

Zhang Yifei's Notebooks: contributions to transnational music teaching

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is the presentation of reflections on the main issues that arose in the reorganization of the Second Cycle of Drama, Art and Music (University of Bologna), which is conducted by teachers of musicological and ethnomusicological disciplines together with students, in order to examine the need to employ different approaches to multidisciplinary teaching in graduate studies. Graduate studies have recorded a significant number of foreign students in recent years, mostly from the Far East, and especially from China, which represents a challenge for multidisciplinary teaching of musicology and ethnomusicology due to the differences between the language cultures. The authors recognize two levels of problems in the implementation of study programs and the organization of teaching: 1) the need to make a specific music lexicon suitable even for non-specialized students without lowering the level of didactic proposals for music curriculum students; 2) the strategy of relations with international students, mostly from the Far East, who generally possess excellent technical musical skills (resulting from the previous schooling at music academies or conservatories), who encounter several language problems, which are often related to the idea of studying and learning human

sciences in general (in the case of students of the Far Eastern origin, the culture of learning and the perception of the methodology of teaching humanities differs significantly from the European approach to the same issue). The paper is based on sociological and ethnographic research on foreign students' learning techniques and reflects on the analysis of collected notes of Chinese students as particular examples of the addressed problems in the perception and adoption of the musicological and ethnomusicological content taught in drama, art and music studies.

Keywords: music pedagogy, music teaching, sociology and ethnography.

Introduction

As a part of the reorganizational work concerning the second cycle degree in Music and Theatre Studies (University of Bologna), a group of teachers of musicological (i.e. Musical Dramaturgy, Philosophy and Aesthetics of Music, Musical Pedagogy) and ethnomusicological disciplines (i.e. Ethnomusicology, Organology) with the help of two teaching tutors have recently examined the need to undertake different approaches to multidisciplinary teaching involving the overall structure of a degree course that has registered a high number of foreign students in recent years, mostly from the Far East, and especially from China.

The enrolled students that hold a foreign bachelor's degree exceed 30%. Such a high percentage of foreign students raises specific issues and challenges, and at the same time it enriches our perspectives as teachers and scholars. We have activated a mentorship program specifically dedicated to foreign students, which has also proved to be extremely useful for directing the foreigners to Italian language courses, which facilitate the overcoming of language difficulties. But the didactic approach to foreign students sometimes reveals wider cultural issues that entail the need for different methodologies for the way of teaching, interpreting disciplines, and problematizing topics.

The second cycle interclass degree programme in Music and Theatre gives graduates a thorough knowledge of:

- the history of Western music and theatre, as arts and sciences, together with their techniques and the traditions of theory, philosophy and criticism,
- the connections between music and theatre, as well as their relation to the development of other arts and sciences;
- the music of oral tradition and theatrical cultures (in the field of theatre, there is a special focus on contemporary performing arts).

The programme's graduates are experts in various professions nowadays associated with musical and theatrical arts in terms of creativity, management, criticism and training, as well as preparing for a career in specialist research. With reference to the different levels of specialization achieved in the areas of music and theatre studies, the degree programme is divided into two distinct curricula: Music and Theatre.

Methods

Turning back to our issues in didactic approaches, we have reflected substantially on two types of problems, relating in particular to the musical disciplines.

(1) The first problem is a technical one. Since the students of the theatrical curriculum do not normally possess specific technical-musical knowledge, it is necessary to take into account the need to make a specific lexicon suitable even for non-specialized students, without lowering the level of our didactic proposals for students of the musical curriculum.

(2) Secondly, we have recorded an opposite problem for international students. The vast majority of these students from the Far East generally possesses excellent technical-musical skills (deriving them from their previous training in academies of music more or less equivalent to Italian conservatories), but they clearly exhibit language problems often related to the idea of studying and learning and of the human sciences in general, which is significantly different from ours as it is formed in a very distant cultural and academic tradition.

Looking at the unavoidable perspective of a reorganization of our second cycle degree, we have considered it appropriate to conduct a sociological and ethnographic survey on the learning techniques of international students, starting from the gathering and analysis of the Chinese students' notebooks. In this sense, Zhang Yifei's notebooks offer, in our opinion, a rich source for reflecting on a transcultural approach to the study of musical disciplines.

From the pedagogical perspective, the awareness and the analysis of the main learning styles undoubtedly constitute an important stock of knowledge for every teacher, together with the ability to reflect on the characteristics of the students and of the teaching methodologies. The latter need to take into account the different channels of learning or learning styles, which are usually divided into four categories (Evans, Cools, Charlesworth, 2010; Zhang and Sternberg, 2006; Cadamuro, 2004; Antonia, Carruba and Colombo, 2004; Keefe, 1979; Mariani, 1996):

1. *Visual verbal approach*: reading and writing are preferred and strategies are set out such as note-taking, writing a summary of what has been read, writing what is appropriate to remember, complementing graphs with written records.
2. *Visual nonverbal approach*: images, drawings, photographs, concept maps, visual learning, which is a kind of learning based on visual memory that resorts to the use of multimedia maps formed by keywords, images and graphs summarising study materials, and the use of different colours to highlight words or key concepts are preferred (see Novak, 2009, Novak and Gowin, 1984 for a definition of concept maps as a diagram that depicts relationships between concepts to organize and structure knowledge. A concept map usually represents ideas and information as boxes or circles connected with labelled arrows in a downward-branching hierarchical structure. The technique for visualizing these relationships among different concepts is called concept mapping. Concept maps have been used to define the ontology of computer systems, for example with the object-role modelling or Unified Modelling Language formalism).
3. *Auditory approach*: listening is preferred and it is enhanced by attending lectures and by participating in discussions and in working groups;
4. *Kinaesthetic approach*: practical and laboratorial activities are preferred (Shulman, 1987; Baldacci, 2004, Margiotta, 2013; Parola and Rosa, 2018).

The practice of taking notes, from which our reflection starts, belongs to the first and the second learning styles, since it sets out at least two different learning strategies: (1) to *understand* what has been heard or read; and (2) to *memorize* what has been heard or read. This permits the integration of new information contained in every kind of communication with the already acquired information, generating positive effects on learning. Therefore, note-taking is a strategy which enables wider and more integrated learning, and it is implemented in several phases: from listening to coding information and from activating cognitive processes such as paying attention and memorizing to writing the information acquired. Furthermore, taking notes is a functional kind of writing, since notes are usually the basis for the subsequent summarising step, and it is a quite complex operation which cannot be correctly performed without some essential prerequisites (Rossi, 2013; Peck and Hannafin, 1984).

Discussion

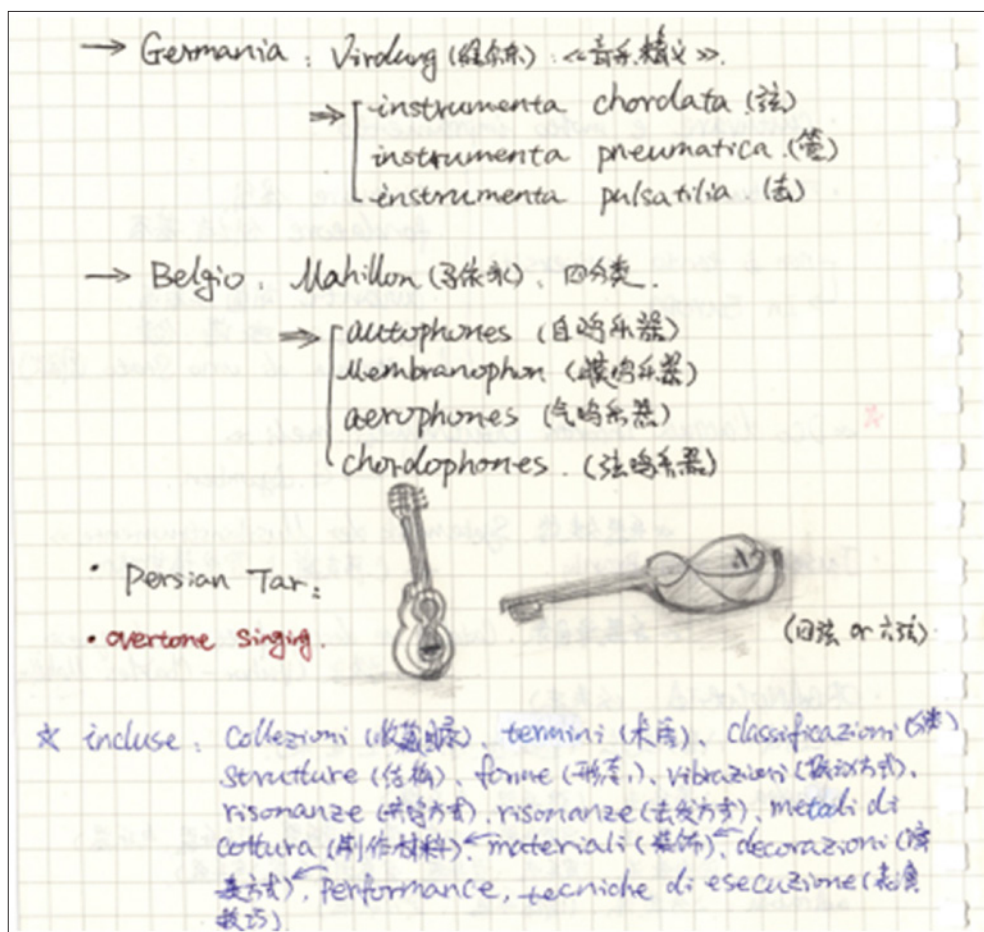
Starting from this short methodological premise, we believed it would be interesting to start a survey among the foreign students, who shared their notebooks with us, from which it is possible to extract useful information. The survey is still in progress, and our intention is to pursue it in the coming months. The notebook we here bring to your attention seemed particularly interesting to us, and to fully understand its structure we asked the student directly to explain the strategies she used to write down her notes. The result is an interview (conducted by Shan Du) which gives us some useful evidence. Among the various disciplines that occur in the notebook, we opted for “Organology”, especially because of the wealth of images used by the professor during the lessons, which represented the foundation for the iconographic apparatus in Zhang Yifei’s notes.

The first aspect inevitably concerns the language issues: “During the current year my language skills have improved, and now I’m able to understand lessons. The first class I took was “Ethnomusicology”, and at the first lecture I understood only three sentences: “Ciao” (hello), “Pausa” (break), “A domani” (see you tomorrow). In Italy professors use slides just a little, and for foreign students that have just arrived from abroad understanding is quite complicated.”¹

Then we turned our attention to the use of images and iconic language during the music lessons: “In “Organology” and “Music Palaeography” I understood the lessons because professors use images, that to me constitute the best way to memorize concepts. In this case I don’t need to prepare for the exams using Chinese, I’m able to give a speech in Italian. But usually during the exam I forget what I’ve prepared. I know what I want to say, but I’m not able to say it. I think that the main difficulty for foreign students like me is the oral communication: we can read, listen and write, but speaking... it’s too complicated.”

Again, focusing on the note-taking technique adopted by the student, we were able to perceive some particular attitudes concerning the use of different colours (Image 1), which is a sort of self-built visual code: “Notes in black represent the concepts I understood in its entirety. I use the pencil when I’m not sure that I correctly understood the concept explained by the teacher. Otherwise when the teacher pronounces a word that I don’t know, I write it down using the pencil, so that after the lecture I can check it up on the dictionary or try to understand it better playing back

¹ This and the following quotes are accurately conveyed as provided by the student in the qualitative research, i.e. while commenting on the entries in the notebooks analysed in this article.

Image 1¹

the lecture's recording. I use the marker to highlight important concepts. Notes in blue contain additional information that I've obtained by myself after the lessons."

"Italian grammar and word order are similar to the English ones. For example, in Italian you use the noun first and then the adjective, just like in English, but in Chinese it's the opposite. If I tried to take notes in Chinese during the lessons I wouldn't have been able to write down everything."

² This and the following images are the photographs taken of notebooks belonging to Zhang Yifei (Second Cycle Degree in Music and Theatre Studies, University of Bologna). We thank the student for making them available.

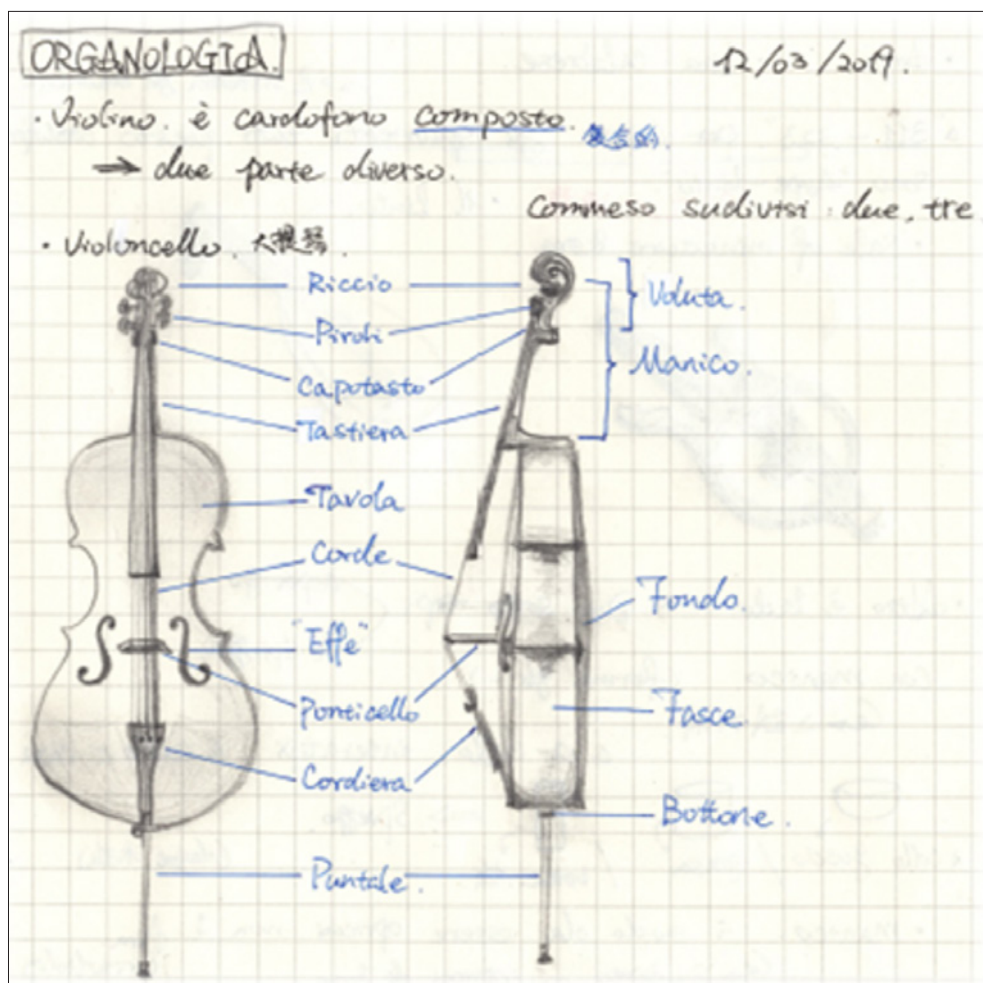
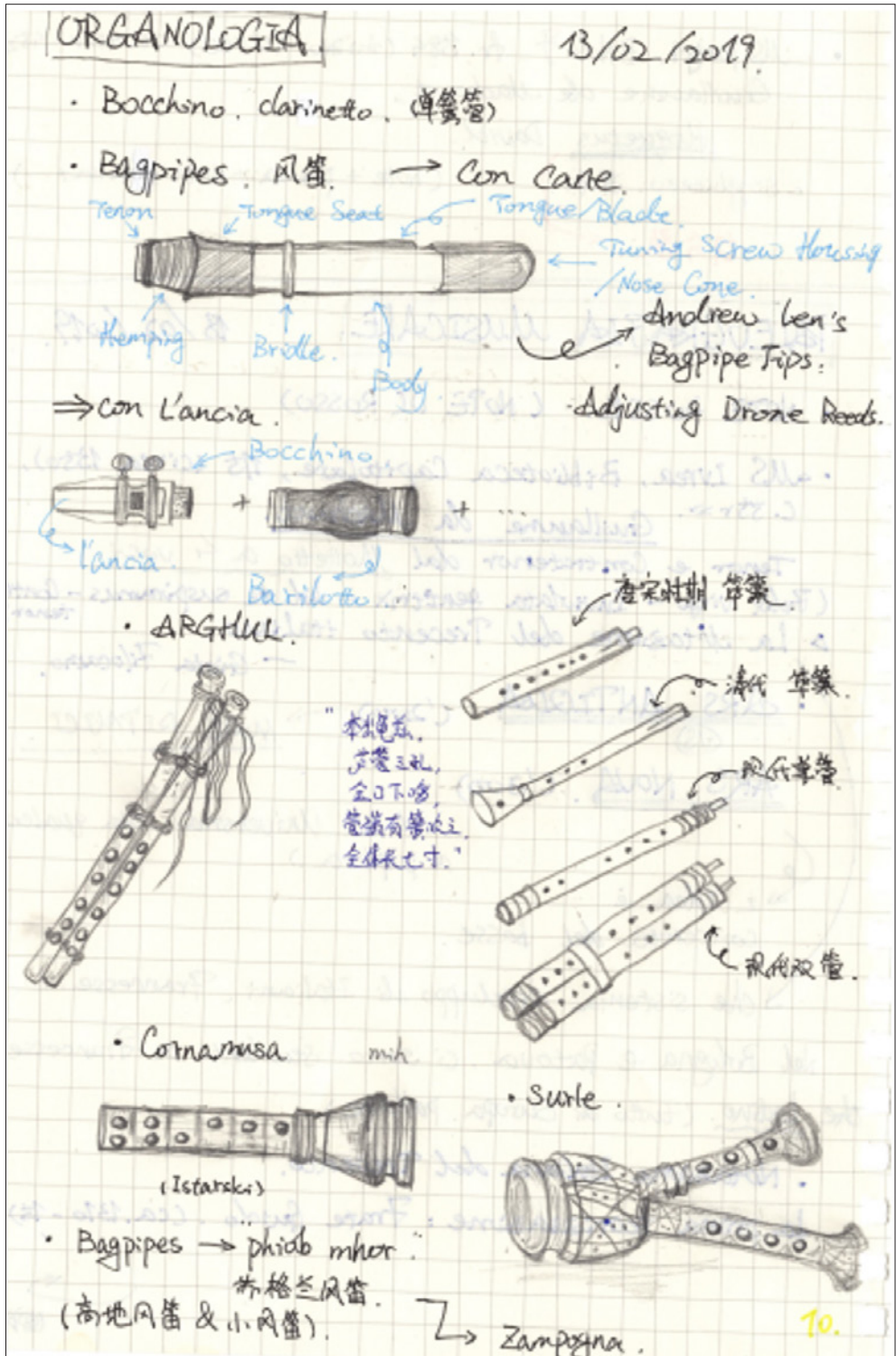


Image 2

There are differences between two distant language systems: “The classification of the musical instruments that the professor told us about is different from the one I knew, so I was curious to find out if there were other types of classification. After the lecture I made a little research on Internet and I wrote down some notes.”

“When the professor taught us about the representative instruments for every musical genre he used to talk about the instrument while showing its picture. Once he told us about an instrument which I didn’t know. It had an African name and I wasn’t able to write it down, so while the professor was continuing to explain, I drew a picture of it. After the lecture I was able to find the instrument’s name on Google through that picture, so I wrote it on the notebook. Little by little I found out that



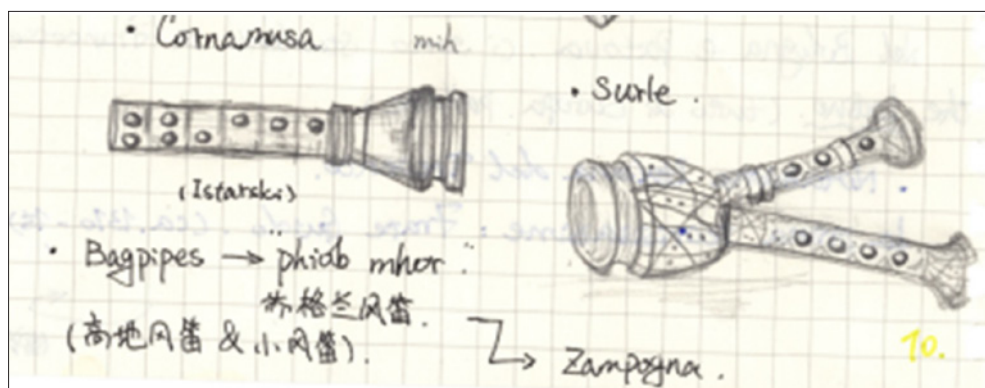


Image 4

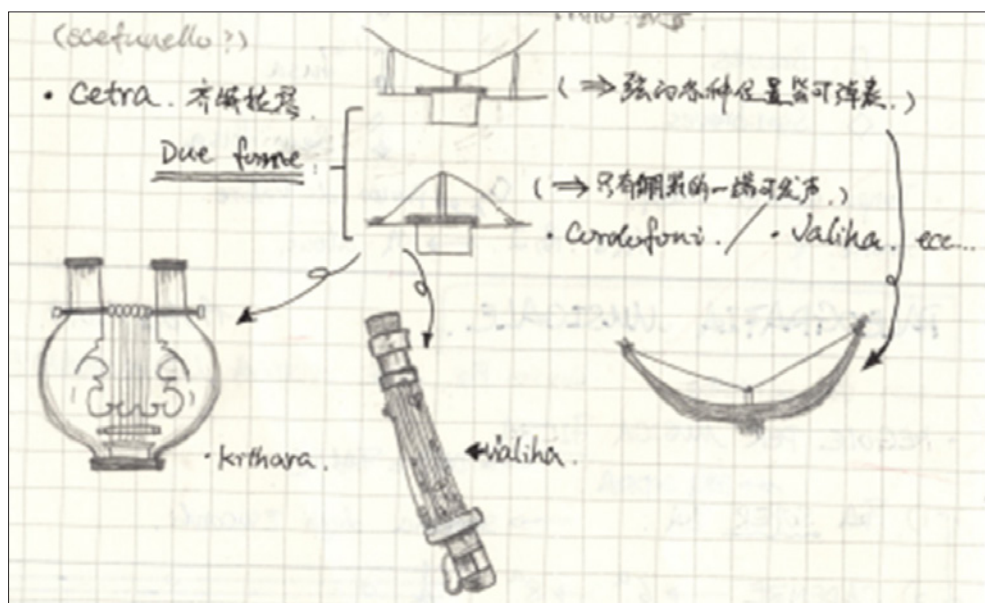
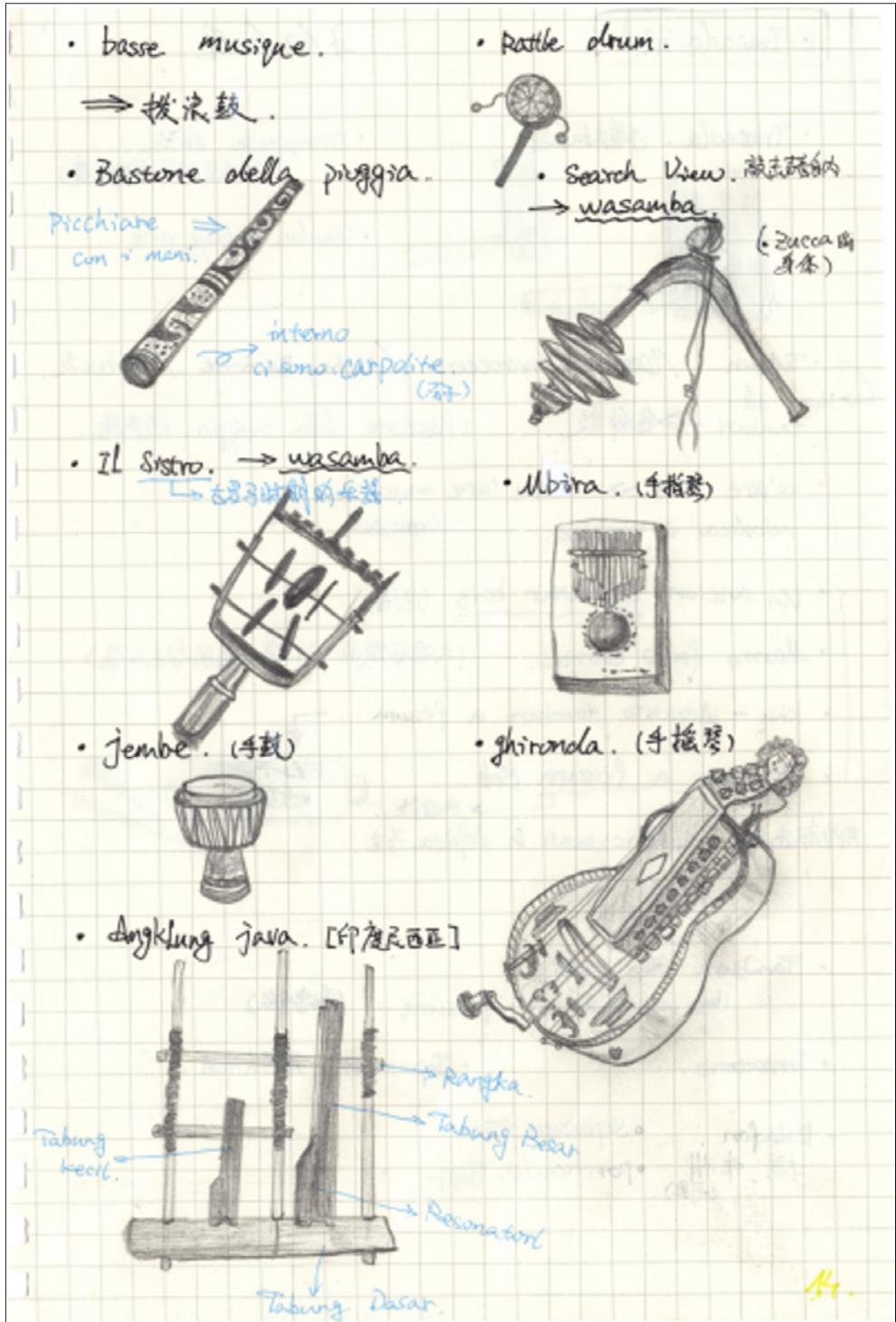


Image 6

drawing is very useful to study Organology, more useful than taking written notes.” (Images 2-7).

“Before the lecture in which the professor was going to speak about the bagpipes I searched for information on internet, so that I was able to understand almost everything: specific terms, related concepts etcetera. In this case I don’t need to translate the sentences in Chinese to understand. But if the professor talks about something that I do not know at all, for example an African drum, first I have to



ORGANOLOGIA. 11/02/2019.

- La tradizione pastorale in provincia di Messina: strumenti e repertorie. → 田园传统.
- ⇒ Zampogna. Composto solo una pista.
 - ↳ 随着时间的推移形状变得更小一些.
 - 12个孔. zampogna non esistono adesso.
- Respirare manuela.
 - 2 nota → note. 2个音高
 - 1 2 3 4 (通常会用 2 4)

可以拧下来. 1765 Piubasso. Melodia. 54321.

- ↳ Solo 2 canne sono strumento. di canto mentre le altre fanno da bordone (surrano una nota fissa).
- Nell'italia meridionale l'unita di misura utilizzata per indicare la larghezza della zampogna è il "palmo".

主 → 属 → 属 → 主 { 5 2 2 5 } { 6 3 3 5 } 12

Image 7

write down every word the professor says, then I translate everything in Chinese and I look for images, videos, recordings etcetera. This is the only way through which I can memorize the instruments. It all depends on my previous preparation.”

Conclusion

In conclusion, the visual aspect of a musicology lesson seems to be extremely important to help bridge the language barrier between Chinese and Italian. Foreign students (and Chinese in particular) tend to lose concentration if teachers speak at length in Italian, especially if the main points in the lessons are not visually supported. Moreover, it should be noted that oriental students tend to show an extraordinary visual memory, which, when accompanied by uncommon graphic representation skills, can lead to surprising and very stimulating results in terms of teaching as well, as it was the case with Zang Yifei's notebooks (for similar perspectives on the concept of visual memory see Tavassoli, 2002, and Zimmer and Fischer, 2020).

An articulated and detailed survey of the notebooks of the students of the Degree Course helps to stimulate new reflections and new intercultural teaching practices, taking into account the limits and advantages of translinguistic and transcultural communication. The report on this experience was intended to initiate a reflection on the opportunities to create learning paths for our Chinese students, which would be focused on the use of images, visual documents and drawings, and so they would also enhance a non-verbal visual approach.

The pedagogical-didactic approaches identified on the basis of our program, specifically dedicated to foreign students, have proved to be particularly effective and advantageous both concerning the concrete results and a broader and more general reflection on the use of visual and non-verbal aspects in musicological classes. The ability to reflect on the characteristics of the students and of the teaching methodologies involves taking into account the different channels of learning or learning styles usually recognized in specific studies (Cadamuro, 2004; Antonia, Carruba and Colombo, 2004). These seem to be an extremely important starting point for future reflecting on students' learning styles, which certainly deserves to be deepened especially for the development of a more effective and inclusive teaching methodology.

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Bilježnice Zhang Yifei: doprinosi transnacionalnom poučavanju glazbe

Sažetak

Cilj je ovoga rada prikazati refleksije na glavna pitanja koja su proizašla u okviru reorganizacije Drugog ciklusa studija drame, umjetnosti i glazbe (Sveučilište u Bologni), koju zajedno sa studenticama i studentima provode nastavnici muzikoloških i etnomuzikoloških disciplina, kako bi se ispitala potreba za poduzimanjem različitih pristupa multidisciplinarnoj nastavi koja se odvija na diplomskom studiju. Diplomski studij u posljednjih nekoliko godina bilježi značajan broj stranih studenata, uglavnom s Dalekog istoka, a posebno iz Kine, što zbog različitosti jezičnih kultura predstavlja izazove za multidisciplinarno organiziranu nastavu muzikološkog i etnomuzikološkog područja. Autori rada uočavaju dvije razine problema u provođenju studijskih programa i samoj organizaciji nastave: 1) potreba da se specifični glazbeni leksikon učini primjerenim čak i nespecijaliziranim studentima, bez snižavanja razine didaktičkih prijedloga za studente glazbenog kurikula; 2) strategija odnosa s međunarodnim studentima, većinom s Dalekog istoka, koji općenito posjeduju izvrsne tehničko-glazbene vještine (koje proizlaze iz prethodnog školovanja na glazbenim akademijama ili konzervatorijima), koji se susreću s nekoliko lingvističkih problema, često povezanih s idejom proučavanja i učenja humanističkih znanosti općenito (kultura učenja i percepcija metodologije poučavanja humanističkih znanosti kod studenata dalekoistočnog podrijetla značajno se razlikuje od europskog pristupa istoj problematici). Rad polazi od sociološkog i etnografskog istraživanja o tehnikama učenja stranih studenata te se reflektira na analizu prikupljenih bilješki kineskih studenata kao pojedinih primjera navedenih problema u percepciji i usvajanju muzikoloških i etnomuzikoloških sadržaja koji se poučavaju na studiju drame, umjetnosti i glazbe.

Ključne riječi: glazbena pedagogija, poučavanje glazbe, sociologija i etnografija.