

A Discussion of Music Education Activities at the White Deer Cave Academy in the Song Dynasty Based on the “Order of Learning”

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ABSTRACT

As the core of Neo-Confucianism dissemination and a model of academy education in the Song Dynasty, the music education activities at White Deer Cave Academy were not merely the impartation of art, but deeply aligned with the "order of learning" outlined in Zhu Xi's "Revelation of White Deer Cave Academy", which advocates for "extensive learning, careful inquiry, prudent reflection, clear discernment, and diligent practice". This led to the formation of a unique educational system that "guides music with Neo-Confucianism and educates people through music". This paper systematically sorts out the Confucian ideological origins of music education at White Deer Cave Academy, and attempts to analyze the educational connotation of the "order of learning". Then this paper focuses on demonstrating the inherent coupling relationship between music education activities and "The Preface to Learning", summarizes the theoretical value and practical significance of the music education model at White Deer Cave Academy, and ultimately refines a four-in-one music education model of "knowledge-speculation-value-practice", thus providing data reference and practical inspiration for the integration of moral and aesthetic education, as well as the combination of theory and practice in contemporary quality education.

Keywords: Song Dynasty, White Deer Cave Academy, Order of learning, Music education activities, Coupling relationship.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since Zhu Xi's reconstruction and establishment of the "Revelation of White Deer Cave Academy",¹ the educational mission of "illuminating human relations" has been firmly established. Its educational practices encompass comprehensive

cultivation in self-cultivation, conduct, and social interaction. Music education, as a crucial medium for "fostering virtue", has been incorporated into the core system of academy education. The "order of learning", as the core content of the "method of teaching people" in the "Revelation," represents Zhu Xi's methodology for "pursuing truth to foster virtue"² based on Confucian classics. Its five-step progressive logic permeates the entire process of academy education. The music education model of White Deer Cave Academy, along with the progressive logic it embodies — “knowledge accumulation, critical thinking and discussion, value judgment, and practical transformation”³ — provides a historical reference for the deep

1. "The Revelation of the White Deer Cave Academy", also known as "The Academic Rules of the White Deer Cave Academy" or "Zhu Xi's Dogmas", was formulated by Zhu Xi, the master of Neo-Confucianism in the Southern Song Dynasty, in the seventh year of the Chunxi era (1180) for the reconstruction of the White Deer Cave Academy in Jiangxi. The academic rules are divided into five sections: "The Objectives of the Five Teachings", "Order of Learning", "The Essentials of Self-Cultivation", "The Essentials of Conducting Affairs", and "The Essentials of Dealing with People". The content is primarily compiled from Confucian classics such as "The Analects," "Mencius," and "The Doctrine of the Mean". (Hereinafter referred to as "The Revelation".) The following sections on Zhu Xi's and the White Deer Cave Academy's educational philosophy are all derived from this.

2. Pursuing the truth of things fosters virtue. The following text all convey this meaning.

3. The author has summarized this progressive logic.

integration of moral and aesthetic education in contemporary quality education.

2. THE ORIGIN OF MUSIC EDUCATION IN WHITE DEER CAVE ACADEMY

The ideological origins of music education at White Deer Cave Academy can be traced back to the pre-Qin Confucian school, with its core being the concept of "music education fostering virtue" established by Confucius. In "The Analects of Confucius: Taibo", Confucius proposed "arising from poetry, established by ritual, and perfected by

music", viewing music education as the final link in the cultivation of a gentleman's character. He emphasized that music not only has an aesthetic function but also nurtures temperament and rectifies the human heart. The aesthetic standard of "being joyful without excess, mourning without harm" in "The Analects of Confucius: Bayi" combined with the moral requirement of "thinking without evil" laid the foundation for the Confucian core idea of "unity of beauty and goodness" in music education — the aesthetic expression of music must conform to ethical norms in order to achieve the perfection of individual morality. ("Figure 1")

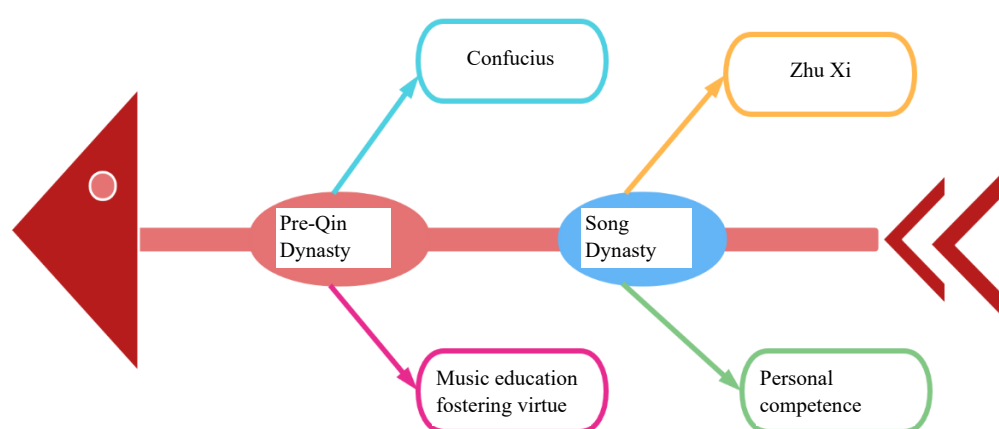


Figure 1 Origin of music education thought in White Deer Cave Academy.

In the Song Dynasty, music education in academies placed greater emphasis on the intrinsic pursuit of personal cultivation, with moral education being placed at the core. In the sixth year of the Chunxi era of the Southern Song Dynasty (1179), Zhu Xi officially incorporated music education into the educational system of White Deer Cave Academy. This involved setting up a ceremonial instrument library, purchasing elegant musical instruments such as qin (a traditional Chinese stringed instrument), se (a similar instrument), bells, and drums, and hiring scholars proficient in music as music education instructors. This formed an educational model that emphasized both music education and lectures, combining etiquette and music.⁴ The academy regularly offered qin music courses, teaching the singing of the Book of Songs accompanied by music and the performance of ancient music. Activities such as

sacrifices, lectures, and festivals required the accompaniment of elegant music, with music education permeating every aspect of academy life. Thus, music education evolved from being purely artistic to becoming a core component of moral development, laying a solid foundation for the deep integration of the "order of learning" and music education. ("Figure 2")

4. Referring to Wu Anyu, Yang Yingzi, Exploration into the Traditional Music Education of Yuelu Academy [J]. Chinese Music, 2018.(1).



Figure 2 Course schedule for qin music at White Deer Cave Academy.

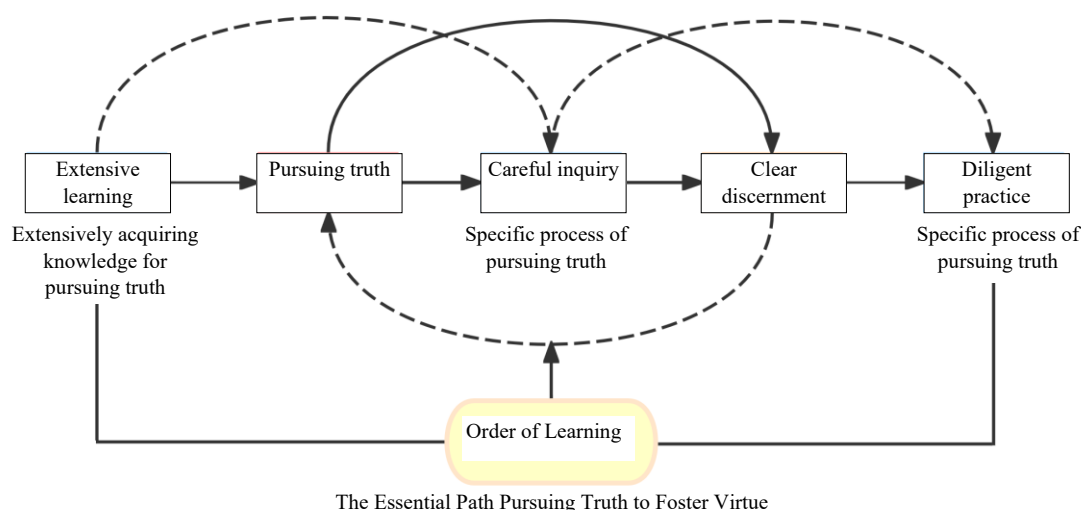


Figure 3 Five-step logical relationship diagram of the "order of learning".

3. EDUCATIONAL CONNOTATION OF THE "ORDER OF LEARNING"

In his work "The Annotations to the Four Books",⁵ Zhu Xi provided a systematic Neo-Confucian interpretation of the "order of learning", placing it at the forefront of "the method of teaching" and emphasizing its central role in academy education. He believed that "extensive learning" involves broadening one's knowledge for the purpose of "pursuing truth", with "careful inquiry", "prudent contemplation", and "clear discernment" being the specific processes of "pursuing truth", and "diligent practice" being the

ultimate goal. The "order of learning" is the essential path to "pursuing truth to foster virtue". These five aspects are interconnected and progress in layers, with none being dispensable. (As shown in "Figure 3")

3.1 The Logic of Music Education in the "Order of Learning" and Its Progressive Relationship

The five-step logic of the "order of learning" constitutes a complete "knowledge-action" closed loop, reflecting the progressive process from knowledge accumulation to practical transformation, with a rigorous and clear internal logical relationship.

5. Referring to Zhu Xi, Collected Commentaries on the Four Books [M]. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company. 2011.

"Extensive learning" represents the fundamental stage of learning, which is interpreted as extensively reading various books and embracing diverse knowledge. Zhu Xi emphasized: "Erudition refers to the principles of all things in the universe, as well as the methods for self-cultivation and governing others, all of which should be studied".⁶ Focusing on "pursuing truth to foster virtue", extensive learning encompasses knowledge of Confucian classics, ritual and music systems, natural principles, as well as practical knowledge such as etiquette norms and musical skills, reflecting the educational philosophy of "advancing both knowledge and action".

"Careful inquiry" serves as the critical starting point for learning, with the core being to question and pose hypotheses, delving into the fundamentals and seeking the origins. Zhu Xi believed that "those who read without doubt must be taught to doubt",⁷ emphasizing the importance of actively pursuing answers to questions such as the interpretation of the idea of joyful education, and the differences between ancient and modern music, on the basis of extensive learning. Through rational questioning, cognitive deepening is promoted.

"Prudent reflection" is the deepening stage of learning, focusing on careful consideration and mastery. It involves continuous reflection on the questions raised in "inquiry", integrating fragmented knowledge and doubts, and exploring inherent laws. It involves internalizing external knowledge into one's own cognition, and contemplating the connections between music, ethics, and the natural order.

"Clear discernment" is a crucial aspect of learning, with the core being to discern right from wrong and establish standards. After "prudent reflection", one can clearly judge right from wrong, good from evil, and beautiful from ugly, adhering to Confucian principles. In music education, this manifests as distinguishing between elegant and vulgar music, proper and obscene sounds, and establishing standards that praise elegance and belittle vulgarity.

"Diligent practice" is the ultimate goal of learning, which manifests as applying knowledge and practicing morality. Zhu Xi believed that "the breadth of learning is not as important as the

essence of knowledge; the essence of knowledge is not as important as the practical application of it".⁸ He advocated for translating the insights gained from "pursuing truth" into words and deeds, and for internalizing morality through practical activities such as music and dance in honor of Confucius, as well as daily string and singing practices in music education.

The five-step logic of the "order of learning" is interrelated and progressive. "Extensive learning" is the foundation, "careful inquiry, prudent reflection, and clear discernment" are the core, and "diligent practice" is the destination. Together, they constitute a complete scholarly path of "knowledge-action", fully embodying the educational philosophy of "unity of knowledge and action" in Neo-Confucianism of the Song Dynasty.

3.2 The Core Content Embodiment of the "Order of Learning" in the Education of White Deer Cave Academy

3.2.1 Embodiment in Teaching Practice

Guided by the "order of learning", White Deer Cave Academy has established a teaching model where scholars learn independently and teachers provide answers to questions. The academy requires scholars to independently study following a five-step path, and stimulates questioning and critical thinking through lectures and debates. Zhu Xi often guided scholars' thinking with classic doubts, implementing the principles of "careful inquiry" and "prudent reflection".

3.2.2 Embodiment in Academic Philosophy

The White Deer Cave Academy adhered to the "order of learning" as its guiding principle. Scholars at the academy regulated their self-study based on this principle, emphasizing the integration of learning and thinking, and the application of knowledge. When Lu Jiuyuan lectured at the White Deer Cave Academy, he centered his discussion around the passage in the Analects of Confucius, "A gentleman is guided by righteousness, while a small man is guided by profit", guiding scholars to accumulate knowledge through "extensive learning", analyze righteousness and profit through "careful inquiry" and "prudent reflection", and practice morality through "diligent practice", fully

6. Referring to Zhu Xi, Collected Sayings of Master Zhu [M]. Edited by Li Jingde. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company. 1986.

7. Ibid.

8. Same as note 6.

embodying the five-step logic of scholarly pursuit outlined in the "order of learning".

3.2.3 *Embodiment in Personality Cultivation*

The "order of learning" serves the educational purpose of "illuminating human relations" and becomes an important path to cultivate the personality of "sages and virtuous men". "Extensive learning" lays a solid foundation in knowledge of human relations, "careful inquiry, prudent reflection, and clear discernment" deepen moral cognition, and "diligent practice" transforms human relations and morality into personality traits, which highly aligns with the cultivation process of the gentleman's personality.

The "order of learning" encompasses various educational activities in the academy: classical teaching, etiquette practice, music education activities, etc. Music education, as the core component, forms a deep coupling with it.

4. COUPLING ANALYSIS OF THE "ORDER OF LEARNING" AND THE MUSIC EDUCATION ACTIVITIES AT WHITE DEER CAVE ACADEMY

4.1 *"Extensive Learning" — Music Education Knowledge Accumulation*

"Extensive learning" requires scholars to accumulate knowledge extensively, and the music education at White Deer Cave Academy provides a rich carrier for this: knowledge of music, etiquette norms, classics, and historical records, forming a knowledge system where "music education is extensive learning".

In terms of musical knowledge accumulation, the courses in the academy centered around elegant music, systematically imparting knowledge of musical theory, instrumental playing skills, and musical composition. The academy offered courses in qin music, teaching playing methods for instruments such as the qin and se, studying the five tones and the "Twelve Lv Lv" (twelve tones), delving into textbooks such as "Qin Cao" (Qin Music) and "Qin Pu" (Qin Music Score), and familiarizing students with traditional pieces such as "Three Variations of Plum Blossoms" and "High Mountains and Flowing Water", thus laying a solid foundation in music studies. ("Figure 4")

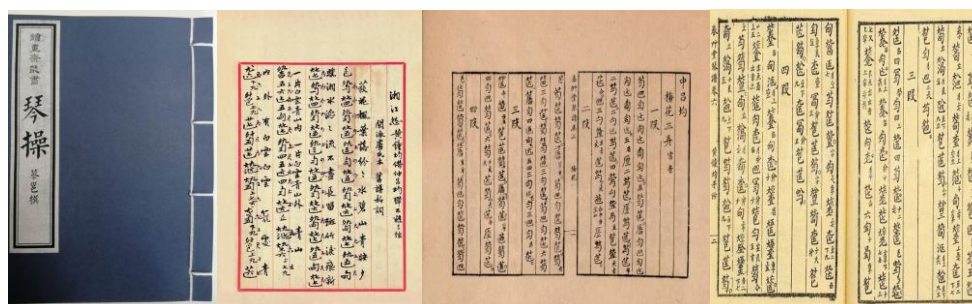


Figure 4 Diagram of the qin learning textbook. From left to right: "Qin Cao" (Qin Music), "Qin Pu" (Qin Music Score), Guqin notation of "Three Variations of Plum Blossoms", Guqin notation of "High Mountains and Flowing Water".

Accumulating knowledge of etiquette norms adhered to the principle that "music is the bridge to ethics",⁹ integrating ritual and music. Through learning the etiquette norms of welcoming the deity, laying the coins, the initial offering, the secondary offering, the final offering, and seeing the deity off

in the ritual dance for Confucius, learners can master the norms of positioning, movements, and attire, deepening the understanding of the "unity of ritual and music".

The accumulation of knowledge in classics and historical records is based on the Confucian classics, with a deep reading of the Four Books and Five Classics, and a broad understanding of works on Neo-Confucianism and musical theory from the

9. Referring to Chen Shuguo, *The Book of Rites: An Annotated Edition* [M]. Changsha: Yuelu Publishing House. 2004.

Song Dynasty, such as the "Book of Songs", "Rites and Music", "Zhu Xi's Collection of Sayings", "Collection and Annotation of the Analects", and "On the Temperament of the Qin". In rituals, the academy chant classic passed from the Book of Songs, combining classical study with musical education practice.

The accumulation of knowledge in the music education at White Deer Cave Academy is characterized by systematicness, practicality, and purposefulness: the interconnectedness of musical rhythm, etiquette, and classical knowledge; the completion through practices such as musical instrument playing, etiquette norms, and classical chanting; and all serving the core goal of "pursuing truth to foster virtue", laying a solid foundation of knowledge for the subsequent four links.

4.2 "Careful Inquiry" — Musical Education and Critical Discussion

"Careful inquiry" requires scholars to actively question on the basis of extensive learning. The music education activities in academies stimulate critical discussion through lectures, debates, and interpretations of classics, making music education an important way to practice "careful inquiry".

The academy lecture is the core platform for critical discussion and debate on music education, encouraging academic contention and cultivating the ability to question. After the Ehu Lake Meeting,¹⁰ Zhu Xi and Lu Jiuyuan held discussions at the academy centered around the "relationship between music and the heart": Zhu Xi advocated that "music is born from reason", arguing that the beauty of elegant music and harmony originates from heavenly principles; Lu Jiuyuan, on the other hand, argued that "music is born from the heart", suggesting that music is a natural expression of inner moral emotions. This debate prompted scholars to re-examine the ideas of music education, actively asking questions such as "Is the origin of music reason or the heart?" and "What is the relationship between elegant music and the original heart?" This fully embodies the critical spirit of "careful inquiry".

10. In the second year of the Chunxi era of the Southern Song Dynasty (1175), a renowned philosophical debate was held at Ehu Temple in Xinzhou, Jiangxi (now Shangrao). The core of the debate was the ideological confrontation between Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism and Lu Jiuyuan's School of Mind. The debate was convened by Lv Zuqian and is historically known as the "Debate of the Ages".

Classical interpretation also encompasses "inquiry". When scholars delve into the passage in the "Book of Rites and Music" that states, "Music is the one that connects ethics", they actively question "How music can connect ethics?" and "Why secular music can bring joy to people?". Studying classics with questions can not only deepen understanding but also cultivate critical thinking skills.

The critical spirit in the music education at White Deer Cave Academy possesses three major characteristics: pertinence, relevance, and constructiveness. It revolves around the essence, goals, and paths of music education, closely integrates with Neo-Confucianism and classics for critical discussion, and aims to deepen cognition, thereby promoting the continuous development of the academy's music education philosophy.

4.3 "Prudent Reflection and Clear Discernment" — Value Judgment in Music Education

"Prudent reflection" and "clear discernment" emphasize in-depth thinking and analyzing right from wrong regarding questions, establishing correct value standards. The academy's music education constructs a value judgment system centered around the joy of harmony.

"Prudent reflection" embodies deep contemplation and mastery of the core issues of music education. Regarding the "origin of music", scholars have repeatedly reflected and recognized that "Li" (principle) is the external order and norm of music, while "Xin" (mind) is the internal emotional foundation of music, and the two complement each other. Regarding the "goal of music education", it is clear that music education is not only about imparting skills, but also about "moral education", with the ultimate goal of cultivating a harmonious nature and perfecting personality.

"Clear discernment" manifests as a clear judgment of the value of music, establishing a value standard centered on "advocating elegance and denigrating vulgarity". Zhu Xi pointed out in "On the Temperament of the Qin" that "the development of ancient music is moderate in rhythm and harmonious in emotion; the development of modern music exceeds the limits and indulges in sensuality".¹¹ He believed that elegant music has

11. Same as note 6.

moderate rhythms and peaceful emotions, which can cultivate one's mind and character; whereas vulgar music is indulgent and decadent, easily leading to restlessness and moral decay. At the same time, "clear discernment" also distinguishes the different functions of music education: with moral education as the core, aesthetic functions serve education, ensuring that music education activities always revolve around the goal of "moral education".

"Prudent reflection" and "clear discernment" have formed a clear value judgment system for the music education in academies: with "the beauty of harmony" as the aesthetic standard, "moral education" as the core goal, and "elegant music" as the main carrier. This system not only conforms to the core idea of Neo-Confucianism in the Song Dynasty, which advocates "preserving natural principles and eliminating human desires", but also inherits the Confucian tradition of music education, which advocates the unity of beauty and goodness. It cultivates scholars' aesthetic judgment and moral discernment.

4.4 "Diligent Practice" — Transformation of Music Education Practice

"Diligent practice" emphasizes the transformation of learned knowledge and cognition into practical actions. The music education activities in the academy, through various practical forms such as Confucius worship and music dance, daily string singing, and social practice, transform the knowledge accumulation, critical discussion, and value judgment in music education into scholars' personality cultivation and behavioral habits.

The ritual of Confucius worship with music and dance is the core practice of the "unity of ritual and music". During the Confucius worship ceremony in academies, the "Great Harmony Music" is played, accompanied by the performance of eight-line dance. Scholars participate in instrumental playing, dance performances, or poetry recitations, strictly adhering to etiquette norms and musical rhythms. Through physical practice, they comprehend the connotation of the joy of harmony, transforming the ritual knowledge of "extensive learning" and the value judgments of "prudent reflection" and "clear discernment" into their own behavioral consciousness.

Daily singing and qin practice are normalized practices. Scholars integrate qin and se playing,

poetry and music singing into their daily lives. Every morning, they sang a song to nourish their mind and character; in the evening, they sat quietly, enjoying the melodious sound of the qin to gain insight into profound truths. Singing pieces such as "Guan Ju" embodies the principle of "being happy without excess, being sorrowful without harm" and Confucian ethics, transforming music education from a specialized teaching activity into a way of life.

Social practice is an extension of "practical application". Scholars disseminate the concept of music education into society, performing elegant music during festivals, teaching local students, and conveying the benevolent thought of empathy towards all living things through music.¹² This social practice expands the influence of music education, allowing scholars to test their understanding of music education in practice and achieve a higher level of "unity of knowledge and action".

The practical spirit embodied in the music education at White Deer Cave Academy possesses three major characteristics: the unity of practicality and morality, the combination of everydayness and rituality, and the integration of individuality and sociality. With moral practice as the core, it balances individual cultivation and social education, assisting scholars in making the leap from knowledge to action, ultimately achieving the ideal personality of unity of virtue and conduct.

5. CONCLUSION

This study systematically explores the intrinsic coupling between the "order of learning" and the music education activities at White Deer Cave Academy. Rooted in the pre-Qin Confucian tradition of music education, White Deer Cave Academy's music education follows a rigorous five-step progressive logic, and the two are deeply integrated, forming a four-in-one music education model of "knowledge - speculation - value - practice".

The philosophy of "guiding music with reason and transforming people through music" embodied by White Deer Cave Academy, coupled with its four-in-one music education model, has achieved a

12. The cosmic ethics proposed by Zhang Zai, a thinker of the Northern Song Dynasty, originates from his famous work "Xi Ming", which means viewing all people in the world as compatriots and all things in the world as belonging to the same category. This is in line with the modern music creation philosophy of serving the people and sharing joy with them.

deep integration of aesthetic education and moral education, knowledge and practice, as well as critical thinking and values. It is a crystallization of ancient Chinese educational wisdom. The concepts it embodies, such as the integration of moral education and aesthetic education, and the unity of theory and practice, provide important historical references for contemporary quality education. Deeply exploring and inheriting this educational

wisdom is of great significance for promoting the development of contemporary quality education and realizing the creative transformation and innovative development of excellent traditional Chinese culture. Based on the above, the author has generated an AI-generated image of music education activities at White Deer Cave Academy in the Song Dynasty (see “Figure 5”)



Figure 5 The AI-generated depiction of musical education activities at the White Deer Cave Academy during the Song Dynasty generated by the author.

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