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Confucian *Creatio in Situ* – Philosophical Resource for a Theory of Creativity in Instrumental Music Education

Abstract

In this philosophical essay, I propose a theory of creativity for instrumental music education inspired by Confucian *creatio in situ* (“situational creativity”). Through an analysis of three major texts from classical Confucianism – the *Analects*, the *Zhongyong* (“Doctrine of the Mean”), and the *Daxue* (“The Great Learning”) – I posit a theoretical model of creativity for instrumental music education that comprises the following pairs of facets: situation and sincerity, tradition and training, and circumscription and collaboration. I then highlight how several ideas in this model bear striking similarities to those of the American pragmatists, in particular, John Dewey, and conclude by sketching a sample application of this theory. This study grounds creativity in performance in bands and orchestras by appeal to a major Asian philosophical tradition, and also serves as an initial step towards a transcultural theory of creativity for music education relevant to the present globalised world.

Keywords: creativity; instrumental music education; Confucianism; pragmatism; transcultural

Instrumental music is a rich and illustrious form of human artistic expression that dates back to the time of the ancient civilisations (Whitwell 2010). Although specific instruments may be different, the use of wind, string, and percussion instruments in music making, often in groups, can be seen in such diverse cultures as ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, China, Israel, Greece, and Rome (e.g., Anderson, 1976; Furniss, 2008; Mark 2013; Montagu, 2007; Rainbow and Cox, 2006; Sachs, 1940; Wellesz, 1990).

From the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, numerous events in Europe led to the global proliferation of wind bands and symphony orchestras of Western origin. String instrument makers such as Antonio Stradivari developed the violin into an instrument of great aesthetic

beauty, brilliance, and carrying power, while the industrial revolution brought about technological advances which enabled wind instruments to be refined in pitch, tone quality, and projection. These improvements in instrumental quality advanced the establishment of the modern wind band and symphony orchestra (e.g., Burkholder, 2010; Fennell, 1954). The nineteenth century industrialisation of music saw the rapid expansion of Western music and ensembles worldwide such that by the twentieth century, the Western classical tradition, as Jorgensen (1997, 76) writes, had become “a truly international musical language.” Although people continued making music using ethnic instruments such as the Chinese *erhu* and Japanese *shakuhachi*, bands and orchestras achieved global ubiquity and became a transcultural activity that continues to this present moment.

In the last two centuries, the rise of instrumental music education – defined in this paper as the teaching and learning of music through symphony orchestras and wind bands of Western origin – accompanied this global proliferation of bands and orchestras. Today, educational bands and orchestras can be found in many parts of the world, including North and South America, Europe, Asia, and Australia. Ensemble competitions are widespread. Examples include the World Music Contest in Holland, all-state competitions in the United States, and the All-Japan Band Competition in Japan (e.g., Cipolla and Hunsberger, 1994; Hebert 2011).

A brief survey of extant writings suggests that educational bands and orchestras in many parts of the world has traditionally been justified by the utilitarian philosophy of music education: the notion that music plays an important role in the social, physical, moral, and intellectual development of students (e.g., McCarthy and Goble 2002; Seybert 2009; Tan 2012). For example, during the first half of the twentieth century, orchestras were included in American curricula to provide emotional outlets for students, training in social living, and “to keep

youngsters busy” (Hazel 1947, 68) so that discipline problems can be eliminated. This utilitarian philosophy was seen through the 1950s as there was a continued emphasis on inculcating social values through instrumental music (Rush 1955). In Singapore, bands were introduced to the public schools in the 1960s to build social values like group discipline, *esprit de corps*, and a sense of national identity (Lee 2004; Tan 1998), while in Japan, Hebert (2005) found that competition, cooperation, and community undergird bands’ philosophy and practice.

The utilitarian philosophy, however, was not accepted *in toto* by all music educators. For example, James Mursell argues that music itself should be the focus of all instrumental programs. Mursell’s philosophy planted the seeds of music education as aesthetic education: music should be taught and learned in ways that emphasise its “esthetic aspects” (Mursell 1936, 6). After Mursell, several other writers advocated the notion of aesthetic education explicitly (e.g., Leonhard and House 1972; Reimer 1970). Not all philosophers, however, embrace an aesthetic philosophy of music education. For example, Elliott (1995) attacks music education as aesthetic education and argues instead that music education should be praxial, something that people do. For Elliott, music is a performative art, and one should focus on musical practice and the social context of music making. In like vein, Goble (2010) suggests that instrumental ensemble classes may be used to explore the musical practices of different cultural communities.

Despite the worldwide ubiquity of educational bands and orchestras, and the range of discourse devoted to its philosophical underpinnings, the value of instrumental music education has come under close scrutiny in recent years, most notably within the North American music education fraternity. Of the many issues raised, scholars question if this large ensemble model of music education fosters creativity. For example, Williams (2011, 53) notes that the “teacher in the large-ensemble model is most likely making practically all the musical and creative

decisions,” further arguing that “students are most often reduced to technicians, simply carrying out the creative wishes of their music director.” Kratus (2007, 45) laments that American school programmes emphasise band and orchestra instruments, despite the fact that “the best-selling instruments in the United States are the electric keyboard and guitar,” instruments that he argues “allow for a lifetime of musical performance and creativity.” Drawing on critical theory, Allsup and Benedict (2008, 170) observe that conductors tend towards “alienating” their “students from the creative process,” adding that in so doing, conductors “oppress” their students.

This brings me to a related question that has generated substantial debate: When students perform in bands and orchestras, are they merely “re-creating” a finished composition, or are they engaging in a potentially creative activity in its own right? On the one hand, Reimer (1970, 153–154) posits that performers are “re-creators” as they begin with “a set of instructions” from the composer and bear the responsibility of executing them “wisely and well.” In like vein, Small (1998, 87) likens the conductor-performer to a “shaman” who studies the “sacred book” (written notation) and “summons up the spirit” of the dead and great composer. Cusick (1994, 90–93) emphasises the hierarchical distinction between the composer as creator and performer as re-creator even further. For Cusick, the power relationship between the composer and the performer is one of “submission” whereby the composer through the written notation “forces” the personality of the performer to disappear. More recently, Boyce-Tillman (2012, 32–33) argues that the composer in the Western classical tradition takes on a role that is akin to God, the performer a role that is like the priest who understands the language of the Western classical tradition, and the listener like the laity whose role is to receive the “mediated word of the composer.” With these tendencies to view performance as a re-creative rather than a creative activity, it is no surprise, then, that efforts to bolster creativity in schools often take on the form

of composing rather than performing (see Humphreys 2006a; Plummeridge 1980; Priest 1997, 2002; Williams 2011). The American *National Standards for Arts Education* divides music education into “creating, performing, listening to, and analysing music,” as if “creating” is a separate activity from “performing” (Consortium of National Arts Education Association 1994, 42). Both the British National Curriculum and the Singaporean Music Curriculum make similar distinctions between creating and performing (e.g., Lowther 2010; Ministry of Education Singapore 2007).

On the other hand, Elliott (1995, 219–220) maintains that performing can be as creative as composing. He argues that performing is by no means merely “re-creative” as compositions are open to a wide range of interpretations. Hargreaves (1999) shares Elliott’s view that performing is not a simple matter of re-creation. He notes that like jazz improvisation, no two versions of classical music will ever be precisely the same (see also, Chaffin, Lemieux, and Chen 2004; Clarke 2012; Mach 1991). Humphreys (2006b, 187) goes so far as to claim that it is “incorrect and pejorative” to term performance “re-creative.” He argues that to construe creativity predominantly in the sense of composing prioritises “the creation of tangible musical products over other musical outcomes.” He expresses confidence that the music education profession would no longer define creativity narrowly as the creation of new products if people were to consider the matter more “rigorously” and “objectively” (355–358). Notwithstanding the efforts of Elliott, Hargreaves, and Humphreys to construe performance as a creative rather than a re-creative activity, several questions remain. If it is indeed true, as Humphreys asserts, that creativity ought not to be construed narrowly as the creation of new musical products, what is the theoretical basis by which we call performers creative?

The issue of whether the large ensemble model of music education fosters creativity is by no means a trivial one. As Mason (2003) notes, the emergence of creativity as a value began in the middle of the 19th century in Western Europe as a result of industrialisation and urbanisation. By the end of the 19th century, humans already began to question how creativity may be fostered (Craft 2001). This gradually influenced countries beyond the West, such that by the late 20th century, the increased attention to creativity, especially in education, can be seen in many different parts of the world (Bentley 1998; Craft 2006). More recently, the particular theorised “twenty-first century skills” which has influenced educational systems worldwide emphasises creativity in general education (e.g., Trilling and Fadel, 2009). So prevalent is the emphasis on creativity in schools today that as Craft (2003, 113) puts it, it is becoming “difficult to see how creativity could be seen as anything other than ‘a good thing.’” Creativity in musical performance has also received considerable attention, and has been researched at the AHRC Research Centre for Musical Performance as Creative Practice (CMPCP) at the University of Cambridge (<http://www.cmcp.ac.uk/>, accessed July 24, 2014), and the Orpheus Research Centre in Music at Ghent (<http://www.orpheusinstituut.be/en>, accessed July 23, 2014).

Given the worldwide importance accorded to creativity, it seems that a theory of creativity is necessary for instrumental music education. Without such a theory, it is all too easy for critics to charge that participation in bands and orchestras under the direction of a seemingly dictatorial conductor, limited by the rules of ensemble performance, and circumscribed by musical notation and stylistic demands, is merely a re-creative or even a non-creative activity. To further complicate matters, the term “creativity” has been variously defined, ranging from “to act in the world, or on the world, in a new or significant way” (Mason 2003, 7) to “the ability to produce work that is novel, high in quality, and appropriate” (Sternberg 2003, 89). How may

creativity be understood in the context of instrumental performance? A firm philosophical and theoretical underpinning is needed to ground practice and to defend this model of music education from calls that have already having been made to replace bands and orchestras with other forms of music teaching and learning (e.g., Kratus, 2007; Williams 2011). Furthermore, as extant music education philosophies in Western academia draw primarily on Western philosophical traditions, they do not transcend geographical and cultural boundaries. A philosophy that has transcultural potential seems crucial; after all, instrumental music education, as noted above, is a transcultural activity practised in both Western and Eastern countries.

In this paper, I propose a theory of creativity for instrumental music education inspired by Confucian *creatio in situ* or “situational creativity.” This situational concept of creativity, I argue, has transcultural potential as it resonates with the writings of the American pragmatists – most notably, John Dewey – whose writings have already influenced major music education philosophers such as Bennett Reimer and David Elliott, both of whom wrote richly about instrumental music education (e.g., Elliott 1995; Reimer 2003). To construct this theoretical model of creativity for instrumental music education, I draw on three classical Confucian texts, namely, the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語: “collected sayings”), the *Zhongyong* (中庸: “Doctrine of the Mean”), and the *Daxue* (大學: “the Great Learning”). This model comprises the following pairs of facets: situation and sincerity, tradition and training, and circumscription and collaboration. In what follows, I unpack each pair of facets in turn and suggest ways in which they may illumine the nature of creativity in instrumental music education. Subsequently, I highlight how several ideas articulated by the Confucian philosophers bear striking similarities to those of the American pragmatists, and conclude by sketching a sample application of this theory.

Situation and sincerity

The philosophical roots of the Western conception of creativity can be traced to the notion of divinely inspired creativity as construed by the Judeo-Christian *Weltanschauung* (Hall and Ames 1987; Niu and Sternberg 2006; Wen 2009). Before God created the world, nothing existed. Furthermore, God did not have to conquer nor emerge from chaos (Hall and Ames 1987; Mason 2003). In this view, creativity is seen as an imitation of God's "transcendent creative act": *creatio ex nihilo* or "creation from nothing" (Hall and Ames 1987, 16. See also, Ames 2005; Wen 2009). It requires genius, prizes individuality and originality, and results in tangible products or beings. As Clarke (2012, 20) puts it, "creativity portrayed as the mysterious appearance of the radically new, apparently from nowhere," still dominates Western culture.

Interestingly, the notion of *creatio ex nihilo* appears absent in early China. Thus, statements related to creativity, including artistic creativity, seem to rely on a rather different model, one that can be related to *creatio in situ* or "situational creativity" (Ames 2005; Ames and Hall 2001; Hall 1982; Hall and Ames 1987; Tan 2008; Wen 2009). Although *tian* (天: heaven / sky)¹ gives birth to "the ten thousand things" (*wanwu* 萬物), humans must put them in order so as to create harmony. Creativity then tends towards the creation of meaning from things that are already present rather than the creation of being (Hall and Ames 1987; Wen 2009). It results in harmony (*he* 和), and prizes interdependence and enhanced significance. Confucian creativity is "*ars contextualis*": the art of responding to unique and specific contexts, which differ from place to place, and from time to time (Hall and Ames 1987, 248; Wen 2009, 18–19). The emphasis is on the situation rather than the product. It is consonant with Mason's (2003, 7) definition of creativity as "to act in or on the world in a new or significant way," with newness construed primarily as meaning rather than product.

Confucian *creatio in situ* may provide a theoretical basis by which one can claim that performance can be a creative, and not merely a “re-creative,” activity. As I see it, much of the difficulty that the field of music education has with seeing performance as a creative activity lies in what Cook (2012, 457–458) calls the “long tradition of ocularcentricity in Western culture – the idea that things are only really there if you can see them.” It is easy to justify composition as a creative activity as one sees the product: the work itself. However, it is not so with performance, which does not always leave behind something permanent that one can see. Even Webster (2002, 27), who regards performance as a creative activity, feels compelled to provide a product-based justification for performance in the form of “recorded performances.”

Nonetheless, might one not see performance for what it is in and of itself: an intangible and ephemeral event? If so, Confucian *creatio in situ* provides an alternative paradigm for a theory of creativity as it relates to performance. Construed as such, creativity is situational and more a matter of creating meaning rather than product per se. The creativity of a performer is “in the moment,” in the public’s eye, and cannot be changed. Once executed, a phrasal nuance, rubato or subtle change of tone colour cannot be reversed. On the other hand, when composing notated Western music in the classical tradition, the creativity of a composer is exercised in solitude and is reversible; a melody can be revised innumerable times. The particular creativity that performing cultivates is different from that of composing. While composing has its unique creative value, so does performing. As Cook (2012, 451) argues, while creativity has traditionally been oriented towards “enduring products, such as musical works,” one may also think of it in terms of “something you do, something that not only generates social or aesthetic meaning but is also inherently pleasurable.”

Confucian *creatio in situ* necessitates *cheng* (誠), commonly translated as “sincerity” (Kleeman and Yu 2010, 95). *Cheng* also carries notions of “integrity,” “authenticity,” “to complete,” “to perfect,” and “perfect genuineness” (Ames and Hall 2001, 33; Tan 2012, 134). According to the *Zhongyong*, “*cheng* is the beginning and end of things. Without *cheng*, there would be nothing (*wuwu* 無物)” (Chan 1963, 108). In Confucian philosophy, *cheng* is an active force that transforms, completes the world, and draws humans and *tian* (天: heaven / sky) together; it characterises the actions of both *tian* and the sage and necessitates strenuous effort. The *Zhongyong* states that only those who are genuinely sincere (*cheng*) can fully develop their own natures, fully develop the nature of others, fully develop the nature of things, participate in the transforming and nourishing process of *tian* and earth, and form a trinity with *tian* and earth (Chan 1963, 107). In fact, *cheng* is so crucial to the creation of the cosmos in Confucianism that scholars have translated it as “creativity” (Ames and Hall 2001, 61; Tu 1989, 81–82).

The notion of sincerity as being a crucial aspect of creativity appears philosophically and practically interesting. How many music educators today would make the connection between sincerity and creativity? Yet, it seems to me that without sincerity, one cannot create a genuinely moving performance. Fingarette (1972, 53–54) draws a parallel between fakery in musical performance and fakery in Confucian ritual (*li* 禮)³: it is all “there” for the public to see. One cannot fake a creative artistic expression nor perform a rubato that is not genuinely felt. A creative, moving, and artistic performance must be genuine and sincere (*cheng*). As Beethoven would say, “from the heart, may it again go to the heart” (Kinderman 2009, 211).

Tradition and training

As noted earlier, *creatio ex nihilo* assumes geniuses to be at work in the creative process. The notion of individual geniuses as creative artists is seen perhaps most clearly in Continental

philosophy. For example, Immanuel Kant (1790/2000, 186) argues that “beautiful art is art of genius,” while Arthur Schopenhauer (1818/2011, 261) sees genuine art as products of geniuses or people who have been “momentarily inspired to the point of genius.” The notion of genius, however, is conspicuously absent in Confucian *creatio in situ*. Instead, we see an emphasis on tradition and training which I shall unpack.

Confucianism arose out of social and political disunity during Warring States China (ca. 453-221 BCE). Numerous questions regarding why society had degenerated led to the emergence of the first philosophers in recorded Chinese history who theorised ways in which society could be transformed for the better. Perhaps the most far-reaching theme to emerge out of this intellectual tradition was the importance of developing character and virtue (*de* 德) through self-cultivation: the ethics of virtue (Van Norden, 2007). Confucius theorises that one self-cultivates through a commitment to the rituals (*li* 禮) of the historical Zhou dynasty (ca. 1046-771 BCE). For Confucius, Zhou rituals encapsulated the pinnacle of human refinement – the cumulative efforts, labour, and teachings or *dao* (道)² – of former sage kings. These social and artistic forms were believed to be forms of the style or pattern (*wen* 文) of civilised behavior that set the Chinese apart from the surrounding nomadic “barbarians” and means through which the highest of human virtue could be expressed. For Confucius, mastery of Zhou rituals was essential to being a morally superior person (*junzi* 君子) who makes ethical decisions in ever-changing and novel situations, thereby creating social order and a new utopia.

This brings me to the crux of classical Confucianism, and that is, to draw on tradition to create something new. For Confucius, in “reviewing the old as a means of realising the new, such a person can be considered a teacher” (*Analects* 2.11; Ames and Rosemont 1998, 78). In order to reap the rewards of received culture, one must be creative in adapting it for one’s own

time and place, which is always *sui generis* (Hall and Ames, 1987). Unlike its *ex nihilo* counterpart, *creatio in situ* grows organically from cultural traditions in and of this world and does not necessitate divine intervention such as Plato's Muse (e.g., *Ion*, 534b; *Phaedrus*, 245a; *Laws*, 719c). In Confucian theory, tradition and innovation are not mutually exclusive. Instead, the old can and should be rendered new every day (*rixin* 日新: literally "every day new"). As the *Daxue* declares, "although Zhou is an ancient state, the mandate it has received from *tian* (天: heaven / sky) is new" (Chan 1963, 87).

Analogously, bands and orchestras receive the culture of the Western classical tradition. Like Zhou rituals (*li* 禮), although the tradition is old, its potential to educate remains new. Each time students perform an old piece of music, they render it anew with a new interpretation. In addition, they learn normative principles of music that they can creatively apply and adapt to performing, composing, and arranging music on their own. This is not unlike reading great novels of the past in order to learn to become a more creative writer. As Csikszentmihalyi (1996, 71) argues, "it is impossible to be creative without having first internalised a domain of culture." He further notes that "a person must believe in the importance of such a domain in order to learn its rules; hence, he or she must be to a certain extent a traditionalist." This sketch of ideas suggests that the learning of Western classical music through bands and orchestras may establish foundations for students to be creative when they are in school and beyond; the fact that students have to perform in a Mozartian or Mahlerian style does not render them any less creative.

While Zhou ritual (*li* 禮) is the predominant tradition that Confucius draws on, it is clear from 15.11 of the *Analects* that the Master advocates drawing from the finest traditions of two other early dynasties as well – the Xia and the Yin (Shang) – a strategy of eclectic borrowing termed by Hagen (2010, 9) as "selective traditionalism." As Hagen rightly points out, although

this is a conservative approach, the task of choosing which elements to preserve is an interpretive one and the final mix is always novel. By analogy, band and orchestral composers today no longer draw from only the Western classical tradition. Take, for example, David Ward-Steinman's *Singapore Sonorama*, a four-movement suite that makes artful use of Chinese, Malay, Indian, and Western musical elements. As students consider ways in which they may approach the work creatively in performance, they also learn and assimilate non-Western musical traditions that provide them with the grammar and tools to engage in creative "selective traditionalism" themselves both in school and beyond.

In addition to tradition, Confucian *creatio in situ* necessitates training and proceeds from mastered skills. The importance of practising to the point of automaticity is seen in the *Analects*, where Confucius emphasises the importance of memorising the *Songs* (*Shijing* 詩經) – a collection of some three hundred poems and songs sung at court and religious ceremonies in early China – as an important aspect of being a *junzi* (君子) or morally superior person (*Analects* 3.8, 17.9, 17.10). The Master warns, however, that "if people can recite all of the three hundred Songs and yet when given official responsibility, fail to perform effectively . . . what good are they?" (*Analects* 13.5; Ames and Rosement 1998, 163). For Confucius, the *Songs* provide us with a language that we can use to effectively create something new in ever changing circumstances (Tan 2008). Such a notion of creativity is especially relevant to instrumental music education, as it suggests that many more students can become creative than the comparatively small number of geniuses assumed in the Kantian notion of creativity. Without training for skill, creativity in instrumental performance is not possible; students require sufficient command of their instruments before they are able to realise their creative ideas. Similarly, in instrumental music education, training is needed as the basis for creativity. Scales

are memorised and practised to the point of automaticity so that “fixed action patterns” (Llinás 2001, 133) take over and free students from having to worry about them. Just as Jascha Heifetz practised effortfully so that he was free to be creative, students rehearse to the state of effortless action (*wuwei* 無為) so that their minds are free to be creative.

Circumscription and collaboration

In large ensembles, how do individual performers contribute creatively? For Reimer (2003, 114), the instrumental student is limited by what he calls the “triple layering of nonindividual demands,” namely, the notated score, the need for sections to sound uniform, and the interpretive decisions of the conductor. He argues that these demands seem to hinder “creativity as an expression of individual imagination” as “convergence” rather than “divergence” appears to be the primary condition for success. As what follows argues, in its emphasis on circumscription and collaboration, Confucian *creatio in situ* provides a theoretical basis by which one may argue that all three layers of nonindividual demands identified by Reimer are sources of, rather than obstacles to, creativity.

For Confucius, “if I hold up one corner of a problem, and the student cannot come back to me with the other three, I will not attempt to instruct again” (*Analects* 7.8; Slingerland 2003, 66). The “one corner” that Confucius furnishes is insufficient to determine the other three; the number of appropriate responses is infinite (see Tan 2008). There is no single right answer, and Confucius leaves room for creativity. However, since the four corners must form a square, some answers must be wrong. This is a fundamental paradox of creativity: possibilities are innumerable, yet circumscribed.

But it is precisely this paradox that illumines instrumental music education. Speaking on musical creativity, Csikszentmihalyi (1996, 250) notes that “paradoxically, it is the abstract rules

we invent to limit and focus our attention that gives us the experience of untrammelled freedom.” One cannot be creative without circumscription, as there are neither contexts nor normative boundaries with which to foster or adjudicate creativity. We begin with the circumscriptions provided by the composer. While a musical score “raises one corner,” students can certainly return with the “other three”; there are at least three different ways of phrasing a melody while remaining within the stylistic boundaries of the composer. For example, the first violin sections of the Vienna Philharmonic, Berlin Philharmonic, and Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra may all shape the first subject from the first movement of Mahler’s Fourth Symphony differently; yet, they all remain within the circumscription of what it means to “play Mahler.” With the score as a basic point of departure, an instrumental teacher can teach innumerable ways to be creative with it. Furthermore, the limitation on individual creativity in instrumental ensembles is compensated by the gains from taking in the ideas of the composer. In so doing, students discover possibilities they may not have done so by themselves.

While *creatio ex nihilo* that assumes a bifurcation between the Maker and the made, Confucian *creatio in situ* is collaborative in its “elevation of the human being to co-creative status” (Ames and Hall 2001, 30). According to the *Zhongyong* (Ames and Hall 2001), *tian* (天: heaven / sky) creates, but humans continue *tian*’s work. In Confucian cosmology, the universe is not a fixed, static entity, but dynamic and ever-changing; it is humans who extend *tian*’s *dao* (道: the way), not the other way round (*Analects* 15.29; Ames and Rosement 1998, 190).

In like vein, instrumental performance is co-creative as the performer co-creates with the composer. An instrumental composition is like the work of *tian* (天: heaven / sky) as it requires the performer to continue the creative process and to realise the work. Since the performer does not create a product from nothing, but creates meaning from musical scores that are already

present, performance is not creative in the sense of *ex nihilo*, but in the sense of *in situ*. The performer interprets the notation, which is a creative act, and brings to life what would otherwise be pages of meaningless notation. The work of art is subsequently realised in performance that impacts the audience. In Mason's (2003, 7) words, the performer acts in the world "in a new and significant way" as he or she creates a new musical event. From Confucian lenses, then, performing from notated scores is a co-creative process whereby the performer co-creates with the composer; it is not merely "re-creative."

More problematic, however, is the circumscription by the conductor and the ensemble. In ensembles, how are individual performers able to contribute their own creativity? After all, any form of "intentionality" – and by extension, creative ones – can only be present in individual minds (Searle 2010, 47). How are individual musicians able to contribute their creative intent when they appear to be under the constraints of the conductor and other ensemble musicians? How does group creativity work, if it exists at all?

I will address this nest of questions by appealing to a crucial aspect of *in situ* creativity, namely, that it is role-based. When Duke Jing of Qi asked Confucius about governance, the Master replied: "Let the ruler be a ruler, the subject a subject, the father a father, the son a son" (*Analects* 12.11; Lau 1979, 114). Confucius' advice is simply that if everyone were to concentrate on fulfilling their role-specific duties, harmony (*he* 和) would naturally occur (Slingerland 2003). We may appropriate Confucius' advice thus for instrumental ensembles: "Let the conductor be a conductor, the violinist a violinist, the clarinetist a clarinetist, the horn player a horn player." With this assumption, we arrive at the crux of what Searle (2010, 50–55) calls "collective intentionality," that "we-intention" is possible because each person assumes that the others are also fulfilling their particular roles. Searle explains this notion with reference to

performing a duet: “we play the duet by way of *me* playing the piano, *in a context where I take for granted that you are playing the violin*” (52). While the creative intentionality of each musician remains in individual minds, it is “we” who are creating this piece of music together. Searle discusses collective intentionality with reference to orchestral performance: “if we are playing in a symphony, all that I can actually cause is my individual performance. But I make that performance as my contribution to the total collective performance” (45). For example, an oboist creatively phrases as she desires, because she is assuming that all the other orchestral musicians are doing likewise.

From the lenses of Confucian “single thread” (*yiguan* 一貫), theory (*Analects* 4.15; Eno 1990, 66–68), creative freedom in instrumental ensembles is possible because each member assumes that the others are devoted to their role-specific duty (*zhong* 忠). At the same time, individual musicians listen carefully to the creative intentions of other ensemble musicians, watch the creative intentions of the conductor (who also considers the creative intentions of the musicians), respond in kind (reciprocity or *shu* 恕), and *build on* the creative intentions of one another. Far from being a limiting factor, the circumscription of the conductor and ensemble serve as sources of creativity. Musicians feed on the creativity of one another, creating an element of improvisation and a creative whole that is greater than the sum of its parts – “three corners for one” (*Analects* 7.8).

What about the need for individual players to blend with one another? For Reimer (2003, 114), since sections must sound uniform, individuals within sections must “conform” to the group interpretation rather than perform according to their individual fancies. If all individuals were to conform, however, who or what do they conform to? Individuals cannot simply conform to conductors all the time; the parts are too complex for conductors to make all the musical

decisions. Neither do individuals conform to the principal player all the time. It seems to me that ensemble performance is not a simplistic matter of conforming. Instead, a complex reciprocal process of shaping and being shaped by others happens in the phenomenal world.

To illustrate my position, I draw on the Confucian focus-field conception of the social self posited by Hall and Ames (1987, 231–241). In this theory, a person is construed as a point of “focus” which constitutes a “field” of community; yet, the “focus” is simultaneously constituted by the “field” itself. A violinist is a basic point of “focus” which constitutes the “field” of the section of violins; at the same time, she is constituted by the “field” of the section. She shapes the group interpretation as much she is shaped by it; there is no way she is merely “conforming” without contributing at the same time. Even if she does not shape a phrase musically, it adds to the overall effect of the phrase, albeit negatively. This explains the oft-heard axiom, “the strength of the ensemble is the strength of the weakest player.” Instead of instructing players to conform in the name of *blend* – which merely results in a *bland* performance – teachers may ask their students to “play like soloists with the awareness of ensemble.” In so doing, students actively contribute creative ideas; at the same time, they adjust their creative decisions in the context of ensemble performance. They shape and are shaped in a process of collaborative creativity. An ensemble where all musicians creatively contribute in such a manner would result in an overall effect that is truly stunning.

In sum, the pairs of facets unpacked above, namely, situation and sincerity, tradition and training, and circumscription and collaboration, may illumine the nature of creativity in instrumental music education. Confucian *creatio in situ* provides a framework whereby creativity in instrumental performance can be construed in terms of event rather than product, training and tradition rather than genius, and collaboration rather than individualism. Through bands and

orchestras, students act in the world in a new and significant way. They create meaning for themselves and others.

Notwithstanding the insights that classical Confucianism offers, readers may be rightfully uncomfortable that I have tried to examine a largely Western musical tradition via Eastern lenses. Yet, the fact that as noted earlier, Western bands and orchestras are rather pervasive in many parts of Asia today suggests that this may not be a futile project altogether. It may well be that Western bands and orchestras are rather easily interwoven into the cultural fabric of Asian countries precisely because the underlying assumptions resonate with key aspects of its own philosophical tradition – an argument that has been made by Huang (2012). Furthermore, aspects of *creatio in situ* resonate with extant ideas from an influential Western philosophical tradition, pragmatism, an American philosophical enterprise whose major proponents include John Dewey and Richard Shusterman.

Resonances with American pragmatism

Alfred North Whitehead once noted rather provocatively that “If you want to understand Confucius, read John Dewey. And if you want to understand John Dewey, read Confucius” (Price 1954, 45). Despite the fact that classical Confucianism and American pragmatism are separated by time, geographical, and cultural borders, they share many theoretical similarities (Hall and Ames, 1987), including their ideas on creativity. Space does not permit a full exposition; what ensues is a brief sketch of salient similarities between the two traditions.

To begin with, Dewey does not construe creativity in *ex nihilo* terms commonly associated with the Judeo-Christian tradition (Fesmire 2003). For Dewey (1934a/1985, 71), the notion of God creating “without any unformed matter to work upon” is “emasculated subjective metaphysics.” He further argues that even God took seven days to create the world, and only at

the end of that period was He “aware of just what He set out to do with the raw material of chaos that confronted Him.” Joas (1996, 133–139) posits that the theory of creativity forwarded by the pragmatists is one of “situated creativity”: the notion that “new variations of action are generated by the tension of problems contained in situations.” Like Confucian *creatio in situ*, a person is not innately more creative than another; instead, one is creative according to particular situations (Gimmler 2006; Hartshorne 1984; Joas 1996). In addition, the Confucian notion of *cheng* (誠: sincerity) resonates with Dewey who follows Tolstoy in regarding sincerity as an important aspect of creativity (Dewey 1934a/1985, 193–194).

The pragmatists similarly show a regard for tradition and training. Contra Kant, Dewey (1930/1985, 127) does not associate creativity “with persons regarded as rare and unique, like geniuses.” Instead, he maintains that each individual is unique in his or her own way. Nonetheless, one ought to be trained and immersed in traditions. For Dewey (1934a/1985, 163), great original artists do not shun but “digest” traditions, further noting that when “the old has not been incorporated, the outcome is merely eccentricity.” He argues that since “the process of creation is experimental and continuous,” the “artist, scientific man, or good citizen, depends upon what others have done before him and are doing around him” (Dewey 1934b/1985, 34). Shusterman (2000) claims that works of art that are purportedly original are always products of the past in some ways. Using the example of rap, which creatively appropriates and remixes tracks, Shusterman (1997) argues that there is no tension between borrowing and creativity. Like Confucian *creatio in situ*, pragmatist creativity draws on the old to create the new.

Finally, the notions of circumscription and collaboration in creativity are equally central to the pragmatists. Shusterman (2000, 189) argues that whether it is the sitcom or the sonnet, the presence of “rigidly standard” conventions does not necessarily preclude creativity. Instead, the

issue is whether one exercises the imagination in turning the circumscription into a basis for creativity. Noting that there is no principled reason to challenge “the aesthetic legitimacy of Greek temples, Gothic churches, and the works of oral literary traditions,” all of which were collectively produced, Shusterman (2000, 190) further argues that there is “no contradiction between collective production and artistic creativity.” Although he concedes that collective production places constraints on the “flights of individual fancy,” he also maintains that “the collaboration of several minds can compensate creativity with added imaginative resources.”

With American pragmatism, therefore, we see the same facets of situation and sincerity, tradition and training, and circumscription and collaboration in their writings on creativity. Having established the transcultural connection between Confucian and pragmatist philosophies, I conclude by relating the theoretical ideas to the practical world of teaching and learning.

Sample Application of Theory

As I write this present essay, I am simultaneously preparing a youth orchestra for a performance of Tchaikovsky’s Fourth Symphony in a week’s time. How may the model unpacked above assist me in teaching, rehearsing, and conducting in such a way that nurtures creativity? More specifically, how may I create the conditions such that my instrumental programme achieves all the vital aspects of creativity discussed in this paper? In what follows, I provide some sample ideas of how my proposed theory may be applied in the rehearsal room.

To begin with, it is important that I communicate to the students that performing in an orchestra is not a simple matter of executing instructions from the composer and the conductor mechanically. A change in mindset is crucial. It is important to convey to the orchestra that together with Tchaikovsky and me, they are the co-creators of the work. As they rehearse the work each time, they ought to respond creatively and sensitively to changing situations. No two

rehearsals are ever exactly the same: as rehearsals unfold and progress towards the concert, intonation, colour, phrasing, dynamics, articulation, and sound change. I stress to the students that orchestral rehearsals ought not to be attended mindlessly; rather, they should listen acutely, respond to changing situations, and create the piece afresh each time they rehearse. I also encourage them to take risks, ownership, and make musical decisions as they rehearse.

Subsequently, I would need to teach and rehearse in such a way that the students can relate to the diverse range of emotions expressed in the work, so that they are able to create the piece of music from their hearts with heartfelt sincerity – the second aspect of *creatio in situ*. While youth orchestra musicians may not have the life experiences of the Russian composer, they certainly can relate to the many universal emotions expressed in the work, including sorrow, nostalgia, anger, joy, happiness, and playfulness. To this end, I should not rehearse mechanically but conduct musically, ask questions (e.g., “What is the character of this section?”; “What is the emotion portrayed?”), and create a rehearsal environment that allows students freedom to explore and be musically expressive. As a teacher, I ought to resist the temptation to merely be a mechanic who fixes parts in the manner of an “assembly line” – “Fordist Method” as Allsup and Benedict (2008, 159) put it. Rather, precious rehearsal time ought to be set aside to explore the affective aspects of the work; only then can the performance be a genuinely sincere, moving one.

Tradition is a useful third element to bring into the rehearsal room. How has this symphony been traditionally performed by other orchestras? To help the principal oboe shape the main melody at the opening of the second movement, and also to teach how the pizzicato strings may sensitively accompany her, I present various video and audio recordings of the passage and have them compare and contrast differences between them. In so doing, I open up what Maxine Greene (2001, 143) calls “vistas of possibilities” that students can draw on creatively. I also pose

them questions to stimulate thinking (e.g., “How are the performances different?”; “What is effective / not effective?”; “What do you like / not like about each performance?”), so that the students may acquire a sense of the thoughtful skills required to draw on tradition to stimulate their own creative thinking.

Of equal importance is training. Without a solid technical foundation, a genuinely free, moving, and creative performance is not possible. Students ought to learn that it is their responsibility to learn their parts; on my end, it is crucial to anticipate technical problems, provide training materials, technical advice, and teach students how to practice. Even while rehearsing difficult passages at half tempo, students should be encouraged to consider how the music ought to be shaped rather than practised in a strictly mechanical fashion. Once the notes are learned close to or at the point of automaticity, the connection should immediately be made to the creative dimensions of performance.

Finally, the various circumscriptions inherent in orchestral performances of Western classical works ought to be celebrated as possibilities, not impediments. For example, at the first statement of the first subject in the first movement (bar 27), Tchaikovsky indicated *piano espressivo*. This is a limited framework – true; paradoxically, it offers rich potential to teach creative thinking. I invite the students to think about how this passage can possibly be shaped using the following sample of guiding questions: “What shade of *piano* would you play this?” “How can this passage be played expressively as indicated by Tchaikovsky?” “What kind of tone colour and vibrato would you use to express this theme?” In having the individual students present their own versions of the first subject, students learn how creative interpretations can be. As the conductor, despite having my own ideas on the passage, I remain pleasantly surprised at the rich array of possibilities presented by my students. My ideas evolve and my overarching

interpretation of the work absorb possibilities presented by the students. Although it is not possible to perform all ten different versions of the first subject as presented by my students, the resultant interpretation is more nuanced and sophisticated than if I had not considered their creative inputs. I would also ask students to play on their own without me conducting – much like the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. In so doing, I convey trust, foster close listening and eye contact between players, and also afford students even greater creative freedom to respond to one another.

Needless to say, it is not possible to go over every passage using the above strategies – the symphony is too long. Since the students have already experienced the creative thinking process, I encourage them to transfer the thinking process to all other passages. As students play through passages creatively, the onus is on me to be *attentive* to their creative intentions, so that I may weave the various ideas into a coherent whole. In turn, they remain attentive to what I gesture, and absorb what I gesture as additional sources of creativity that they can mine on. In so doing, the students actively participate in a creative activity and reap the satisfying rewards of instrumental performance, one of co-creating a living composition with the composer, the conductor, and fellow orchestral musicians.

In closing, I have proposed a theory of creativity for instrumental music education inspired by Confucian *creatio in situ*. I have argued that this theory has transcultural potential by showing its resonances with American pragmatist philosophy, and offered some sample ideas of how the model may be realised in practice. Although this theory is discussed with reference to performance in this paper, future research may explore how it may be relevant for other music educational practices, such as composing, improvising, and perhaps even listening. Furthermore, as this study draws only on two philosophical traditions, albeit two major ones,

future studies may explore how philosophies from other cultures resonate with the ideas presented.

Is a genuinely transcultural theory of creativity for instrumental music education, one that transcends the East and the West, possible? This remains to be probed. Nonetheless, by appeal to classical Confucianism and showing its resonances with pragmatism, I hope to have argued that viewing performance in bands and orchestras as a creative educational and artistic endeavour, is a plausible thing to do.

Notes

1. In classical Chinese philosophy, “tian” (天), commonly translated as “Heaven” or “Sky,” is a term that refers to the deity of the ancient Chinese, an immanent fashioner, shaper, or personified force for what humans see in real life.
2. “Dao” (道), commonly translated as the “Way,” is a multi-faceted term in Chinese philosophy that refers variously to a path, a method, a doctrine, a principle, the essence, or the Truth.
3. The Chinese philosophical term “li” (禮), frequently glossed as “ritual,” refers to religious and social ceremonies of the ancient Chinese Zhou dynasty, and also to the norms of proper daily conduct.

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