

The Role of the Clarinet in China

by

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ABSTRACT

Throughout western clarinet art music, there are not only a large number of great performers and classical works, but also a valuable body of literature that has laid a solid foundation for clarinet development and global dispersion. By contrast, Chinese clarinet literature is lacking in quantity and global distribution. However, this is the first comprehensive study that discloses the mysterious mask of China's clarinet art.

This study does not merely discuss the Chinese clarinet history, but it also introduces important historical events that influenced the development of the Chinese clarinet industry (excluding manufacturing), including Chinese military bands, clarinet music, pedagogy, clarinet figures, and its future direction.

In the conclusion of this paper, the author discusses the deficiency of the Chinese clarinet industry and makes suggestions for solving problems with clarinet players practicing more technique rather than focusing on musicianship, educators' lack of concentration on teaching and academic research, and the shortage of Chinese clarinet works. Additionally, the author appeals to Chinese clarinet players to actively participate in international activities and the Chinese government to increase incentives to introduce high-level Chinese talents overseas to help make China a better country in any field.

This Research Paper is Dedicated to Chinese Clarinet Art.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

From the perspective of world history, China lost some of its power in the late Qing dynasty (1644-1912). Meanwhile, Europe thrived during the Industrial Revolution (ca. 1760-1840), which brought economic, political, and cultural prosperity. China's recession and Europe's rise made two distinct developmental orbits. In this great historical exchange of power, feudal China, which had enjoyed a worldwide reputation and great glory, was gradually reduced to a country of poor, uneducated people and was on the verge of subjugation by Britain, France, and other European countries.¹ Evidence of this situation can be seen through ancient military bands, which had thrived and circulated for thousands of years in ancient times. However, these ensembles could not survive the recession and were replaced by Western-style military bands.

The motivation for this paper is to show that the historical development of the clarinet including its repertoire, pedagogy, performers, etc. were related closely to the rise and fall of modern China. In its short lifetime, beginning in approximately 1885, the clarinet in China was shaped by warfare, diplomacy, economics, politics, and important people. This paper will examine historical influences that affected the development of this instrument in China. Research on this topic reveals that important musical events concerning the clarinet were recorded, but a comprehensive history had not been created before now. The goal of this paper is to describe this history in more detail, thus filling a noticeable niche in the clarinet's background.

¹ Pei Wang, *The Outline of Chinese Modern History* (Jilin, China: Jilin University, 2015), 12.

This study contains two major parts: a recording and a paper. The recording will include significant works written by Chinese composers. This paper will examine the historical context that influenced the development of the clarinet in China.

The second chapter will introduce the following important events that happened in modern Chinese history and covers military, political, economic, and diplomatic fields: The First Opium War, the Sino-Japanese War, the Chinese Civil War, the Cultural Revolution, the Reform and Opening-up, and China Reenters the United Nations. Since these milestones will be mentioned repeatedly, I will introduce the events to the readers first.

Moreover, we should have a general knowledge of the Chinese military music history before discussing the development of the clarinet in China. There is no doubt that the rise and development of the clarinet can never be realized without the introduction of western military music into China; thus, the third chapter discusses the Chinese military music development.

The fourth chapter begins to describe the clarinet history of China. The famous Chinese clarinet educator, Madam Tao Chunxiao once said, “When writing about the clarinet history in China, Mr. Mu Zhiqing must be named in the first place.”² Mr. Mu Zhiqing was hailed as the first clarinet player in China. His biography and clarinet pedagogy are introduced in detail in the first part of the chapter. By reading Mr. Mu Zhiqing, we can see the Chinese clarinet development history from the time it was introduced to the founding of the People’s Republic of China. The second part of this

² Guangri Jin, *The Clarinet Figures in China* (Chongqing, China: Chongqing, 2008), 14.

chapter includes a brief biography of Madam Tao Chunxiao. Tao Chunxiao is a figure who is important to this study because not only has she been considered the most important clarinetist in China, but she is also a witness to most of the clarinet's development in China.

The fifth chapter discusses Chinese clarinet music, which is the weakest part of the Chinese clarinet industry due to its quantity and recognition. In addition to introducing the clarinet concerto *The Sound of Pamir*, written by Chinese composer Hu Bijing, this chapter discusses the different clarinet music styles and characters in different periods after the People's Republic of China was established. In addition, I worked with the famous American accompanist, Gail Novak, to record this clarinet concerto, which is included in the recording portion together with two other significant Chinese clarinet pieces, *Theme and Variations* by Zhang Wu and *The Song of Grazing Horses* by Wang Miao.

The last chapter of the paper aims to summarize the past and look to the future, based on the incomplete nature of China's clarinet history and expectations discussed in the interview of Madam Tao Chunxiao. As a young Chinese clarinetist, I feel to have an obligation to actively promote a robust future for the Chinese clarinet industry.

CHAPTER 2

SIGNIFICANT EVENTS IN MODERN CHINA

First Opium War

The first opium war was started by the United Kingdom by invading China from 1840 to 1842; this signaled the beginning of the modern history of China.³ After the Industrial Revolution (ca. 1760-1840), the United Kingdom spared no effort to sell its products to China and to reverse its long-term, inferior trade position with China. When these efforts failed, the U.K. began more controversial, subversive actions, smuggling mass amounts of opium into China to satisfy their desire for profit.

This influx of opium into Chinese markets had brought astonishing profits and broke the trade advantage of China over the U.K. that had been maintained for two hundred years.⁴ With a vast quantity of imported opium, Chinese wealth kept flowing out, resulting in a serious money shortage. Furthermore, the opium seriously corrupted good social habits. This deterioration brought mental and physical destruction to Chinese people and greatly damaged social productivity, leading to the depression and decline of China's industry and commerce.

The great destruction produced by opium had raised the Qing government's attention. Out of self-interest, the Qing government instituted a smoking ban and destroyed massive opium stocks in China, which was considered an infringement of

³ Pei Wang, *The Outline of Chinese Modern History* (Jilin, China: Jilin University, 2015), 6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

private property by the British. The conflicts kept escalating, finally resulting in war. The corruption of the late Qing government and the “closed-door policy” led to China lagging behind the United Kingdom in many areas, including military equipment, leading to a British victory.

Sino-Japanese War

The Sino-Japanese War was a Japanese invasion of China that occurred during the Japanese Meiji Restoration and ranked among the world powers and embarked on a path of aggression and expansion abroad. Invading and conquering China was an important step toward implementing its national policy of world domination. In the end, the Sino-Japanese War ended in a Chinese fiasco.

China’s War of Liberation

Chinese civil wars were armed battles between the Chinese Nationalist Party and the Communist Party of China scrambling for power. From 1927 to 1949, Many armed conflicts occurred between those two parties, the largest among them being the War of Liberation (1945-1949), which was the final, most brutal war.

Because of the constant wars and prevailing social ills during the period of the Chinese Nationalist Party power, the poorest of Chinese society had lived miserable lives, with an average of 300,000 to 700,000 people dying of hunger per year and average life expectancy of less than 45 years.⁵ That was the fundamental reason that the War of Liberation erupted. The core reason that the Communist Party of China could thrive

⁵ Ibid., 35.

rapidly in rough times was that Chinese people were all overwhelmed by the old rule and supported revolution. By the end of this war, the Chinese Nationalist Party retreated to Taiwan.

The Cultural Revolution

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution occurring from May 1966 to October 1976 caused great damages and setbacks to the establishment of new China and its people. The revolution overturned a lot of conservative principles, policies, and accomplishments that the new China had originally implemented and denied the hard effort of all Chinese people to build socialism.

The conferences held by the Communist Party of China in May and August of 1966 marked the full launch of the Cultural Revolution.⁶ The conferences identified that a number of bourgeois representatives had infiltrated and bided their time to overthrow the authority of the Communist Party of China, which was why the Cultural Revolution was supposedly started—to limit the bourgeoisie power. It was stressed that all the bourgeois reactionary academic authority as well as the ideology from the bourgeoisie and other exploiting classes should be criticized, and all the education, literature, art, and superstructure should be reformed to adjust to the current socialist economic foundation. Central to the revolution movement was to expel the capitalist followers in power in the

⁶ Jicai Feng, *Ten Years* (Jilin, China: Era Literature and Art, 2004), 5.

party. Chairman Mao Zedong⁷ led the movement and began his personal despotism. The Proletarian Cultural Revolution movement soon spread out over the country.

Within the next two years, the “rebels” successively seized the central and local government leadership, during which the social orders were in chaos and the practices of beating, smashing, looting, raiding, and arresting prevailed in society. The contradictions between different factions escalated to trigger massive armed fights and the situation was progressing out of control.

As for the Cultural Revolution, disagreements existed within the party in the beginning. As the political turmoil intensified, the resistance forces began to grow and more people realized that the theory of the Cultural Revolution was wrong and its results were doubted. After 1972, the views between continuing with the revolution or rectifying it divided and confronted each other.

In January 1975, a man named Deng Xiaoping⁸ took over the country’s military and political daily work. Xiaoping Deng posited that agriculture, industry, and literature should be fully reorganized and rectified, and he emphasized that the key was to rectifying the party and leadership team. Under Deng Xiaoping’s ten months of presidency, his new policies were supported by the masses and the effects of his

⁷ Mao Zedong (1893-1976), born in Xiangtan city, Hunan province, was a statesman, strategist, poet, and calligrapher. As a Chinese Communist, he was the founder and chief leader of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army and the People’s Republic of China.

⁸ Deng Xiaoping (1904-1997), born in Guangan city, Sichuan province, was a statesman, strategist and diplomat. He was also one of the prime leaders of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army and the People’s Republic of China. He was the core of the second generation of collective leadership of the Communist Party of China and chief architect of China’s socialist reform, opening up and modernization.

rectifications were obvious because the social situation became stable and the national economy improved.

Deng Xiaoping's work was supported by Chairman Mao at the beginning. As the full rectification advanced and deepened, the basis of the Cultural Revolution was challenged, which was intolerable to Chairman Mao, and Deng's work had to be suspended. It was not until Chairman Mao died on September 9, 1976 that the ten years of Cultural Revolution came to an end.

The Reform and Opening-up

At the end of the "Cultural Revolution," the political situation in China was in chaos and the Chinese economy was in a state of slow development and stagnation. Deng Xiaoping once said, "We must reform and open up to enhance the vitality of China's socialism, liberate and develop social productive forces, and improve people's lives."⁹

The report of the Communist Party of China pointed out that the reform and opening-up is a great new revolution led by the Communist Party of China in the new era.¹⁰ The purpose was to liberate and develop the productive forces, to realize the modernization of the country, to enrich the Chinese people, and to revitalize the great Chinese nation. Furthermore, it also promoted the self-improvement and development of China's socialist system, giving new vitality to socialism, and combined this socialism with Chinese characteristics. Since 1978, the Chinese government has promoted this

⁹ Jisheng Yang, *The Age of Deng Xiaoping* (Beijing: Central Compilation & Translation, 1998), 5.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

reform and opening up, during which the communists and the people have become stronger with great enterprising spirit and innovative practices.

Since 1978, the Communist Party of China has made great success in promoting the construction of the party and the country. Firstly, the party promoted the economic, political, and cultural restructuring of China to form new social environment that were in line with China's future directions.¹¹ These provided a strong, institutional guarantee for China's economic prosperity, social harmony, and stability.

Secondly, the party aimed to transform China from a semi-closed and semi-feudal country to a fully open country. The Communist Party of China adheres to the policy of opening up to the outside world and developed an open economy. According to Yang, China's total import and export volume increased from \$21 billion in 1978 to \$2,973 billion in 2010,¹² which ranked second in the world. Until recently, China's export volume and foreign reserve ranked first in the world. Extensive international cooperation has not only accelerated China's economy, but also made significant contributions to the development of the world economy.

Thirdly, upholding economic development as the central task undoubtedly enhanced overall national strength. The most remarkable achievement in the new period is the rapid GDP development that increased from \$365 billion in 1978 to \$39,798 billion in 2010, with an average annual growth rate of 9.8% that triples the world average.¹³

¹¹ Ibid., 6

¹² Ibid., 8

¹³ Ibid., 9

China relies on its own strength to support the livelihoods of its population of 1.3 billion people.

Fourthly, upholding the absolute leadership of the Communist Party of China, the development of national defense and the military have been major achievements. The Communist Party of China and the government have been comprehensively strengthening national defense and the army's modernization and standardization. By implementing military strategy in the new period, the effect of military weapon and equipment construction are significant. The people's army has played an important role in defending and building the motherland, especially in the fight against natural disasters.

Since the opening-up period, the Chinese government has always upheld the independent foreign policy of peace and pursuit of peaceful development.¹⁴ Through its foreign policy of maintaining world peace and promoting common development, China has witnessed comprehensive relationship development with developed countries. These actions have led to deepening friendly relations with neighbors and consolidating traditional friendship with developing countries. China actively participates in multilateral affairs and international obligations. China's international status is rising and its influence is increasing, thus giving China a more constructive role in international affairs, such as the 2001 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit was held in Shanghai, the 2016 G20 summit was held in Hangzhou. Keeping pace with the times, the Communist Party of China has formed a diplomatic theory system with Chinese characteristics that serve as a strong, ideological tool for diplomacy, which has made

¹⁴ Pengfei Qi and Li Baozhen, *The History of Chinese Diplomacy* (Beijing: Renmin, 2014), 15.

important contributions to safeguarding national sovereignty, security and development interests, and promoting world peace, development, and cooperation. China has been working closely with other countries to participate in various international disputes in a responsible manner and has made great efforts to execute economic, cultural, and public fields of diplomacy with fruitful results. The friendly cooperation between China and other countries has been carried forward so extensively that the number of the countries having diplomatic relations with China has risen from 116 in 1978 to 174 at present, and has formed our allies exist worldwide.¹⁵

During the last forty years of creative practices of the policy, China has accumulated valuable experience through hard exploration. Through scientific endeavors and opening up, China has achieved great accomplishments in modern times.

China Reenters the United Nations

The United Nations is an international organization founded in 1945 by the five major allies of the Second World War: United States, Soviet Union, Republic of China, United Kingdom, and France. The headquarters was set in the USA and it had 193 ambassadors. The United Nations aims to protect world peace and promote economic, scientific, and cultural cooperation and exchanges in the world.¹⁶

When the Communist Party of China founded the new China in 1949, the People's Republic of China could have replaced the Republic of China to become legal representatives; however, out of political self-interest, some countries had strongly

¹⁵ Ibid., 33

¹⁶ Ibid., 40

opposed this change.¹⁷ Through years of hard work, the Communist Party of China and the Chinese people had gained more and more support.

In October 1971, the 26th General Assembly of the United Nations voted to replace the Republic of China with the People's Republic of China to become legal representatives in the UN.¹⁸ Ever since, China has resumed its legal seat in the United Nations, which was seen as a significant breakthrough in new China diplomacy. Since China resumed its legal status in the United Nations in 1971, China has actively participated in the work of the United Nations in various fields such as security, society, and education, which has been positive for both China and the United Nations.

¹⁷ Ibid., 47

¹⁸ Ibid., 49

CHAPTER 3

THE ROLE OF MILITARY BANDS IN CHINA

Brief History of Chinese Ancient Military Bands

Where did military music originate? Many people think it developed in the Western world, probably because they are not aware of Chinese music history. In fact, since the Xia dynasty (BCE ca. 2100-1600), military music had its debut in Chinese music history. This music was older than Western military music. Cai Yong (133-192), a well known writer of the book *Li Yue Zhi* had mentioned, “Emperor Xuan Yuan, the first emperor of China, had contributed to the start of Chinese military music by commanding musicians to compose music for his military specifically for combat.”¹⁹ The purpose of this music was to irritate the enemies during combat and to build the confidence of his army.²⁰

From the Xia Dynasty to the Qin Dynasty, for over 1800 years, the Chinese people had developed important historical innovations, such as the Oracle bone script and bronze wares. These inventions were milestones to human civilization. Meanwhile, Chinese ancient military music was also blooming, playing a significant role in wars, and serving in major events for the country other than wars. In this period, percussion played the most important role in military bands, along with a few wind instruments.

¹⁹ Yigang Chen, *The History of Chinese Military Bands* (Beijing: Liberation Army Literature and Art, 2015), 23.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 24

For 800 years during the Han, Wei, Northern, and Southern dynasties, Chinese military bands gradually entered into a prosperous stage. By this period of time, one of the most significant changes was wind instruments replacing percussion as the main elements of the band.

When China entered the Sui, Tang, and Five dynasties (ca. 581-960), many kingdoms existed and competed with each other to be the single kingdom and reunite China again. War after war, the mainland finally was at peace and united once again. The economy was blossoming, and foreign countries started to gain interest in doing business with China. China was ready to be introduced to the rest of the world. In this context, no longer experiencing disturbing civil wars, the military no longer served its main purpose of fighting battles. Military music was played more in royal or diplomatic events. In summary, during the whole Sui, Tang and Five dynasties, military bands were expanded and foreign music elements were incorporated into the military music.

From the Yuan dynasty to the Qing dynasty, for about 400 years, military music carried its multi-purpose role in many aspects of society. However, there was not as much innovative development as there was in previous dynasties. Especially during the Qing dynasty, the last feudal society of China, which lasted for three centuries, the Qing government closed the border of China. For over 100 years, China had no interaction with the rest of the world; Chinese civilization developed slowly, which negatively affected Chinese military music.²¹ Eventually, ancient Chinese military bands began to fade away.

²¹ Ibid., 42

Brief History of Modern Military Bands and Influence of Wars, Politics, Economics and Diplomacy

War I: First Opium War (1840-1842)

Surprisingly, the Western military band made its debut in Nanjing instead of Beijing, the capital of China. When the first opium war was over, the Chinese government had no choice but to sign the first unjust treaty, the Treaty of Nanjing; Hong Kong thus became a colony of the United Kingdom for 155 years. During the signing ceremony for this treaty, the Chinese people were introduced to the Western military band and its acoustics, which were completely different from ancient military bands. In 1885, one western wind band was established in China by Robert Hart (1835-1911), who was the head of Chinese Customs Department. The members of this band were primarily teenagers.²² In my opinion, this band should not be considered canonically as the first military band, because this band was privately owned by Robert Hart to entertain himself and his visitors; it did not serve any military purpose. However, when the Chinese government inevitably built the first modern military band shortly after, many key members of Robert Hart's band formed the foundation of China's first military band. In addition, his band was also the first modern wind band in China and was under the great influence of Western instrument development and Western music education in China.

²² Ibid., 58

War II: Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895)

From 1840 (the first Opium War) through the 1894 Sino-Japanese war, China lost almost all of the battles forced upon it by Western intruders. Certainly, losing to the Japanese in the Sino-Japanese war woke up the Qing government; consequently, the government finally realized the urgency and importance of building a modern military. In 1895, the Qing government hired Western military officers to train the soldiers in modern concepts and weapons.²³ By then, the government started to focus on training the military in modern Western ways. Because of this, two military bands were established: the Tianjing Military Band and the Jiangnan Military Band. As the first two modern Western military bands in China's history, they have contributed greatly to the development of Chinese modern military music.

In 1912, the Republic of China announced the end of the Qing dynasty and the end of the imperial political structure that had existed in China for over 2000 years.²⁴ Although the nationalist party as the government of China only lasted for 38 years (1912-1949), they rapidly drove the development of modern military bands.

War III: China's War of Liberation (1945-1949)

During this civil war, the growth of the military bands of the Chinese People's Liberation Army led by the Communist Party was stunning. From the 1930's to 1949, the Communist Party founded the People's Republic of China, and hundreds of troops had

²³ Pei Wang, *The Outline of Chinese Modern History* (Jilin, China: Jilin University, 2015), 46.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 55

their own bands. On October 1, 1949, these bands united into a union military band and performed the national anthem on Tiananmen Square for a founding ceremony.

The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)

The great proletarian cultural revolution turned out to be a mistake that caused great disasters and civil unrest to the country and its people. Chairman Mao, the founder of People's Republic of China, was one of the greatest men in modern China; however, he was primarily responsible for that mistake because he was confused in his old age and could not distinguish between right and wrong and could not realize friend from enemy, which is a tragedy and regret to his life. As such, military bands were also inevitably affected. In July 1969, Chairman Mao decided to dismiss military bands from regional districts as well as from the Navy and Air force. Only one band was allowed to remain—the military band of the Chinese People's Liberation Army.²⁵

The Reform and Opening-up (1978)

China's reform and opening up is the policy of internal reform and opening to the outside, which was formulated by the Chinese government in 1978. In December 1978, the Communist Party of China held a conference of great historical significance, which opened a new era of reform. In 1980, the Chinese military band set several long term and short term goals for its development.

During the same year, Shi Lei, the head of the military band of the Chinese People's Liberation Army went on a business trip to the International Military Music

²⁵ Yigang Chen, *The History of Chinese Military Bands* (Beijing: Liberation Army Literature and Art, 2015), 86.

Festival in the UK to observe foreign military bands that they had missed seeing for decades during the Cultural Revolution. When he came back, he gave a detailed presentation comparing the current differences between foreign military bands and the Chinese military band; a proposal was later written as a guide for future improvements. By following this guide, the Chinese military bands have accomplished great feats. They participated in numerous national and international events, such as the opening ceremonies of the Asian Games in 1990, the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008, and the World Expo in Shanghai in 2010.

China Reenters the United Nations (1971)

Since China resumed its legal seat in the United Nations, China had become active again in diplomacy and building international relations with several countries. In 1972, the American President Richard Nixon visited China for the first time; following his visit, Japan, Australia, UK, and many other countries that had been opposed to China started to break the ice and reconnect. Because of that, the military band became active again in many diplomatic events. They have been well recognized and built their reputation since then.

However, for some time, the military band had not participated in any events abroad nor presented themselves on any foreign stages since the new China was established in the earlier 1980s. Finally, in December 1987, the military band had an opportunity to visit Thailand and performed with several military bands from other countries to celebrate the 60th birthday of the Thai emperor Bhumibol Adulyadej (1927-2016). Although this was not a significant international military band event, the Chinese military

band made its debut on the international stage and started to be recognized more broadly by the world. Ever since, more and more international military band events opened their doors to China.

Discussion

Previously, I mentioned that during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, Chairman Mao Zedong had dismissed all regional military bands and only saved the one military band of the Chinese People's Liberation Army. This policy of having only one band had lasted for almost 20 years. In 1984, during a conference of military music, the government announced the end of this policy. Soon after, in 1986, the military band of the Navy of China and the military band of the Beijing Armed Police Corps were re-founded. In the past thirty years, more than 300 military bands in China have been gradually established with more than 5000 members.²⁶ This was the beginning of the re-expansion of Chinese military bands and built a solid foundation for further military band development.

With the expansion of Western-style military bands, what happened to the ancient military bands and ancient military music? Have they faded away from the music history of China completely? The answer is no; they are still part of Chinese music. However, they are no longer any part of military duties. Since the ancient military bands were replaced by the Western military bands in the Qing dynasty, the ancient instruments used in the bands are now so-called Chinese folk instruments, including the Pipa, Suona,

²⁶ Shuangjiang Li, *The Music History of Chinese People's liberation Army* (Beijing: Liberation Army Literature and Art, 2004), 71.

Bamboo Flute, Erhu, Chimes, etc. These instruments can be performed as solo instruments or in an ensemble.

Conclusion

In conclusion, when I started writing this paper, I had to stop several times because of the painful history that I had to recall when revisiting the history of China and its military bands. Nowadays, not only has the Western military band replaced the ancient military band, but also many aspects of Western culture have gradually uprooted and replaced many Chinese elements in China.

I agree that there is a huge gap between China and the Western developed countries, but this cannot be the reason why we are abandoning our own culture. China is one of five ancient civilizations with over 5000 years of written history, and the only ancient civilization that has survived.²⁷ For over a century, the Chinese people were fighting for their freedom and beliefs, millions of people sacrificed and died, and the fate of China had finally been held by the Chinese people again. The Chinese people shall always remember this and carry on the core value of Chinese culture instead of completely copying the Western educational, political, and economic structure. We shall maintain our unique socialist system, and revive and promote Chinese culture to the world continuously and proudly.

²⁷ Guoliang Shi, *The Interpretation of China's Dream* (Beijing: People's Daily, 2013), 23.

CHAPTER 4
IMPORTANT CLARINET FIGURES

Mu Zhiqing

Mu Zhiqing (1889-1969) was a famous clarinetist and clarinet educator in China. He was the former clarinet professor at Sichuan Conservatory of Music and known as “the first clarinetist in China.”²⁸

Born in Beijing, Mu Zhiqing lived with his merchant father early in his childhood. Since he lived near the embassies and consular posts in China, Mu had many chances to listen to the performances of western wind bands for parties and balls which generated a great interest in music. Against his father’s wishes, at the age of 16 before graduating from high school, Mu was admitted into the government sponsored music school opened by an English man, Robert Hart (1835-1911), the Qing Government Secretary General of Customs. The predecessor of this music school was Robert Hart’s private wind band founded in Tianjin City in 1885.²⁹

During his music courses, Mu studied with five foreign music teachers, majored in clarinet, and minored in strings and conducting. Additionally, he received training in music theory, all of which distinguished him in the profession. Before graduation, he had successfully held recitals in the Palace of the Qing Dynasty, and was awarded by the empress, Ci Xi, the “Palace Artist” honor.

²⁸ Guangri Jin, *The Clarinet Figures in China* (Chongqing, China: Chongqing, 2008), 7.

²⁹ Yigang Chen, *The History of Chinese Military Bands* (Beijing: Liberation Army Literature and Art, 2015), 36.

In 1910, after graduation, Mu stayed at the music school and worked for the music school as principal clarinet of the wind band until the band was closed due to a shortage of funds.³⁰ Though its audiences were mainly foreigners and Chinese officials, the band made indelible contributions to Beijing music activities in the late Qing dynasty.

In the history of the development of modern music in China, Mu was a first-generation pioneer of Chinese people mastering foreign orchestral instruments, and he was the first professional clarinet performer in China. From 1919 to 1922, he became principal clarinet in the Shanghai International Orchestra and Beijing Symphony Orchestra and interestingly, he was the only Chinese performer for both orchestras.

In 1922, employed by Mr. Cai Yuanpei, a pioneer of China's democratic revolution and famous educator, Mu became a professor of music at Beijing University, primarily teaching woodwind instruments and also teaching strings. Mu also acted as the principal clarinet in Beijing University Symphony Orchestra, the first Chinese symphony orchestra (without foreign performers) established at that time.

In 1927, a new Minister of Education in the Chinese government, Liu Zhe, who was also a politician, had ordered the Beijing University to be reorganized. With the charge that music was hurting the social atmosphere and wasting state money, Liu suspended the Music Department of Beijing University. Utterly enraged, Mu went south and was recommended by a former student to work at a Shanghai private art school. He was again hired by the art school in Guangzhou City in 1930, and two years later, he transferred to the art school in Chengdu City. Unfortunately, the schools could not

³⁰ Ibid., 38

continue because of war over the next few years. Afterwards, Mu continued to travel throughout the country to impart music knowledge.

After the founding of new China in 1949, Mu loved the new society and the leadership of the Communist Party and participated in various musical activities in the early days of the founding. Mu was fully dedicated to the cause of the people's music industry services. In 1953, Mu served as the clarinet professor of Sichuan Conservatory of Music until retirement.

In Mu's music teaching career, he had developed a lot of influential clarinet performers and educators, most of whom are still active in conservatories and arts organizations. As it were, Mu's cultivation of students had spread throughout China until his death in 1969. Mu's son later recalled that during the disaster of the Cultural Revolution, in watching so many of his students being denounced, Mu felt so sad that he wept bitterly and passed away with great sorrow.³¹

The reason why Mu had such profound achievements in his profession and teaching was his persistent pursuit and love of art. In his sixty-year teaching career, he loved clarinet so much that he could not part with it and remained indifferent to fame and wealth to dedicate all of his efforts to his beloved music career.

Mu had been critical with himself and even more strict with his students. In his clarinet pedagogy, he asked his students to acquire profound performance technique and pay attention to fundamentals. Instead of adhering to rigid procedure, he made flexible learning arrangements according to the learning processes of different students in order to

³¹ Guangri Jin, *The Clarinet Figures in China* (Chongqing, China: Chongqing, 2008), 16.

help them fully understand and learn. The prominent features of his students' playing were that they had solid fundamentals and excellent technique and could easily play repertoire of different styles and difficulty levels.

Mu believed that music expression is as important as fundamentals, and the two are indivisible. He stressed that technique is the basis of musicianship and musical expression is what makes the technique come into practice. Thus, Mu always required his students to master performance technique, cultivate music appreciation, develop musicianship, and most of all, balance all of these aspects.

Mu's students claim that his tireless spirit ran through his teaching and he was always patient, suggestive, and encouraging to students. He would make a detailed analysis of each piece before teaching, explain its content and instruct how to shape the music because he wanted the students to know the difficulties to overcome and guided them to be able to practice and think independently. If the students still could not play the piece well, he would make a persuasive demonstration; however, he would not allow his students to simply and rigidly imitate his demonstration.

Mu had responsibilities in his teaching as well as love and care for his students. He cared for their life and dreams and provided them financial help even when Mu was not well-off himself.

Tao Chunxiao

Tao Chunxiao was born in Chongqing, China, in 1937, and is regarded as one of the most influential clarinet players in China.³² She is a professor at the Central

³² Ibid., 28

Conservatory of Music (Beijing, China) and has served in various roles in the past, including: the Director of Orchestral Instruments Department at Central Conservatory of Music, the President of Chinese Clarinet Association, Member of the Committee on Arts Education at Ministry of Education of China, and the Director of the Education and Technology Department at Ministry of Culture of China. In addition, Mdm. Tao has been invited to many significant international clarinet festivals and competitions (e.g. the Munich and the Geneva International Competitions) as a member of the adjudication panel. Many of her former students have played pivotal roles in helping clarinet art gain its prominence in modern China, such as Yuan Yuan who founder of International Clarinet Festival in the Beijing Central Conservatory of Music, and Jin Guangri, who is the general secretary of the China Clarinet Association and China's Clarinet Festival, etc. In 2016, I sent Madam Tao Chunxiao a personal interview request as a former student, and I am very grateful that she kindly accepted my invitation. The interview contains valuable information about Madam Tao Chunxiao and the Chinese clarinet development history after the establishment of new China. Additionally, due to the rare references about Chinese clarinet history, Madam Tao Chunxiao's oral history has played a crucial role to this study. The transcript (translated) is included in the appendix.

CHAPTER 5

REPERTOIRE

The Sound of Pamir

This chapter will introduce “The Sound of Pamir” clarinet concerto, which is hailed as the most successful Chinese clarinet work.

Context

This work was written by the famous Chinese composer Hu Bijing in 1981, after the end of the Cultural Revolution. From 1977 to 1978, Hu had made two trips to the Pamir plateau and was deeply impressed by the hard-working and kind-hearted Tajik people, splendid scenery, and warm atmosphere of the Tajik traditional wedding, from which Hu was motivated to compose such a unique and far-reaching clarinet work.

The chamber version (clarinet and piano) and symphonic version were both written by Hu. Combined with music elements of the Middle East, the concerto’s musical material originated from Tajik folk music in China, and the conception had the character of tone-painting that creates a vivid, figurative image by use of various sound effects. The clarinet concerto comprises three movements that are more like three pictures depicting the Pamir plateau.

Movement 1: Camels in the Desert

There are two roads on the Kunlun Mountain of the Pamir plateau, with one road to Pakistan and the other to Tibet. The first movement describes a caravan of camels

venturing and overcoming difficulties to climb over Kunlun Mountain, which shows the Tajik people's national spirit of defying hardship and marching forward courageously.

Movement 2: The Night of Pamir Plateau

This movement describes the beautiful scenery of the Pamir plateau and the time the composer spent with the Tajik people, during which Hu felt the kindness, passion, and simplicity of these people. It also depicts the pure, beautiful love of young men and women along the lake at night.

Movement 3: Tajik's Wedding

This movement was written based on the material of an impressive Tajik wedding that left an impression on Hu. It describes the celebratory scene of the wedding and dancing.

The Influence of "The Sound of Pamir"

Clarinet art has made rapid developments alongside the Reform and Opening-up in China. At the same time, many Chinese clarinet works started to emerge. Amongst these Chinese clarinet works, "The Sound of Pamir" Clarinet Concerto is without a doubt one of the most important works in the clarinet history of China. Unlike before the Cultural Revolution, in which Chinese clarinet music was composed with simple Chinese folk music elements and traditional composing techniques, or the works composed during the Cultural Revolution with strong political overtones, this work represents the combination of western classical composing technique and Chinese folk music. It brings

new elements into Chinese clarinet works and has much value and far-reaching significance, which also benefits from the policy of Reform and Opening-up in China.

This work is successful in that it won prizes in the First Chinese Symphonic Work Competition in 1981 and made both the clarinet and the concerto achieve greater prominence. A number of distinguished clarinetists have performed the piece and evaluated it positively, such as American clarinetist John Denman (1933-2001). In 1986, at the conference of the International Clarinet Society, held in Seattle, Washington, Tao Chunxiao performed the piece, making its debut on an international stage.³³ Later, the piece was selected as a mandatory piece in the First Beijing District Clarinet Competition and was assigned by many Chinese conservatories in the clarinet studio curriculum. The China Record Corporation subsequently recorded the piece and released it in China and abroad. Thus, it can be seen that “The Sound of Pamir” has played an essential role and has important academic status in the Chinese clarinet field.

³³ Guangri Jin, *The Clarinet Figures in China* (Chongqing, China: Chongqing, 2008), 33.

CHAPTER 6

FINAL THOUGHTS

Future Directions

Throughout the interview with Professor Tao Chunxiao, we discussed the problems that the development of the clarinet met in China. She clearly identified three primary issues. The first is that teachers in the past have focused too intensely on playing technique. The second is that young and middle-aged teachers in China generally could not concentrate entirely on teaching and academic research. The third is that there are very few Chinese clarinet pieces. Hence, let us examine these problems, consider solutions, and plan a path for future development.

Technique is undeniably indispensable in clarinet performance because without it, the music cannot be expressed. However, many Chinese clarinet educators have misjudged technique to be the only pursuit. In such guidance, high school students tend to choose high level pieces such as Weber, Crusell, or Spohr concertos to be their college entrance examination. Most of these students cannot grasp the music style or musicianship of these pieces at all. Thus, Tao Chunxiao suggested that Chinese clarinet teachers and students should attach importance to studying each work's style and musicianship, and enhancing their cultural connotation. Only by combining technique with musicianship can Chinese clarinetists improve their performance level. The fact that among the international clarinet competitions, only a few Chinese players progress to the final round to compete for prizes suggests many Chinese clarinet educators are emphasizing technique over musicianship. That is because in the most of clarinet

competitions, satisfactory technique and consistent performance could help you go progress to further rounds, but not enough to assure you beat those participants who have both fine technique and musicianship.

The second issue is teaching. There is a saying in China that one is never too old to learn, which means that regardless of age, identity, and status, a man or woman should never stop learning and progressing in his/her lifetime. But in reality, many of the young Chinese clarinet educators do not put that into practice, and very few young Chinese clarinet educators are willing to teach or do academic research in schools. To solve the issue, Madam Tao Chunxiao mentioned that good education requires teachers' true devotion, teachers should nurture their students in the same way as parents nurture their kids.

As the Chinese economy has been soaring, and people's lives have become more prosperous since the reform and opening-up policy, young people are helpless to resist the temptation of the society, and have become extremely fickle. Many of the young Chinese clarinet educators have spent much time off-campus for profit by maintaining private teaching studios and charging high rates. I personally think that educators of any field should undertake more responsibility and mission than other professionals because teachers are in charge of spreading knowledge and thoughts, and shaping souls and humans, which should be profoundly recognized by educators. Only in this way can it be helpful in cultivating more and more successful students.

The third issue is a lack of prominent Chinese clarinet pieces. Tao Chunxiao thinks that the quality and quantity of repertoire are directly related to the international influence of the Chinese clarinet profession. The more excellent works we have, the more

respect we will get from the world and then possibly formulate our own school of thought. As when we discuss the German or French clarinet school, a number of representative pieces will be recalled, such as Weber's clarinet concertos or Debussy's *Première Rhapsodie*. To achieve this, the Chinese performers should review how much enthusiasm they have for their own national music. Clarinetists worldwide will probably be more interested in their work if the Chinese embrace their own nationalism. In other words, finer Chinese clarinet works will be produced only if Chinese performers have a greater need and respect for works of nationalistic musical elements. This will be a long-term project and takes every performers' efforts.

Beyond the three issues mentioned above that need to be resolved, I propose some of my personal views in broader perspectives. Firstly, China should strive to introduce local talents that have accomplishments abroad. According to the data released by the Ministry of Education of China, as early as in 2006, up to one million Chinese students were studying abroad; however, the number of students who returned to China was about 200,000.³⁴ A large percentage of talented professionals remaining in other countries severely reduces the country's competency. The phenomenon of "brain drain" is caused by a series of problems including large income gap compared to western countries that affect quality of life, high housing prices, government intervention, and restraint of academic research that lead to funding shortage and lack of professional innovation. The Chinese government must think about how to solve the above problems, and only by constantly reforming and optimizing the system to create better living and working

³⁴ Guoliang Shi, *The Interpretation of China's Dream* (Beijing: People's Daily, 2013), 56.

conditions can China attract talented Chinese professionals back to China to achieve their dreams, promoting China's development in various fields. Besides, China should actively participate in and promote its representation and voice in international affairs in various fields like clarinet (including some clarinet competitions, festivals, and conferences) by offering Chinese wisdom, sharing responsibilities of the times, and promoting global development.

In conclusion, world history tells us that the development of humanity in any field has never been smooth, and all things have internal connections, as Chinese or world clarinet history could not be written by itself. Our clarinet family is moving forward in the struggle against problems and difficulties. History has always been created by the brave. We should be confident and take actions to work together for a better clarinet future.

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APPENDIX
INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Interview with Tao Chunxiao: General Questions and Answers

1. Can you talk about the Chinese government's attitudes towards western music, especially clarinet arts, after People's Republic of China was established in 1949 (but before the Cultural Revolution was launched in 1966)?

During those years, speaking overall, the Chinese government was being very respectful and supportive towards western music. After 1949, the Communist Party of China recruited a large group of talented youths to form military bands. This is a tradition that the Communist Party adopted from the Kuomintang (also known as the Chinese Nationalist Party). At the same time, China started to have its own symphonies, even though the number and size of symphonies were not comparable to that of the Military Bands at that time.

2. What was the Cultural Revolution's main impact on China's general education, and more specifically, China's western music education (including clarinet development)?

During that period, China's education system as a whole was almost ruined, and there was no room for western music to survive. The major conservatories of music were shut down, and when the Revolution reached its climax, people were prohibited from speaking favorably of western music. Near the end of the Cultural Revolution, the major conservatories of music gradually started to reopen, but Western instruments were only allowed to perform Chinese music that portrays a strong political message. Music by Mozart, Debussy, and other famous western composers and musicians was not allowed to be played in those years.

3. In 1978, China started its “Reform and Opening-up” policy. Can you please talk in detail about how this policy has influenced the development of clarinet education in China?

After this policy came into force, not only the clarinet industry, but the entire music industry had promising development. The fact that the Chinese government promotes “aesthetic education” allowed music education to start blooming. To give a rough estimate, in Beijing alone, there are hundreds of secondary-school and primary-school orchestras and wind bands today. Moreover, ever since the “Reform and Opening-Up”, the Chinese government has put great emphasis on cross-national cultural exchange. Well-known foreign clarinetists have been invited to China to perform and to teach. This has, without a doubt, stimulated the fast growth of the clarinet industry, as well.

4. Has the military band of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army contributed to the development of clarinet in China? If yes, how?

The military band has played a pivotal role in publicizing and promoting the education of wind music. In fact, Beijing’s primary-school/secondary-school orchestras and wind bands (something that I mentioned earlier) have all received different kinds of support from the military band. In addition, the military band has been an important talent pool for the main music institutions in China, sending numerous high-potential students (including clarinet players) to top conservatories of music each year. These students further improve their performance skills as well as theory knowledge in music institutions,

and the trainings they receive from both the army and the school become cutting edge, allowing them to shine in many national clarinet competitions.

5. In your opinion, which events (e.g. festivals, competitions, or other special occasions) have positively influenced the development of clarinet industry in China?

First, considering the competitions, the series of National Clarinet Competitions initiated by the Ministry of Culture of China have been very influential. Many winners from these competitions have become backbones of the clarinet industry in China. As for the conferences, back in 1990, the Ministry of Culture of China designated the Wuhan Conservatory of Music to hold a Chinese Clarinet Music Conference. This conference was an important driver behind the development in Chinese clarinet music. Last but not least, looking at the music festivals, the most significant one has to be the Beijing International Clarinet Festival held in 1998. It was the very first Chinese clarinet festival, and many well-known world-class clarinetists attended it, including Dr. Robert Spring. These famous clarinetists' stunning performances inspired music lovers in China, igniting their passion for clarinet music.

6. In your opinion, what are some of the representative clarinet pieces from China? Why do you think they are important?

The first one that came to my mind was "Theme and Variations" composed by Zhang Wu, a former Clarinet Professor at the Central Conservatory of Music. This work by Prof. Zhang was the first clarinet piece independently composed by a Chinese composer. It was also the first time that Chinese music elements were incorporated and used in clarinet pieces. Next, "The Song of Grazing Horses" by Chinese Composer Wang

Miao is also a classic piece in China's clarinet music history. This piece was specially written for me at that time. Composer Wang made use of a composition skill that is called musical imaging. It was one of the mandatory pieces of the repertoire at the First National Clarinet Competition.

Finally, I have to mention "The Sound of Pamir" by Composer Hu Bijing. This is the first clarinet concerto in China's history. Its musicality, technical difficulty, and influence since its publishing has made it one of the most successful Chinese clarinet pieces so far.

7. Please talk about the current conditions of clarinet education in China. Please feel free to approach it from any aspect, for example, students' technical skills compared with those from other countries, the qualifications of Chinese clarinet instructors, the academic exchange activities with western countries, etc.

Right now, Chinese clarinet instructors consist of two main categories of professionals: those who were educated and trained domestically and those who studied abroad and gained experience overseas. Overall, the current batch of Chinese clarinet instructors are relatively high-standard. Having said that, there are many areas of clarinet education that can be potentially improved. For example, one prominent phenomenon in today's China is that both instructors and students tend to overly emphasize the mastery of technical skills. Unfortunately, this often results in lack of focus on performance style and failure to interpret the real essence and spirit of music itself. This may be part of the reason why young Chinese clarinetists have failed to win major international clarinet competitions. It will be crucial for both clarinet instructors and students to improve their

ability to accurately interpret and convey the spirit and beauty of each unique musical piece apart from acquiring and mastering fancy technical skills.

8. In your opinion, what does the future of China's clarinet industry look like? What are some of the potential directions that it might/should follow?

The most important task is to compose more and more world-class Chinese clarinet pieces, and accumulate such works, so that China can form its own "School of Thought" or "System of Practice" with respect to the clarinet arts. Only with distinct Chinese characteristics and a system of practice can we improve the status and international reputation of China's clarinet arts in general. However, this is no doubt a tough and enduring process that requires the devotion and commitments of generations of clarinet professionals.

Interview: Personal Questions and Answers

1. Why did you choose to learn clarinet, and not other instruments such as piano or violin?

It was in fact quite coincidental how I stepped into this profession. When I was young, the Chinese People's Liberation Army just attained the goal of liberating the nation and the people. As a result, I admired the Liberation Army very much and wished to become part of it when I grew up. Soon after P.R. China was established, I heard that the Military Band of the Chinese People's Liberation Army was conscripting, and I applied for it without hesitation. The military officer who was in charge of conscription back then found that I had big hands and long fingers, suitable for playing wind instruments, and thus assigned me to the clarinet section of the Military Band. That was

basically how I started to learn clarinet. Before that, I knew very little about this instrument, to be very frank with you.

2. Why did you decide to study abroad? What is the most important thing that you learned during your years in Prague? How did the knowledge you obtained abroad influence your personal clarinet pedagogy later on in China?

After 1949, China started to establish diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries, and signed bilateral corporation agreements with these countries. Some of these agreements apply to the music world, and that is why the Ministry of Culture of China started to select and appoint representatives to study abroad in Eastern European Countries. I was lucky to be nominated by my institution, the Sichuan Conservatory of Music, to participate in the national selection process and earned the great opportunity to study clarinet in the Czech Republic.

During my years in Prague, my clarinet professor put great emphasis on building up students' solid foundations through thorough practice of basic skills and essential techniques. I spent lots practicing time to gained familiar with different pattern of scalers and a large number of etudes. The solid foundation that I built from this training was the most valuable asset that I earned from my overseas studies experiences, and I've been emphasizing foundation building in my own decades of teaching, as well.

3. Can you please briefly talk about your own teaching philosophy?

First, I ask my students to stay relaxed during their performance, but “staying relaxed” is not the same as “being in low spirits.” Second, I ask my students to keep the

laryngeal cavity wide open while playing because if not, it will be difficult to play once reaching the upper register.

Moreover, I came up with my “Three Straight Lines” concept as part of my teaching philosophy. To be more specific, the first line refers to the fact that the lower jaw needs to be held tight so that it looks like a straight line and forms a 90-degree angle with the floor. The second line refers to the breath. It should be smooth and stable, resembling a straight line, so that we will have beautiful and focused sound coming out of the clarinet. The third line refers to the finger motion. Fingers must always remain close to the clarinet and resemble a straight line as well.

4. The American clarinetist Robert Spring once said that “Madam Tao is probably the reason why clarinet flourishes in China.” What do you think of his statement?

First of all, I want to thank Prof. Spring for his kind words, even though I think he has given me too much credit. The achievement that we have today in clarinet development is inseparable from the hard work put in by each and every one of the clarinet educators, and I am simply one of them. I am just one of the many clarinet educators from my generation. Many of my colleagues and friends from the old days have made significant contributions to clarinet education around China, as well, for example: Prof. Wang Duanwei and Prof. Gu Peng, who used to teach in Shanghai; Prof. Bai Wenshun, who mainly stayed and worked in Northeastern China; Prof. Wang Yu, who taught in Xi’an, and Prof. Xing Xuezi, who worked in Sichuan Province.

Compared with my peers, I enjoyed the geographical location advantage of being in the capital of the country. The fact that I became a government official at the Ministry

of Culture also gave me the authority and convenience in supporting some of the major clarinet events such as the national competitions, conferences, and festivals.

5. Who were your clarinet teachers? Are you willing to briefly share your experiences with them?

My first clarinet professor was a clarinet player from the Chinese Nationalist Party Military Band. I cannot really remember his name because he taught me for only a week. In 1953, I started to study under Prof. Mu Zhiqing, at the Southwest Music College (which was the origin of today's Sichuan Conservatory of Music). He was my first real clarinet teacher, and in fact, he was the first Chinese clarinetist in history. Under his guidance, I got to learn more fundamentals of clarinet performance, and I had many important changes including switching from playing with double-lip embouchure to single-lip embouchure. At the same time, I started to get familiar with clarinet pieces by foreign composers, for example: Weber's clarinet Concertos and Brahms' clarinet sonatas, etc.

When I studied in Prague, my instructor was Vladimir Riha, a famous clarinetist from the Czech Republic. He taught me for five years. I remember that I cried several times in his class, because he was a very strict teacher and had very high expectations of his students. I learned a great deal from him, especially in music interpretation and performance experiences. I am very grateful for the guidance and support that I received from these two teachers.

6. Besides being a well-known clarinet professor, you were also a successful politician. Would you mind talking a little bit about your political life? How do you define and balance these two different roles in your life? Is there any link between them?

I was in charge of performing arts management in general when I worked for the Ministry of Culture. My job required me to be acquainted with not only music, but also fine arts, drama, dance, etc. These different disciplines of arts are inter-connected, and so are performing arts education and management. I often applied what I learned from my management job to my teaching, and conversely, I was able to use my teaching experiences to support my management role. For example, because I knew what kind of challenges teachers were facing on the frontline, when I served my role as a government official, I made sure that I came up with backend support policies that could most effectively address these challenges.

I believe that bosses should maintain a healthy relationship with their direct reports, and people working in the same team should respect each other, trust each other, and learn from each other. This is the foundation for a conducive working environment. Only with this, leaders can then manage their team effectively.

7. Looking back at your career and all your contributions to China's clarinet development, what were you most proud of? Do you have any regrets?

I'm very proud to see my students growing into clarinet professionals, and I'm proud to see how China's clarinet education has flourished over the years.

However, I am a little concerned about the fact that our country has very few world-class clarinet pieces of our own. I wish I could have done something earlier in my career to cultivate a batch of composers.

Besides that, I find that many of our young clarinet educators tend to run after big gains and quick accomplishments and have no patience for teaching and academic research. This is very worrisome. Good education requires teachers' true devotion. Teachers should nurture their students in the same way as parents nurture their kids.