be learned in a strict sequential manner.

#### 3.2. Official Documents and Standards in the Time of the Republic of China

Soon after the modern school system was established with this *Constitution* in China, the last feudal empire - Qing Dynasty - ended and was replaced by the Republic of China in 1911. Since then, the school education was administrated under the acts or course outlines or curriculum standards issued by education authority of the Republic of China until the founding of People’s Republic of China in 1949. During the time of the Republic, school curriculum policies presented in documents pertaining to music were officially promulgated, respectively, in years of 1912, 1913, 1915, 1916, 1923, 1929, 1932, 1936, 1940, 1941, and 1948 in the forms of School Acts

or Course Outlines or Curriculum Standards.

These documents in the original formats are now rarely seen in public libraries and archives in China. Thanks to the staff members at the Research Institute of Curriculum and Textbooks, an academic sector of People’s Education Press in Beijing, a *Collection of Curriculum Standards and Syllabus of Primary and Secondary Schools in China during 20th Century: Volume of Music, Visual Arts and Labor-Tech [14]* was compiled by them and published by People’s Education Press which is operated under the leadership of the Ministry of Education, P. R. China. The summarizations below are all based on this valuable source.

Glancing through this collection, one may come to an impression that the policy makers and the designers of course outlines or curriculum standards went through a gradual progress as to how music elements and various genres as well as skills of singing and instrumental playing could be managed for students to lean in a sequential manner. It seems that two periods might be divided. And it seems safe to conclude that the documents issued in 1912, 1913, 1915 and 1916, though dimly stated, already suggested a sequence of singing and instrumental playing from lower to higher grades in primary and then to secondary grades, appearing in *Regulation and Course Table* (1912): The purpose of singing is to make children sing songs to cultivate a sense of beauty and morality. For lower primary grades, children might sing simple monophonic songs. And increasingly, easy polyphonic songs might be introduced to higher graders while lyrics and melodies should be pure and elegant to suit children with lively and beautiful moods. For secondary school children, songs were first taught monophonic, and polyphony and musical instruments came later. In the *Secondary School Curriculum Standards* of 1913, there were very few words mentioned for music except basic etudes and songs for the first, second and third year, and instrumental music was added for the last fourth year. Nothing was mentioned for specific sequence of learning. Perhaps, the previous 1912 edition was still valid in practice with little to be revised. In 1915, *National School Act* was issued from which one might see a bleak scene of school music. The Act did claim that singing was one of the courses supplied for primary schools in Clause 13. However, it added that one of or all the courses of handcraft, painting, singing might be legally omitted if facilities and teachers were not available to secure the teaching. The 1915 Act continued with the *Detailed Rules and Regulations for Implementing National School Act* in 1916 which requested simple monophonic singing to easy polyphonic singing. Nothing new was elaborated.

The four documents from 1912 to 1916 showed a slight awareness for designing singing course (NOT MUSIC as understood by today’s concept) based on the designers’ personal experiences in teaching singing. An authentic music curriculum with a mind of structural and sequential design for primary and secondary schools needed a person who was well trained in music studies and curriculum. At this time, a gentleman named Liu Zhiping (1894-1978) appeared to accomplish this sophisticated work. Here is a story about him

inserted, especially about his knowledge in music and other literacies he acquired from his teacher and his experience in Tokyo Music School – the previous institute of Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music.



(Source: Baidu image in public domain)

**Figure 1.** Liu Zhiping with his teacher Bronze Hong Yi, and his peer Feng Zikai or Fong Tse Ka (from left to right). The three pioneers all studied in Japan.

Economically and physically, Liu Zhiping was born poor. But he was lucky to be cared and taught by the Great Arts Master – Bonze Hong Yi (1880-1942) - whose name was Li Shutong before embracing the Buddhism. In 1916, Liu was sponsored and sent by Bonze Hong Yi to Tokyo Music School to study western music theory. With rich knowledge of western music learned in Tokyo, Liu came back to China. In addition to vast work done in the fields of school and teacher education in music and visual arts during the period of the Republic, he contributed to writing the *Primary School Music Course Outline and Secondary School Music Course Outline* under the *Curriculum Outlines of New School System* in 1923. A radical change urged by him was replacing “Singing” with “Music” in *Course Outlines or Standards* for primary and secondary schools. This change of a course name seemed trivial but it allowed much more knowledge and skills entering schools and textbooks in which he also involved. His contributions extended to establishing his own arts school and helping others do the same in many places in China. The knowledge of music fundamentals and harmony as well as music history and fresh ideas about Chinese music by his writings and lectures were learned by many teachers and preservice students in arts schools. Furthermore, his teacher Li Shutong and others launched a movement of “Xue Tang Yue Ge” (学堂乐歌) or “School Songs” arranged from European, American and Japanese tunes of songs with Chinese lyrics newly written to suit the conditions of China at the time of reform to learn from the West and Japan. Liu’s younger peer Feng Zikai (Fong Tse Ka) also took part in various music activities in addition to his mastery visual arts output. All these endeavors pushed waves of arts learning including music. Naturally the western music was warmly embraced in such a favorite atmosphere introduced in China by these three overseas scholars from Japan and others from Europe. The western influence with overwhelming superiority can be seen

in the following analysis on the Standards of Music for primary and secondary schools, starting from 1923 version prepared by Liu Zhiping, then followed successively in 1929, 1932, 1936, 1940, 1941 and 1948 by national education authority of the Republic of China (one word must be mentioned that in the Communist governed regions, there were also curriculum guidelines available to lead the school teaching during this period which emphasized CCP’s moral orientation with artistic norms).

One article does not allow detailed descriptions on these seven versions of Standards of Music at the levels of primary and secondary schools because of the daunting demands of the musical learning areas of singing, instrumental playing, appreciating, moving, creating, reading, and researching with unthinkable tasks and contents structurally arranged and sequentially designed. The author chooses a midway sample between 1923 and 1948 that is the 1936 version of the *Standards of Music* for (1) Primary school grades 1-2; (2) Primary school grades 3-6; (3) Lower secondary school grades 7-9; (4) Higher secondary school grades 10-12. Four stages showed the intentions paid to sequences and stages bounded together with the continuity.

A thoughtful sequence, for the first time, started with a careful concern given to grades 1-2 children by indicating a new conceptualized *Standard of Singing Plays or Games* instead of “Music” alone which apparently meant to protect tender conditions of these small ones mentally and physically from possible hurts other than gains. The caring intentions from the designers showed the American impact of child study movement introduced into China around 1920 through hundreds of lectures delivered by educational philosophers and psychologists Dewey and Kilpatrick all over China. For these children, the Standard emphasized principles adapting to children’s interest in playing, feelings of love, courage, and happiness via rhythmic, chanting and moving games. Imitation of natural sounds such as chicken, bird, and cat was encouraged. Singing and performing were closely tied to children’s experiences such as lyrics about festivals, animals and plants, daily life, and patriotism. Likewise, music appreciation was led to natural sounds such as birds, insects, wind, and kites. Of course, the genuine music elements were listed according to the natural sequences from easiest duple meters along the progressive steps to slight difficult ones. Loudness, duration, and tempo were first learned from the contradicting high vs. low, long vs. short, fast vs. slow. Body moves were used childishly by various rhythmic activities, such as walking, jumping, clapping, running, jumping, or imitating horse running, birds, ducks, and bears. Beating musical instruments became much easy using small gongs, drums, and wooden blocks. Then came simple folk dancing-singing games such as the doll, elephant, little farmer, singing bird, cock with hen. Story games might be familiar ones such as how Cao Chong figured elephant’s weight. Pursuit and escape games would be interesting to children for grabbing seats, cat chasing mouse. Imitation games, such as duck parade, rabbit jump, frog jump, etc. were possible resources fitting children well.



Sequentially continued was the Standards for middle and senior grades of primary school, the stage complying with children's happy and lively nature to further deepening their interest and ability in appreciating and applying music while developing their listening and singing skills. Children's feelings of love and courage continued to be cultivated. Music appreciation covered Chinese and foreign songs and instrumental music in solo and chorus. Music fundamental basics were required with cautious steps and sight singing with score reading was arranged very carefully in dealing with fixed and unfixed singing name systems. Vocal and simple instrumental performing came first and followed with music score transcription. Cares were given to young students for making feasible solo and chorus of songs and children's operas. Professionally, the concepts on music staves, notes and rests, keys and scales, intervals and simple chords, general ideas of duration, dynamics, tempos and performing concepts of dictation and timbre, expression and rendering, pronunciation and articulation, as well as skills for singing and instrumental playing were listed according to the ought-to-be sequences. Even basic knowledge on the structure and repair method of simple musical instruments were included. All these contents and skills, viewed from today's standard, were demanding enough to the little kids. However, the idea of sequential learning was covertly reflected in the nuances here and there watching to avoid possible hurts, such as caring on music pieces with sweet and noble meaning, solfeggio with full involvement in action, music tunes related to children's literature, and stressing continuity connecting successive grades. As for the specific fundamentals, these standards set a structural layout, such as keys and modes or scales suitable for children. Of course, a few flaws could be seen from the unrealistic approach for children to read the staves using fixed note-names.

The *Standards for Lower Secondary School* grades 7-9 continued the children centered perspective on keeping their interest in music while fostering talents musically. Like the previous stages, students were required to sing monophonic and polyphonic songs and understand further the music fundamentals. Music appreciation was to listen with understanding to master pieces other than childish styles and forms listed earlier. The literacies of artistry emerged which emphasized on more elegant emotions of beauty, and the spirit of harmony, hardworking and enterprising. As for music theory, lectures were planned for 15 minutes every class hour with detailed points to read music including various symbols on staves such as more sophisticated notes and rests, beats and pulses, major and minor scales with homologous tones, as well as tempos with relevant emotions. Surprisingly, even modulation such as tonic to dominant was introduced. This is even rarely seen in today's music standards. For performing study, students were asked to practice pronunciation, scales, intervals, tones, and various rhythms. For higher grades, more tough demands extended to concepts of meaning and classification of music, genres of vocal and instrumental music, schools of classical and romantic music, absolute and program music, even the significance of music in daily life. The

sequential learning in music theory was arranged carefully with much more requirements in the study of harmony such as composing techniques using three-part including sixth and sixth-fourth chords without parallels of octaves and fifths which were prohibited. When one reads the concepts of inversions of triads and seventh chords, modulation, and cadence in analyzing the musical works, it is difficult to believe that this set of Standards for the grades 7 – 9 was issued in 1936's China. High school standards were even demanding. More difficult were the professional oriented tasks for high school students who were asked to practice Western vocal etudes of Concone, Lemoine, Dannhäuser, to sing with fixed-do system of music reading, and listen to western and Chinese operas, to read and understand developments in the history of western music. Interestingly, such a step-by-step layout for grades from lower to higher in the music program did show strong intentions to arrange music sequentially for students' learning. Consider the time that was ninety years ago, one admires those music educators' delicate design based on their own understanding of sequential learning in music.

From the time of late Qing Dynasty to the end of the Republic, China saw a gradual progress to deliberately design national standards requiring music learning in a sequential manner while considerable cares were given to students at different stages of growth so that their inner route for learning music might be secured without exposed demands beyond their reach. It can be seen, however, that the progress did not go smoothly. Flaws appeared now and then due to the possible reasons that the standards designers themselves were unsurely trying out proper ways of children's learning in music. And apparent imbalance existed among these national standards. Some were portrayed overwhelmingly and exceeded children's needs and abilities which sounded impossible to achieve. Another reason for the imbalance might well be related to the domestic riots and chaos caused by the warlords and cruel invasion from outside. Under those oppressive pressures, to be fair to conclude, those who contributed to music education during the first half of the twentieth century deserve high compliments. Their contributions left us deep footprints as a foundation to follow, succeeding from the founding of the People's Republic of China.

## **4. Policies and Standards (Syllabuses) from the Founding of P.R.C. to Early Reform Time**

### **4.1. Official Documents Reflecting Sequential Learning and Moral Orientation Issued by Authorities of P.R.C. in 1950's**

Starting from October 1949 with the founding of People's Republic of China, CCP became the political core leading other political parties and democrat forces for this country. In addition to the continued concern for the sequential learning in music itself, the documents issued by officials also stressed the moral and political orientations.

For instance, the *Provisional Standards for Primary School Music Curriculum* [15] which was a draft first issued by P.R.C. education authority in 1950 stated that the goals of music were to cultivate children's preliminary music knowledge and skills such as correct listening, phonation, singing and easy instrumental performance as well as their interest and desire to love music, and cultivate their body and mind with music and enrich their life and serve the people with music. For the moral aims through music, patriotic beliefs, liveliness, cheerfulness, enthusiasm, courage and loves for national morality and safeguarding the motherland and world peace were particularly emphasized.

The idea of sequential learning was reflected clearly in the textbook guidance in great details. The music curriculum designers paid close attention to the music knowledge and skills arrangements for each grade from academic years one through five. Under the category of singing, careful descriptions were extended along sub-categories of lyrics' moral significances in the songs chosen and music elements divided into styles, beats, melody, voice range, intervals, and rhythms. A smart strategy was to make these details sequentially written in year-to-year tables to secure a logically proper layout so that graded children could learn them from easy to difficult while the holistic image and meaning of music might be tied together spirally, not to be missing or split during these five grades.

During early years of the 1950's, the People's Republic of China was substantially influenced by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) in many ways including education. Learning from the "Big Brother USSR" was the political orientation and became a fashion. As the school curriculum concerned, this fashion was seen in the notion of "Syllabus" instead of "Standards". The former was considered USSR concept and the latter Western. In 1956, the Ministry of Education of China issued a draft of *Singing Syllabus for Primary Schools* and *Music Syllabus for Lower Secondary Schools* [16-17]. A realistic consideration for young students had the previous primary school MUSIC replaced by easier task of SINGING. In these two revised documents, the learning sequence in music was obviously complied with a strict framework adopted from the Soviet format which allowed the learning sequence to be more controllable. For instance, the Syllabus for primary schools was divided into the following parts:

- A. Introductory accounts
  - (1) Aims and contents
  - (2) Teaching methods
  - (3) After-class activities
  - (4) Teaching facilities
- B. Syllabus: descriptions for grades one to six
  - (1) Singing skills
  - (2) Knowledge of music
  - (3) Appreciation of music
- C. Appendixes
  - (1) Suggested songs for singing
  - (2) Suggested works for appreciation

The document claimed that singing was one of the means to

complete aesthetic education; it aimed at cultivating new generation to accomplish an all-round development. The course content included singing, music knowledge and appreciation of which singing is the most effective means of music education for children. The syllabus also emphasized that teaching materials should secure qualities ideologically and artistically and fit children's conditions for learning in the best acceptable and sequential manner. These requirements were ensured by vigorous orders arranged on a successive semester basis – twelve semesters going through six academic years. The sequential intention was expressed by this successive order so that elements of singing, musical knowledge, and appreciation to be acquired by students in each stage were progressively organized with continuity.

The *Syllabus* of 1956 version was used with no revisions until 1979. Things stayed the same during the years when China experienced the movement of the "Three Red Banner (the General Line for Socialist Construction, the Great Leap Forward and the People's Communes)" and went worse in "Cultural Revolution" which almost abandoned all the schoolings from 1966 to 1976. At last, the so-called ten-year-havoc ended with down-fall of the "Gang of Four".

#### 4.2. *Getting Started Again by Restoring the Standards: A New Stage Pushed Forward by Deng Xiaoping's Reform*

Starting from December 1978, the Eleventh CCP Central Committee's Third Plenary Session initiated a radical "Reform and Open" policy led by the respected leader Deng Xiaoping for Chinese people to modernize the country. With the enthusiastic waves pushing all lines of work in China, the ensuing year saw a new *Syllabus of Music for Primary and Secondary Schools* (a draft program for provisional implementation) issued by the Ministry of Education, China. Though it was framed in the similar format of the 1956 vision, this 1979 document assumed historically significant role in leading China's music educators to restore school music education devastated during the unstable ten years of the "Cultural Revolution" and to explore a new route of aesthetic education forward. Appearing in such a dividing age, the 1979 Syllabus faced challenges to recuperate positive experiences accumulated from the early decades of twentieth century to 1966 when the "Cultural Revolution" broke out, and to figure out practical descriptions carefully, avoiding something ideally written but not feasible for the class use because of the shortages of teachers and necessary facilities.

Like the rationale of 1956 Syllabus, the 1979 Syllabus continued the belief that "music education is one of the important means of aesthetic education and an indispensable part of cultivating students' all-round development of moral, intellectual and physical conditions. It serves to improve the scientific and cultural level of the whole Chinese nation and realize the four modernizations." [18] The last words - Four Modernizations - were then a popular slogan at that time. As for the general aims of music, the *Syllabus* suggested that students should love the music art of the motherland, be

familiar with the language of national music, get in touch with foreign excellent works, master basic music knowledge and skills, and gain a basic ability to sing expressively, appreciate the beauty of music with their own judgement.

The content of music in primary and secondary schools included singing, music knowledge and skills training and appreciation in which singing should be placed first. Sequential learning was apparently considered that the teaching materials of each grade should be arranged from simple to deep according to the requirements of singing skills and music knowledge. Though chorus was mentioned as the main form, the Syllabus warned that two-part voices might be not added until secondary school grades, while the primary school students were suggested to sing easy two-part canon. Sequential considerations could be seen in many aspects. For instance, great care was given to protect the voice of students, especially those in the changing voice period physically to prevent unhealthy use of voice such as excessive loudness and wide intervals. And the voice range of the students in the lower grades of primary school, the Syllabus pointed out, was generally within  $c^1$  to  $c^2$ ; It was with the increase of age that their voice range might be appropriately expanded. For the sequence of music score reading, it was suggested that the children of grades one to four might learn to read the easy number score and the western staff should not be introduced until the fifth grade. All these arrangements pointed to a basic principle that sensory images of music itself and proper body movements went before the learning in abstract logic. As far as political orientation concerned, a smart strategy was to guide teachers to teach music first and to conduct ideological education only through the appealing artistic image of music. Arrangements of singing skills and knowledge of music were neatly weaved into the traditional graded format.

The 1979 Syllabus functioned well for recovering from the ten-year's unstable period of "Cultural Revolution" movement and laying down a solid foundation for the later Syllabi revised respectively in 1982, 1988, 1992, 1997, and 2000, as well as the Music Standards framed in brand new format appearing in 2001, 2003, 2011, 2017 and 2020 [19-23]. These standards absorbed contemporary reform experiences such as three-dimensional domains for designing teaching and learning objectives that had basic knowledge and skills, emotions and attitudes and values, as well process and methods included for students to expand much wider perspectives in music and out of arts disciplines. At the time of this article being prepared, the most recent revision of the standards titled *Compulsory Education Arts Curriculum Standards* (2021 revision), for use of compulsory schooling from grades one to nine [24] was being developed, to be soon released by the Ministry of Education China in which music is one of the five art forms. A creative strategy, among others, requests educators to focus on four artistic competences including (1) performing or presenting artistically, (2) perceiving aesthetically, (3) understanding culturally, and (4) practicing creatively. This newest set of standards covers not only music but also visual arts, dance, theatre, and media arts. An important conception

one might observe in all these documents is thoughtful attention paid to how the curriculum contents and skills of music should be suitably arranged for students to learn in a sequential manner. Frequently appearing in these official documents is a warning that the law of mental and physical growth of children must be obeyed.

As reviewed in this article, by the time of 1979 Syllabus, the concept of learning music sequentially had already shown a mature status based on the previous experiences accumulated in researching and developing more than a dozen of standards or syllabuses during most time of twentieth century in China. This can be seen in the relatively stable frame which allowed music contents, skills, knowledge, and other training items arranged spirally into successive gradation according to the designers' understanding. That is: To learn music sequentially on the horizontal succession and spirally on the gradation in relation to students' mental and physical growth. This is the ultimate pursue of Chinese music educators and is the purpose of this article, as stated early in the introduction, to make music fit with students' learning in accordance with their physical, mental, and social-emotional development as well as the knowledge and skills previously learned as the starting basis for further progress to follow. Meanwhile, care must be given to the subject matters of music. This is the inherent logic of what students learn music as an artistic endeavor as well as a discipline of study.

## 5. Conclusion

Since early ages of human civilization, learning in an orderly manner has been considered as one of the laws recognized by generations of educators. Informed scholars expressed various opinions or practiced with their own guiding principles on learning subjects logically while being alert on suitability for children's developing conditions in learning. These considerations have been true with music for school children. Summarized from the historical cues as described in this article, it might be concluded that the modern theory of sequential learning in music was initiated by Edwin Gordon, the eminent American educator and psychologist whose series of books with this title have influenced many music educators worldwide. His contribution in this area of research and applicability stands out as the sole resource in the field of music learning theory.

However, education practitioners could not wait for a theory to be born before doing the real thing. This article clearly shows that long before a systematic theory of music learning was established, Chinese educators and musicians had set out to explore a proper order for arranging the contents and skills in textbooks while more concerns were carefully paid to young students so that they might learn music smoothly along their growing stages avoiding abrupt encounters. Paradox, of course, exists that music is by its very nature a creative art form and human endeavor. Unlike the strict logic in mathematics and sciences, music is



sophisticated variant that makes it sound charming with creativity. Sequence of music learning does not mean a dead-order, fixed-up as an imperial decree. To make music learning along a sequential route should not become a hindrance that seizes music to lifeless regulations exposed artificially. That will distort the heart of music and its significance as an art full of creativity.

From this brief historical review, one might notice a fact that has been little touched by writers in English. The Chinese music educators were among early contributors making school music normalized by developing nationally even internationally recognized standards or so-called syllabus or other formats while sequential learning in music from multi-dimensions was always pursued. One might imagine the difficulties of the early standards' writers experienced, especially in the early twentieth century when the country was invaded by several foreign forces.

One article cannot hold all the aspects on the topic of this historical study; music educators in and out of China may continue to do in-depth research and share experience on sequential learning in music, as well as what strategies may be used to implement the sequence into textbooks and teaching in class. Future research studies may well be carried out on several directions: (1) A mapping technique can be applied to analyze the layout of music textbooks based on the newest Standards. Such a research study may be designed, using two dimensions of competencies to be acquired by students and the contents provided by the textbooks, to check to what extent the textbooks comply with requirements by the Standards. This model will help ensure music educators implement the Standards with as least loss as possible. (2) The textbooks developers need to construct a rigorous model taking into considerations of official demands, children's way of learning and interest, and music as a school discipline. (3) Supplementary questions need answers from studies, such as how the traditional culture can be taken into the textbooks without harms to children's interest to music; how the intension of moral education might be infused into music that sounds natural and appealing. The list of recommendations for future research could be a long one but a core should be cared. No matter whatever topics are chosen, the most important factor should be directed toward children's needs and toward the very nature of music – the creativity and beauty.

## Disclosure Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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