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Article

The Role and Strategic Positioning of Music Education in Building National Cultural Soft Power

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Abstract: In the context of globalization, cultural soft power has become an important dimension of national influence, and cultural education increasingly contributes to cultural communication and identity formation. Music, as a widely accessible cultural form, plays a significant role in transmitting cultural values and shaping national cultural image. However, existing research on cultural soft power mainly focuses on cultural industries and cultural diplomacy, while the role of music education as a foundational mechanism in this process remains relatively underexplored. This study examines the role and strategic positioning of music education in the construction of national cultural soft power. The research adopts a qualitative approach combining theoretical analysis and comparative case studies. Based on the framework of cultural soft power, the study analyzes four key mechanisms through which music education contributes to cultural influence: cultural inheritance, cultural innovation, international communication, and national image shaping. Case studies of South Korea, Finland, and China are used to illustrate different institutional pathways linking music education and cultural development. The analysis shows that music education functions as a long-term mechanism for cultivating cultural talent, supporting cultural industries, and enhancing international cultural exchange. Countries with systematic music education systems demonstrate stronger cultural visibility and international cultural participation. These findings suggest that strengthening music education systems and integrating them with cultural strategies can contribute to the sustainable development of national cultural soft power.

Keywords: music education; cultural soft power; cultural communication; cultural identity; cultural strategy

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1. Introduction

In the context of globalization and increasing cultural interaction, cultural soft power has become an important dimension of national competitiveness. Cultural soft power refers to a country's ability to influence international audiences through cultural attraction, values, and ideas rather than economic or military means. Since the concept was introduced, scholars and policymakers have increasingly examined how culture and education contribute to global influence. Among cultural forms, music holds a distinctive position due to its universal language and emotional appeal. Music transcends linguistic and geographical barriers and plays a vital role in cultural communication and international exchange. Consequently, music education has become an important component in shaping and enhancing national cultural soft power.

Music education not only cultivates musical knowledge and artistic skills but also serves as a channel for transmitting cultural traditions and values [1]. Through systematic education, individuals develop an understanding of national musical heritage and cultural identity. In this sense, music education supports the preservation of traditional

culture while encouraging cultural innovation. Educational institutions such as schools, conservatories, and universities play a key role in nurturing musical talent that later participates in cultural creation, performance, and international exchange. As a result, music education forms an important foundation for the development of cultural influence.

In recent decades, many countries have recognized the strategic significance of music education in strengthening cultural soft power. Governments have incorporated arts education into national cultural and educational policies to cultivate creative talent and promote cultural diversity. Countries such as Finland and South Korea have developed comprehensive music education systems that emphasize artistic training while supporting cultural industries and international cultural promotion. These practices indicate that music education can contribute to the formation of cultural brands and enhance a country's global cultural visibility [1].

Despite growing recognition of its importance, research on the specific role of music education in constructing national cultural soft power remains limited. Most studies focus on cultural industries or cultural diplomacy, while the educational foundations supporting these processes receive less attention. Music education operates at the intersection of education, culture, and policy, making it an important yet underexplored area [2]. Understanding how music education supports cultural transmission, talent cultivation, and international communication can provide insight into the mechanisms through which cultural soft power develops.

This study therefore examines the role and strategic positioning of music education in the construction of national cultural soft power. Through theoretical analysis and international case studies, it explores how music education contributes to cultural inheritance, innovation, and global cultural influence. The study aims to clarify the strategic significance of music education in national cultural development and provide a theoretical reference for future cultural and educational policy [3].

2. Theoretical Foundations of Cultural Soft Power and Music Education

2.1. The Concept and Connotation of Cultural Soft Power

The concept of cultural soft power was first proposed in the late twentieth century [4]. Soft power refers to the ability of a country to influence others and achieve desired outcomes through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or payment. Cultural soft power is a core component of this concept because culture embodies a nation's values, traditions, and creative achievements. When a country's culture gains international recognition and admiration, it strengthens national influence and enhances its global image.

Cultural soft power generally consists of several elements, including cultural resources, cultural values, and the attractiveness of cultural products. Cultural resources refer to historical traditions, artistic achievements, and cultural heritage accumulated by a society. Cultural values represent the beliefs and ideas embedded in cultural expressions, while cultural products are the concrete manifestations of these values in forms such as literature, film, music, and art. Among these elements, cultural dissemination and public acceptance play a crucial role. Culture becomes a source of soft power only when it is effectively communicated and positively received by international audiences [5].

Education is an important channel for cultivating and transmitting cultural soft power. Through educational systems, nations can systematically introduce cultural heritage and artistic traditions to younger generations, ensuring the continuity of cultural identity. Education also shapes individuals' cultural awareness and aesthetic appreciation, influencing how culture is created, interpreted, and disseminated. Therefore, cultural soft power is generated not only through cultural industries and media but also through long-term educational processes that cultivate cultural competence and creativity [6].

2.2. Music as an Important Medium of Cultural Communication

Music is widely regarded as one of the most effective forms of cultural communication. Unlike many other art forms, music can transcend linguistic and cultural

barriers, allowing people from different backgrounds to experience emotional and aesthetic connections. Because of this characteristic, music often serves as a powerful medium for cultural exchange and international dialogue [7].

Throughout history, music has played an important role in shaping cultural identity and promoting cultural interaction. Traditional folk music reflects the customs, beliefs, and historical experiences of a nation, while contemporary music often integrates global influences and modern artistic expressions [2]. When music travels across borders through performances, recordings, or digital media, it carries elements of the culture from which it originates. As a result, music becomes an important cultural symbol contributing to the formation of a nation's international image.

In the modern era, the circulation of music has accelerated due to technological development and digital platforms. International music festivals, global music markets, and online streaming services have expanded the reach of musical works beyond national boundaries. These developments strengthen music's role as a cultural ambassador [8]. Through performances and creative works, nations can present their cultural uniqueness and artistic vitality to the world, thereby enhancing cultural attractiveness and soft power.

2.3. Music Education and the Construction of Cultural Identity

Music education plays a fundamental role in shaping cultural identity and cultural awareness. By introducing students to traditional music, national musical heritage, and diverse musical styles, music education helps individuals develop a deeper understanding of their cultural background. This process not only preserves cultural traditions but also fosters a sense of belonging and cultural pride [9].

Within educational institutions, music education provides systematic training in musical knowledge, performance skills, and aesthetic appreciation. More importantly, it allows students to engage with the cultural meanings embedded in musical works. For example, learning traditional instruments, folk songs, or classical compositions enables students to explore the historical and social contexts of their culture [7]. Through this process, cultural traditions are transmitted and revitalized across generations.

Music education also promotes intercultural understanding. Exposure to music from different cultures broadens students' perspectives and encourages cultural openness. This intercultural dimension is particularly important in a globalized world where cultural interaction is increasingly frequent [3]. By cultivating both cultural identity and cultural awareness, music education enables individuals to actively participate in cultural dialogue.

2.4. The Relationship between Music Education and National Cultural Strategy

In many countries, music education is closely linked to national cultural strategies. Governments often recognize that the development of cultural soft power requires long-term investment in education, talent cultivation, and cultural infrastructure. As a result, music education is frequently integrated into broader policies related to cultural development, creative industries, and international cultural exchange [10].

A well-developed music education system can support the growth of cultural industries by nurturing professional musicians, composers, educators, and cultural managers [11]. These individuals contribute to the production and dissemination of cultural works that represent the nation's artistic identity. In addition, music education institutions such as conservatories and universities often participate in international cooperation programs, academic exchanges, and global performances, further promoting cultural communication between nations.

From a strategic perspective, music education functions as the foundation of cultural development [6]. While cultural products and performances may represent the visible outcomes of cultural influence, the training and education of cultural practitioners occur within educational systems. Therefore, the integration of music education into national cultural strategies not only strengthens cultural preservation and innovation but also enhances a nation's ability to participate actively in global cultural competition and exchange.

3. Mechanisms through Which Music Education Promotes National Cultural Soft Power

3.1. Cultural Inheritance Function

One of the most fundamental mechanisms through which music education contributes to national cultural soft power is cultural inheritance. Every nation possesses a rich musical heritage that reflects its history, traditions, beliefs, and social values. Traditional music, folk songs, classical compositions, and indigenous instruments together form an essential part of national cultural identity. However, without systematic transmission, these cultural resources may gradually decline under the influence of modernization and globalization [12]. Music education therefore provides an institutional framework for preserving and continuing musical traditions.

Within educational systems, traditional music can be integrated into curricula through courses, ensemble activities, and performance practice. Students learn not only musical techniques but also the cultural meanings embedded in musical works. For instance, studying folk songs or traditional instrumental music helps students understand regional cultural characteristics and historical narratives [11]. Through this process, traditional music is transmitted across generations in a structured and sustainable manner.

Music education also supports the documentation and academic study of traditional music. Universities and conservatories conduct research on folk music, ethnomusicology, and traditional performance practices. These studies help preserve musical heritage while offering scholarly interpretations that enhance its cultural significance. As traditional music becomes more systematically preserved and studied, it gains greater visibility both domestically and internationally, strengthening the cultural resources that underpin national soft power.

3.2. Cultural Innovation Function

While music education preserves tradition, it also provides a platform for cultural innovation. Cultural soft power relies not only on historical heritage but also on a culture's ability to evolve in response to social and global changes [11]. Music education encourages creativity by equipping students with theoretical knowledge, technical skills, and opportunities for artistic experimentation.

Students in music institutions are exposed to diverse musical styles, including classical, contemporary, popular, and world music traditions. Such exposure promotes cross-cultural learning and creative integration. When musicians combine traditional musical elements with modern production techniques or global influences, new musical forms emerge that appeal to contemporary audiences while retaining elements of national identity [4].

Furthermore, music education cultivates composers, producers, and performers who contribute to cultural industries [4]. Innovative music production supported by professional training can generate influential cultural products with international appeal. For example, modern genres that incorporate traditional melodies or instruments often attract global audiences by presenting distinctive cultural characteristics. Through this process, music education becomes a driving force for cultural innovation and global cultural appeal.

3.3. International Communication Function

Another key mechanism linking music education with cultural soft power is international communication. In an increasingly interconnected world, cultural influence often depends on effective cross-cultural dialogue. Music education prepares musicians and cultural professionals who can participate in international artistic platforms and cultural exchanges.

Music students and educators frequently take part in international exchange programs, overseas study opportunities, and collaborative performances. These experiences allow musicians to present their cultural traditions to global audiences while learning from other musical cultures. Through concerts, festivals, and academic

conferences, musicians often act as cultural ambassadors representing their nation's artistic achievements.

Educational institutions also establish partnerships with foreign universities and cultural organizations. Joint performances, academic collaboration, and international competitions create channels through which music travels across borders. When audiences encounter music rooted in a particular cultural tradition, they gain insight into the culture behind it. Consequently, music education indirectly supports cultural diplomacy by promoting the global circulation of cultural expressions.

The relationship between music education activities and their contributions to cultural soft power is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. The Role of Music Education in International Cultural Communication

| Function of Music Education | Cultural Outcome | Contribution to Soft Power |
|------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Training professional musicians | High-quality performances and artistic works | Enhances cultural reputation |
| Academic exchange programs | Cross-cultural understanding | Strengthens cultural dialogue |
| International performances and festivals | Global exposure to national music | Expands cultural influence |
| Research and collaboration | Knowledge sharing in music studies | Builds intellectual cultural networks |

As shown in Table 1, music education contributes to cultural soft power not only through artistic production but also through academic exchange, cultural dialogue, and global dissemination of musical works. These activities collectively enhance the international visibility and attractiveness of a nation's culture.

3.4. National Image Shaping Function

Music education also contributes to shaping national cultural image. A nation's cultural image is often reflected through music performances, artistic achievements, and internationally recognized musicians. The success of these cultural representatives frequently reflects the strength of the educational systems that supported their development.

High-quality music education institutions play a significant role in cultivating internationally recognized performers, composers, and conductors [7]. When musicians achieve success in international competitions, prestigious orchestras, or major music festivals, they become symbols of national cultural excellence. Their achievements enhance global perceptions of their country as a center of artistic creativity and cultural vitality.

Music education systems can also influence the development of distinctive musical styles [9, 10]. When institutions emphasize particular traditions, performance techniques, or aesthetic values, they help shape a recognizable national musical identity. This identity becomes part of a country's cultural brand in the global cultural landscape.

The relationship between music education systems and national cultural image is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. The Relationship between Music Education and National Cultural Image

| Educational Input | Cultural Output | International Impact |
|--------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
|--------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|

| | | |
|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Comprehensive music curriculum | Skilled musicians and composers | International recognition |
| Institutional support for performance | High-level orchestras and ensembles | Cultural prestige |
| Promotion of national musical traditions | Distinctive musical identity | Cultural branding |
| Participation in global competitions | Award-winning artists | Positive national image |

As illustrated in Table 2, the development of music education systems directly influences the production of cultural talent, artistic achievements, and recognizable musical traditions. These outcomes shape how a nation is perceived culturally on the international stage and contribute significantly to the formation of national cultural soft power.

4. Case Studies of Music Education Enhancing National Cultural Soft Power

4.1. South Korea: Music Education and the Global Expansion of K-Pop

South Korea provides a notable example of how music education can support the development of national cultural soft power. Since the late twentieth century, the South Korean government has emphasized the importance of cultural industries and promoted the integration of cultural education with the entertainment sector. Music education plays a significant role in cultivating performers, composers, and producers who later contribute to the global music market.

The Korean music training system combines formal education with industry-oriented training [11]. Many universities offer programs in popular music performance, music production, and entertainment management, while entertainment companies provide intensive training that includes vocal performance, dance, stage skills, and foreign language education. This integrated system develops artists who are equipped to perform in international markets.

The global popularity of K-Pop has significantly enhanced South Korea's cultural visibility. Groups such as BTS and BLACKPINK have achieved worldwide recognition through international tours, streaming platforms, and global media. Their music blends modern pop styles with elements of Korean culture, creating a distinctive cultural product. The success of K-Pop illustrates how a well-developed music education and training system can contribute to influential cultural industries and bolster national cultural soft power.

4.2. Finland: Music Education and National Cultural Reputation

Finland is renowned for its comprehensive and high-quality music education system. Unlike South Korea's industry-oriented approach, Finland prioritizes universal access to music education and the cultivation of artistic excellence through public institutions. Music education is seamlessly integrated into the national education system, spanning from primary school to higher education, ensuring students have continuous opportunities to develop their musical skills.

A distinctive feature of the Finnish system is its extensive network of music schools and conservatories. These institutions offer systematic training in instrumental performance, music theory, and ensemble participation. Many students begin their music education at an early age and benefit from professional guidance throughout their development. Consequently, Finland has produced numerous internationally acclaimed conductors, composers, and musicians.

This robust educational foundation has significantly contributed to Finland's reputation as a nation with a vibrant musical culture. Finnish orchestras and musicians frequently participate in international festivals and competitions. Composers such as Jean Sibelius have become cultural icons, while contemporary musicians continue to promote

Finnish culture on the global stage. This example illustrates how a comprehensive public music education system can foster cultural excellence and enhance a nation's cultural reputation [8].

4.3. China: Music Education and the Transmission of Traditional Culture

In recent years, China has increasingly emphasized the role of music education in preserving and promoting traditional cultural heritage. With a long history of diverse musical traditions, including folk music, classical instrumental music, and regional opera, China possesses abundant cultural resources. Music education serves as an important channel for transmitting these traditions to younger generations [9].

Educational institutions have gradually incorporated traditional music into their curricula. Students are taught to play traditional instruments such as the guzheng, erhu, and pipa, as well as various forms of folk music. Universities and conservatories also conduct research on ethnomusicology and traditional performance practices, contributing to the documentation and preservation of musical heritage [10].

At the same time, many Chinese musicians integrate traditional elements with contemporary musical styles. This fusion results in new musical works that appeal to both domestic and international audiences. Through performances, festivals, and international collaborations, Chinese music has gained increasing global visibility. Music education supports this process by cultivating musicians who are well-versed in both traditional culture and modern musical expression.

4.4. Comparative Analysis of Different National Models

The case studies above demonstrate that various countries adopt distinct approaches to integrating music education with cultural soft power. South Korea prioritizes the synergy between music education and cultural industries, Finland emphasizes public education and artistic excellence, and China focuses on preserving and innovating traditional culture. Despite these differences, all three nations recognize music education as a vital strategic resource for cultural development [3]. The relationship between music education and cultural soft power can be illustrated through the framework presented in Figure 1.

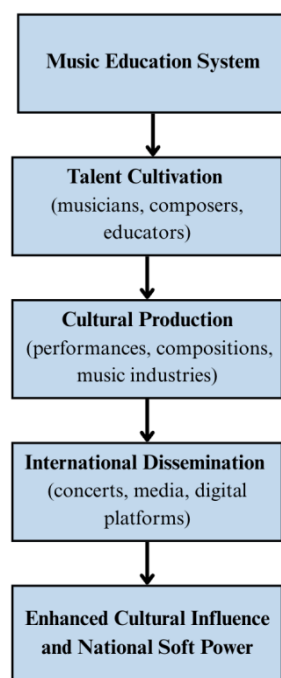


Figure 1. Pathways through Which Music Education Enhances National Cultural Soft Power

As depicted in Figure 1, music education forms the foundation of the cultural influence process. Through structured education, skilled musicians and cultural professionals are nurtured. These individuals contribute to cultural production and creative activities, resulting in musical works and cultural products. When these cultural products are disseminated internationally via performances, media platforms, and cultural exchanges, they enhance global recognition of a nation's culture.

Although national strategies vary, the underlying mechanism remains consistent: music education supplies the human resources, cultural knowledge, and creative capacity essential for cultural development and international cultural communication. Strengthening music education systems is therefore a crucial strategy for bolstering national cultural soft power in the contemporary global cultural landscape [1].

5. Strategic Positioning of Music Education in the Construction of National Cultural Soft Power

5.1. Establishing a Systematic Music Education Framework

In the context of globalization and increasing cultural competition, the strategic importance of music education in strengthening national cultural soft power has become more evident. A well-structured music education system that connects basic education, professional training, and lifelong learning is essential for sustainable cultural development. In primary and secondary schools, music education should focus on cultivating students' aesthetic awareness, creativity, and appreciation of cultural diversity. At the higher education level, universities and conservatories should emphasize professional musical training, artistic research, and creative practice.

In addition to formal education, community music programs and cultural institutions can provide opportunities for lifelong participation in music activities. These programs encourage broader public engagement with music and help maintain cultural vitality within society. Through the establishment of a multi-level and inclusive music education framework, nations can ensure the continuous cultivation of musical talent and support the long-term development of cultural resources.

5.2. Strengthening the Transmission of Traditional Musical Culture

Traditional music represents an important component of national cultural heritage and plays a vital role in shaping cultural identity. Integrating traditional musical forms, instruments, and folk traditions into music education allows students to develop a deeper understanding of their cultural roots [4]. By learning traditional music within educational institutions, students not only acquire musical skills but also gain insight into the historical and cultural contexts embedded in musical traditions.

Educational institutions should also encourage research in fields such as ethnomusicology and cultural history to support the preservation and documentation of traditional music [2, 12]. At the same time, traditional musical elements can be adapted and incorporated into contemporary musical practices. This combination of preservation and innovation helps traditional music remain relevant in modern cultural contexts while strengthening national cultural identity.

5.3. Promoting Integration between Music Education and Cultural Industries

Music education can contribute to enhancing national cultural soft power by supporting the growth of cultural and creative industries [9]. Sectors such as music production, film scoring, digital media, and live performance demand professionals with both artistic creativity and technical expertise. Educational institutions can collaborate with cultural enterprises to design interdisciplinary training programs that integrate artistic education with industry-specific knowledge.

Internships, collaborative projects, and industry partnerships provide students with practical experience and a deeper understanding of the cultural market. This synergy between education and industry fosters innovative musical production and enhances the competitiveness of cultural products. Consequently, music education becomes closely

intertwined with the advancement of cultural industries and the global dissemination of cultural works.

5.4. Expanding International Exchange and Cultural Communication

International exchange in music education serves as a vital strategy for fostering cultural communication and enhancing global influence. Academic partnerships, student exchange programs, and international performances enable musicians to share their cultural traditions with audiences from diverse backgrounds. These initiatives promote mutual understanding and facilitate cultural dialogue among nations [8].

Engagement in international music festivals, competitions, and collaborative artistic projects can greatly enhance the visibility of national music. Furthermore, digital media platforms and global streaming services offer new avenues for the worldwide dissemination of musical works. By leveraging these channels, music education institutions can advance cultural exchange and contribute to the growth of national cultural soft power [11, 12].

6. Conclusion

This study examined the role and strategic positioning of music education in the construction of national cultural soft power. The analysis shows that music education contributes to cultural inheritance, artistic innovation, international cultural exchange, and the formation of national cultural identity. As a universal artistic language capable of crossing linguistic and cultural boundaries, music plays an important role in cultural communication. Through systematic education, individuals develop musical skills, cultural awareness, and creative abilities, which together support the sustainable development of cultural vitality and national cultural influence.

The comparative cases of South Korea, Finland, and China illustrate different pathways through which music education supports cultural soft power. South Korea emphasizes the connection between music education and cultural industries, Finland focuses on comprehensive public music education and artistic excellence, and China highlights the preservation and revitalization of traditional musical heritage. Despite these differences, the cases demonstrate that music education provides the human resources, creative capacity, and cultural knowledge necessary for cultural production and international cultural dissemination.

Overall, music education functions as an important strategic resource for strengthening national cultural soft power. By improving music education systems, supporting cultural innovation, promoting traditional culture, and encouraging international exchange, nations can enhance the global visibility and influence of their cultural expressions while contributing to broader intercultural dialogue.

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