

## Political Ideologies and Moral Education in Contemporary China's Music Curriculum

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### Abstract

This study examined how the Chinese state has strategically mobilized the music curriculum as a vehicle for its political ideologies and moral education, as reflected in its officially approved textbooks. Drawing on Michael Apple's conceptualization of education as cultural reproduction and Lucy Green's analysis of the ideological construction of musical value, this research revealed how selected songs and lyrics were used to (a) promote Confucian values, (b) advance nationalist and socialist ideologies, and (c) cultivate a global outlook aligned with China's diplomatic objectives. By exploring the interplay between official ideologies, moral education, and the state-sanctioned music curriculum, the findings highlight how the Chinese government has deliberately used cultural production to shape students' values, behaviors, and worldviews. The findings also offer critical insights into the ideological underpinnings of China's education system and underscore the role of music education as a tool for cultural governance and ideological influence.

## **Introduction**

The study of ideology and moral education has long been a focal point in social and political thinking, as ideology and moral education play a crucial role in shaping society's social order (Apple, 1990; Graham et al., 2008; Hand, 2018; Li et al., 2004). Understanding the relationship between ideologies, power, and moral education is critical for illuminating the sociopolitical dynamics that influence education systems. Ideology, encompassing beliefs, values, and customs, functions as a pervasive element embedded within social structures and serves as a mechanism for producing and reproducing dominant norms and power hierarchies (Apple, 1990; Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Eagleton, 1991). Althusser (1971) argued that "all ideology has the function (which defines it) of constituting concrete individuals as subjects" (p. 171). This perspective questions traditional ideas of the "author" (as a source of authority or originality) and the "individual agent," substituting them with the notion of the subject shaped or defined by ideology (Strickland, 2012, p. 50). Through its material practices and institutions, such as schools, which act as Ideological State Apparatuses, ideology ensures the reproduction of ruling class ideologies and societal structures. This theoretical foundation provides a lens for examining how moral education is influenced by ideological forces and how these forces manifest within education systems.

Building on this foundation, this study examined the pivotal role of ideologies in moral education. The works of Adam Smith (1984), Henri Bergson (1935), and Émile Durkheim (1961) highlight that social cohesion serves as the basis of morality in any society. This perspective emphasizes how deeply ideological contexts influence the way moral education is implemented. Similarly, Apple (1990, 1993) and Giroux (1981, 2011) have argued that curricula are shaped by dominant political and cultural ideologies, which frame moral education through the transmission of "official knowledge."

The theoretical foundation of this study was grounded in Michael Apple's neo-Marxist perspective on ideology, power, and education. Apple's (1990, 1993, 1995, 2004, 2013) concept of "official knowledge" emphasized that curricula, rather than being neutral, are shaped by the dominant political and cultural ideologies of those in power. Moreover, curricula reflect the interests of the ruling class, embedding its worldview into educational materials while marginalizing alternative perspectives. This study also drew on Apple and Christian-Smith's (1991) work on "official historical narratives," which explored how curricula content prioritizes historical perspectives to legitimize dominant ideologies. By framing the curriculum as a site of ideological struggle, Apple's theories have provided a robust framework for analyzing how education systems reproduce existing power structures. Thus, Apple's critique of the ideological function of curricula is particularly relevant for exploring how music education serves as a vehicle for moral instruction and the reproduction of societal values.

This study applies Apple's (1990, 1993, 1995, 2004, 2013) and Apple and Christian-Smith's (1991) theoretical insights to analyze China's music education curriculum. Green's (1988, 2003, 2005) work on the role of music in perpetuating ideologies within education systems further supported this investigation. Her research highlighted how music education often reflects societal structures, reinforcing dominant social groups' values and norms. In this light, music education is not merely an artistic endeavor but also a sociopolitical tool that aligns with broader ideological goals.

Music, with its profound impact on cultural identity, emotional expression, and moral development, is a powerful medium for transmitting ideologies (Bowman, 2002, 2007; Jorgensen, 2007; Koza, 2010). In contemporary China, moral education and ideological instruction are intertwined with music education, particularly through the content of music textbooks. The music curriculum serves as a cohesive force, uniting communities and instilling shared values (Crooke et al., 2023; Woodford, 2006). By examining the connections between official ideologies, moral education, and music curricula, this study sought to uncover how sociopolitical structures have influenced the development and implementation of moral education in contemporary China. While previous critical content analyses in music education, such as those by Bernabe-Villodre and Martinez-Bello (2018), Cao et al. (2025), and Koza (1994), have primarily focused on gender, this study makes a distinct contribution by examining political ideologies within the context of Chinese music education. The findings may provide a nuanced understanding of how music education has contributed to the reproduction of cultural and societal norms, shaping the moral and ideological fabric of Chinese society.

### **The Interplay between Ideologies, Power, and Official Knowledge in Chinese Music Education**

Historical narratives have long played a critical role in supporting and legitimizing dominant ideologies, as they frame values and perspectives as natural and self-evident (Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991). In the context of Chinese music education, these narratives have been instrumental in reinforcing moral and sociopolitical priorities, shaping both cultural identity and governance. This section explores how music education has historically served as a vehicle for promoting social harmony and moral values in China, tracing its development from the Warring States Period (475–221 BCE) and the influential teachings of Confucius to the present day.

During the Warring States Period (475–221 BCE), a time of political fragmentation and conflict, Confucius (551–479 BCE) emerged as a pivotal philosopher whose teachings shaped Chinese thought for centuries. Confucius emphasized the critical role of music in fostering moral education and achieving sociopolitical harmony (Garrison, 2012; Portnoy, 1949). He

also recognized music's potential to regulate governance, promote ethical behavior, and cultivate universal social harmony (Zhe, 2008). For example, Confucius advocated for the use of *yayue* (elegant music) to instill virtue and maintain order, contrasting it with more vulgar forms of music that he believed could lead to societal discord. This Confucian perspective on music as a tool for cultivating societal morals laid the foundation for traditional Chinese music education, influencing its development throughout the imperial dynasties (Lai & Mok, 1981).

At the core of Confucius's philosophy was the belief that music had a unique capacity to shape individuals' thoughts and feelings, aligning them with the principles of ethical conduct and social harmony (Park, 2015). By incorporating music alongside other humanistic disciplines, Confucius sought to create a well-rounded educational experience that would produce individuals who were not only intellectually capable but also morally and socially responsible citizens. This emphasis on the moral and social dimensions of music education was a fundamental aspect of Confucius's broader philosophy, which aimed to promote a harmonious and ethical society by cultivating virtuous individuals (Cheng, 2017; Jiang, 2014).

Building on this Confucian foundation, establishing the Republic of China (ROC) in 1911 brought about significant educational changes, including music education, as China transitioned from an imperial society to a modern nation. Music education was critical during this transition in promoting political ideology, moral values, and patriotism. A commission dedicated to music education was created to provide suitable music for schools and civic and national gatherings (Wiant, 1966). Aligned with the concept of national development, the ROC officially recognized aesthetic education as a core educational objective in 1912, explicitly including singing as a fundamental subject (Li et al., 2023). The early reforms in school songs emphasized patriotism, self-discipline, and the cultivation of solid willpower in Chinese children. The protest songs of the 1919 May 4th Movement and the revolutionary songs published by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the 1920s further developed the nationalist and ideological aspects of music education (Wong, 1984).

Following the foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, music education became a key tool for promoting revolutionary fervor, loyalty to the CCP, and the dissemination of Maoist ideologies. Maoist principles emphasized class struggle, collectivism, self-reliance, and unwavering loyalty to the CCP and Chairman Mao. These principles shaped every aspect of cultural and educational practices, including music education, which was used to cultivate ideological alignment, reinforce socialist values, and mobilize the masses in support of political campaigns (Bryant, 2005; Perris, 1983). The Ministry of Education incorporated patriotic and anti-imperialist songs into the curriculum to instill a sense of national pride and revolutionary commitment among students (Bryant, 2005; Perris, 1983).

Iconic revolutionary songs rallied support for the Cultural Revolution and served as anthems for the movement, further demonstrating music's powerful role in mobilizing the masses and propagating political campaigns (Bryant, 2005, 2007; Lau, 2008). Songs such as "The East Is Red," "Sailing the Seas Depends on the Helmsman," "We Are Chairman Mao's Red Guards," "Long Live Chairman Mao," and "I Love Beijing's Tiananmen" captivated the nation with their emotional appeal and unwavering devotion to Mao's teachings (Bryant, 2005, 2007; Lau, 2008). During this period, music education was primarily used as a means of political indoctrination, shaping the values, attitudes, and behaviors of students to align with Maoist principles.

The post-1978 economic reforms ushered in a new era of social and cultural developments, which were reflected in the evolution of music education. While patriotic education campaigns continued to integrate content that promoted pride in China's ancient civilization and collective memory, the curriculum standards also began to shift their focus from primarily political to moral messaging, emphasizing traditional Chinese values such as social harmony and loyalty to the CCP (Lee & Ho, 2005; Wang, 2008). This shift did not represent a departure from political objectives but rather a reframing of political ideas through the lens of morality, where traditional values were used to reinforce loyalty to the Party and cultivate a cohesive national identity.

In recent years, the Chinese government has implemented education reforms to further strengthen the party-state's control over the creation of citizens through its education system (Zhao, 2023). Since 2017, China's reintroduction of the "one guideline, one textbook" policy for history, Chinese language, and moral education has created tensions between state control over textbook content and teachers' autonomy in their use, while other subjects continue to follow the more flexible "one guideline, various versions" approach (Ye, 2022). Central to these reforms was Chinese President Xi Jinping's rebranding of the compulsory political-ideological-civic curriculum as "Morals and Rule of Law," which now accounts for "6-8% of school hours" (Publicity Department of CCP and CSME, 2020, cited in Zhao, 2023, p. 746). This rebranding framed traditional political messaging into a moral framework, emphasizing personal virtues, social responsibilities, and adherence to state authority as key components of good citizenship.

One notable example of this moral reframing was the ongoing revisions of the music curriculum. Revolutionary songs that once explicitly celebrated class struggle and Maoist ideals were supplemented or replaced by songs that promoted traditional Chinese values, national unity, and pride in China's cultural heritage. This shift culminated in the 2022 integration of music into the broader *Arts Curriculum Standards* (Ministry of Education, 2022b), which further demonstrated the leadership's deliberate efforts to align music

education with official ideologies. Through this realignment, music education has become a tool for cultivating patriotism, reinforcing moral values rooted in Chinese tradition, and fostering loyalty to the CCP. This evolution reflects the persistent interplay between ideologies, power, and the shaping of official knowledge and historical narratives in Chinese education.

## **Methodology**

### ***Research Design and Research Question***

This study employed a critical content analysis of selected music textbooks to investigate how ideologies and moral education are expressed in China's music education resources. Critical content analysis, a qualitative method (Boréus & Bergström, 2017; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), extends beyond descriptive analysis to interpret the underlying power dynamics, ideologies, and representations within texts (Kong, 1995, 2006; Terzioğlu, 2022; Yalçinkaya, 2015). This approach was particularly suitable for examining the ideological underpinnings of the music education materials, as it allowed for an in-depth exploration of how state-directed narratives are embedded within the curriculum.

The analysis was guided by the following overarching research question:

How are ideologies and moral education expressed in music education resources, particularly China's music textbooks, to promote traditional Chinese culture and values, nationalistic and socialist values, and a global perspective?

### ***Data Sources***

The study analyzed 18 sets of music textbooks (two volumes per school year) for Grades One through Nine, published by the following major state-approved publishing houses commonly adopted in national and regional cities in China, such as Beijing, Chengdu, Guangzhou, Hangzhou, Shanghai, and Changsha:

- Hunan Literature and Art Publishing House (HLAPH)
- Juvenile & Children's Publishing House (JCPH)
- People's Education Press (PEP)
- People's Music Publishing House (PMPH)
- Shanghai Educational Publishing House (SEPH)

All textbooks included in this study were centrally approved by China's Ministry of Education, and they are widely distributed across schools nationwide. These materials, as standardized content mandated by the state, reflect the government's educational priorities and ideological objectives.

While this list is not exhaustive of all state-approved music textbooks in China, it is comprehensive within the scope of this study. The selected textbooks represent those published by the most influential publishers in the country, whose materials are widely adopted in schools and shape dominant narratives in Chinese music education. Including all textbooks from across the country was not essential for this study, as the selected sources provide sufficient insights into the ideological priorities embedded in the curriculum. To ensure transparency and provide detailed information, Appendix A includes a summary table of the textbooks analyzed, specifying their publishers, titles, and publication years.<sup>1</sup>

### ***Development of Thematic Coding Framework***

A thematic coding framework was developed and applied through a rigorous, iterative process to systematically analyze the ideological themes embedded in the textbooks. This framework served as the foundation for identifying and interpreting key ideological priorities within the curriculum and instructional materials.

The process began with a comprehensive review of literature and policy documents (e.g., Cheng, 2007; Li, 2024; Ministry of Education, 2001, 2003, 2011, 2014, 2022a, 2022b; Xinhua News Agency, 2010; Zhao & Lee, 2023). This review identified core ideological priorities in Chinese education, including:

- Traditional Chinese cultural values (e.g., Confucian virtues, folk traditions)
- Patriotism and loyalty to the state
- A global perspective promoting cultural exchange and social harmony

Based on these insights, preliminary themes were drafted to capture content related to Communist Party doctrine, patriotic education, traditional Chinese values, and the cultivation of moral virtues and desirable personality traits. The framework underwent multiple rounds of refinement to ensure clarity, coherence, and alignment with the study's objectives.

The finalized framework identified three key themes:

1. Preservation of traditional Chinese values (e.g., cultural heritage, Confucian virtues)
2. Cultivation of patriotism and socialist ideals
3. Promotion of a global outlook to foster social harmony

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<sup>1</sup> All song titles and lyrics originally written in Chinese were translated into English by the author of this paper.

This framework was applied to analyze curriculum guidelines (Ministry of Education, 2001, 2011, 2022a, 2022b) and music textbooks (see Appendix A). Song titles, lyrics, and accompanying narratives were systematically reviewed to identify explicit and implicit ideological themes. For instance, explicit references included lyrics promoting cultural heritage or national pride, whereas implicit narratives were interpreted to align with state policies. By documenting examples, the analysis demonstrated how ideological directives have been embedded in educational materials, offering a systematic approach to understanding their integration into the curriculum.

The textbooks analyzed in this study were centrally produced and approved by the Ministry of Education. As part of China's standardized curriculum, these materials were designed to align with the government's ideological agenda, and they underwent rigorous review to ensure compliance with state policies. These materials serve as educational tools and instruments for reinforcing state narratives, such as promoting patriotism, socialist core values, and cultural heritage.

This study did not seek to criticize individual textbooks or publishers but instead examined the ideological priorities that are reflected across the curriculum. The findings provide valuable insights into the role of music education in shaping cultural and ideological narratives under an authoritarian regime.

## Results

### *Moral Education for Traditional Values and the Role of Family and Home*

The findings of this study show that Chinese music textbooks use traditional Chinese music and folk songs to disseminate moral education, instilling values such as traditional culture, festivals, filial piety, and the significance of community and home (Zhang, 2022).

The music textbooks collectively emphasize traditional Chinese values and celebrate cultural heritage through songs and units dedicated to traditional festivals and family-centered virtues (HLAPH, 2023a–2023e, 2024; JCPH, 2019, 2020a–2020c; PEP, 2023a–2023h, 2024; PMPH, 2023a–2023j; SEPH, 2024a–2024g). Many of these textbooks highlight the richness of Chinese culture by including songs and lessons on traditional festivals, such as the Lunar New Year. For example, the song “The Couple Returning Home” (PEP, 2023h, p. 10–11) emphasizes the importance of cultivating strong family bonds and promoting values such as hard work, love, and mutual support. These inclusions suggest that the textbooks aim to foster a sense of cultural identity and pride by emphasizing virtues long respected in Chinese society (PMPH, 2023a–2023i).

Songs in Chinese music textbooks convey lessons of love and connection within the family and the larger community, emphasizing the importance of nurturing strong bonds at home and fostering harmony and inclusivity in society. Similarly, the Chinese song “Washing Handkerchiefs” (PMPH, 2023a, p. 29) illustrates the intimacy between a mother and child, as reflected in both its lyrics and accompanying illustrations. The song begins with the lines: “Red sun, white clouds, mother washes the clothes, and I join her...white handkerchief, flowery handkerchief, I will wash, and I will hang it.” These lyrics depict a child eagerly helping his mother with household chores, turning an everyday task into a meaningful moment of bonding. The accompanying illustration vividly reinforces this theme of familial closeness. It portrays a boy joyfully bouncing as he reaches for a clean, wet handkerchief from the wash basin, while his mother looks on with a warm smile and affectionate smile. Both mother and child are laughing, their faces radiating affection and happiness. This shared activity elevates a mundane chore into a moment of connection, highlighting the strength of their relationship and the joy found in simple, everyday interactions. Another example, “Please Come to See Our Village” (PEP, 2023b, pp. 18–19), serves as a medium for moral education by emphasizing traditional values such as hospitality, community spirit, and the importance of family and home. The song’s lyrics extend a warm welcome to outsiders, inviting not only people from other villages but also animals—dogs, ducks, chickens, donkeys, horses, pigs, cows, and goats—to visit. This playful and inclusive tone reflects a strong sense of community and harmony, where all beings are valued and embraced.

Filial piety and love for parents are central themes in these textbooks. Songs such as “My Mother’s Heart” (PMPH, 2023d, p. 26) and “Little Crow Loves Mother” (HLAPH, 2023a, p. 8) teach respect, diligence, honesty, and compassion in children’s relationships with their parents. Songs such as “Pick up Mom” (HLAPH, 2023b, p. 55) and “Mama” (PMPH, 2023d, p. 28) reinforce the importance of filial love and care for one’s parents. The song “Pick Up Mom” beautifully portrays the tender love between a mother and child, highlighting their close bond through simple yet heartfelt moments of care and togetherness:

Raining, raining,  
The ground is covered with raindrop flowers.  
I open my little umbrella,  
Heading out to greet my mom.  
The sky is dark,  
The road is wet.  
My mom holds my hand,  
As we walk back home.  
Back home, back home,  
Feeling so happy.

Many songs also emphasize intergenerational connections, portraying elders. Songs such as “Healthy Song” (PEP, 2023b, p. 10–11), “Grandfather, Father and I” (HLAPH, 2023c, p. 28), and “Cutting the Paper Windows” (HLAPH, 2023d, p. 22) promote respect for elders and appreciation for their wisdom and experience. For example, the lyrics of “Healthy Song” highlight practical wisdom passed down through generations, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a healthy and disciplined lifestyle.

In addition to fostering familial bonds, the textbooks encourage students to appreciate their local culture, history, and sense of belonging to their hometown or ancestral village. Songs such as “Now My Home Village is a Mountain Range” (HLAPH, 2023a, p. 48) portrays a bond between a mother and child, depicting the home as not only a physical place but also a space of love and intimacy. The song “The Grassland is My Home” (PMPH, 2023c, p. 22) celebrates the beauty of one’s homeland and the joy of living in harmony with nature, expressing a deep attachment to one’s homeland:

The grassland is my home.  
The blue sky flies with colorful clouds,  
Riding on my little horse...  
Singing a song, the grassland is my home.

Such songs instill pride and love for one’s homeland, highlighting the importance of cultural and environmental appreciation. By linking home to the themes of love, intimacy, and a connection to nature, the textbooks encourage students to develop a sense of rootedness and pride in their cultural and geographical heritage.

### ***Values of Nationalism, Patriotism, and Socialism***

Nationalism, patriotism, and socialist ideals are deeply embedded in China’s education system, including its music curriculum. Music is recognized by the Chinese government as a powerful tool for conveying ideological messages and shaping societal values. Nationalism and patriotism are emphasized to promote autonomy, unity, and collective identity among China’s population. The concept of “pluralistic unity” (*duoyuan yiti*) is particularly significant in fostering harmony and inclusivity among the nation’s diverse ethnic groups (Wei, 2023, p. 23).

Ethnic songs included in the music textbooks reflect cultural diversity while promoting national unity. Examples such as “Grassland is My Home” from the Mongols, “Xinjiang is a Good Place” from the Uyghurs (PMPH, 2023c, p. 50–51), “Under the Silver Moonlight” from the Tartars (PMPH, 2023h, p. 26–27), “Jumping the Moon Song” from the Yi people (PEP, 2024, p. 31), and “Amal Fire” from the Tibetans (PMPH, 2023d, p. 24–25) celebrate the

vibrancy of China's ethnic groups. A notable example is the song "All (Chinese) Ethnic Friends are Coming Together," which symbolizes harmony and happiness among China's 56 ethnic groups through the unifying power of singing together (PEP, 2023c, p. 26–27):

Little friends from every ethnic group,  
We are together as one.  
Like fresh flowers blooming in spring,  
We sing, we dance, and we have such fun.  
Our bond is close and sweet...

A unit of the music textbook titled "56 Flowers" represents the 56 ethnic groups in China (PEP, 2023b, unit 4). The title compares each ethnic group to a flower, emphasizing their diversity and unity. The lyrics in this unit express happiness, togetherness, and shared laughter. Photo illustrations feature children from different ethnic groups with smiling faces, highlighting joy and harmony.

Patriotic and nationalistic education is further reinforced through songs associated with the "Chinese Dream," which promotes national revival, loyalty to the CCP, and a collective Chinese identity. Examples include "I Love You, China" (HLAPH, 2023e, p. 15), "We Are Singing the Same Song" (PMPH, 2023a, p. 19), and "I Am Chinese" (PMPH, 2023g, p. 34). Labor-focused and revolutionary songs, such as "Come and Work, Everyone" (PMPH, 2023a, p. 35), "Guerrilla Song," and "Military and Civilian Unity Unites One Family" (PMPH, 2023i, units 1 and 2, respectively), emphasize dedication to collective goals and responsibilities.

Songs like "Stay True to the Original Aspiration" (HLAPH, 2024, p. 12–13) embed ideological messages, encouraging students to uphold the foundational mission of the CCP. The lyrics of "Stay True to the Original Aspiration" convey deep devotion, stating:

No matter life or death, you are my whole life, my everything.  
We march toward you; you are all blessed.  
We never forget our original aspirations and we keep moving forward.  
Millions of waters and thousands of mountains are beautiful, and that is the path of  
China.

Through these songs and the accompanying textual and visual content, China's music curriculum emphasizes collective identity and pride in the nation's cultural heritage and socialist ideals. The inclusion of unity-themed songs highlights the importance of ethnic harmony and national cohesion, while patriotic and revolutionary anthems underscore loyalty to the country, the CCP, and the collective goals of the nation. The curriculum reflects the role of music as a key medium for promoting shared values and fostering a sense of togetherness

across China's diverse population.

### ***The Promotion of a Global Outlook and International Social Harmony***

China's music curriculum has undergone significant changes in recent decades, reflecting the country's journey toward greater globalization. A pivotal moment was the state visit by renowned violinist Issac Stern to China in 1979, which marked an important milestone in this process. One music textbook dedicated a particular unit titled "The Covenant of the Century" (HLAPH, 2023e, p. 18–19) to Stern, who promised to return to China for a performance in Beijing in November 1999. Stern's visit may have paved the way for less ideological driven and liberal reforms, including the incorporation of a broader range of music genres and styles in the curriculum, such as Western classical music and popular music. These changes aimed to expose students to a broader musical repertoire, foster creativity, and encourage individual expression (Ministry of Education, 2022b; also see Huang, 2012).

In line with those reforms, music textbooks have increasingly sought to cultivate a global outlook in students by integrating elements of diverse cultures and traditions, promoting an appreciation for cultural diversity, and encouraging cross-cultural understanding (JCPH, 2019, 2020a–2020c; PEP, 2023d–2023h; PMPH, 2023g–2023j; SEPH, 2024b, 2024d).

Songs such as "Hand in Hand, Global Village" (PEP, 2023d, p. 12–13), which depicts children dressed in various national customs from Africa, Japan, Korea, and various European nations, underscore the shared experiences of harmony and unity among children worldwide. The lyrics convey a hopeful and cooperative message:

Bending down, picking up hope, hand in hand, pulling out the sun.  
The sun of hope is us; we make the Earth village beautiful!  
... Hand in hand, we sing, the Earth village is our common hometown.  
... Hand in hand, the Earth village, the life of the river sings in our hearts.

Similarly, the song "We Are One" (JCPH, 2020b, p. 41), by Mary Donnelly and sung in English, carries a powerful message of unity, interconnectedness, and global harmony. Its lyrics emphasize shared humanity and mutual respect, transcending cultural, national, and geographical differences. Key lines such as "Everyone is in the world together," "We are a part of one big family," and "I pray one day that we may live together in peace throughout the land" foster a sense of solidarity and shared purpose. This vision of unity and cooperation resonates with the curriculum's broader aspiration to instill values of global citizenship. Other examples include songs like "The Olympic Style" (PEP, 2023e, unit 6) and the Chinese adaptation of the British children's song "London Bridge" (HLAPH, 2023b, p. 58–59). These songs emphasize shared human values and the interconnectedness of cultures, reflecting a

broader aspiration for international collaboration and understanding.

A particularly notable example is the song “The World Will Be Much Better” (SEPH, 2024d, p. 43), which carries themes of hope, unity, and optimism. The lyrics poetically depict a world where individuals contribute to collective progress and harmony:

Each star is an island, there are big and small ships parking there,  
Wind is blowing and the fish net is opened, motivating us to sing our familiar songs.  
...  
I am the starred island, we are all holding out our hands, the world will be much better.  
You are a bridge, ah, I am also a bridge, we both construct a bridge that makes the  
world much better .

This song utilizes poetic imagery to symbolize the importance of connection and collective progress. The depiction of stars as islands and individuals as bridges underscores the idea that humanity’s shared efforts can create a brighter, more harmonious world.

Through these globally oriented songs, the music textbooks extend the values of unity and harmony from a national context to the global stage. They encourage students to see themselves as active participants in a shared world, where their actions contribute to the well-being of all. This aligns with the broader educational goal of fostering not only national pride and loyalty but also a cosmopolitan outlook that cherishes peace and cooperation across borders.

## **Discussion**

### ***Theoretical Perspectives on the Curriculum and Music Education***

Michale Apple’s (1990, 1993, 2002, 2013) theory of ideology and curriculum emphasizes that the curriculum in educational institutions is not neutral but instead reflects the dominant sociopolitical and cultural agenda. The curriculum represents the “official knowledge” and “official historical narratives” that those in power seek to legitimize and perpetuate. This study applied Apple’s framework to examine the role of the Chinese government in shaping music education to align with its broader ideological objectives.

Lucy Green’s contributions provide a critical lens for interpreting the findings. Green (2003) highlights the risks of presenting state-approved values and cultural narratives as natural or self-evident, which obscures underlying power dynamics. Her critique is particularly relevant to China’s music curriculum, where traditional, socialist, and global themes are often framed through a nationalist perspective. Green (2005) has also advocated for musical autonomy,

arguing that prioritizing conformity in music education can constrain students' creative capacities and critical engagement with diverse perspectives. These insights underscore the tension between fostering individuality and transmitting state-approved values, a recurring theme in this study.

This study explores the intricate relationship between political ideologies, moral education, and music education in China. By applying Apple's and Green's frameworks, the analysis highlights how the Chinese government uses music education to advance its ideological agenda. Apple's concepts of "official knowledge" and "official historical narratives" underscore the state's prioritization of specific ideologies in the curriculum, while Green's critique of common-sense assumptions emphasizes the risks of ideological conformity. Additionally, Green's focus on musical meanings highlights the multifaceted ways in which music conveys values, sometimes transcending its explicit ideological purposes.

The findings of this study revealed three key themes in China's music curriculum: (1) the promotion of traditional Chinese culture and values, (2) the reinforcement of socialist ideologies and nationalism, and (3) the integration of a global perspective. These themes are analyzed below, drawing on Apple's and Green's theoretical insights to illuminate the implications for moral education in China's music curriculum.

### ***Promotion of Traditional Chinese Culture and Values***

The promotion of traditional Chinese culture and values in music education is central to the Chinese government's broader ideological agenda. This study revealed that the government strategically leverages music as a medium to instill cultural identity and reinforce values rooted in Chinese traditions. The music textbooks prominently feature songs and units dedicated to festivals such as the Lunar New Year, the Mid-Autumn Festival, and the Dragon Boat Festival. These cultural celebrations, expressed through music, foster an appreciation for the rhythms, melodies, and symbolism passed down through generations.

The curriculum also emphasizes Confucian values such as filial piety, respect for elders, and intergenerational relationships. Songs that celebrate familial bonds and reverence for the elderly align with President Xi Jinping's vision of moral and cultural rejuvenation (Ministry of Education, 2022a, 2022b; State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2022). Songs that celebrate familial bonds, such as "Healthy Song" (PEP, 2023b, p. 10–11), encourage students to adopt healthy habits modeled by elders, underscoring their wisdom and role as moral exemplars.

Apple's (2002) concept of "official historical narratives" illustrates how these practices position traditional values as essential to the state's vision of cultural preservation and social

cohesion. However, Green's (2005) critique of conformity warns that embedding state-approved values into music education may limit students' ability to critically engage with alternative cultural perspectives or explore their own creative identities. While the curriculum fosters cultural pride and national identity, it raises questions about whether students have an interpretive agency to engage with music on their own terms.

### ***Reinforcement of Socialist Ideologies and Nationalism***

The reinforcement of socialist ideologies and nationalism in the music curriculum reflects the Chinese government's aims to foster students' allegiance to the Communist Party and commitment to collective ideals. Revolutionary songs, labor anthems, and patriotic compositions—such as “Guerrilla Song” and “Military and Civilian Unity Unites One Family”—reinforce values of unity, sacrifice, and devotion to the nation (PMPH, 2023j). These themes are further supported by the mandatory inclusion of the textbook *Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era*, which covers topics such as morality and governance tailored to different grade levels (Ministry of Education, 2022a, 2022b).

While the songs highlight the beauty and richness of diverse regional traditions, they also serve a broader ideological purpose: reinforcing the state's narrative of a cohesive and harmonious national identity. By glorifying the beauty of specific ethnic regions and traditions, these songs evoke pride in local heritage while tying it to the larger context of a unified China. The lyrics often connect cultural prosperity and regional beauty to the stability and leadership provided by the state, subtly encouraging loyalty to the nation and appreciation for its governance. Through these songs, the textbooks foster a dual sense of belonging: pride in one's cultural roots and unity within the collective identity of the Chinese nation. This approach ensures that cultural diversity is celebrated, but only within the framework of fostering national loyalty and inclusiveness.

Apple's (1993) framework has provided a useful lens for understanding how this curriculum legitimizes the state's ideological priorities. By embedding these themes into music education, the government ensures that students internalize a collective identity centered on loyalty to the Communist Party and adherence to socialist values. However, Green's (2005) critique of ideological conformity raises concerns about this approach. When music education is primarily employed as a tool for transmitting state-approved values, it risks curtailing students' creative and interpretive capacities, reducing music to a vehicle for ideological indoctrination rather than a medium for personal expression and exploration.

Despite these concerns, Green's (2003) theory of musical meanings suggests that even state-selected songs may carry unintended or subversive interpretations. Students and educators

bring their own experiences and perspectives to the music, potentially engaging with it in ways that extend beyond the state's intended narrative. This duality underscores the complexity of using music education as an ideological tool and highlights the need for more open-ended approaches that encourage diverse engagements with musical content.

### ***Integration of a Global Perspective***

The integration of a global perspective into China's music curriculum is a complex and multifaceted issue, reflecting the Chinese government's political ideologies, power dynamics, and attempts to shape "official knowledge." On the surface, the incorporation of a global outlook aligns with President Xi's vision of promoting a shared future of humanity through cultural exchange and international understanding (Ministry of Education, 2022b). Songs such as "Hand in Hand, Global Village" and "The Olympic Style" promote themes of global unity and cultural exchange, exposing students to a variety of music genres and traditions.

However, Green's (2003) critique of common-sense assumptions is relevant here. While the curriculum appears to foster intercultural understanding, the global perspective is often filtered through a nationalist lens, prioritizing Chinese cultural pride and geopolitical aspirations. Critics have noted that these efforts may be less about genuine cultural exchange and more about advancing China's global influence (Zhu, 2022). This perspective aligns with Apple's (1993) theory of curriculum as a vehicle for legitimizing dominant ideologies, as the global outlook promoted in the curriculum reflects the government's political agenda rather than a neutral or inclusive approach to internationalism.

Concerns have also been raised about the depth and authenticity of cross-cultural dialogue within the curriculum. While the music textbooks emphasize fostering cross-cultural understanding and global citizenship, they also advance a state-sanctioned narrative of "international social harmony." The emphasis on "international social harmony" may limit students' exposure to alternative perspectives on globalization and the complexities of international relations. While globally themed songs celebrate cultural diversity, they often present a homogenized view of the world, where differences are celebrated primarily in ways that align with state-approved narratives. For example, the inclusion of globally inspired songs such as "The World Will Be Much Better" (SEPH, 2024d) emphasizes unity and cooperation, but these themes are often framed to emphasize China's leadership role in promoting global harmony. However, this portrayal of global unity often presents a romanticized vision that may obscure the complexities of international relations and cross-cultural interactions. For instance, while these songs emphasize optimism, collaboration, and shared goals, they rarely address the challenges or power dynamics inherent in globalization. Instead, the narrative tends to emphasize China's role as a contributor to global harmony, subtly reinforcing the state's ideological perspective on international relations.

Drawing on Green's (2003) insights, this study found that globally themed songs may evoke diverse interpretations that extend beyond their ideological framing. Students and educators, through their unique experiences, might engage with these songs in ways that challenge their intended nationalist narratives. However, the curriculum's prioritization of nationalistic goals may limit students' ability to critically engage with globalization and diverse perspectives.

Striking a balance between promoting Chinese heritage and fostering genuine cross-cultural dialogue remains a key challenge for China's education policies. The global perspective integrated into the music curriculum has raised important questions about whether it equips students with the critical thinking skills and openness required to navigate a diverse, interconnected world or whether it primarily serves to reinforce state ideologies. Striking this balance is crucial for ensuring that students are prepared to engage meaningfully with the complexities of a globalized society.

### **Limitations and Future Directions for Research**

This study critically explored how political ideologies, moral education, and music education were utilized to advance sociopolitical goals. Several limitations of the study must be acknowledged to contextualize the findings and provide a balanced perspective.

First, the researcher approached the data with an open and critical lens, consulting diverse music education and sociology perspectives while reflecting on their positionality as a Hong Kong Chinese-based scholar. Although efforts were made to mitigate potential biases, complete objectivity is inherently challenging. Readers are encouraged to consider how the researcher's background and experiences may have influenced the interpretations presented. Peer feedback and scholarly critiques further informed this analysis, ensuring a more balanced and nuanced understanding of the topic.

Second, the study was conducted during a period of significant sociopolitical challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the aftermath of the 2019 Hong Kong protests, and the implementation of new security legislation. These factors heightened school authorities' sensitivity to "political correctness" and limited the researcher's ability to access schools and gather data directly from teachers and students. Despite these constraints, the findings provide meaningful insights into the ideological underpinnings of China's music curriculum and its broader implications for education systems worldwide.

Third, while China's music curriculum reflects key governmental priorities, including the promotion of cultural heritage, national identity, and global aspirations, its focus on advancing a singular ideological narrative limits opportunity for teachers and students to engage with diverse perspectives and to cultivate critical thinking skills. Such constraints may have long-

term implications for students' personal growth, cultural understanding, and ability to navigate an interconnected, globalized world. Striking a balance between fostering national unity and nurturing critical thinking and openness to global perspectives remains a pressing challenge for educational policy and practice.

Further research is needed to explore the long-term consequences of ideologically driven education, particularly its impact on students' cognitive, social, and emotional development. Comparative studies on music curricula across different countries could illuminate how political ideologies and moral education shape educational practices and outcomes globally. Such research could also provide insights into how music education can support critical thinking, cultural awareness, and meaningful participation in diverse, interconnected societies. While this study provided detailed descriptions of the content and themes presented in the textbooks, it could be further enriched by examining how students perceive and internalize these values in their daily lives.

This study contributes to the broader discourse on how education can balance promoting national unity and cultivating globally aware, critically engaged citizens. By exploring the interplay between political ideologies, moral education, and music education, scholars can better understand how curricula reflect and reproduce societal priorities. Future reforms in China and beyond should aim to create education systems that balance cultural pride and national identity with the development of critical thinking and openness to diverse perspectives.

Ultimately, this study's findings raise essential questions about how China can balance its goals of promoting national unity and cultural pride with the need to cultivate critical thinking, openness to global perspectives, and well-rounded personal development in its music curriculum. Reforms that prioritize these goals would ensure that music education serves the comprehensive needs of students in the twenty-first century. By continuing to study the interplay between political ideologies, moral education, and music education—both in China and in other contexts—scholars can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how education can support students' growth in an interconnected, diverse world.

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### About the Author

Wai-Chung Ho is a professor in the Academy of Music at Hong Kong Baptist University. Her research interests encompass the sociology of music, sociology of education, China’s music

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## Appendix A

### *Summary of Analyzed Music Textbooks*

<b>Publisher</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Year of Publication</b>
Hunan Literature & Art Publishing House (HLAPH)	<i>Yinyue</i> [Music] (Grade 3, vol. 2)	2023a
Hunan Literature & Art Publishing House (HLAPH)	<i>Yinyue</i> [Music] (Grade 1, vol. 2)	2023b
Hunan Literature & Art Publishing House (HLAPH)	<i>Yinyue</i> [Music] (Grade 1, vol. 1)	2023c
Hunan Literature & Art Publishing House (HLAPH)	<i>Yinyue</i> [Music] (Grade 2, vol. 1)	2023d
Hunan Literature & Art Publishing House (HLAPH)	<i>Yinyue</i> [Music] (Grade 6, vol. 2)	2023e
Hunan Literature & Art Publishing House (HLAPH)	<i>Yishu: Yinyue</i> [Arts: Music] (Grade 7, vol. 1)	2024
Juvenile & Children's Publishing House (JCPH)	<i>Yinyue</i> [Music] (Grade 6, vol. 1)	2019
Juvenile & Children's Publishing House (JCPH)	<i>Yinyue</i> [Music] (Grade 6, vol. 2)	2020a
Juvenile & Children's Publishing House (JCPH)	<i>Yinyue</i> [Music] (Grade 7, vol. 1)	2020b
Juvenile & Children's Publishing House (JCPH)	<i>Yinyue</i> [Music] (Grade 7, vol. 2)	2020c
People's Education Press (PEP)	<i>Yinyue</i> [Music] (Grade 9, vol. 1)	2023a
People's Education Press (PEP)	<i>Yinyue</i> [Music] (Grade 2, vol. 2)	2023b
People's Education Press (PEP)	<i>Yinyue</i> [Music] (Grade 1, vol. 1)	2023c
People's Education Press (PEP)	<i>Yinyue</i> [Music] (Grade 5, vol. 1)	2023d
People's Education Press (PEP)	<i>Yinyue</i> [Music] (Grade 6, vol. 1)	2023e
People's Education Press (PEP)	<i>Yinyue</i> [Music] (Grade 7, vol. 1)	2023f
People's Education Press (PEP)	<i>Yinyue</i> [Music] (Grade 8, vol. 1)	2023g
People's Education Press (PEP)	<i>Yinyue</i> [Music] (Grade 9, vol. 2)	2023h
People's Education Press (PEP)	<i>Yishu – Yinyue</i> [Arts – Music] (Grade 7, vol. 2)	2024

People's Music Publishing House (PMPH)	<i>Yinyue [Music]</i> (Grade 1, vol. 1)	2023a
People's Music Publishing House (PMPH)	<i>Yinyue [Music]</i> (Grade 2, vol. 1)	2023b
People's Music Publishing House (PMPH)	<i>Yinyue [Music]</i> (Grade 2, vol. 2)	2023c
People's Music Publishing House (PMPH)	<i>Yinyue [Music]</i> (Grade 3, vol. 1)	2023d
People's Music Publishing House (PMPH)	<i>Yinyue [Music]</i> (Grade 3, vol. 2)	2023e
People's Music Publishing House (PMPH)	<i>Yinyue [Music]</i> (Grade 4, vol. 1)	2023f
People's Music Publishing House (PMPH)	<i>Yinyue [Music]</i> (Grade 5, vol. 2)	2023g
People's Music Publishing House (PMPH)	<i>Yinyue [Music]</i> (Grade 7, vol. 2)	2023h
People's Music Publishing House (PMPH)	<i>Yinyue [Music]</i> (Grade 8, vol. 2)	2023i
People's Music Publishing House (PMPH)	<i>Yinyue [Music]</i> (Grade 9, vol. 2)	2023j
Shanghai Educational Publishing House (SEPH)	<i>Yinyue [Music]</i> (Grade 6, vol. 1)	2024a
Shanghai Educational Publishing House (SEPH)	<i>Yinyue [Music]</i> (Grade 6, vol. 2)	2024b
Shanghai Educational Publishing House (SEPH)	<i>Yinyue [Music]</i> (Grade 7, vol. 1)	2024c
Shanghai Educational Publishing House (SEPH)	<i>Yinyue [Music]</i> (Grade 7, vol. 2)	2024d
Shanghai Educational Publishing House (SEPH)	<i>Yishi [Arts]</i> (Grade 8, vol. 1)	2024e
Shanghai Educational Publishing House (SEPH)	<i>Yishi [Arts]</i> (Grade 9, vol. 1)	2024f
Shanghai Educational Publishing House (SEPH)	<i>Yishi [Arts]</i> (Grade 9, vol. 2)	2024g

*Note:* All textbooks were approved by the Ministry of Education and are part of the compulsory education curriculum in China.