

## DOCTORAL THESIS

### Parental cultural capital and support for students' participation in music activities: a comparative study of Beijing and Hong Kong

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## Abstract

This study examines and compares students' perceptions of parental influence (i.e., cultural capital and support) on students' participation in music listening and instrumental learning, focusing on Beijing and Hong Kong. These two cosmopolitan cities have economies that rank them among the most developed cities in China, and share some similarities in their historical, cultural, and sociological backgrounds. Framed by Pierre Bourdieu's "cultural capital" (1973, 1986) model, this study investigates how parental cultural capital (particularly education and instrumental learning background) and support affect students' participation in music listening and instrumental learning, per students' perceptions. Bourdieu (1986) defined cultural capital as familiarity with the dominant and high-brow culture in a society, which serves as a social marker to distinguish middle-class individuals from lower-class individuals. Students' disposition towards music and participation in music activities, often regarded as social markers, are closely associated with their parents' cultural background. In this study, two secondary school students' common daily-life music activities, music listening, and instrumental learning were studied, and two main research questions explored regarding the similarities and differences between Beijing and Hong Kong:

- 1) How do students perceive the degree and importance of parental influence, in terms of cultural capital and parental support, on their music listening and instrumental learning?
- 2) To what extent does students' perceived parental cultural capital affect support for students' music listening and students' instrumental learning?

A mixed-method sequential research study, consisting of two distinct phases – quantitative and qualitative – collected data from junior secondary school students in grades seven to nine in eight secondary schools in Beijing and nine in Hong Kong. Survey questionnaires and individual interviews were conducted from mid-June to September 2015, and from April to May 2016, respectively. Completed questionnaires (n=3,288 – 1,674 from Beijing and 1,614 from Hong Kong) complemented by interviews involving 56 respondents (28 students from each region), provided nuanced insights on the interplay between parental cultural capital and parental support, and on how parental support influenced students' participation in music activities.

This study found students in both Beijing and Hong Kong perceived their parents to be generally more supportive of their at-home music activities, and that parental support, both physical and personal, enhanced their motivation to participate in music activities. The perceived degree and perceived importance of parental support for student's music activities were positively associated. Moreover, the study also found that while parental cultural capital may not predict students' musical listening preferences, it may inform the frequency and types of parental support offered, which mediates the intergenerational transmission of musical preferences. This study found Beijing and Hong Kong parents generally exerted similar parental influences on students' music activities; however, Beijing students generally perceived their parents to offer greater physical and mental support than did their Hong Kong peers, and to have greater influence over their music listening.

This study also found differences between the types of support Beijing and Hong Kong parents offered for students' instrumental learning.

Secondly, the study shows parental cultural capital predicts the level and types of parental support offered for students' music activities, in both Beijing and Hong Kong. Parents with greater cultural capital may be more capable of providing more musical support and a musical home environment for students' music listening and instrumental learning, which may help cultivate students' cultural capital, particularly in terms of their musical development and enrolment into instrumental class.

This study argues and further complements Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1973, 1986), which holds the intergenerational transmission of musical disposition, namely musical listening preference and musical knowledge, is facilitated by parental support and mediated by the home music environment, both of which are governed by parental cultural capital. This study implies the intergenerational transmission of cultural capital may not be a direct process, and parental support is necessary to impart parental cultural capital into students' cultural capital. This study further supplements Bourdieu's theory that parental support for their children's music activities reproduces parents' cultural capital as students', in the Chinese context. It found that parental cultural capital informed the types and extent of parental support for students' music activities, which may, in turn, have enhanced students' motivation for participating in music activities. This study argues that the mechanisms for intergenerational transmission of musical dispositions – i.e., musical preferences and musical knowledge – were facilitated by parental support and mediated within a musical home environment, both of which were governed by parental cultural capital. The study suggests a close collaboration among parents, school educators (including school music teachers), and instrumental instructors would best facilitate students' music learning, by providing a more comprehensive and immersive music education to students in their daily life.

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