

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Engagement of young Chinese adults born between 1990 and 2000 with the culture of traditional Chinese music: A quantitative study

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## ABSTRACT

The post-90s generation faces several challenges in engaging with and being exposed to traditional Chinese music culture, particularly due to issues related to schools, families, and cultural imbalance. These challenges are becoming increasingly prominent as modern influences continue to reshape young people's cultural preferences. This study analyzes and explores these issues and finds that post-90s individuals who have studied traditional Chinese music culture are more proactive in engaging with it. Moreover, frequent discussions about traditional Chinese music culture by their parents have helped them better understand it. These findings suggest that both formal education and family communication play significant roles in shaping cultural identity and musical engagement. In addition, this study also finds that the advancement of Western musical instruments, the lack of family financial resources, and high tuition fees are barriers to the post-90s generation's exposure to traditional Chinese music culture. These financial and perceptual obstacles limit their opportunities to engage with and appreciate their own musical heritage. Therefore, to address these issues, we need to increase the interest of the post-90s in learning about traditional Chinese music culture and make reasonable use of media communication to promote it. This can also attract their attention through the development and evolution of traditional Chinese music culture. Addressing these barriers will help the post-90s generation better connect with traditional Chinese music culture and promote the inheritance of cultural traditions in the modern age.

**Key words:** traditional Chinese music culture, post-90s, modern society, media

## INTRODUCTION


In recent years, many voices have been raised regarding the study of traditional Chinese music culture, which has provided a rich source of knowledge and, at the same time, offered new ideas for a new era of musical culture. A persistent issue surrounding traditional Chinese music culture is that of transmission. The premise of transmitting traditional Chinese music culture is to share and develop the existing body of traditional Chinese music culture (Fu, 2015). People born in the 1990s have

grown up during China's rapid development phase. They enjoy excellent material conditions and are priority experiencers of the information age. They have elevated spiritual needs and have been exposed to diverse cultural forms. As one of the first generations influenced by Western culture, they may possess an awareness of traditional Chinese music and culture but often lack a deep understanding or show limited interest. In either case, their exposure to and knowledge of traditional Chinese music and culture is affected, which can also hinder its transmission (J. J. Zhang, 2013).

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The post-90s refers to a group of people born between 1990 and 2000, who are now growing up as university students and junior workers who have just entered the labor market. They grew up in a media-advanced, information-driven era, and are more open-minded and independent than previous generations, more self-aware, and more willing to try new things (An, 2016). Most post-90s find that learning about traditional Chinese music culture helps them better understand national culture. However, they generally lack sufficient knowledge, skills, or interest in specific cultural content. Although post-90s individuals have a willingness to learn about traditional Chinese music culture, in practice they rarely make it the focus of their studies. Although the post-90s may experience confusion due to the clash between Chinese and Western cultures, they also have more options thanks to the information brought by the age of diversity (Bai *et al.*, 2010). The post-90s are living in a time of rapid development. One way to attract their attention is through innovative approaches to traditional Chinese music culture, such as expanding the channels for its transmission, integrating its cultural characteristics into modern society, showcasing elements of earlier eras, and adapting to the current times (Feng, 2022).

Traditional Chinese music culture refers to all forms of music from ancient times to the present, including opera, folk songs, musical instruments, and dance, featuring distinct musical and cultural works with profound meaning (Zhang, 2022). As research on traditional Chinese music culture continues to deepen, the methodology has shifted from linear thinking to a more three-dimensional approach. This means that it is necessary to study the development of traditional Chinese music culture both in horizontal scope and through its vertical historical characteristics. The post-90s, as the newest generation in our society, are quick to accept new music and culture (Yang, 2022). However, in the future, it is necessary to ensure that traditional Chinese music culture better adapts to the needs and pace of modern society. To achieve both inheritance and innovation in the context of multiculturalism, it is essential to adhere to the core principles of tradition while incorporating contemporary cultural development and integrating multicultural elements. In doing so, practical and effective strategies can be implemented to promote the inheritance and innovative development of traditional Chinese music culture, making the post-90s more interested in and eager to understand it (Chen, 2019). In the age of diversity, the existence of the post-90s affirms and influences traditional Chinese music and culture. When the post-90s are willing to participate in traditional Chinese music and culture, it becomes essential to promote the inheritance and development of traditional Chinese music culture.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This study explores how Chinese youth born between 1990 and 2000 engage with traditional Chinese music culture. This section introduces the background of traditional music culture in China, examines strategies to enhance its appeal to younger generations, and analyzes how to ensure its continuity among post-90s youth. It also explores how traditional music is disseminated and how it can be better integrated into the education system.

Scholars argue that the social changes in China during the 20th century have had a profound impact on traditional culture. Despite the modern emphasis on “national education”, the rise of nationalism has not fundamentally changed the marginalized status of traditional culture in contemporary society (Lin, 2009). How to preserve and practice traditional culture in a modern context has become an essential issue, and the dynamic between tradition and modernity has emerged as a key area of study (Luo & Zeng, 2003). President Xi (2014) emphasized that traditional culture is the foundation of Chinese cultural identity in a global context. With the evolution of society, traditional music culture has gradually integrated into modern life, preserving its core values while adapting to a more favorable environment for continued development (Bai, 2015).

### **Related background research**

In recent decades, China has experienced rapid economic and technological development, accompanied by cultural growth. Traditional culture encompasses kung fu, Peking opera, embroidery, calligraphy, and more, all deeply rooted in Chinese history and ethnic diversity (Zimmermann, 2017). However, many forms of intangible cultural heritage are overlooked, lack successors, and face financial or educational barriers, threatening their transmission (Gu, 2021). Although public awareness has increased and there are growing calls for a stronger cultural identity, practical efforts remain insufficient (L. P. Zhang, 2013).

As aesthetic values evolve, traditional culture must adapt (Liao, 1986). Many young people today lack an understanding of traditional culture, resulting in widespread apathy. This is largely attributed to weak educational frameworks, limited curricula, and the influence of modern cultural trends (Rao, 2014). To revitalize traditional music, its surrounding environment and communication strategies must be improved, enabling youth to fully appreciate its value (Zhang, 2020). Although post-90s youth are open-minded and materially secure, their knowledge of traditional culture remains low. This is due to inadequate emphasis in

schools, poorly designed curricula, and a lack of effective educational practices (Lin *et al.*, 2018). To foster interest and initiative, the social environment and educational guidance must be optimized (Wu, 2015).

### **Problems encountered in development**

Zhang (2022) argued that traditional music, a key component of Chinese culture, still lacks effective methods of transmission. A high-level forum at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music (2017) emphasized the need to incorporate traditional music into the academic system. Xiu (2020) emphasized that traditional music must adapt to modern developments while preserving instruments, repertoire, and aesthetics that reflect national and humanistic values.

Lv (2014) pointed out that the main problems hindering transmission include a lack of innovation and the influence of regional limitations, time gaps, and Western culture. She advocated for scientifically grounded heritage strategies, deeper exploration, and enhanced education. Zhou (2018) noted that researchers specializing in traditional music are scarce, and that modern education emphasizes Western systems, leaving students with minimal knowledge of traditional music.

Wang (2006) argued that universities should strengthen ethnic music education by developing courses that integrate local resources and by setting up appreciation sessions outside the classroom to build interest. Many students have limited exposure to works such as *High Mountains and Flowing Water* or instruments like the guqin and liuqin, which are either not taught or underemphasized even when included in curricula (Bian, 2010).

### **Diverse perspectives on traditional music culture**

Wang (2013) suggested integrating traditional music into everyday teaching to foster students' interest and initiative. Cai (2008) advocated blending Western and Chinese music to promote traditional music through diverse teaching approaches. Zhang (2009) and Zi (1987) emphasized the importance of preserving local cultures within a global educational system to prevent cultural homogenization. Tang (2011) noted that while social media helps disseminate culture, relying solely on individual interest is insufficient—media and society must collaborate.

Chen (2019) emphasized that traditional culture must evolve to meet the needs of the times. Longley (2020) argued that multiculturalism brings positive impacts and offers opportunities for traditional music to expand its influence. Zhao (2014) highlighted the need for traditional music to be disseminated within a multicultural context to gain broader acceptance.

He (2020) emphasized the refinement of content in traditional music education, allowing students to experience cultural values and develop practical skills, thereby promoting the integration of traditional and modern music. Yang (2019) proposed the use of online platforms and storytelling techniques to reintroduce traditional music into the public eye.

While some studies focus on whether post-90s youth learn traditional culture, and some educators address issues of transmission, few have examined how this generation engages with traditional music in terms of exposure and comprehension. This study aims to fill that gap by conducting a questionnaire survey to analyze their participation and the obstacles they face. It will also explore how traditional music can be incorporated into a multicultural framework to enhance its appeal to younger audiences.

### **Research questions**

This study focuses on two questions. First, to what extent are post-90s individuals participating in traditional Chinese music culture? Second, what barriers do they perceive in engaging with traditional music culture?

Zhang (2020) emphasizes the importance of the inheritance and development of Chinese traditional music culture, noting current issues such as the singular mode of transmission and the lack of successors. The article stresses that societal changes have hindered its development, and that active improvements are needed.

Studies show that post-90s college students generally have a positive attitude toward traditional culture but lack a deep understanding of it. Lin *et al.* (2018) argue that improving this situation requires the combined efforts of families, society, and schools. However, the lack of practical implementation has resulted in insufficient involvement from this generation. Therefore, this study investigates post-90s Chinese youth's engagement with traditional music culture, explores their perceptions of its inheritance and future, and identifies barriers that hinder their exposure.

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

The study was based on anonymous, voluntarily completed questionnaires. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and the study was approved by the Ethics Committee of University of York.

The sample consisted of 100 participants. Data were collected using snowball sampling (Simkus, 2023), with the survey distributed online through the platform

“Sojump” *via* the following link: <https://www.wjx.cn/vj/Q0dJdFN.aspx>. Participants were encouraged to share the questionnaire within their social circles.

Young people born between 1990 and 2000 are at various life stages—some are in education, others are in the workforce, and a few are still exploring career paths. These differing contexts influence their exposure to traditional music. The questionnaire collected data on participants’ birth year, gender, education level, occupational status, and marital status.

### **Instrument**

Participants completed a structured questionnaire divided into three parts. The first section gathered demographic data (year of birth, gender, occupation, education, marital status). The second section surveyed participants’ exposure to traditional Chinese music, including whether they had studied or encountered it. The third section focused on their perceptions of its development and dissemination.

Two additional questions were added: “During school years, did the school organize the study of traditional Chinese music culture?” and “In which part of daily life can you be exposed to traditional Chinese music culture?” A Likert scale (Mcleod, 2008) was used to evaluate perceived barriers, ranging from 1 (significant barriers) to 5 (no barriers). This scale allowed clearer distinctions in participant attitudes.

To improve clarity, ambiguous questions were reworded. For example, “Is it difficult to learn Chinese traditional music culture?” was split into two opposing statements to enable precise responses. An “Other” option was added for suggestions on enhancing the development of traditional music.

### **Questionnaire design and data collection**

The questionnaire was distributed online *via* “Sojump”, a widely used survey tool in China known for its accessibility and data visualization features. Distribution was completed in July 2022. Initial participants received the survey *via* email and were encouraged to forward it to others who met the criteria.

Each participant was informed of the study’s purpose and the anonymity policy. Contact information was provided for any inquiries. Participants were given three days to complete the survey. A snowball sampling method was employed to efficiently reach a broader group, prioritizing generalizability over depth.

### **Data analysis**

Descriptive analysis was used to intuitively summarize the data (Bush, 2020), classify patterns, and highlight

trends. This method is suitable for large samples and offers analytical neutrality. Inferential methods, such as the chi-square test, were employed to assess relationships between variables (Zach, 2021).

The questionnaire contained 38 questions, including single-choice, multiple-choice, dichotomous, ranking, and scale items. Dichotomous responses were used to determine prior exposure to traditional music (*e.g.*, instruments, opera, folk songs, dance music). Chi-square tests conducted in SPSSAU analyzed participants’ engagement and perceived obstacles, providing statistical insight into the relationship between the post-90s generation and traditional Chinese music culture.

## **RESULTS**

### ***To explore to what extent the post-90s engage in Chinese traditional music culture***

Based on the questions in the questionnaire, the degree of involvement of the post-90s in Chinese traditional music can be judged by looking at how long the participants have studied it, the school aspect, the parental aspect, and the factor of social media.

The SPSSAU was used to analyze the data on the extent of post-90s involvement in traditional Chinese music culture. Firstly, the independent variable “How long have you studied traditional Chinese music culture?” and the dependent variable “How often do you watch performances about traditional Chinese music culture?” were selected. From Table 1, we can see through the chi-square test (cross-tabulation) that the response to “How long have you studied traditional Chinese music culture?” has a significant impact on the results to the question, “How often do you watch performances about traditional Chinese music culture?” The chi-square test (shows that “How long have you studied traditional Chinese music culture?”) has a significant effect on “How often do you watch performances about traditional Chinese music culture?” ( $\chi^2 = 56.517$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ). It can be seen from the data that those post-90s who have studied Chinese traditional music and culture for a long time (8 years and above) are more likely to watch Chinese traditional music and culture more often. The proportion of post-90s who have “Never studied” Chinese traditional music culture is 34.88%, which is significantly higher than the average of 20.00%. The balance of post-90s who have “never studied” Chinese traditional music culture choosing “Over 12 months (not including 12 months)” was 34.88%, significantly higher than the average of 30.00%. From the participants’ data, it can be guessed that the post-90s who have never studied Chinese traditional music and culture are less likely to watch Chinese traditional music and culture. Therefore, compared to the post-90s who



**Table 1: Association between attendance to performances about traditional Chinese music culture and studying traditional Chinese music culture**

Watch performances about traditional Chinese music culture	How many years have you studied traditional Chinese music culture?						Total (%)
	< 1 (%)	1 - 3 (%)	>3 ~ 5 (%)	>5 ~ 8 (%)	> 8 (%)	Never (%)	
Once a month	24.0	0	18.2	0	50.0	9.3	15.0
Once every 3 months	32.0	7.7	0	0	0	2.3	10.0
Once every 6 months	8.0	15.4	36.4	100.0	33.3	11.6	17.0
Once every 12 months	4.0	23.1	9.1	0	0	7.0	8.0
Over 12 months (not including 12 months)	20.0	46.2	27.3	0	16.7	34.9	30.0
Never	12.0	7.7	9.1	0	0	34.9	20.0
Total	25.0	13.0	11.0	2.0	6.0	43.0	100.0

Notes:  $\chi^2 = 56.5$ ,  $P$ -value < 0.001

have never studied Chinese traditional music culture, those who have studied Chinese music culture will more frequently watch traditional Chinese music culture performances.

We used *chi-square* to analyze whether school aspects influence the post-90s viewing of traditional Chinese music culture [Table 2]. “When you were at school, did the school organize a study of traditional Chinese music culture?” acts as the independent variable and “How often do you watch performances about traditional Chinese music culture?” becomes the dependent variable. Using the chi-square test (cross-tabulation), we can see that the results of “When you were at school, did the school organize a study of traditional Chinese music culture?” and “How often do you watch performances about traditional Chinese music culture?” show a non-significance ( $\chi^2 = 9.021$ ,  $P = 0.530$ ). The questionnaire results reveal that although the school had organized a study of traditional Chinese music culture, it did not significantly affect the frequency of watching traditional Chinese music culture in post-90s individuals.

We used chi-square to analyze whether parental aspects influence the post-90s viewing of Chinese traditional music [Table 3]. The independent variable, “When you were growing up, did your parents discuss traditional Chinese music culture?” was selected first, followed by the dependent variable, “How often do you watch performances about traditional Chinese music culture?” From Table 3, the chi-square test (cross-tabulation) analysis for “When you were growing up, did your parents discuss with you about traditional Chinese music culture?” and “How often do you watch performances about traditional Chinese music culture?” showed significance ( $\chi^2 = 42.328$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ). By comparing the percentages, it can be seen that 50.00% of “We often discuss” chose “Once a month” which is significantly higher than the average of 15.00%. It can be concluded that parents often discussing Chinese traditional music

culture will make their post-90s’ children watch Chinese traditional music culture more frequently. The proportion of those who chose “Once every six months” for “We often discuss” is 37.50%, significantly higher than the average of 17.00%. Those who often discuss traditional Chinese music and culture with their parents are more likely to watch traditional Chinese music and culture performances once every six months than the rest of the post-90s. The proportion of those who chose “Never” for “We never discuss” was 34.38%, significantly higher than the average of 20.00%. From the data, it can be seen that if parents never discuss Chinese traditional music and culture with the participants, it will make the post-90s participants choose to never watch performances of Chinese traditional music and culture often. A brief understanding from Table 3 is that a high frequency of parents discussing Chinese traditional music culture with the post-90s would make the post-90s watch a performance of Chinese traditional music culture many times. Parents influence the post-90s’ participation in traditional Chinese music culture [Table 4].

In the exposure to traditional Chinese music culture through their interests, only the option of own learning was found to be linked to “How often you watch performances about traditional Chinese music culture?” Further, chi-square (cross-tabulation) analysis revealed that question 30, “own learning” showed a significant effect on “How often do you watch performances about traditional Chinese music culture?” ( $\chi^2 = 16.954$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ). It is visible that the selection of “own learning” for “Once a month” and “Once every three months” showed “35.7%” and “14.3%”. It can be understood that through their learning, the post-90s have more frequent contact with traditional Chinese music culture. The other options, such as advertisements, books, and media, are not statistically significant for “How often do you watch performances about traditional Chinese music culture?” Thus, it can be assumed that arousing the

**Table 2: Association between attending traditional Chinese music performances and the study of traditional Chinese at school level**

Watch performances about traditional Chinese music culture	When you were at school, did the school organize a study of traditional Chinese?			
	Organized (%)	Never organized (%)	I don't remember (%)	Total (%)
Once a month	11.6	22.6	11.5	15.0
Once every 3 months	16.3	6.5	3.9	10.0
Once every 6 months	18.6	12.9	19.2	17.0
Once every 12 months	11.6	6.5	3.9	8.0
Over 12 months (not including 12 months)	27.9	32.3	30.8	30.0
Never	14.0	19.4	30.8	20.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>43.0</b>	<b>31.0</b>	<b>26.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Notes:  $\chi^2 = 9.0$ ,  $P$ -value= 0.530

**Table 3: Association between attending performances of traditional Chinese music culture and whether parents have an influence on the viewing of traditional Chinese music and culture in those belonging to the post-90s**

Watch performances about traditional Chinese music culture?	When you were growing up, did your parents discuss with you about traditional Chinese music culture?					Total (%)
	Often discuss (%)	Occasionally discuss (%)	Neutral (%)	Rarely discuss (%)	Never discuss (%)	
Once a month	50.0	9.1	11.8	9.4	15.6	15.0
Once every 3 months	0	45.5	11.8	9.4	0	10.0
Once every 6 months	37.5	27.3	11.8	12.5	15.6	17.0
Once every 12 months	0	9.1	11.8	6.3	9.4	8.0
Over 12 months (not including 12 months)	12.5	9.1	41.2	40.6	25.0	30.0
Never	0	0	11.8	21.9	34.4	20.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>11.0</b>	<b>17.0</b>	<b>32.0</b>	<b>32.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Notes:  $\chi^2 = 42.3$ ,  $P$ -value= 0.003

**Table 4: The link between attending performances of traditional Chinese music culture and being exposed to it in everyday life**

Watch performances about traditional Chinese music culture?	Own Learning		
	No (%)	Yes (%)	Total (%)
Once a month	6.9	35.7	15.0
Once every 3 months	8.3	14.3	10.0
Once every 6 months	18.1	14.3	17.0
Once every 12 months	8.3	7.1	8.0
Over 12 months (not including 12 months)	37.5	10.7	30.0
Never	20.8	17.9	20.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>72.0</b>	<b>28.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Notes:  $\chi^2 = 17.0$ ,  $P$ -value = 0.005

interest of the post-90s themselves would be more effective than other methods.

### ***To what extent do the post-90s think there are obstacles to engaging with traditional Chinese music culture***

In exploring whether there are barriers between the post-90s and traditional Chinese music culture, the

information collected from the questionnaire can be analyzed in terms of the reasons for the cultural imbalance, the reasons for ending learning of traditional music culture, the tuition fee issue, and the reasons for the perceived barriers [Table 5].

In exploring the reasons for the imbalance in Chinese traditional music culture and what barriers exist in

**Table 5: The link between the barriers in exposure to traditional Chinese music culture and “Western instruments are more advanced”**

Do you think there are any barriers in accessing traditional Chinese music culture?	What do you think are the causes for traditional Chinese music cultural imbalance (Western instruments are more advanced)?			
	Not participate (%)	No (%)	Yes (%)	Total (%)
There are significant barriers	12.2	5.9	37.5	11.0
Possible barriers	14.6	31.4	37.5	25.0
Neutral	24.4	27.5	12.5	25.0
May not have barriers	31.7	13.7	12.5	21.0
No barriers	17.1	21.6	0	18.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>41.0</b>	<b>51.0</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Notes:  $\chi^2 = 15.7$ ,  $P$ -value = 0.047

accessing it, it was found that only Western instruments are more advanced and related to barriers to accessing Chinese traditional music. In this situation, the independent variable is “Western instruments are more advanced,” and the dependent variable is “Do you think there are any barriers to accessing traditional Chinese music culture?” Using the chi-square test (cross-tabulation), we can find that “Western instruments are more advanced” has a significant effect on the results of “Do you think there are any barriers in accessing traditional Chinese music culture?” It showed significance at the 0.05 level ( $\chi^2 = 15.713$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). The difference in percentages shows that the rate of “Yes” to “There are significant barriers” is 37.50%, which is significantly higher than the average of 11.00%. So those who believe that ‘Western instruments are more advanced’ are also more likely to think that there are significant barriers to their exposure to traditional Chinese music and culture. The other options are not statistically significant with the question “Do you think there are any barriers to accessing traditional Chinese music culture?” and it can be guessed that the other options do not show significance with the question “Do you think there are any barriers in accessing traditional Chinese music culture?” [Table 6]

In the analysis of the research question of whether there are barriers to accessing traditional Chinese music culture and stopping the study of Chinese traditional music culture, “Why did you stop learning?” was used as the independent variable, and “Do you think there are any barriers to accessing traditional Chinese music culture?” as the dependent variable. Each of the options in “Why did you stop studying?” was compared to the dependent variable. We can see from this that “Family finances are not sufficient to continue to support” is an essential question for “Do you think there are any barriers in accessing traditional Chinese music culture?” It was significant at the 0.05 level ( $\chi^2 = 10.897$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). It can be speculated that “family financial support is not enough” was the main reason why many

participants stopped learning Chinese traditional music culture, while “reasons for further education” and “reasons for work” were not enough to constitute a significant influence. In the table, 30.77% of the “yes” respondents chose “There are significant barriers”, which is significantly higher than the ‘no’ respondents. This is significantly higher than the 9.09% who chose “no”. The percentage of “yes” choices for “Possible barriers” is 46.15%, significantly higher than the percentage of “no” choices at 20.45%. In short, participants who felt that their families were not financially able to continue to support the study of traditional Chinese music and culture also felt that there were significant barriers to accessing traditional Chinese music and culture. “The proportion of participants who chose “no barriers” was 27.27%, which was significantly higher than the proportion who chose “yes”, which was 0.00%. It can be inferred that the participants believe that the reason for their exposure to Chinese traditional music and culture is economic issues [Table 7].

Using the chi-square test (cross-tabulation), the above table shows that responses to the question “Has the high cost of tuition been a major factor in influencing you to study traditional Chinese music culture?” were significant at the 0.01 level for “Do you think there are any barriers in accessing traditional Chinese music culture?” ( $\chi^2 63.385$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ). “Has the high cost of tuition been a major factor in influencing you to study traditional Chinese music culture?” was the independent variable, and “Do you think there are any barriers to accessing traditional Chinese music culture?” was taken as the dependent variable. The difference in percentages shows that the percentage of “Very influential” and those who chose “There are significant barriers” is 41.18%, significantly higher than the average of 11.00%. When the post-90s participants believe that the high tuition fees significantly impact their exposure to Chinese traditional music culture, there are significant barriers inhibiting their direct contact with Chinese traditional music culture. The percentage of participants

**Table 6: The link between the barriers in exposure to traditional Chinese music culture and “Family finances are not sufficient to continue to support”**

Do you think there are any barriers in accessing traditional Chinese music culture?	Why did you stop studying (Family finances are not sufficient to continue to support)?		
	No (%)	Yes (%)	Total (%)
There are significant barriers	9.1	30.8	14.0
Possible barriers	20.5	46.2	26.3
Neutral	18.2	15.4	17.5
May not have barriers	25.0	7.7	21.1
No barriers	27.3	0	21.1
Total	44.0	13.0	57.0

Notes:  $\chi^2 = 10.9$ ,  $P$ -value= 0.028

**Table 7: Association between the barriers in exposure to traditional Chinese music culture and “the high cost of tuition”**

Do you think there are any barriers in accessing traditional Chinese music culture?	Has the high cost of tuition been a major factor in influencing you to study traditional Chinese music culture?					
	Very influential (%)	Comparative impact (%)	Neutral (%)	Comparison does not affect (%)	Does not affect (%)	Total (%)
There are significant barriers	41.2	11.5	0	7.1	0	11.0
Possible barriers	29.4	42.3	14.8	28.6	6.3	25.0
Neutral	11.8	34.6	44.4	7.1	6.3	25.0
May not have barriers	0	7.7	29.6	42.9	31.3	21.0
No barriers	17.7	3.9	11.1	14.3	56.3	18.0
Total	17.0	26.0	27.0	14.0	16.0	100.0

Notes:  $\chi^2 = 63.4$ ,  $P$ -value = 0.001

who chose “No barriers” for “Does not affect” was 56.25%, and significantly higher than the average of 18.00%. This indicates that when post-90s participants believe tuition costs do not impact their learning of traditional Chinese music culture, they are much less likely to perceive any barriers in accessing it.

This study employed descriptive statistical analysis methods to identify overall patterns in participants’ responses across multiple dimensions. As illustrated in Table 8, which presents the distribution of perceived barriers to engaging with traditional Chinese music culture, “Too little promotion of traditional Chinese music culture” (Option A) emerged as the most frequently cited factor, with 50% of respondents identifying it as the primary obstacle. It also had the lowest mean rank of 2.20, indicating it was perceived as the most important issue. This result suggests that a significant proportion of post-90s participants perceive current efforts to promote and disseminate traditional music as inadequate, thereby limiting their access to and awareness of this cultural form.

Following this, “Loss of interest among young people” (Option B) was reported by 41% of participants and had a mean rank of 2.56, indicating a noticeable decline in

enthusiasm for traditional music among certain segments of the post-90s demographic. The third most frequently selected item was “The insertion of Western musical culture” (Option C), with a support rate of 32% and a mean rank of 3.12, reflecting concerns that globalized Western influences have, to some extent, displaced or diluted local cultural expressions. In addition, “Modern music culture is growing in popularity” (Option D, selected by 31%) had a mean rank of 4.21, and “Lack of national cultural awareness” (Option E, selected by 36%) had a mean rank of 4.89—both viewed as notable but less dominant contributing factors.

It is worth noting that “Out of date” (Option F), while ranking sixth with a mean of 5.57, had a relatively high selection rate of 41%, suggesting that many participants associate traditional Chinese music with being outdated or disconnected from contemporary cultural aesthetics. Finally, “No complete teaching” (Option G) was selected by 40% of participants and had a mean rank of 5.40, highlighting concerns that the lack of a comprehensive and systematic educational framework hinders the effective transmission and appreciation of traditional music.

This indicates that some post-90s participants perceive a



**Table 8: An analysis of the reasons for the barriers in accessing traditional Chinese music culture**

Option	Rank1 (%)	Rank 2 (%)	Rank 3 (%)	Rank 4 (%)	Rank 5 (%)	Rank 6 (%)	Rank 7 (%)	Mean Rank
A	50	23	15	6	3	1	3	2.20
B	18	41	20	9	5	2	5	2.56
C	11	14	32	17	9	8	9	3.12
D	12	8	15	31	15	8	11	4.21
E	3	8	9	13	36	15	16	4.89
F	4	5	7	11	15	41	16	5.57
G	2	1	2	13	17	25	40	5.40

Option A: Too little promotion of traditional Chinese music culture; Option B: Loss of interest among young people; Option C: The insertion of Western musical culture; Option D: Modern music culture is growing in popularity; Option E: Lack of national cultural awareness; Option F: Out of date; Option G: No complete teaching.

significant generational gap between themselves and traditional music culture, viewing it as lacking vitality and systematic educational support in contemporary society. However, from a cultural development perspective, traditional music is not necessarily destined to be phased out. If innovation and integration continue—particularly in dissemination methods, educational systems, and value reinterpretation—Chinese traditional music culture has the capacity to “keep pace with the times” and holds significant potential to revitalize its appeal in the context of the new era.

DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings presented above in the context of the literature review. The focus of this study is the engagement of young Chinese people born between 1990 and 2000 with traditional Chinese music culture. The discussion is organized into three parts: (1) how to increase the post-90s’ engagement with traditional Chinese music culture; (2) how to alleviate the barriers encountered by the post-90s; and (3) how to promote a better integration between the post-90s and traditional Chinese music culture in an era of diversity.

**How to increase the post-90s’ participation in traditional Chinese music culture**

The attitude and influence of the post-90s generation on traditional culture are crucial. Pu’s (2014) questionnaire survey of 23,709 post-90s individuals showed that only 42% had read the *Four Great Books*, suggesting a weak understanding of traditional culture. This aligns with this study’s finding that 43% of participants had not studied traditional Chinese music culture, and 29% had never learned it in school. Even when cultural content is included in curricula, schools often struggle to establish a comprehensive system due to the complexity of traditional culture.

Despite this, 62% of participants rated traditional

Chinese music and culture as “very valuable,” indicating recognition but limited understanding—often confined to surface-level exposure. This supports Zhang’s (2013) view that the post-90s neither reject tradition nor modernity but hope that tradition can be modernized.

Parents play a vital role. Participants whose parents frequently discussed traditional music with them demonstrated greater cultural engagement. Kang (2014) found that parenting styles influence children’s interests, while Shi (2016) emphasized the importance of familial inheritance in traditional music. Even without formal succession, parental influence still fosters cultural awareness.

Media also enhances accessibility. A total of 81% of participants found traditional culture more accessible through television, and 76% through social media. Carey (1989) suggests that media communication helps maintain cultural identity by shaping shared values. Therefore, traditional Chinese music culture can gain broader recognition through strategic media dissemination, particularly when integrated with modern technology.

**How to address or mitigate the barriers encountered by the post-90s**

A major barrier is high tuition. Tian (2015) highlighted that many institutions offering instruction in traditional instruments like the guzheng charge high fees. These costs—along with additional expenses for costumes and accessories—make learning traditional music inaccessible for working-class families. Qu (2015) notes that Peking opera costumes require skilled craftsmanship and costly materials, making them unaffordable for many and discouraging participation in learning.

Another barrier is cultural imbalance. Many participants believe that “Western instruments are more advanced.” The novelty and wide sound range of Western

instruments historically attracted attention (Xiao, 2010), leading young people to perceive Western culture as superior. Su (2013) argues that the post-90s generation, influenced by societal changes and Western ideas, often regard Western music as more modern, thereby reducing their engagement with traditional culture.

The top three barriers identified were: insufficient publicity, a loss of youth interest, and the dominance of Western music. Zheng (2019) emphasizes that intense market competition and the younger generation's preference for trendy culture hinder the promotion of traditional music. Similarly, An (2016) found that media saturation draws the post-90s generation away from tradition. Other obstacles included a lack of structured teaching and the perception that traditional culture is outdated. These findings align with Zheng's (2019) classification of threats to traditional music culture.

### ***How to make the post-90s and traditional Chinese music culture better in an era of diversity***

The era of diversity brings both opportunities and challenges. This study found that the most significant factor in increasing post-90s engagement is their intrinsic motivation to learn. Li and Zhang (2021) emphasize the importance of creating a cultural atmosphere that enables the post-90s generation to experience the value of traditional music first-hand. Stimulating interest and supporting autonomous learning can help bridge existing gaps in cultural engagement.

Innovation is also essential. Traditional Chinese music culture should not only preserve its essence but also explore new modes of dissemination. Regional cultural characteristics can help attract interest and foster emotional resonance with various musical forms (Li & Zhang, 2021).

Although the influence of schools appeared statistically insignificant in this study, educational institutions still serve as vital platforms. Luo (2015) argues that improving the traditional music education system helps learners progress from perceptual to rational understanding. Sheng (2022) points out that modernization often leads to the neglect of ethnic traditions, but higher education can integrate traditional and modern music. Yin and Li (2021) highlight the shift from mutual rejection to mutual enrichment between traditional and Western music.

Zhu (2021) contends that traditional music education can foster youth interest and promote cultural popularity. Zheng (2020) supports the integration of traditional and modern elements in teaching, encouraging educators to value both. This fusion can

diversify cultural choices and broaden musical development.

Finally, this study acknowledges several limitations. It lacked in-depth interaction due to the use of questionnaires and involved a relatively small sample size. Future research should include more comprehensive questions, in-depth interviews, and larger samples to explore additional influencing factors such as upbringing and learning environments.

## **CONCLUSION**

### ***Summary of key findings***

This study explores the engagement of Chinese youth born between 1990 and 2000 with traditional Chinese music culture. The findings indicate that the duration of learning traditional Chinese music culture is positively correlated with the frequency of attending related performances. While formal education in schools had no significant impact on engagement, discussions with parents were found to significantly increase participation. Those exposed to traditional music during their education tend to maintain a stronger interest and attend performances more frequently.

The study also revealed that perceived cultural imbalance—particularly the belief that Western instruments are more advanced—acts as a major barrier. Additionally, high tuition fees were identified as a significant factor preventing the post-90s from continuing their studies. Many families were unable to afford expenses such as lessons and required performance materials, limiting access to traditional music education.

The three most frequently cited barriers to engagement were insufficient promotion, declining interest among youth, and the growing influence of Western music culture. These findings reflect broader cultural and economic trends that affect the survival and dissemination of traditional Chinese music.

### ***Limitations***

This study is limited by its sample size and the use of a questionnaire. Due to time constraints, the participant pool could not be fully diversified in terms of gender or specific birth years. Many respondents selected “other” without providing clarification, which limited the potential for deeper analysis. The survey's fixed-response format also restricted the collection of nuanced insights, thereby reducing the depth of understanding of participants' perspectives.

### ***Further research***

Future studies should broaden the participant pool and

include individuals from diverse backgrounds, regions, and education levels to enhance the reliability of results. Open-ended questions or interviews are recommended to supplement questionnaires and reveal deeper perspectives, particularly regarding “other” responses. Incorporating more flexible response formats will better capture the complexities of post-90s engagement with traditional Chinese music culture.

## DECLARATIONS

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### Author contributions

Gao M: Conceptualization, Writing—Original draft preparation, Writing—Reviewing and Editing. MingGao: Conceptualization, Supervision. Liddle A, Lopes AD: Supervision, Project administration. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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Not applicable.

### Informed consent

This study has been approved by the University of York Ethics Committee. Informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to their participation in the study.

### Conflict of interest

The authors declare no competing interest.

### Use of large language models, AI and machine learning tools

None declared.

### Data availability statement

Not applicable.

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