

Prestige, Pressure, and Practice: Cultural Influence in East Asian Children's Violin Training

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ABSTRACT

This study reviews how violin training is framed in many East Asian cultural contexts, where it is seen as a pathway to academic and social success rather than a purely artistic or leisurely hobby. Through these contexts, music education is closely tied to broader values of discipline, achievement, and status. The purpose of this study is to analyze how violin study functions as a strategic investment in a child's education, identity formation, and the accumulation of cultural capital. Using a qualitative approach, this study draws on existing scholarly literature and anecdotal accounts to examine patterns in parental expectations and student experiences. The findings suggest that violin training is often shaped by extrinsic motivations, such as college admissions and social distinction, over intrinsic enjoyment. This can build tensions in the child's relationship with music, shifting the focus towards performance and outcomes. As a result, many children experience pressure that in some cases, creates tension within family relationships. These findings are significant because they highlight how cultural values can influence students' emotional and psychological practices. By reframing music as a form of cultural capital, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how success is constructed and pursued in an East Asian cultural framework, while also raising important questions about the long-term impact of achievement-driven musical training.

Keywords: Classical Music Education; Maternal Role in Education; Violin; East Asian; Cultural Capital; Extrinsic Motivation; Educational Achievement

INTRODUCTION

Classical music education plays a foundational role in many East Asian societies, particularly in countries such as China and South Korea, as well as within East Asian diasporic communities where structured musical training is often integrated early as a part of childhood development. In South Korea, around 80% of elementary school students participated in some form of classical

music instruction in 2024 (1). Within many of these contexts, classical music training is not simply viewed as a leisurely hobby or artistic pursuit, but as a strategic investment in a child's future (2-10). In practice, violin study frequently emerges as one of the instrumental disciplines most discussed in this literature, with scholarship describing violin as one of the most widely pursued instruments in East Asian music education systems such as Taiwan's (2, 10).

Early childhood music education is highly widespread across East Asia and East Asian diaspora communities, with parents commonly initiating music lessons at a young age and taking highly active roles in their children's musical education, supervising daily practice, selecting teachers/programs, and structuring

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long-term musical goals (2-4). Such involvement closely ties into broader cultural frameworks that put an emphasis on academic achievement, self-discipline, and future success (2-4). Rather than centering violin training on enjoyment and/or individual creativity alone, it is more often framed as a means of growing focus, a strong work ethic, and moral responsibility (2-10). Music practice, in return, becomes closely tied to ideas of self-regulation, filial obligation, and intergenerational advancement, shaping both family dynamics and children's futures (2-10).

This study examines how East Asian families frame children's musical education as a long-term strategic investment, rather than a casual extracurricular activity. Across cultural contexts, classical music training is associated with discipline, academic excellence (3), and elite cultural capital that demonstrates refinement and legitimacy (8). Particularly in lower-income households, music education represents a pathway towards upward social mobility (5). By situating violin study within a cultural context, this study reviews how intensive parental involvement reflects wider cultural values surrounding achievement, hierarchy, and intergenerational responsibility, and how violin study functions as a cultural investment in children's futures.

MUSIC EDUCATION AS EDUCATIONAL INVESTMENT

Across studies, parents frequently framed music education as a strategic investment intended to support children's long-term academic development and future opportunities. In Youm's (2013) study, *Parents' Goals, Knowledge, Practices, and Needs Regarding Music Education for Their Young Children in South Korea*, researchers examined the goals, knowledge, practices, and needs of 22 South Korean mothers whose children under the age of five were enrolled in music programs in Seoul. Data was collected through questionnaires, interviews, and observations of parent-child musical interactions. Mothers reported that their primary motivation for enrolling children in music programs was to establish a strong developmental foundation that would benefit future learning. Music education was believed to broaden children's emotional experiences while also cultivating skills such as concentration and academic readiness. Participants strongly supported early music training and viewed it as an important component of early childhood education. 17 participants also expressed a desire to become knowledgeable "home teachers,"

actively guiding their children's musical activities outside formal lessons. Overall, parents framed music education not simply as artistic enrichment, but as preparation for long-term educational success (3).

A similar pattern emerged in Pan et al.'s (2025) quantitative study of 430 Hong Kong parents with children aged 3-8, *Importance Attributed to Music Education by Hong Kong Parents and Prediction of Children's Music Participation*. Using an online questionnaire distributed through kindergarten networks, the study collected demographic information, parental musical background, and beliefs regarding the value of music education. Although relatively few parents had extensive personal experience with music training, parents who attributed greater educational importance to music were significantly more likely to enroll their children in private lessons and sustain long-term participation. For each additional score attributed to the parents' perceived importance of music education, reports of plans for future enrollment decreased by 29.3%, suggesting that these parents had already enrolled their children in musical activities. Participants frequently emphasized outcomes such as academic enhancement and resume value, placing greater importance on these broader developmental benefits than on enjoyment of music itself. Music study was therefore commonly perceived as a pathway to future advantages, with parents viewing musical training as a means of cultivating transferable skills that could support children's success in future educational and professional contexts (6).

Collectively, these findings suggest that many parents conceptualize music education as a long-term educational investment. Early music training was widely associated with the development of concentration and academic readiness, while sustained participation in formal lessons was viewed as a means of building skills and experiences that could contribute to children's future educational prosperity and broader life opportunities.

CULTURAL CAPITAL, DISCIPLINE, SELF-REGULATION, AND DEVELOPMENT

Several studies highlight how music education functions not only as a cultural resource, but also as a mechanism through which parents cultivate discipline, endurance, and self-regulation in their children. In Liu et al.'s (2025) study, *Conceptualising Instrumental Practice Among Chinese American Children, Their Parents, and Teachers: Self-Regulation, Cultural Mediation, and Filial Piety*, researchers examined instrumental practice among

Chinese American children through interviews with 51 participants, including children, parents, and teachers. A focused sample of 10 Chinese American children aged 8-12 with varying levels of musical experience participated in phone interviews lasting 20-45 minutes. The study explored how cultural expectations shape children's motivation and attitudes towards instrumental practice. Findings indicated that parents and teachers consistently emphasized endurance, perseverance, and cognitive development as key outcomes of sustained musical training. Eight out of ten parents believed these outcomes would help foster their children's long-term success and achievement. Children's motivation to practice was frequently shaped by extrinsic influences, particularly parental expectations and a sense of responsibility toward family obligations. Technical exercises were disliked by 80% of the children, although it was most favored by teachers as they were a tedious, but critical component for building technique and proficiency. Many children described practicing not only as a learning activity, but also as a moral responsibility, motivated by a desire to meet parental expectations and gain their approval. Parents also viewed musical training as a means of strengthening concentration and focus (7).

Parental involvement in cultivating these disciplined behaviors was further examined in Cui's (2023) study, *Measuring Parental Involvement as Parental Actions in Children's Private Music Lessons in China*, which surveyed 894 Chinese parents of children aged 5-12 who were enrolled in private music lessons. Researchers used exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on 644 valid responses to examine patterns of parental involvement. Results indicated that proactive parental involvement was the most common form of engagement, while avoidance was the least frequent. The findings also suggested that the source of motivation influenced parental behavior — when children expressed their own interest in music learning, parents demonstrated higher levels of proactive support, whereas parent-initiated participation was sometimes associated with more passive or avoidant involvement over time. Children's personal interests and parent's proactivity were found to have a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.18$, $p < 0.01$). Importantly, high levels of parental regulation and involvement were widely perceived as necessary components of developing children's responsibility and self-control, rather than as intrusive interference (4).

Cultural expectations surrounding discipline and achievement were also reflected in Wang's (2009) study, *Interlopers in the Realm of High Culture: "Music Moms"*

and the Performance of Asian and Asian American Identities, which interviewed Asian American mothers whose children were engaged in classical music education. The study explored parental motivations, experiences within classical music communities, and perceptions of the "music mom" label. Mothers frequently linked musical training with cultural values such as focus, hard work, self-sacrifice, and discipline, aligning participation in Western classical music with broader Asian familial expectations. Classical music was also viewed as a prestigious cultural domain through which Asian American families could claim legitimacy within elite artistic spaces. Participation in this field therefore reinforced both cultural identity and social status, while simultaneously providing children with structured environments that foster discipline practice habits (8).

Comparative findings from Cui et al.'s (2024) study, *A Comparison of the Parental Values of Children's Extracurricular Music Learning in Guilin, China and in Tampa, United States*, further illustrate how cultural contexts shape parental expectations surrounding music education. Through interviews with families in Guilin, China and Tampa, United States, researchers examined differences in parental motivations and values related to children's extracurricular music learning. Parents in Guilin were more likely to emphasize visible achievements, competitions, and measurable progress, often influenced by peer expectations and social comparison. US parents, by contrast, highlighted children's enjoyment, self-expression, and stress relief as primary motivations for participation (9). While both groups acknowledged nonmusical developmental benefits such as focus and academic improvement, Chinese parents more strongly emphasized disciplined effort and externally visible accomplishments, whereas US parents prioritized autonomy and personal fulfillment (9).

Taken together, these studies demonstrate that music education frequently operates as a structured environment for cultivating discipline, perseverance, and self-regulation. Within many East Asian and Asian American contexts, sustained musical practice is closely connected to broader cultural values emphasizing responsibility, endurance, and achievement (4, 7, 8, 9). As a result, music education functions not only as artistic training, but also as a form of cultural capital through which families reinforce valued behavioral traits and position children for future success. These motivations, however, are not equally accessible to all families, as income and social standing often determine whether this kind of training is even an option.

SOCIOECONOMIC CONTEXT AND INEQUALITY

Evidence from the included studies indicate that socioeconomic position plays a decisive role in shaping both parental perceptions of music education and children's opportunities for participation. In Ho et al. 's (2020) qualitative study, *Low-Income Parents' Perceptions of the Importance of a Musical Training Programme for their Children*, researchers examined 25 low income parents whose preschool children participated in a free music training program. The study aimed to explore parental perceptions of music education, family background factors, and observed changes in children's behavior and emotional development. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews that addressed parents' beliefs about music, their experiences with the program, and perceived impacts on their children. Findings revealed that music was not only viewed as beneficial for children's emotional and developmental growth, but also as a socially valued and prestigious activity. Parents frequently associated music education with refinement, opportunity, and higher social standing, recognizing that participation in formal lessons is more common among affluent families. All 25 participants highlighted the great opportunity of having a free musical training program for their children. Therefore, the free enrollment program was described as a rare and meaningful opportunity, one that allowed children access to an activity typically perceived as beyond the reach of underprivileged households (5).

Similarly, Pan et al. (2025) conducted a quantitative study, *Importance Attributed to Music Education by Hong Kong Parents and Prediction of Children's Music Participation*, examining parental perceptions of music education and children's music participation among 430 Hong Kong parents with children aged 3-8. Data was collected through an online questionnaire distributed via kindergarten platforms, gathering information on child and parent demographics, parental musical background, and beliefs regarding the value of music education. Results showed that parents who attributed greater importance to music were significantly more likely to enroll their children in private lessons and sustain long term participation. Specifically, the chances of parents signing their child up for musical activities showed an increase of 38% for each additional score attributed to their perceived importance of music education. Positive correlations were identified between perceived importance and parental age, education level, prior music participation, and

family income, suggesting that multiple socioeconomic familial factors are associated with participation in music education — with correlation coefficients of 0.148, 0.209, and 0.151 respectively. Together, the findings demonstrate that socioeconomic capacity influences both the symbolic value attributed to music education and the ability to act on those beliefs, reinforcing patterns of unequal access (6). These patterns of investment and access are, in practice, largely carried out by mothers.

MATERNAL ROLE

Mothers were shown to play a central role in shaping their children's participation in music education. In studies examining Asian mothers' involvement in classical music training, interviews and observations reveal how mothers actively structure, monitor, and sustain their children's musical development.

In Boon's (2013) study, *The Role of East Asian Mothers in Their Children's Musical Lives*, four Chinese and Korean mothers whose children were enrolled in the University of Florida String Project were interviewed, exploring parental motivations and expectations. Despite having limited personal musical backgrounds, all four mothers reported intentionally exposing their children to a variety of early experiences, with strong emphasis on long-term educational advantages. Classical music was perceived as beneficial for future academic success, higher education opportunities, and social mobility. Highlighted by one of the participants, within their cultural framework, music education also symbolized prestige and a higher education, being associated with cultivating disciplined and morally refined individuals. Mothers expressed high expectations from an early age, emphasizing that children were too young to make decisions independently. All of the mothers assumed the role of home instructor, each in their own adaptive way, actively supervising and structuring daily practice to ensure consistent progress. Their involvement reinforced the idea that maternal labor plays a central role in sustaining music education (2).

Similarly, in Wang's (2009) *Interlopers in the Realm of High Culture: "Music Moms" and the Performance of Asian and Asian American Identities*, Asian American mothers of children engaged in classical music education were interviewed, focusing on motivations for enrollment, experiences within classical music communities, and perceptions of the "music mom" label. Through interviews, researchers found that mothers often congregated separately along ethnic lines, reflecting racial

and cultural distinctions within classical music spaces. Engagement in Western classical music frequently aligned with values such as hard work, discipline, focus, and sacrifice — traits that resonated with maintaining Asian familial and cultural expectations. The mothers also described classical music as being a pathway to legitimacy and elite status, allowing them to claim recognition within a field historically associated with prestige. At the same time, mothers used participation in classical music communities to also reinforce shared identity with other Asian mothers, creating supportive networks while navigating racialized labeling in predominantly Western spaces. Their involvement not only influenced their children's musical development, but also a broader construction of class and cultural identity in the US (8).

In another study, Youm's (2013) *Parents' Goals, Knowledge, Practices, and Needs Regarding Music Education for their Young Children in South Korea*, 22 South Korean mothers of children under five years old who were enrolled in local music programs were surveyed and interviewed. Data was collected through questionnaires, interviews, and observations of parent-child music interactions to examine maternal goals and practices. 12 out of 22 mothers reported that music education provided a strong foundation for future learning and fostered emotional expression, concentration, discipline, and academic readiness. Deciding on enrolling their children in music education was largely driven by the perception of long-term payoff, rather than immediate enjoyment. Many mothers expressed a strong desire to become effective "home teachers" to reinforce learning outside of lessons. 13 mothers reported interacting musically with their child every day. 4 stated they interacted musically with their child several times a week. One said never. The degree of active interactions between mother and child depended on multiple factors, including the mother's musical background, the child's age, the presence of siblings, and employment status. These findings reinforce the idea that maternal involvement is central to sustaining early music education in young children (3).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates how violin study is often framed not as a purely leisurely or artistic pursuit, but rather as a strategic investment in future educational success, disciplined identity formation, and the accumulation of elite cultural capital across East Asian cultural contexts. Taken together, this framing appears to reshape the meaning of music in children's lives —

shifting it from a source of personal expression to a tool for future achievement. As a result, this builds tensions between extrinsic and intrinsic motivations, influencing both their relationship with music and their family dynamics.

Examining how cultural values shape not only educational motivations but also emotional and psychological experiences, this study also highlights the role of violin training as a form of cultural and social positioning. This deepens the understanding of how success is constructed and pursued within the cultural framework.

However, this study does not fully address several areas that merit further exploration. Future research should further examine the long-term effects of this approach on early childhood musical education, particularly whether the children maintain a lasting connection to music or stray from it after external pressures lessen. Additionally, researchers should pay attention to the variations within East Asian communities, including differences in socioeconomic status and parenting styles. Further exploration would expand the understanding of how the violin shapes children's long-term identities and values beyond childhood (Figure 1).

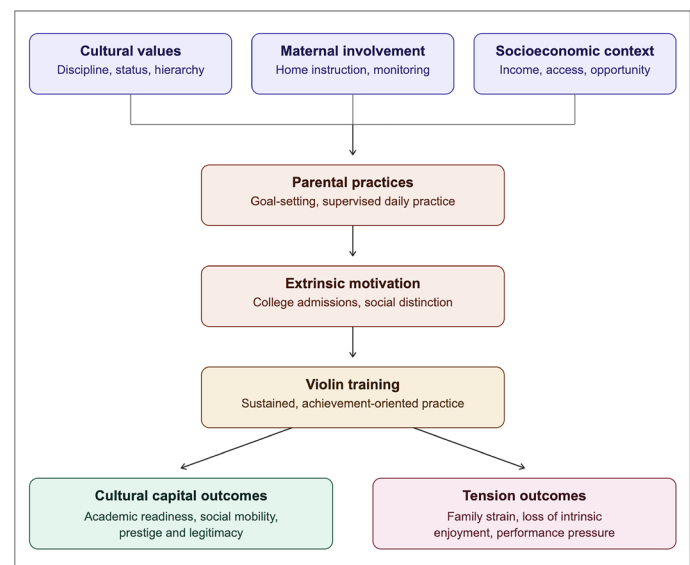


Figure 1. Conceptual model of violin training as cultural capital in East Asian families. Cultural values, maternal involvement, and socioeconomic context collectively shape parental practices. In turn, it further drives children's violin training, being motivated largely by extrinsic goals such as academic advancement and social distinction. This training produces two parallel outcomes: gains in cultural capital and tension outcomes.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest related to this work.

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