



The United States And China

Management Differences In The Private Teaching Studio

By Anthony Olson And Terry Coalter

Anthony Olson is associate professor of music at Northwest Missouri State University, Maryville, Missouri. He has written articles on a wide range of topics and presented recitals and lectures/recitals throughout the United States, China and Europe.



Terry Coalter is associate professor of business management at Northwest Missouri State University, Maryville, Missouri. He is an award-winning instructor who authors articles on a variety of business and ethics topics.



Dedicated to the training of the next generation of musicians, private instructors sometimes become so deeply involved in the pedagogy of teaching they do not fully consider the administrative side of the profession, but as entrepreneurs, our businesses live or die on our ingenuity and professional skills—musical, pedagogical and business skills. Even further from our minds are thoughts of how private teachers in other countries operate their studios. As a result, few studies have been conducted comparing business practices of music teachers in the United States to those in other countries. Information regarding the business practices of private, pre-college music teaching is extremely limited. To fill that void, we teamed up to start exploring this topic by conducting an international, cross-cultural, cross-disciplinary study that explores the economic

The United States And China

survival of individuals who are providing a purely discretionary service under very different circumstances: private music studio instructors in the United States and China. The United States and China are the two most diverse political and economic superpower systems in the world. As a result of these differences, one would expect the business practices of pre-college music teachers in these two countries to be very diverse as well. But surprisingly, we found this not to be the case.

Data for the study were collected using a combination of telephone interviews and online surveys. Personal interviews were conducted in Chinese with private music teachers living and working in various parts of China, and an online survey was administered to private instructors in the United States. The U.S. survey generated 124 completed entries and the China sample was limited to 10 participants due to the cost, complexities and intensive data collection process necessary to obtain the responses.

The collection of data for the Chinese portion of the study proved the most daunting of the tasks we had to complete—thus the limited number of participants in our study. The complications of conducting the survey in China were due largely to cultural differences. As the Chinese culture requires an appropriate relationship before undertaking business-related activities, we decided to conduct telephone interviews with Chinese subjects in their native language rather than attempt an online survey. It was a personal relationship with a Chinese national that provided our entry into the Chinese culture. We were very fortunate the relationship was with a musician who had the professional contacts we needed. But each step of the way was time consuming. Just the translation of the survey instrument itself took a significant amount of time. Sometimes just finding the right Chinese word was problematic, and we went through several iterations before the translators were comfortable with the Chinese version. Cultivating contacts in China also demanded a significant amount of time investment: it usually took several calls just to get a person on the phone and at least two conversations before the idea of participating in a survey could be discussed with a potential participant. Only then could a survey be administered. Once that was successful, the completed survey had to be translated back into English and that translation reviewed. With time invested in finding the proper participant, initiating contact, building a rapport, conducting the survey and then translating the results, an average of six hours was consumed in the collection of each survey, severely limiting the amount of data we could collect.¹

In the end, our perseverance paid off. Data analysis revealed several interesting differences and even more interesting similarities regarding the way private teachers invest their time, as well as differences in the ways the two groups market and manage their businesses.

How Do We Spend Our Time?

As most private studio instructors are freelance musicians as well as educators, most do more than just teach in their private studios. Often, significant amounts of time are invested in performing, teaching outside the studio or even holding a job outside of music. Comparing the way teachers in China and the United States invest their time, we found significant differences.

The percentage of time that American and Chinese educators spent in the studio is very different. While private teachers in the United States dedicate about 71 percent of their working time to their studios, Chinese instructors spend an average of 54 percent of their working hours with their businesses and more than six times as much time as their American counterparts teaching in a school. American teachers are much more likely to work for some other musical organization, such as serving as a church musician.

The Typical Day			
USA	China		
70.9	53.5	%	All activities in/relating to the teaching studio
7.00	6.9	%	Performing
5.8	37.8	%	Teaching in a school (public or private)
11.3	0.9	%	Working as an organist, pianist or music director for another organization (e.g., a church, opera company, choral organization, etc.)
5.0	0.9	%	A job outside of music

These differences are directly related to cultural differences between the two countries, as well as some significant legal and political differences that exist. One question included in the study asked participants who work outside the studio why they did so, for extra income, or for more professional image. On a seven-point scale where 1 represented extra income and 7 represented professional image,



U.S. teachers scored about in the middle (3.3) leaning slightly toward interest in extra income. On the same scale, Chinese teachers were much more interested in professional image (5.3). In an attempt to understand this difference, we included follow-up questions to ascertain why participants felt the way they did, and found that overall, the Chinese participants were more interested in professional image partly because professional image held an economic advantage. One participant in the study said her position at a university allowed her to charge much more than her competitors. She spent only 20 percent of her time teaching in her private studio, but that relatively small portion of her time generated approximately 80 percent of her income. We should note that it is fairly common in China for public school teachers at various levels to benefit economically from teaching their students privately in addition to the work that goes on during normal school hours.²

Studio Time

Comparing the way U.S. and Chinese instructors spend their studio time, there are a few similarities. In both countries, teachers spend approximately the same amount of time teaching, conferring with parents and attracting new students. The big differences appear to be in the amount of time spent on administrative duties, managing other instructors, participation in professional organizations and possibly the amount of time practicing and learning music. The largest difference was time spent on the administration of the business: American instructors spend almost three times as much time on administrative duties (10 percent) than their Chinese counterparts (3.8 percent).

The Studio Time			
USA	China		
67.2	71.8	%	Teaching
3.6	4.8	%	Conferences with parents
2.5	2.8	%	Marketing/attracting new students
10.0	3.8	%	Administrative duties
9.8	12.0	%	Learning/practicing music
0.6	2.8	%	Managing other instructors
5.4	2.0	%	Duties for professional organizations (attending meetings/conferences/etc.)
1.0	0.0	%	Other

We believe this difference is more related to the differences in the business environment between the two countries than differences in culture or any other factor.

Although Chinese instructors have a limited number of licensing requirements, the nature of the Chinese government and the interaction of the Chinese government with small businesses, is entirely different. Under the communist system, small business ownership was outlawed in 1949 but never completely left China. From 1949 until the 1980s and 1990s, a few small business owners and entrepreneurs continued to exist within China but mostly as a part of a black market that benefited from the limited resources that existed under the communist system. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Chinese government began to relax the laws—or at least the enforcement of the laws.³ This allowed a few small businesses to exist and, in more recent times, thrive. Today, China is not a single market but a collection of multiple small markets with very few universal rules. Many of the rules that do exist are not widely enforced, whereas in the United States, a small operator with only a few students is sometimes required to get local and/or regional licenses, is required to keep records for state Department of Revenue and IRS purposes and may be required to maintain records for sales tax purposes or a variety of other reasons related to local, state and national laws and regulations. There is also evidence that individual transactions between instructors and students are less formalized in China than they are in some parts of the United States. Here, students may pay in advance or be billed for services that might require additional record keeping whereas such practices are less likely in China.

Participation in professional organizations appears to be another area that differentiates private music teachers in the United States from those in China. According to our results, U.S. music teachers spend approximately 5.4 percent of their time involved in professional organizations while Chinese music teachers spend 2 percent involved in that activity. These results appear to indicate that in the United States, private music teachers seem to have a much greater sense of community with their peers than that of Chinese music teachers. We believe this difference is primarily the result of significant differences in national culture between the two countries. Specifically, in this analysis we rely on the work of the Dutch sociologist Geert Hofstede, who spent much of his professional life describing cultural differences among the nations of the world. One of those differences he referred to as individualism versus collectivism. A person from an individualist culture values the self and interactions with close family members and close

“Today we live in a world where the world is our marketplace, but also our competitor.”

friends. When an individualist becomes a member of a group there tends not to be an expectation of a long group membership or a particularly intense group membership when compared to a collectivist culture.⁴ In a collectivist culture, people form strong groups early in life and are resistant to changing groups. The fact that the United States is one of the most individualist cultures in the world and China is one of the strongly collectivist cultures might be counterintuitive to the results of the study. If Americans are less likely to group and the Chinese are more likely to group, why did we find the Chinese music teachers spend significantly less of their time involved in professional organizations? We believe that a further understanding of distinctions between individualism and collectivism explains this difference. While it is true that collectivists form stronger group bonds, those groups tend to be formed early in life and are resistant to change. A professional organization is not a group one is likely to be a member of until later in life; therefore, members of a collectivist culture will be less likely to form additional groups as they age. We also believe there might be some political differences at work. The recent political history of China is one in which an individual was discouraged from forming associations outside his or her family that were not directly related to the needs of the nation, and groups of professionals could be viewed as a type of labor organization, an organizational type that was essentially prohibited in much of China's recent past. In an attempt to better understand this question, we learn that, in general, professions in China do not have professional organizations and find little need for pro-

fessional or social organizations. In a follow-up question, Chinese instructors were asked how membership in professional organizations helps their businesses. The answer was invariably “They are of no help at all.”

Satisfaction And Happiness

We asked participants to report how happy and satisfied they were in their business using a seven-point scale where 1 represented “very unsatisfied/unhappy” and 7 represented “very satisfied/happy” with some interesting results. While some people might consider the terms “satisfied” and “happy” to have essentially the same meaning, there is general agreement that the word “satisfied” usually relates to cognitions, thoughts and assessments of a situation, whereas the word “happy” relates to affect or feelings about something. When we say we are satisfied, it is usually an evaluation of the good and the bad in a situation, sometimes compared to other situations—it is a thought process. When asked about happiness, we do not really think about it, you just know you are or you are not—it is a feeling that may not be open to logical analysis.⁵

Overall, teachers in both countries were satisfied and happy with their businesses, but American educators scored higher on both counts. In the United States, satisfaction scored 5.9 versus 5.1 in China. American educators got much more joy from their studios: 6 compared to 4.8 for Chinese. In addition it should be noted that educators in the United States were happier than they were satisfied, while educators in China were more satisfied than they were happy.

Despite attempts to explain this difference, we are unable to find any indicators in our data set that helps us better understand this difference. It is possible that individuals in the United States are, as a group, happier and more satisfied than individuals in China, or it could have to do with the different opportunities that exist in the two countries. While we have no empirical evidence to support it, it is possible that American music teachers are happier and more satisfied simply because it is the field they chose from all the opportunities that existed while Chinese teachers, although still happy and satisfied in general, have fewer opportunities. Another possibility is that Chinese individuals are less likely to express happiness and satisfaction as a matter of cultural training, life experiences and personal attitude.

The Marketplace

The greatest similarities between American and Chinese teaching studios were found in the area of marketing. Most



respondents had tried a variety of marketing and advertising activities. For this area of the study, we asked what marketing activities teachers used and which were most successful. In every marketing and advertising venue we asked about except one, the responses were essentially the same for the U.S. sample and the Chinese sample. The primary method of obtaining new clients in both cultures is actively related to word-of-mouth advertising. Both groups also reported approximately the same utilization of classified advertisement, posting flyers in a public place, and mailing or hand delivering flyers. The only significant difference found was the use of networking, and the difference found in that category was so great (54 percent for the United States and 0 percent for China) that we are concerned the difference might be a translation issue or a misunderstanding of the term rather than an actual difference between the two samples. On the other hand, the absence of the utilization of networking might be the result of different cultural and political influences and the lack of individual's reliance on professional organizations in the Chinese sample.

We also found that Chinese studio owners pay much more attention to what their competitors are doing. In the study, we asked "How much attention do you pay to your fellow private teachers? Rank on a scale of 1 (none at all) to 7 (all of the time)." The average response from American teachers was 2.9 compared to 5.5 for Chinese teachers. We believe this response continues to highlight the cultural differences between the two countries. In addition to the other dimensions already noted, Hofstede identified other dimensions that may be able to explain the differences reported. One of the dimensions Hofstede reported was related to Chinese culture. It was originally referred to as "Confucian Dynamism" although the name currently in common usage is Long Term Orientation (LTO). This may be the cultural dimension that explains why American executives who have been caught in a compromising position call their attorneys while Chinese executives under the same circumstances might choose suicide. Long Term Orientation includes things like the importance of persistence and perseverance, a sense of shame, believing in the long term (tradition) and the unimportance of the person. China scores very high on this dimension while it is the lowest dimension score for the United States.⁶ This cultural dimension might explain why a Chinese teacher would keep track of competitors—not only for strategic marketing purposes, but to constantly compare one's own actions with the actions of others to assure one's actions are appropriate and not violating the social norm.

Expectations And Perceptions

The most interesting similarities and differences we found in our study were aspects of private teaching completely unrelated to business operations. These differences were in the area of student expectations, motivation, preparation and talent.

When we asked about student motivation on a scale of 1 (very unmotivated) to 7 (very motivated), the perception of students' motivations were essentially identical, with both groups scoring student motivation 4.8. Perceptions regarding talent, using the same seven-point scale, were also identical at 4.6. While perceptions regarding motivation and talent were identical, we found the results of the next question fascinating. Participants were asked how much they believed their students practiced each day. Teachers in the United States estimated student practice at an average of 25.6 minutes per day compared to 43.1 minutes for students in China. Chinese students practice about 65 percent more than American students.

Quality of instruction is another area where there are differences between the United States in China. It appears high-quality instruction is more important to the Chinese people. When we used a seven-point scale to ask what mattered more to parents and students (price (1) or the quality of training (7)), we found that U.S. teachers believed quality was slightly more important than price (4.6), but Chinese teachers believe that quality was significantly more important than price (5.8). While our study did not uncover why this difference exists, we have several theories. First, Chinese students are, in many ways, encompassed within a more competitive environment than American students, including the strong and ever-present competition to get into a top university after high school. For some Chinese parents, music training might be another piece of the puzzle that allows their son or daughter acceptance into an ivy-league school. Second, we found Chinese students are involved in many fewer extracurricular activities. In the United States, it appears music is one of many activities that involve students, and many parents use music as just one more thing to provide a "rounded" education. Chinese students are more likely to spend a significantly greater portion of their time involved in purely academic study and are less likely to take part in a wide array of extracurricular activities. It only stands to reason that individuals involved in fewer activities are likely to be more concerned about the quality of those particular activities than an individual involved in many extracurricular activities. We also heard the argument that music may simply not be as important to

American students—while we cannot find any empirical evidence to support this view, it is true, as we noted above, Chinese students are much more competitive than American students and, therefore, might be more focused on all of their studies, including music. Finally, this difference may merely be a difference in the perceptions of the teachers—U.S. instructors may believe their customers are more focused on money than they really are.

We expected many of these differences and believe they are a reflection of the different cultures regarding work ethic, expectations and motivation. These differences were examined closely in the recent documentary “Two Million Minutes: A Global Examination,” where the filmmakers compare the four years (approximately 2,000,000 minutes) students spend in high school by contrasting the habits and motivations of high school students in the United States, China and India.⁷ While a long discussion of the film is beyond the realm of this article, it highlighted the considerable disparity in how high school students in the United States spend their high school years compared to students in both India and China. While the high school years of the typical student in China is characterized by regimented and formalized educational and tutoring activities, U.S. students’ time was more characterized by diversion and fragmentation. Chinese students spend comparatively less time with friends and seem to participate in fewer extracurricular activities.

Closing Thoughts

As the world gets smaller, and we are all brought closer together by technology and advances in transportation, what people on the other side of the world do becomes more important to us. One hundred years ago it was uncommon for most people, the world over, to travel more than a few miles from home during their entire life. Today, however, it is common for a high school student to travel thousands of miles from home for a one-week visit, and to do it more than once. Fifty years ago most of the products we used and virtually all of the services we consumed were provided in this country. Today we live in an economic system where our customers no longer come from just down the street, and where our competitors are no longer local. Today we live in a world where the world is our marketplace, but also our competitor. Twenty-five years ago we expected most of our products to be manufactured overseas,

but those of us who provided services for a living felt like we were immune from international trade. Today, that no longer holds true. We live in the economic environment where services are now being outsourced to foreign countries. Today the citizens of India are answering our phones (in India) and doctors in Israel examine our x-rays.

While it is unlikely that private music teachers in the United States will compete on a broad global scale with private music teachers in China any time soon, it is important to note who they are, what they are doing and how they are doing it. In our study, the most fascinating result was how little difference there really is in the business operations of private music studios in the United States and private music studios in China. It is unlikely there are any two groups of people that are anymore different. They come from different economic backgrounds, different political systems, different worldviews, different cultures and different religions. But with all of these differences, in this one field, they are very much alike. ☺

Notes

1. Terry Coalter and Anthony Olson, “Research Challenges in the Age of Globalization: Conducting Cross-Disciplinary, Cross-Cultural Research Projects,” *2009 Proceedings of the Southwest Academy of Management* (Spring 2009): 165–75.

2. Mark Bary and Percy Kwok, “Demand for Private Supplementary Tutoring: Conceptual Considerations, and Socio-economic Patterns in Hong Kong,” *Economics of Education Review* 22/6 (Dec. 2003): 611–20.

3. Debbie Liao and Philip Sohmen, “The Development of Modern Entrepreneurship in China,” *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs* 1 (Spring 2001): 27–33.

4. For a more in-depth discussion individualism vs. collectivism and related cultural dimensions, see Geert Hofstede’s website <http://www.geert-hofstede.com/>.

5. For a discussion of the distinction between happiness and satisfaction and a discussion of some relevant assumptions, see Karen J. Crooker, “Happiness and Satisfaction: Measures of Affect and Cognition?” *Social Indicators Research* 44/2 (June 1998): 195–224.

6. See <http://www.geert-hofstede.com/>.

7. *Two Million Minutes: A Global Examination*. Directed by Chad Heeter, Broken Pencil Productions, 2008.