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Author(s)	Leonard Tan
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IN DIALOGUE

RESPONSE TO ALEXANDRA KERTZ-WELZEL,  
“TWO SOULS, ALAS, RESIDE WITHIN MY BREAST”:  
REFLECTIONS ON GERMAN AND AMERICAN MUSIC EDUCATION  
REGARDING THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF MUSIC EDUCATION

LEONARD TAN  
National Institute of Education  
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore  
[leonard.tan@nie.edu.sg](mailto:leonard.tan@nie.edu.sg)

As a Singaporean who, like Kertz-Welzel, spent four years residing in the United States, I read the article with great interest. Born to traditional Chinese parents, I was raised steeped in Confucian values, savored Chinese operas, and spoke Mandarin as a child. When I went to school in postcolonial Singapore, however, the medium of instruction was primarily English. I read Enid Blyton in primary school, Shakespeare in secondary school, and Chaucer in Junior College. My university studies in music were Western-centric. All seemed fine until my doctoral studies in the United States when I was inspired by my music education professor to revisit my cultural roots and to read Chinese philosophy. It was no easy task reading the original texts – they were written on bamboo slips more than 2,000 years ago in classical Chinese, and I needed tuition from my mother. Yet, as I worked my way slowly but surely through each character, one thing became unmistakably clear: although I had read more Western than Asian philosophy, many ideas in the ancient Chinese texts resonate with the innermost recesses of my being and are unmistakably a part of who I am as a Chinese Singaporean, albeit one schooled in Western ways.

Two souls, alas, *have been residing* within my breast! Like Kertz-Welzel, I had to find a way to reconcile my two scholarly identities. How may one negotiate the seeming chasm between the Chinese and Western philosophical worlds? In this paper, I sketch some insights gleaned from my journey into the world of comparative philosophy, specifically, classical Chinese philosophy and American pragmatism. In particular, I address two obstacles to the internationalization of music education identified by Kertz-Welzel, namely, the tendency for researchers to only know one scholarly tradition well, and the use of English as an international language. I then proffer Dewey’s metaphor of “friendship” as a way of charting a new “silk road” – one that blends Eastern and Western ideas – for the philosophy of music education.

As noted by Kertz-Welzel, many researchers only know one scholarly tradition well. Dangers lurk when scholars have limited knowledge of foreign philosophical enterprises. To begin with, one may fall into the trap of stereotypical preconceptions. For example, I have been asked if it were methodologically sound to juxtapose Chinese philosophical aphorisms with the closely argued texts of the American pragmatists. The basis of this critique is understandable: think Confucius and aphoristic phrases that teach humans how to lead moral lives immediately spring to mind; think Dewey and one is reminded of the depth and breadth of his philosophical arguments. Chinese philosophical texts, however, are by no means mere aphorisms. While the *Analects* of Confucius may, *prima facie*, appear as if it were a random collection of brief sayings, many passages relate to one another and cohere as a philosophy. The rich commentarial tradition that spans over two thousand years further augment the range of insights embedded in the *Analects*. Post Confucius, Xunzi, the philosopher best known for his argument that human nature is evil and ought to be cultivated through ritual (*li*禮) and music (*yue* 乐), articulated his philosophy through thirty-two books that rival Dewey in richness and complexity.<sup>1</sup> For two souls to reside within one breast, one has to remain vigilant against potential stereotypes.

The tendency to only know one scholarly tradition well may also inadvertently cause one to judge a foreign philosophical tradition using the standards of the familiar one. When encountering Confucius for the first time, scholars schooled in European philosophy may, as Hegel did, criticize him for being a shallow moralizer obsessed with rituals (*li*禮) rather than a speculative philosopher concerned with theoretical matters.<sup>2</sup> Such a judgment is misguided as it ignores the fact that the Chinese philosophical tradition was founded on a set of metaphysical assumptions that differed from its Greek counterpart. Seeing the cosmos in discrete, quantitative, and unchanging terms, the ancient Greeks espoused an atomistic worldview that stressed logical

analysis, reason, universal physical and moral laws, and an epistemology that prized “knowing that.” By contrast, the Chinese saw the cosmos in continuous, qualitative, and changing terms; they embraced an organic worldview that emphasized aesthetic synthesis, rules of thumb that were often imprecise, and an epistemology that valued “knowing how.”<sup>3</sup> These contrasting assumptions led to two rather different ways of doing philosophy. As Robert Eno argues, Confucianism is distinct from the Western analytic tradition in that it is rigorous in its meticulous design of a syllabus of practice.<sup>4</sup> To adjudicate Chinese philosophy using Western standards, or vice versa, stifles hope for two souls to reside within the same breast.

Another obstacle to the internationalization of music education, as pointed out by Kertz-Welzel, is the use of English as an international language. While this has the obvious merit of facilitating transcultural discourse, it is also fraught with problems. When presenting on the international stage, scholars of Chinese philosophy have little recourse but to try to present the Chinese texts as faithfully as possible in the English language. Try as they may, something is always lost. Take, for example, the five-character declaration by Xunzi, “夫樂者，樂也，” commonly translated as “music is joy.”<sup>5</sup> This is an accurate translation; still, it does not do full justice to the original text. In the absence of the Chinese characters, Xunzi’s clever play on words, where he exploits the fact that music and joy were (and still are) written using the same character, 樂, cannot possibly be experienced. In the Confucian tradition, 樂 (*yue*: “music”) takes on an ethical quality, a dimension that would also be lost in the translation.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, as Kong Yingda argues, the use of 樂 (*le*: “joy”) rather than 喜 (*xi*: “delighted”) suggests long-term rather than one-time happiness, yet another nuance that may well be lost in translating the original text to English.<sup>7</sup> If matters are already so complicated with the translation of five characters, how much more when one tackles the entire Chinese philosophical corpus! Just as it

is, as Kertz-Welzel argues, difficult to translate German papers to English and vice versa, no translation, no matter how authoritative, can fully capture the spirit of the original Chinese.

Given the obstacles to the internationalization of music education unpacked above, might it be possible nonetheless to chart a new “silk road,” one that blends Eastern and Western philosophical insights, for music education? John Dewey, who probably had both souls residing within his breast, may be particularly useful here.<sup>8</sup> In the final pages of *Art as Experience*, Dewey mines the metaphor of “friendship” as a way of thinking about transcultural exchanges in art.<sup>9</sup> For Dewey, in a genuine and intimately affectionate friendship, we go beyond knowing mere facts about our friends to learn to see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and sympathize with them through the imagination. We understand our friends only when their desires, aims, interests, and responses become a part of who we are. Barriers are dissolved and prejudices limited, thereby bringing about a genuine “organic blending of attitudes” between cultures.<sup>10</sup>

Dewey’s metaphor of friendship may be meaningfully applied to the philosophy of music education. When scholars encounter foreign philosophical traditions, it is important for them to resist hasty stereotypes, ethnocentric judgments, and to acknowledge that they are ultimately reading translations that are at best reduced versions of the original. They ought to go beyond knowing mere facts about their new “friends” and try to see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and relate to their ideas with both the mind and the heart through the imagination. To return to my example from Xunzi, it is not enough for scholars who do not read Chinese to know that for Xunzi, “music is joy”; that would be akin to knowing mere facts about their friends. Instead, they ought to make the effort to unpack the richness of implications embedded in the original “夫樂者，樂也，” to try to say and hear it in Chinese, and to engage with it cognitively, affectively, and imaginatively. Similarly, scholars whose native language is not English should engage with

Dewey in its original version to the best of their abilities. All scholars, and not just the non-native speakers of English, experience, as noted by Kertz-Welzel, the feeling of being reduced to a child's mental state when one encounters a foreign language. Yet, this fosters humility, open-mindedness, and respect for others – traits that are crucial for transcultural dialogues.

By embracing a Deweyan attitude of friendship, just as I discovered that two souls, alas, *have been residing* within my breast, Western scholars may realize that an Eastern soul has been residing in them all along. Of all the satisfaction that I have derived from my journey into East-West comparative philosophy, none beats the moment when the aforementioned professor who had inspired me to revisit my cultural roots remarked that her writings were in fact rather Eastern.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps the twain have already met, and the “silk road” has long been built; it remains for scholars to foster more vibrant transcultural exchanges for the melioration of music education.

#### NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> John Knoblock, *Xunzi – A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, vols. 1-3 (California: Stanford University Press, 1988).

<sup>2</sup> Young Kun Kim, “Hegel's Criticism of Chinese Philosophy,” *Philosophy East and West* 28, no. 2 (1978): 173–180.

<sup>3</sup> On contrasts between Chinese and Greek forms of knowing, see, for example, Robert Eno, *Confucian Creation of Heaven* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 8, 67; Li Zehou, *Reading the Analects Today* (Beijing: Shenghuo, dushu, xin zhi san lian shu dian, 2008), 61; David Hall and Roger Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 11–25.

<sup>4</sup> Eno, *Confucian Creation of Heaven*, 6–13.

<sup>5</sup> *Xunzi*: 20/98/14; Knoblock, *Xunzi*, vol. 3, 80.

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<sup>6</sup> Scott Cook, “*Yue Ji* 樂記 – Record of Music: Introduction, Translation, Notes, and Commentary,” *Asian Music* 26, no. 2 (1995): 33–36.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>8</sup> From 1919 to 1921, Dewey travelled to China to lecture; the immersion in Chinese culture in turn influenced his writings that were then articulated in the West. See Jessica Ching-Sze Wang, *John Dewey in China – To Teach and to Learn* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), 87-114.

<sup>9</sup> John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, in *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953*, vol. 10, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), 335-339.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 336.

<sup>11</sup> For example, Chinese *yin-yang* theory resonates with Jorgensen’s dialectical approach to music education. See, for example, Estelle R. Jorgensen, “A Dialectical View of Theory and Practice,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 49, no. 4 (2001): 343–359.