An investigation of the violin teaching method of Lin Yaoji from a personal perspective

Mo Zhou
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An Investigation of The Violin Teaching Method of Lin Yaoji

From A Personal Perspective

Mo Zhou

A Doctor of Musical Arts Document submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

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_____________________________________________

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Dr. Carl Donakowski
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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments ................................................................................................................. ii  
Table of Contents ...................................................................................................................... iii  
List of Figures .......................................................................................................................... v  
Abstract ..................................................................................................................................... vi  
Chapter I: Introduction. Lin Yaoji as A Great Violin Pedagogue in China ...................... 1  
    Biography ............................................................................................................................... 1  
Chapter II: The Russian Violin School ............................................................................... 8  
Chapter III: The Lin Yaoji Method of Violin Teaching .................................................... 15  
    The Core Content of Lin Yaoji’s Violin Pedagogy ............................................................. 15  
    Philosophy in Lin’s Pedagogy .............................................................................................. 16  
    Lin’s Methodology: The Unity of Opposites ..................................................................... 18  
        Dynamic and Static .......................................................................................................... 18  
        Exert Pressure and Relax ............................................................................................... 21  
        Time and Space .............................................................................................................. 22  
    The Principle — Treat Each Case on A Case-By-Case Basis ............................................. 23  
    The Viewpoint — Follow Nature and Learn from Nature .................................................. 27  
Chapter IV: Mnemonic Rhymes Regarding Technique and Practicing .......................... 29  
    Mnemonic Rhymes for General Practice .......................................................................... 29  
    Mnemonic Rhymes for The Left Hand .............................................................................. 36  
    Mnemonic Rhymes for The Right Hand ........................................................................... 40  
    Mnemonic Rhymes for the Coordination of Both Hands .................................................. 48  
    Mnemonic Rhymes for Practicing ..................................................................................... 51  
    Musicianship and Musical Interpretation ......................................................................... 54
Chapter V: Personal Thoughts on Violin Education Inspired by Lin Yaoji’s Violin Teaching Method .................................................................59

Reflections on Musical Interpretation and Techniques ...............................59

Reflections about the Application of Psychological Knowledge in Violin Teaching .................................................................................67

Reflections on Being a Violin Teacher ......................................................70

Conclusion ..............................................................................................74

References ..............................................................................................75
List of Figures

Figure 1: Timeline of Important Events in Professor Lin’s Life ........................................7
Figure 2: Members of the Russian Violin School by Generation ....................................12
Figure 3: Kreutzer Etude No. 9, mm. 1-4 ......................................................................19
Figure 4: Finger Changing in Double Stops ..................................................................23
Figure 5: Mélodie from Souvenir d’un Lieu Cher, Op.42, P. I. Tchaikovsky ..................24
Figure 6: Ciaccona in Partita No.2 BWV 1004, J. S. Bach ...........................................25
Figure 7: Beethoven Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 8 in G major, Op. 30, mm. 1-4 ....25
Figure 8: Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto, Op. 35, mm 28-33 ...........................................25
Figure 9: Hand Joints ......................................................................................................37
Figure 10: Hand-Operated Steering Wheel for Ship .......................................................39
Figure 11: Seven Flat Surfaces of the Strings .................................................................41
Figure 12: Flat Surfaces Involved in the Process of String Crossing ..............................45
Figure 13: Fritz Kreisler’s Praeludium and Allegro, mm. 1-19 ........................................48
Figure 14: Max Bruch Violin Concerto No.1 in G Minor, Op. 26, I. Vorspiel, mm. 1-10 ..57
Figure 15: The Theme of the Vorspiel .............................................................................58
Figure 16: Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto, Op. 35, mm 28-33 ...........................................69
Abstract

As a Western musical instrument, the Violin has a history spanning more than three hundred years. Contemporary approaches to its performance and pedagogy have been developed and influenced by the Russian, the Franco-Belgian, and the German Violin Schools. It was not until the 1920s and '30s, that the violin entered the public realm of Chinese society.

From the 1980s until today, several generations of violinists have emerged as Violin Educators in China. Among them, Lin Yaoji was the most famous. This study will research and examine Lin Yaoji’s violin teaching method. Specifically, this document will consist of five chapters discussing the following: (1) a general biographical introduction exploring Lin Yaoji as a pedagogue; (2) the Russian Violin School; (3) the philosophy of Lin’s teaching method; (4) Lin’s mnemonic rhymes, and (5) the researcher’s thoughts on Chinese violin education.

The purpose of the current document is four-fold. Firstly, to offer an English translation of the content and pedagogical approaches of Lin as included in Yang’s work. Secondly, to offer my personal perspectives and interpretative insights concerning Lin’s and other well-known (non-Chinese) violin pedagogical approaches from the viewpoint of someone who grew up in China and studied violin there until graduate studies brought me to the United States. Thirdly, to provide important historical and cultural contextual information relevant to the growth of violin playing and the evolution of Lin’s approach.
And finally, to celebrate and share Lin’s important pedagogical contributions to violin playing, his life achievements, and his legacy with the Western world.
Chapter I: Introduction

Lin Yaoji as A Great Violin Pedagogue in China

As a Western musical instrument, the violin has a history spanning more than three hundred years. Contemporary approaches to its performance and pedagogy have been developed and influenced by the Russian, the Franco-Belgian, and the German Violin Schools. The violin first entered China towards the end of the seventeenth century, during the late Ming Dynasty and early Qing Dynasty. At that time, Western music was only performed in the royal palace. It was not until the 1920s and ‘30s, that the violin entered the public realm of Chinese society. Parallel to this, violin education throughout the society of China also began.

From the 1980s until today, several generations of violinists have emerged as violin educators in China. Among them, Lin Yaoji was the most famous. This study will research and examine Lin Yaoji’s violin teaching method. Specifically, this document will consist of five parts: (1) a general biographical introduction exploring Lin Yaoji as a pedagogue; (2) the Russian Violin School; (3) the philosophy of Lin’s teaching method; (4) Lin’s mnemonic rhymes, and (5) the researcher’s thoughts on Chinese violin education.

Biography

Lin Yaoji (1937-2009) was born into a family of Chinese immigrants who on both sides, were originally from Guangzhou, China, but had moved and settled in the United States in the nineteenth century, working as merchants, before Lin’s Grandfather decided to return to resettle in China in 1930 – where he met and married Lin’s mother before Yaoji was born. Lin Yaoji had loved music since childhood and aspired to be a violinist. However,
his parents believed that he was not suited to learning music because he often misbehaved and ignored his interest.

Despite this, one day, Lin Yaoji took a violin lesson without his parents’ permission with a famous local violin teacher, Wen Zhanmei. When his parents found out, they agreed to pay for lessons and let him learn the violin. Lin Yaoji was thirteen years old at that time. As a beginner, he even did not have his own violin. He used his teacher’s violin during his lessons. After his lessons, he would practice using two chopsticks to replicate the violin and the bow. Despite starting to learn the instrument at a late age, and not having his own violin, Lin made rapid progress due to his extraordinary musical talent.

In the summer of 1951, Professor Ma Sicong, a great Chinese violinist who was then the President of the Central Conservatory of Music, visited Wen Zhanmei in Guangzhou. One day, Lin took a lesson with Wen in the living room while Professor Ma was resting in another room. Professor Ma did not see Lin but just overheard a lesson. With keen judgment, Professor Ma recognized that Lin had great potential on violin, and he instantly decided to admit Lin (then fourteen years old) to the Central Conservatory of Music without an audition.

Lin graduated from the Central Conservatory of Music in 1960. In the same year, the Moscow Conservatory selected Lin to study with the renowned violin professor Yuri Yankelevich (1909-1973) in the former Soviet Union. Yankelevich appreciated Lin’s intelligence and talent. At that time, the new government of the People’s Republic of China had only existed for eleven years, and consequently, many aspects of the country needed development, including the field of Music Education which was also very far behind in its development. Therefore, Yankelevich suggested that Lin switch his emphasis from violin
performance to pedagogy. Lin accepted Yankelevich’s suggestion. Yankelevich predicted that Lin would contribute significantly to professional violin education in China in the future.

In 1962, after studying for two years at the Moscow Conservatory, Lin returned to China and began to teach violin at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing. However, his teaching career was abruptly interrupted by the Cultural Revolution of 1966. The Cultural Revolution was a violent sociopolitical purge movement in China from 1966 to 1976. At that particular time, a group of four politicians — Wang Hongwen (1935-1992), Zhang Chunqiao (1917-2005), Jiang Qing (1914-1991), and Yao Wenyuan (1931-2005) — known as “the Gang of Four” classified intellectuals as bourgeoisies and reactionists. Any aspects of life identified as being “Western”, including Western music, were outlawed and not allowed.

As a result of these reforms, between 1970 and 1972, Lin and his wife Hu Shixi - a singer - were sent to two separate re-education camps. Because Western music was forbidden to be taught or played, Lin began to experiment with violin playing and teaching methods in his mind. As he lived in nature every day, he was inspired by what he had observed. Combined with the Russian Violin School and his own pedagogical thinking, Lin formulated his very own unique teaching approach. In later years, he was quoted as saying that he had had three teachers: the first one being nature, and the other two, his life and his colleagues (including his students).

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2 Jiang, *Red: China’s Cultural Revolution*. 
In 1972, as part of his reeducation camp experience, the Chinese government approved for Lin to teach violin in the May Seventh Cadre School. The May Seventh Cadre Schools were Chinese labor camps established during the Cultural Revolution that combined agricultural work with the study of Mao Zedong’s writings to “re-educate” cadres and intellectuals in proper socialist thought. Since these schools served political purposes, the type of music that was allowed in China at the time was mainly revolutionary Opera. Revolutionary operas were a series of shows planned and engineered during the Cultural Revolution by Jiang Qing. These revolutionary operas were in the Peking style of opera. Lin was a resourceful person who could always find ways to thrive. This was important because the classic Western repertoire he would have normally played on the violin was forbidden, and he could then only play the music from the revolutionary operas with which he was familiar but had never played. Despite this challenge, Lin still actively worked on playing the music with the characteristics of Peking Opera on his violin. This period of his life became a learning experience for his future teaching. During this time, he also made some professional connections through his friendships with other musicians who were more experienced with Peking Opera.

In 1975, as the influence of the Cultural Revolution gradually subsided, the Central Conservatory of Music resumed its regular operations, and Lin was invited back to teach. This resulted in him teaching there for nearly fifty years. Within his first few years of teaching at the conservatory, his students began to make their mark on the international

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3 Jiang, Red: China’s Cultural Revolution.
violin stage. Under his guidance, the first Chinese violinist to win an international competition was Hu Kun. At the age of approximately 17, Kun won fifth place in the fourth Sibelius International Violin Competition in 1980.

Since 1980, Professor Lin’s students have participated in every crucial international violin competition, including the Sibelius competition in Finland, the International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, the Queen Elisabeth Competition in Belgium, and additional competitions in Britain, Italy, Germany, the United States, and many other countries. During the past fifty years, Lin’s students have won more than forty awards, of which thirteen were first place. Many of his students achieved successful solo careers. Some continue to play in high-level orchestras, and others are teaching in universities around the world.


He was also invited to give Master Classes frequently in the United States, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Europe. When Professor Lin died in his sleep on March 16, 2009,
he was still actively teaching. His obvious passion and love for music continued until the end of his life. Following is a timeline of the important musical events in Lin’s life as summarized in the content of this chapter.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>Born in Guangzhou, China.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950 (age 13)</td>
<td>Began violin studies with Wen Zhanmei.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951 (age 14)</td>
<td>Attended Central Conservatory of Music. Studied with Ma Sicong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960 (age 23)</td>
<td>Traveled to the former Soviet Union. Began studies with Yuri Yankelevich.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966 (age 29)</td>
<td>Beginning of the Cultural Revolution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970-1972 (age 33-35)</td>
<td>Sent to a re-education camp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972 (age 35)</td>
<td>Approved to teach the violin at the May Seventh Cadre School.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975 (age 38)</td>
<td>Returned to the Central Conservatory of Music. Continued to teach the violin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980 (age 43)</td>
<td>Lin’s student, Hu Kun, won the fifth place in the Sibelius International Competition, became the first Chinese contestant to win a prize in an international competition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-2009 (age 43-72)</td>
<td>Lin’s students had successively won prizes in international competitions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009 (age 72)</td>
<td>Professor Lin died in Beijing. Passed away in his sleep on March 16th.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1*: Timeline of Important Events in Professor Lin’s Life.
Chapter II. The Russian Violin School

As a young violinist growing up in China, Lin Yaoji was a product of the influence of the French school of violin playing. This came about as a result of Lin studying as a teenager with his violin teacher Ma Sicong who taught at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing and had studied violin at the Conservatoire de Paris in France. In 1960 when he traveled to Russia to study violin with Yuri Yankelevich (1909-1973), Lin Yaoji was exposed to the Russian Violin School approach for the first time, and it would end up having a profound influence on the development of his teaching method as he built his career as a violinist and pedagogue.

Lin’s opportunity to study in Russia at this time was quite significant both in terms of history, but also in terms of the potential for a huge pedagogical impact on the system of teaching violin in China, once Lin returned there. During the time that Lin Yaoji was studying abroad, as well as before that period, the playing or hearing of Western music was not a common occurrence in his home country. Indeed, for several centuries, in addition to a paucity in the areas of advanced science and technology, there was also a lack of convenient transportation means and networks (when compared to China’s current technological advances). Many historical and political reasons had contributed to the existing cultural isolation between China and the Western world.

During the course of Chinese history, the last three dynasties, Yuan (A.D. 1271-1368), Ming (A.D. 1368-1644), and Qing (A.D. 1644-1912), all implemented a maritime ban policy. These maritime bans completely prohibited local people from going to sea privately, and also banned foreign ships from coming to China for trade purposes. Emperor Qianlong (1711-1799) of the Qing Dynasty had the strictest sea ban policy, and once cut
off all contacts with the West. Because the maritime ban was not always continuous, the trading ports were still open at times.

Consequently, Western string instruments, including the violin, were brought into the Chinese court by missionaries from Western countries during the times when the trading ports were opened. Therefore, Western music at that time only existed in the Chinese court, and there were no opportunities for it to be heard among the general population. It was not until the end of the Qing Dynasty that China was forced to open its doors as a result of the two Opium Wars, and subsequent frequent aggressive wars initiated by Western powers.

The development of Western music in China can be traced back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, during the last years of the Qing Dynasty and up until its fall in 1912. At that time, China was in a semi-feudal and semi-colonial social situation, so there were many concessions from Western countries in China's port cities, such as Guangzhou, Tianjin, and Shanghai. During that period, some European musicians visited China and were responsible for establishing several orchestras and music schools. This resulted in Western music being spread among the Chinese people.

As a result of this growth of Western music practices, a group of Chinese musicians who studied Western music emerged. However, the influence of Western music was still limited to geographical areas surrounding the port cities and at this point, did not broadly influence other parts of China. The People’s Republic of China was founded in 1949, after a period of frequent civil wars and World War II. The New China, which was then just established, was waiting to be rebuilt, and the lack of economic growth resulted in all aspects of life being behind when compared to the West. This lack of innovation could also
be seen in the field of Music Education, especially in the knowledge of studying the violin. These were China's national conditions at the time that Lin Yaoji went to study the violin in Moscow.

In the field of violin performance, the pedagogical approach known as the Russian School of violin playing and teaching has long been associated with some of the most famous and well-known violinists and string pedagogues around the world. Surprisingly, a Hungarian violinist, Leopold Auer (1845-1930) is credited with having significant influences on the establishment of the Russian Violin School. Auer taught in St. Petersburg from 1868 to 1917. Auer’s violin students were also proponents of furthering to develop and disseminating the pedagogical approach moving forward. Some of these names have included violinists such as Jascha Heifetz, Nathan Milstein, and Mischa Elman.5

Author Masha Lankovsky offers this description of the term “Russian Violin School” in her book *The Russian Violin School: The Legacy of Yuri Yankelevich*6:

Naturally, as a representative of the Moscow and Soviet Violin Schools, Yuri Yankelevich also represents the more generally known Russian Violin School. Although the term “Russian Violin School” is in common use, it eludes a fixed definition. The history of violin playing in Russia is a fascinating combination of both foreign and native elements over the course of many centuries. Instead of attempting to define the Russian Violin School,

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it is easier to understand it as a broad term that encompasses a variety of different, although often overlapping, branches.\textsuperscript{7}

In the paragraph above, besides stating that there is no fixed definition of what the term “Russian Violin School” means, Lankovsky also mentioned the term “Moscow or Soviet Violin School”. These terms are reflective of the recent history of Russia. In Russia, the period before 1917, was known as the Russian Empire. After the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Soviet Union was established in 1922, with Moscow as its capital. From 1868 to 1917, the Hungarian violinist Leopold Auer (1845-1930) taught in Saint Petersburg. In 1917, he was forced to flee Russia because of the Russian Revolution. The leader of the revolution, Vladimir Lenin, moved the capital of Russia from Saint Petersburg to Moscow.

Continuing the legacy of Auer after he left Russia, were Lev Tseitlin (1881-1952), Konstantin Mostras (1886-1965), and Abraham Yampolsoky (1890-1956), who were centered around the Moscow Conservatory and the Central Music School. The collaborative, supportive, and pedagogical tradition they used became known as the “Moscow or Soviet Violin School”.\textsuperscript{8} The pedagogical associations and heritage shared between Leopold Auer and the following generational members of the Russian Violin School are illustrated in Figure 2.

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., page 2 of 12.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., page 1 of 12.
A Hierarchical Diagram of The Key Figures in The Russian Violin School

Leopold Auer (1845-1930)
was a Hungarian violinist, taught in St. Petersburg from 1868-1917.

Sergei Korguyev (1863-1938)
was an assistant of Auer.

Ioannes Nalbandyan (1871-1942)
was an assistant of Auer.

Boris Sibor (1880-1961)
was a student of Auer.

Konstantin Mostras (1886-1965)
was a student of Sibor, one of the founding figures of the Moscow Violin School. Mostras was interested in the psycho-physiological aspect of playing and teaching. He introduced the concept of “pre-hearing” and “pre-feeling”.

Ivan Galamian (1903-1981)
was an Armenian violinist and educator born in Iran. He was a student of Mostras. His teaching method combined the Russian and French Violin Schools. He became a significant figure in the history of violin education in the twentieth century.

Lev Tseitlin (1881-1952)
was a student of Auer, one of the founding figures of the Moscow Violin School.

Abraham Yampolsky (1890-1956)
was a student of Sergei Korguyev, and one of the founding figures of the Moscow Violin School. He elaborated on Mostras’ pedagogical ideas, paid attention to cultivating sound, and stressed the connections between mental conceptions and physical executions.

Yuri Yankelevich (1909-1973)
was a student and assistant of Yampolsky. Yankelevich was strongly influenced by Yampolsky, Mostras, and Tseitlin because of their detailed analysis of pedagogical issues.

Lin Yaoji (1937-2009)
was a prominent Chinese violinist and educator. He was a student of Yankelevich from 1960 to 1962 in Moscow Conservatory.

Figure 2: Members of The Russian Violin School by Generation.
From 1960 to 1962, Lin Yaoji primarily studied with Yuri Yankelevich in Moscow, Russia. Yankelevich was born in Omsk in 1909. As a young man, Yankelevich had studied violin with Anisim Berlin, a student of Auer, in Omsk.9 In 1924, Yankelevich entered the Leningrad Conservatory studying with Ioannes Nalbandyan (1871–1942), who was Auer’s teaching assistant. In 1928, Yankelevich became a graduate student and studied with Abraham Yampolsky in Moscow. In addition to his studies in the conservatory, Yankelevich had also absorbed influences from the flourishing musical cultural life of 1920s Russia.

As part of these cultural influences, Opera significantly influenced Yankelevich, leading to his being recognized as one of the most prominent proponents of the Russian Violin School’s methodological approach, which emphasized the ability to “sing” with the violin.10 In 1930, following his graduation from the Leningrad Conservatory, the Moscow Philharmonic appointed Yankelevich as its Assistant Concertmaster. During his work with the orchestra, Yankelevich noticed that he was good at both giving violin fingering suggestions and tips to his colleagues on how to improve their playing. This was the beginning of his journey to become a violin pedagogue. In 1932, Yankelevich then began to teach at the Central Music School and the Unchilische (another specialized high school) in Moscow.11 In 1936, Yankelevich became Yampolsky’s teaching assistant at the Moscow Conservatory and began teaching his own lessons there in 1953.

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9 Ibid., see page 5 of 12.
10 Ibid., see page 6 of 12.
11 Ibid., footnoted by the editor, “The Central Music School provided a ten-year course of study to students aged seven through eighteen, combining intensive musical training with regular schoolwork. The uchilische or music high school was a parallel five-year music-intensive program for students aged fifteen through nineteen.”
One of Yuri Yankelevich’s students at the Moscow Conservatory was a young Chinese violinist called Lin Yaoji, who studied with him from 1960 until 1962. China’s national conditions during this time had resulted in both a shortage of music teachers and a reduced emphasis on Music Education. Yankelevich appreciated Lin Yaoji’s talent and suggested that Lin should investigate violin playing techniques and pedagogical theories that would be useful for when he returned home to China. Yankelevich believed that Lin's talent would contribute to China's system of violin education in the future. The young Lin took Yankelevich’s advice and focused on studying and developing his violin pedagogy. As Yankelevich predicted, even though he had only studied for two years in Moscow, Lin had learned the essence of the Moscow Violin School to include in his future teaching methods. Further, Lin also continued to constantly add his innovative ideas to form his pedagogical approach – which today, is highly regarded in China, and is the most followed teaching method for the violin.
Chapter III: The Lin Yaoji Method of Violin Teaching

The Core Content of Lin Yaoji’s Violin Pedagogy

It is not an overstatement to say that Lin Yaoji’s teaching method is perhaps the most influential in the history of violin teaching in China. In the book, *The Essentials of Lin Yaoji’s Violin Teaching Method*, the Chinese author and violinist, Yang Baozhi provides a detailed explanation of Lin Yaoji’s teaching method. Yang’s work is the most detailed document that exists in its description of Lin’s pedagogical approach. In his book, Yang organizes Lin’s method into three categories that can be translated literally as follows: (1) Philosophy in Lin’s pedagogy; (2) Keys regarding technical issues; and (3) Musicianship and musical interpretation.

The purpose of the current document is four-fold. Firstly, to offer an English translation of the content and pedagogical approaches of Lin as included in Yang’s work. Secondly, to offer my personal perspectives and interpretative insights both about Lin’s and other well-known (non-Chinese) violin pedagogical approaches from the viewpoint of someone who grew up in China and studied violin there until graduate studies brought me to the United States. Thirdly, to provide important historical and cultural contextual information relevant to the growth of violin playing and the evolution of Lin’s approach. And finally, to celebrate and share Lin’s important pedagogical contributions to violin playing, his life achievements, and his legacy with the Western world.

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Philosophy In Lin’s Pedagogy

According to Yang Baozhi, Lin Yaoji’s teaching system was developed around one core methodology, one core principle, and one main viewpoint. Lin’s methodology was rooted in the ideals of a philosophy that incorporates ideas from nature, science, and history, which was studied in both the Russian and Chinese cultures, which is known as “dialectical materialism” or contradiction. Knight’s (2002) article on *The Role of Philosopher to the Chinese Communist Movement* notes that while often being associated with Russian philosophical ideals such as those by Karl Marx, the principles of dialectical materialism were also incorporated and interpreted into the writings of Mao Zedong in his 1937 work “On Contradiction” in which he discussed a number of the principles of dialectical materialism with Chinese communist society.

The unity of opposites is the central law of dialectical materialism. According to Vassily Krapivin in his book *What is Dialectical Materialism?* (1985): 14

The unity of opposites means that they cannot exist without each other and are mutually dependent. Another manifestation of their unity is that in definite conditions they are balanced out. Such an equilibrium, when neither of the two opposite sides prevails, marks a stage of stability in the development of a thing. The state of equilibrium, however, is only relative and temporary. In the course of development, the equilibrium is upset,

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which ultimately leads to the disappearance of one thing and the emergence of another, with a new unity of opposites.…

While being in unity, the opposites are at the same time in “struggle” with each other, that is, they mutually negate and rule each other out. Whereas the unity of opposites is relative, their struggle, Lenin said, is just as absolute and permanent as motion and development. Indeed, the very existence of contradictions implies the reaction of one opposite to another and mutual changes as a result.¹⁵

Lin abstracted several pairs of opposites from violin playing, such as: “dynamic and static (动与静)”; “exert pressure and relax (用力与放松)”; “emotion and rationality (感情与理智)”; “rest notes and musical continuity (休止符与音乐的 连贯性)”; “performer’s personality and composer’s composition style (演奏者的个性与作曲家的 创作风格)”; and so on. Lin used ideas based on the philosophies of dialectic materialism to solve problems related to the idea of opposite relationships in violin playing. In thinking about the various aspects of violin playing, Lin’s approach was to treat each issue “on a case-by-case basis” (“具体情况具体对待”)¹⁶. These topics of exploration included fundamental problems in violin playing, such as intonation, posture, musical creativity, and teacher’s demonstration. The viewpoint that shared Lin’s perspective in thinking about violin playing is related to nature. “Follow nature and learn from nature” (“顺应自然, 师
Lin advocated the idea of seeking inspiration from nature in looking for ways to approach technique and musicality in violin playing.

**Lin’s Methodology: The Unity of Opposites**

**Dynamic and Static**

The first pair of “opposites” identified in Lin’s approach to teaching violin are the concepts of dynamic and static ("动与静"). Lin identifies two aspects of violin playing specifically to this pair of opposites. These are techniques and musical interpretations. In terms of technique, the opposites of dynamic and static apply to both the left and right hands. For the left hand, when a violinist plays a *trill* or *tremolo*, one finger moves up and down, and another is stationary.

This combination of moving and non-moving fingers is also applicable to many of the technical pieces that make up the violin repertoire including, for example, Kreutzer’s *Etude No. 9* (see Figure 3). In Galamian’s edition of this work, he annotates that the first four measures should be played in the first position. To do this, the second finger needs to stay in steady contact with the string on the fingerboard. If it is disturbed because of other fingers’ movements, the pitch of the note F would be impacted. Therefore, the second finger could be described in Lin’s words as being “static”. In contrast, the third and fourth fingers need to move flexibly, and thus, may be considered “dynamic”. Hence, these opposite relationships of dynamic and static movement specific to the left hand technique illustrate the first pair of opposites identified by Lin in his teachings.

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17 Ibid., 16.
18 Ibid., 3.
In terms of the right hand, Lin summarized the opposites as “动中有静——手动弓静”, which means “there is stillness in movement, the hand is moving while the bow is still”. The stillness of the bow does not mean that the bow is stationary on the string. Rather, it means that the bow stick should be straight, the hair should be flat, and the stick should move steadily. “Straight, flat, and steady (一要直，二要平，三要稳)” is an essential requirement of the bowing technique in Lin Yaoji’s violin teaching approach.

Lin was good at illustrating his pedagogical points with analogies from real life and nature. He used cycling as an example to explicate the requirement of “straight, flat, and steady”. He said that if the road is straight, its surface is flat, and the cyclists’ bodies do not sway from side to side, then they can ride their bicycles fast. On the contrary, if the road twists and turns, the road surface is uneven, and if the cyclists’ bodies sway, it is not difficult to imagine that the cyclists cannot ride fast.

In addition to the left and right hand having a “dynamic and static” relationship of opposites, the technique of vibrato also requires the “dynamic and static” combination of forces. Regardless of whether or not the violinist is vibrating, the pitch cannot change – it

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19 Ibid., 4.
20 Ibid., 3.
must be consistent. In this context, intonation is the “static” element, while the amplitude and velocity of the vibrato are the “dynamic” elements. Therefore, there are also “dynamic and static” opposites in the vibrato technique.

From the perspective of musical interpretation, two characteristic traits embodying the idea of the unity of “dynamic and static” opposites are discussed in Lin’s book. Firstly, the contrasting ideas of emotion and rationality concerning musical intent serve to illustrate this concept. According to Lin, the evoking of emotions in the process of musical interpretation may be considered “dynamic”. If the emotions are too intense, the violinist may experience out-of-control technical and musical issues, such as rushing the tempo or accidentally bowing on other strings. Contrastingly, rationality might be considered a “static” factor.

One might question how a performer can maintain their composure while in an emotional moment. However, Lin pointed out that a calm mind and ears are the key. Only when one has a quiet mind can the violinist be able to successfully pre-hear the music in their mind. The act of pre-hearing according to Lin is a performer’s anticipation of the sound, intonation, articulation, tempo, and other factors that the violinist will make happen that occur during a performance or playing of the instrument. If a performer disengages their pre-hearing focus, their performance may be out of control. In this circumstance, the “dynamic” becomes chaos. Therefore, it is impossible to make good music under the “dynamic” without the “static”.

Secondly, the unity of rhythm and tempo is another illustration of “dynamic and static” unity. The tempo might be considered “static”, whereas the rhythm might be considered the “dynamic” side in this pair of opposites. The rhythm can be variable all the
However, the tempo is usually constant in a specific passage. Lin summarized this pair of opposites as “the dynamic contains the static” (“动中有静”). No matter how the notes’ values vary—dynamic, the inner pulse is always steady—static. He made an analogy that the steady pulse is like a human’s heart beating. Some students play fast in easy places but slow down in difficult places. Lin jokingly called this phenomenon “arrhythmia”. He also mentioned that the Chinese opera performers said fast passages should be steady and slow passages should be tight. Similar to Chinese operas, violin playing should also be like that.

**Exert Pressure and Relax**

The second pair of opposites identified in Lin’s teaching method are those that encourage the violinist to “exert pressure and relax” (用力与放松). Professor Lin mainly used this pair of opposites to explain how to use the bow arm. Ma Sicong (Lin’s violin teacher at the Central Conservatory in China) used to teach his students the word “weight” to avoid the muscle tension caused by using terms such as “pressure” and “exert pressure”. Lin believed that it is impossible to relax absolutely when playing the violin, just like with sleeping, and that the most important thing was “never to exert superfluous pressure”, or to “take out superfluous pressure all the time”. This principle has to do with subtraction.

Taking out superfluous pressure is essentially an issue of controlling and utilizing the bow’s weight and the right arm's weight. Lin created a mnemonic rhyme for this issue: “With the hand on the bow, and the bow on the string, how much do they weigh? One plus one equals two; With the bow tightly held while losing contact with the strings, how much do they weigh? One minus one equals zero.” (“手放弓上，弓放弦上，重量多少？一加
In this rhyme, Lin emphasized the issue of sound quality. He believed that good sound comes from the weight of the bow and relaxed arm. If the pressure exerted on the bow causes the bow out of the string and makes the sound superficial, this pressure is superfluous. On the contrary, if placing the arm's weight on the string, the sound is solid. Then how to place the arm’s weight on the string? The key is to relax the arm. This is the relationship between exerting superfluous pressure and relaxing. He explained further that when the bow is moving on the string, the weight on the string varies. The weight is heavy at the frog and light at the tip. Therefore, he maintained that when reaching the bow’s tip, violinists should place the arm’s weight on the string; when reaching the frog, the little finger should exert pressure on the bow to keep the balance. He also said that the arm's weight is not always placed on the string but hung on the shoulder most of the time.

Lin applied this pair of opposites to the bow stroke of *martelé* and *staccato*. He pointed out that there are three steps in the process of *martelé*. The first step is preparation; the second step is departure; the third step is gliding. From placing the bow on the string to preparing for the moment when the bow “sprints” (“冲刺”), it is exerted strength. After the moment, remove the strength immediately, and let the bow glide; this is relaxed. During the gliding, the energy is lost, the bow speed slows down, the volume of sound decreases, and get ready for the next bow.

**Time and Space**

The third pair of opposites that Lin Yaoji indicated was that of “time and space” (“时间与空间”). Lin summed up “four changes” (“四换”) in violin playing. These included
the following: “string crossing (换弦), shifting (换把), bow change (换弓), and finger change (换指).” Lin believed it necessary to reduce space to achieve connection and singing in these four processes—space reducing means applying smaller movements and removing unnecessary movements. For example, when doing the string-crossing, the bow is drawing a circular sector in the space—the smaller area of the circular sector, the smoother string-crossing. The reason is that in the movement of the bow, the extra distance the bow takes will waste time and make the music unconnected. According to Lin, “to reduce space and save time” the player must shorten the distance and remove unnecessary movements.

As for the left hand, the rule of “reducing space to save time” can be applied to the finger moving in double stops. For instance, when playing the patterns of a fourth-sixth, a third-seventh, and a second-octave (see Figure 4), the fingertips should move horizontally. If the fingers move vertically too much, it will increase the space and waste time.

![Figure 4: Finger changing in double stops.](image)

The Principle — Treat Each Case on A Case-By-Case Basis

In Yang Baozhi’s book, he expounded on this principle from four aspects. The first aspect was about intonation and temperament. Lin believed that violin performance cannot
be based on only one temperament but should adopt a different temperament under different circumstances. He called it “comprehensive balanced temperament” (“综合平衡律”). He advocated “collecting various temperaments for use” (“集各律为我所用”). When playing a piece of melody-dominated music, for example, Tchaikovsky’s Mélodie from *Souvenir d’un Lieu Cher, Op.42* (see Figure 5), the players should lean towards the Pythagorean tuning\(^{21}\) to highlight the melody. If there are plenty of chords or arpeggiated chords in a musical work, such as J. S. Bach’s Ciaccona in *Partita No.2 BWV 1004* (see Figure 6), Lin advocated for the just intonation\(^{22}\) to make the chords consonant. When it has an octave relationship with the piano, for example, the beginning of Beethoven’s *Sonata for Violin and Piano*, No.8 in G major, Op.30 (see Figure 7), it should be consistent with the piano and adopt the equal temperament\(^{23}\). As for dissonant notes, Lin believed that people’s ears will accept a wider range. Lin also mentioned that the intonation would be different due to people’s aesthetics. He took the first movement's theme in Tchaikovsky’s *Violin Concerto, Op.35*, as an example (see Figure 8). It sounds consonant, stable, and grand if one plays F\(^\#\) in just intonation, but some violinists will play it higher.

![Moderato con moto](image)

*Figure 5: Mélodie from Souvenir d’un Lieu Cher, Op.42, P. I. Tchaikovsky.*

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21 Pythagorean tuning is the temperament that the frequency ratios of all intervals are based on the ratio 3:2.

22 Just intonation is a temperament that attempt to tune all intervals as whole number ratios (such as 3:2 or 4:3) of frequencies.

23 Equal temperament is a musical temperament that divides an octave into equal steps.
Figure 6: Ciaccona in Partita No.2 BWV 1004, J. S. Bach.

Figure 7: Beethoven Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 8 in G major, Op. 30, mm. 1-4.

Figure 8: Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto, Op. 35, mm 28-33.

The second aspect that the principle deals with is the relationship between the stability and change of violin playing posture. Some violinists believe that there is only one standard hand shape for the left hand, and others consider that hand shape is changeable according to circumstances. However, Lin believed that the stability and changeability of hand shape are mutually restricted. Overemphasizing the hand shape’s stability will cause the hand rigid. On the contrary, if only emphasizing the variability of the hand, it may cause unnecessary and even harmful movements. For instance, there have been controversies about the position of the left-hand thumb.

Lin objected to a fixed position of the thumb. He believed that the hand shape of individuals should determine the position of the thumb. The general principle is to enable
the remaining four fingers to move freely, in the meantime, to be conducive to the development of left-hand techniques. Lin’s standpoint about the shape of the left hand is consistent with his teacher Yuri Yankelevich’s. Yankelevich wrote in his article:

Undoubtedly, the issue of an efficient setup can only be examined regarding its immediate relationship to those movements for which it was created and whose freedom it must guarantee. At the same time, one must not forget that in musical performance the criteria for establishing correct movements should be determined solely in consideration of the quality of sound that is subsequently produced.”24

In this context, Yankelevich emphasized that no matter the left-hand shape or the whole-body posture, an effective posture must free the hands and ensure sound quality. Yankelevich also said, “The term ‘prospective positioning’ is often encountered in pedagogical practice. Relative to what was mentioned earlier, the prospective positioning of a violinist is determined by how that positioning can accommodate the entire range of movements a violinist will require in his or her future development.”25 In other words, from the beginning of learning the violin, the hand shape and posture must be forward-looking. Probably because of Yankelevich’s influence, Lin’s views relate to Yankelevich’s statements tightly.

Under this principle, Lin talked about universality and individuality. The reason why Lin had this thinking is because of China’s music education background. In the 1950s,

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25 Ibid., 3.
globalization was not as apparent as in the 21st century. Especially, the P. R. China had just been founded in 1949, the communication with Western countries was not as closed as today. Therefore, in the 1950s, the Chinese violin field often followed the experts from the West to do what they did precisely and changed postures or other related expertise when another expert brought different views. Lin later said the way of thinking was unscientific because the violin masters’ physical conditions, learning experiences, and habits differed. Therefore, taking the experience from only one individual as a universal truth is incorrect. Lin believed that no matter which country the violinist comes to give a lecture, Chinese violinists should absorb the internal regularity, the commonality, like the practice methods. However, Chinese violinists should also have musical creativity. No matter how outstanding the performance of any master is, Chinese violinists cannot directly imitate it because it is others’ creations, not Chinese ideas. Therefore, the so-called individuality is the originality in musical interpretation.

The last aspect is about the demonstrations in teaching. Lin believed that teachers must play better than students for the demonstration to be effective. Moreover, teachers should not attempt to impose their own interpretations on students. Teachers should be good at stimulating students’ inherent potential and developing students’ creativity.

**The Viewpoint—Follow Nature and Learn from Nature**

Lin believed that the laws of nature could often be used when reflecting on and writing about the physical movements of violin playing and their related pedagogy. He also used analogies relating to nature to describe what he wanted in terms of sound. For instance, he suggested that students seek inspiration from nature in the sounds of resonant and transparent Buddhist temple bells, the wind, and water. To create the sound of temple bells,
Lin suggested that the bow should make the string vibrate sufficiently to make the sound resonant. He also likened the sound of wind in nature to musical crescendi or decrescendi. In order to emulate the sound of flowing water, Lin suggested that violinists should keep the bow hair moving fluidly on the string. In lesson situations where students were playing with a harsh sound, Lin would suggest that they needed to think about the sounds heard in nature to help them find a way to make a more musical sound.

Lin also applied the theory of gravitational force in his teaching. He believed that violinists should utilize gravity rather than resist it. For example, when playing a down bow. Lin also believed that his students could achieve great results with less effort when incorporating the theory of gravitational force into their approach to playing. According to Lin, “Nature is our best teacher.”
Chapter IV: Mnemonic Rhymes Regarding Technique and Practicing

As previously mentioned, one of Lin Yaoji’s inventions was combining what he learned from the former Soviet Union with his own experience and creating mnemonic rhymes to help his students. Mnemonic rhyme has always been an essential method of imparting skills in Chinese culture. For example, primary school students must memorize “ninety-nine multiplication tables (九九乘法表)”, while students of traditional Chinese medicine need to recite a “Tang verse (汤头歌)” to remember more than three hundred traditional Chinese prescriptions under twenty categories, and those studying the Guqin(古琴) also learn specific formulas.

The rhyming nature of these mnemonic rhymes makes them easy to remember, and easy to share. Therefore, in China, even if a violinist was not Lin’s student, they would probably be able to recite part of Lin’s rhymes. Lin’s mnemonic rhymes cover all aspects of violin playing, including pedagogical ideas specific to violin performance, left-hand technique, right-hand technique, coordination of the left and right hands, and practice methods.

**Mnemonic Rhymes for General Practice**

Lin recommends two rhymes to use when practicing:

1. **Rhyme Title:** 两预两要

   **Literal Translation:** Two “Preparations” and Two “Shoulds”.

   **Practical Translation:** Two preparatory steps to be completed before playing, and two steps to be completed during playing.
Translation of Rhyme Text:

内心歌唱预先听  “To sing in heart and listen in advance,
两手动作预先量 to plan the movements of two hands beforehand,
多余动作要去掉 to avoid unnecessary movements,
紧张因素要扫清 to clear nervous elements.”

The first “preparation” refers to the act of “pre-listening” (内心歌唱预先听). Lin believed that it is crucial to sing internally and anticipate the melody before the actual sound is produced on the violin. Although the player can make corrections after being out of tune or making unsatisfactory sounds, anticipating the intonation and timbre beforehand can be more beneficial. In other words, let the brain lead the hands instead of the other way around.

The second “preparation” relates to planning bow distribution, and the placement and position of the left-hand fingers (“两手动作预先量”). Bow distribution should include specific decisions about bow placement, including the length of the bow used, bow speed, bow pressure, and the contact point. Before actually playing, the violinist should think through and plan all of the factors related to the bow. In regards to the left hand, factors that affect intonation, such as the distance between fingers (i.e. half step and whole step finger placement), shifting, and double stops, should also be pre-planned.

The first “should” is to eliminate unnecessary movements (“多余动作要去掉”). For example, when playing a passage, the left-hand fingers should not be lifted too high
above the fingerboard. Likewise, when playing frequent string crossings, the bow arm should be relatively steady rather than moving excessively.

The second “should” is to clear all the elements of playing that may cause tension (“紧张因素要扫除”). For instance, an inappropriate left-hand shape (e.g. collapsed wrist) can lead to tension. Likewise, raising the right shoulder too high can cause tension in the bow arm. Both of these habits should be avoided when playing the violin.

The tips of “pre-listening” and “pre-perceiving” in the first and second sentences can be traced back to the Russian Violin School. School, and indeed, these ideas had already existed before Lin studied in the former Soviet Union with his teacher Yuri Yankelevich. According to Masha Lankovsky’s *Yuri Yankelevich and the Russian Violin School.*

Auer fled Russia at the onset of the 1917 Revolution, and when Moscow replaced Petersburg as the capital his legacy continued largely through the work of the violin teachers Lev Tseitlin, Konstantin Mostras, and Abraham Yampolsky. … As Yampolsky’s assistant for seventeen years, Yankelevich synthesized and elaborated on the traditions of this Moscow Violin School.

Yankelevich was also strongly influenced by his teachers in the development of his pedagogical approach:

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27 Ibid., page 1 of 12.
As an heir to the rich traditions of violin playing in Russia, Yankelevich was particularly influenced by the violin teachers Lev Tsetlin, Konstantin Mostras, and Abraham Yampolsky who helped establish the Moscow Violin School following the Russian Revolution of 1917.28

Therefore, Yankelevich inherited the traditions of the Moscow Violin School. The basis of Lin’s rhymes about “pre-listening” and “pre-perceiving”, on the other hand, can be traced back to Konstantin Mostras’s views. Mostras was one generation before Yankelevich, and had influenced him deeply, as illustrated in the same article by Lankovsky:

Mostras taught at the Moscow Conservatory from 1922 to 1965 and headed the violin department from 1936 to 1950. He was deeply committed to the analysis of violin playing and teaching, and in 1931 he instituted a course at the conservatory devoted exclusively to violin methodology. … Extremely analytical and scientific in his approach, Mostras was interested in the psycho-physiological side of playing and teaching, and he introduced the concepts ‘pre-hearing’ and ‘pre-feeling.’ Mostras’s ideas not only were influential on the Moscow Violin School but also were passed on to his student Ivan Galamian (1903–1981), who would go on to become one of the most important violin teachers in the United States.29

In summary, the concepts of “pre-hearing” and “pre-feeling”, as well as their related psycho-physiological factors, are key features of Lin’s teaching method. The words “pre-hearing” and “pre-feeling” were translated by Masha Lankovsky from Russian, and

28 Ibid., page 2 of 12.
29 Ibid., page 4-5 of 12.
the terms “pre-listening” and “pre-perceiving” have been translated by the author of this
document from Chinese. Although the literal translations from both languages are different,
they share the same meaning.

(2.) Rhyme Title: 一个基本要求

Literal Translation: “A Basic Requirement”.

Translation of Rhyme Text:

内心歌唱率两手 “Lead two hands with internal singing,

两手顺从跟着走 both hands accept the leadership,

基本要求匀准美 the basic requirement is even, accurate, and beautiful,

胆大心细精益求 achieve excellence with bravery and carefulness.”

The first two sentences (“lead two hands with internal singing, both hands accept
the leadership”) and the one from the previous rhyme (“To sing in heart and listen in
advance”) are very similar to some extent. They both emphasize the importance of internal
singing. The critical point in this rhyme is the third sentence: “the basic requirement is even,
accurate, and beautiful.” This requirement is consistent with Yankelevich’s violin teaching
philosophy.

Masha Lankovsky’s book Yuri Yankelevich and the Russian Violin School includes
Maya Glezarova’s article Aspects of Yankelevich’s Teaching Methods, in which she
described how Yankelevich made an individual plan for every student:

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30 Maya Glezarova, Aspects of Yankelevich’s Teaching Methods, The Russian Violin School (Oxford
University Press), accessed July 12, 2021,
https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199917600.001.0001/acprof-
f-9780199917600-chapter-4.
All the individual plans (both in the younger and older classes) included every aspect of violin technique in the appropriate quantity and level. For example, the beginning classes covered the main techniques of playing scales in one and two octaves. The goals were as follows: an even sound, good bow distribution, smooth string crossings, even rhythm in the left hand, accurate intonation, and freedom in executing all these skills. In approximately the third and fourth years, scales were studied in each position—that is, first, second, third, fourth, fifth, and so on—and three octave scales were also covered. The goals included being able to shift freely and correctly, improved tone quality, clear and precise rhythm in the left hand, and good intonation.31

In this paragraph, Glezarova described Yankelevich’s requirements for scale practice. Lin summarized these goals into “even” (匀), “accurate” (准), and “beautiful” (美). “Even (匀)” refers to the even sound, even rhythm, and good bow distribution. “Accurate (准)” contains accurate intonation, correct shifting, and precise rhythm in the left hand. “Beautiful (美)” includes smooth string crossings and good tone quality. Lin summed all the goals into three Chinese characters. This catchy rhyme is easy for students to remember and check whether their daily practice improves towards the goals.

The last sentence is “achieve excellence with bravery and carefulness”. This can be understood as that the fearless and confident psychological state can drive physiological

31 Ibid., page 8 of 16.
abilities into a good performance. On the contrary, a worried and unconfident psychological state can adversely affect a person’s output.

(3.) **Rhyme Title:** 演奏心态

**Literal Translation:** The Mentality of Performance.

**Translation of Rhyme Text:**

东西南北中，四面八方通  
“East, West, South, North, and center, all directions are connected,

脚踏地球中，顶天立地松  
standing on earth, like a pine tree

pointing to the sky,

情爱我心中，箭发自弦中  
emotions from my heart, like an

arrow from the bow,

祝君更成功，展翅游太空  
wish you more success, spread your

wings and roam the sky.”

The first two verses of this rhyme mean that no matter the generation, the school, or the nationality, as long as our experiences and perspectives are worth studying, we should learn from them.

The third verse talks about “love” in two different ways. Firstly, it refers to the love of music that students experience when playing any instrument, especially in relation to loving every note that they play. The second kind of love refers to teachers “loving” their students and teaching them in a way that helps them to develop a love for the violin and music.
The last verse of this rhyme is about imagination. Technical excellence is indeed important, but technique only works for people who have a rich imagination. Yankelevich also emphasized the importance of imagination. In Vladimir Grigoryev (1927-1997)’s article *Yankelevich’s Methodological System*, when he explained Yankelevich’s approach to tone production, in which he cited Yankelevich’s words: “correct, clean, full, free process of tone production. There are different ways to change the timbre... A varicolored sound depends on the student’s imagination and artistic understanding of the music.” Grigoryev also wrote: “Yankelevich pointed out that developing the student’s artistic imagination directly influences the development of a variety of colors in the sound.” Yankelevich believed that the artistic imagination decides the tone color - one of the most critical elements of music interpretation. This final verse in the rhyme coincides with Yankelevich’s idea about imagination.

**Mnemonic Rhymes for The Left Hand**

There are four rhymes under this category:

(1.) **Rhyme Title:** 换指口诀

**Literal Translation:** Rhyme for Changing Fingers On The Same String.

**Translation of Rhyme Text:**

指根发力到指尖  “Power from the roots of the fingers to tips,

手指关节不发蔫 and all joints should be firm to brace the force.

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33 Ibid., page 19 of 54.

34 Ibid., page 21 of 54.
指头轮休存耐力       Rest fingers alternatively in order to acquire long-lasting endurance,

手指独立实又坚       and they should move independently and be firm.”

According to Lin, the force that presses on the string comes from the metacarpophalangeal joint, also known as the first knuckle joint (illustrated in Figure 9). The distal interphalangeal joint (i.e. the first knuckle from the tip of the finger), and the proximal interphalangeal joint (i.e. the middle joint of the finger) should bear the force and support the finger, rather than being distorted and flat. With every joint being supportive, the left-hand shape can be stable. In the meantime, every finger needs to maintain its independence, and should not be constrained by the other fingers. In addition, the undepressed fingers should relax to maintain endurance.

![Hand Joints](image)

*Figure 9: Hand Joints.*

(2.) **Rhyme Title:** 换弦口诀

**Literal Translation:** Rhyme for Changing Fingers on Different Strings.

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Translation of Rhyme Text:

换弦靠手肘  “Use the left elbow to cross strings,

琴颈为中心 while centering on the neck of the violin.

四指成一线 Keep all four fingers aligned while moving,

肘带腕跟指 with the elbow leading the wrist and fingers.”

This rhyme talks about the left arm's movement when playing on different strings. Lin described it as a “Rudder-like movement (舵式动作)”. He explained that when changing from the lower strings to the higher strings, or the other way around, the movement of the left arm should feel like the steering gear in a ship. Under this metaphor, the neck of the violin is the axle, and the elbow is like the handle (see Figure 10). The elbow drives the wrist and hand to move together around the violin neck like the wheel. When playing on the E string, the elbow is in an outer position relative to the body, and when going to the lower strings, the elbow moves towards the inner side of the body. This rhyme focuses on the issue that some players only move their left-hand fingers when changing strings, instead of moving their elbow. With only parts of the arm moving, the intonation can suffer and result in negative shape distortion of the left hand.
(3.) **Rhyme Title**: 换把口诀

**Literal Translation**: Rhyme for Shifting.

**Translation of Rhyme Text**:

下臂带动腕指跟       “Use the forearm to drive the wrist and fingers,
腕指配合要认真       pay attention to the coordination between them.
先行指头最重要       The leading finger is the most important,
按得不准白费心       all is lost if misplaced.”

This rhyme describes that when shifting, violinists should use the forearm to drive the wrist and fingers. If the shift is made with the same finger, the finger should leave the fingerboard, but maintain contact with the string while sliding into the new position. If the

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shift is executed with different fingers, the previous finger should measure the distance so that the new finger is in tune.

(4.) Rhyme Title: 揉弦口诀

**Literal Translation:** Rhyme for Vibrato.

**Translation of Rhyme Text:**

如坐摇椅如乘轿 "As if sitting in a rocking chair or recliner chair,

又似扇子手中摇 also like waving a fan.

君能识得此中味 If you can comprehend its essence,

宽窄快慢自可调 you will be able to adjust its width and pace easily.”

Lin used analogies to describe the feeling of vibrato. He believed that once the vibrato motion begins, the finger should just follow the inertia to vibrate. The vibrato should be a continuous, natural, and relaxed process.

**Mnemonic Rhymes for The Right Hand**

(1.) Rhyme Title: The Three Basic Requirements of the Bow.

**Translation of Rhyme Text:**

一要直 1. Straight bow

二要平 2. Flat surface

三要稳 3. Steady bow traveling

The three basic requirements of the bow movement are “straight, flat, and steady.” “Straight” means that the bow should be perpendicular to the string, and parallel to the bridge at all times. “Flat” refers to understanding all seven flat surfaces of the strings (see
Figure 11. When playing on the string, students should know which flat surface they are playing on. “Steady” means withholding any extra movements in the bow, such as unconscious trembling. Only through mastering these foundations can the player apply advanced techniques to the bow.

![Figure 11: Seven Flat Surfaces of The Strings.](image)

(2.) **Rhyme Title: Use “Gravity” to Make Sound.**

**Translation of Rhyme Text:**

手放弓上  “With the hand on the bow,

弓放弦上  and the bow on the string,

重量多少  how much do they weigh?

一加一等于二 One plus one equals two;

弓被抓紧 With the bow tightly held

弓弦分家 while losing contact with the strings,

重量多少 how much do they weigh?

一减一等于零 One minus one equals zero.”
This rhyme was mentioned in the opposites of exerting pressure and relaxing. It emphasizes that good sound comes from gravity rather than tightening up the right arm.

(3.) **Rhyme Title: The Essentials of the Right Arm Coordination.**

**Translation of Rhyme Text:**

肩肘腕指环扣环

“The shoulder, elbow, wrist, and fingers should all be inter-connected,

整体动作不零散

to avoid scattered movements overall.

上臂下臂联合动

The lower and upper arms collaborate,

大刀阔斧声音宽

the bold and resolute movements lead to the broad sound.”

Some teachers insist that when playing with the upper half of the bow, the violinist should use the forearm; and that when playing with the lower half of the bow, they should use the upper arm. This rhyme opposes this standpoint. Lin believed that players should not isolate the movements of the forearm and the upper arm. He suggested that all the joints and parts should coordinate, including the shoulder, upper arm, elbow, forearm, wrist, and fingers. All the joints and parts should be interlinked with “chi” inside. “Chi (气)” is a common concept both in Chinese Taoist philosophy, and Chinese medicine.

The concept of “chi” can be approximately traced back to the Spring and Autumn period from 771 to 476 BCE of Chinese history. The ideologists from the Spring and Autumn period refined the concept of “chi”. “Chi” became the fundamental element that constitutes everything in the world. It has a flowing characteristic, like gas. The energy or power of life possessed by all beings and everything in the universe result from the
movement and change of “chi”.

Since Chinese students are familiar with the concept and its flowing characteristic, they can try to comprehend the right arm coordination through the analogy of “chi”.

(4.) **Rhyme Title: Tips for Different Bow Speed.**

**Translation of Rhyme Text:**

快弓如顺风

“When playing with fast bow, it feels like biking downwind.

慢弓似逆风

When playing with slow bow, it is like biking against the wind.

不快不慢像和风

When playing with moderate bow, it feels like walking in the gentle breeze.”

This rhyme is about how it feels to play the whole bow with different bow speeds. The contact point between the bow and the string should adjust according to the bow speed. In most instances, when playing at a fast bow speed, the contact point should be slightly towards the fingerboard; in other cases, such as when playing ponticello, the contact point should be close to the bridge. The contact point should be approximately halfway between the bridge and the fingerboard when playing at a moderate bow speed.

It is worth noting that when playing with a fast bow speed, the bow can potentially lose contact with the string easily. Therefore, the player must maintain pressure into the

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string through the index finger of the bow hand. The same idea applies to the slow bow speed: when pulling the bow slowly, too much pressure can lead to unmusical outcomes.

(5.) **Rhyme Title: The Keys to String Crossing.**

**Translation of Rhyme Text:**

平面均匀要走好, “The process of switching the surfaces needs to be smooth,

欲换先往下弦靠; approach the next string before switching.

平稳过渡下条弦, With the smooth transition,

天衣无缝艺更高。 the technique becomes flawless.”

This rhyme explains that the key to smooth string crossing is approaching the upcoming string ahead of time. Lin summarized that there should be three movements happening during the process of string crossing. The first movement is that the left hand should prepare for the first note on the next string. The second movement is to make the bow approach the next string. The third movement is keeping the contact between the bow and string without stopping the bow. When approaching the next string, the player still needs to utilize gravity to keep the contact between the bow and string. Otherwise, the sound might become accented, discontinuous, or uneven. The goal is to achieve a smooth and coherent string crossing.

The illustration below (see Figure 12) has been included to explain the second movement that Lin identified related to how the bow should approach the next string. As displayed in Figure 11, there are seven basic flat surfaces of the strings. However, given that the shape of the bridge is arched, theoretically, there are infinite flat surfaces that are
tangent to the arch. Among these infinite surfaces, every string has its basic surface, as labeled by Number 2 in the circle in the illustration. Except for that surface, every other string has two other surfaces that are close to its neighbor strings. These are labeled by the numbers 1 and 3 on both sides of the circle in the diagram that follows. For example, surface 1 of the D string is close to the G string, and surface number 3 is close to the A string. If making the bow cross from the D to the A string, the bow should move from surface 2 of the D to surface 3 of the D string, surface 1 of the A string, and finally fall on the A string alone. This process is how the bow can approach each next string smoothly.

![Diagram of flat surfaces involved in the process of string crossing.](image)

*Figure 12: Flat Surfaces Involved in The Process of String Crossing.*

(6.) **Rhyme Title: Rhyme for Short Bow, Fast Bow, And Sautillé.**

**Translation of Rhyme Text:**

手动弓静拉短弓  “When playing short bow, lead the bow with

上下弓匀拉快弓  the hand,

make sure the up and down bows are even

when playing fast.
The sautillé happens naturally in the middle bow, where it is the lightest, it is done with the hair on the string.”

There are four aspects to this rhyme. First, when playing the short and fast bow stroke, the bow should be kept straight and steady, and not skid or land on the different contact points on the string. Second, the down bows and up bows should be even, rather than heavy down bows and light up bows. Third, when playing sautillé, the player should use the part near the gravitational center of the bow, where it is the easiest and the most bouncy. Lastly, when playing the sautillé, the bow should not leave the string.

The reason why Lin proposed that the bow should not leave the string is to correct the misconception that the bow should bounce high off the string during sautillé. He said, “the sautillé is achieved by bounce, not by jump (跳弓不跳).” In this phrase (跳弓不跳), “bounce” and “jump” these two words are both referred as “跳” in Chinese character, some students are confused, as in whether the sautillé should be off or on the string. The motion of “bounce” relies more on the elasticity of the bow, and the motion of “jump” refers to making the bow jump artificially. The key to sautillé is not whether the bow leaves the string or not. Instead, it is what the arm does. The arm exploits the bow’s bouncing property, instead of making the bow bounce on the string. In other words, the arm does not enforce it; instead, it makes the property emerge. Sautillé is usually applied at fast tempi. The outcome of playing sautillé is that the bow hair remains close to the string or on the string, even with the stick bouncing. In this way, students can understand “the sautillé is achieved by bounce, not by jump (跳弓不跳)”. 
(7.) **Rhyme Title: Rhyme for Marcato and Martélé.**

**Translation of Rhyme Text:**

先松后冲  “Relax before pulling,

冲后放松  relax after pulling.

声有余辉  The sound comes with a ring,

近似撞钟  that sounds like striking a temple bell.”

One of the typical examples of *marcato* bow stroke is from the beginning of Fritz Kreisler’s *Praeludium and Allegro* (see Figure 13). One of the shared actions required for the successful execution of *marcato* and *martelé* is to quickly sink into the string at first before releasing the sideways bow stroke. A difference between them is that the bow must be stopped between the strokes in *martelé* style, but not in *marcato* style. When playing *marcato*, even though the bow needs to be stopped in order to sink into the string, the stopping moment should be minimized as much as possible. In teaching the *martelé* stroke, Lin emphasized that in the process of releasing the sideways bow movement, the sound should sound like the resonance of a large temple bell (“the sound of a temple bell” is discussed in the content of “Learn from Nature” (on page 27 of this document), rather than the sound made by a blacksmith hammering iron. Therefore, the timings of the bow
stop and sinking action are crucial.

*Figure 13:* Fritz Kreisler’s *Praeludium and Allegro*, mm. 1-19. (Example of marcato shared from Yang Baozhi’s book).

**Mnemonic Rhymes for the Coordination of Both Hands**

(1.) **Rhyme Title:** 两手配合

**Literal Translation:** Coordination of Both Hands.

**Translation of Rhyme Text:**

左手一把抓  “Place all fingers of the left hand down at once,

右手分开拉  and the right hand plays the notes respectively.

两手相配合 Two hands work together,

紧密不分家 and never part ways.”

This rhyme discusses the importance of placing all involved left-hand fingers in a position at once. It applies in the following three circumstances: Firstly, when shifting from a higher position to a lower position, for example, in three or four-octave descending scales or arpeggios, all involved fingers should be placed in the lower position at once, then
released one by one; Secondly, when performing a string crossing in a descending pattern, all involved fingers should be placed on the following string at once; and thirdly, when playing chords, all the fingers of the left hand should be placed simultaneously. It should be noticed that the right hand must cooperate with the left-hand fingers.

(2.) Rhyme Title: 三点相通

Literal Translation: Three Points Interconnected.

Translation of Rhyme Text:

三点相通声音通 “When the three points are connected, the sound becomes penetrating,

点点相连显神通 a miracle happens with the connection.

三点合成一颗珠 The three points combine to create a pearl,

串起珠子闹天空 string the pearls and roam the sky.”

This rhyme is about the interworking of the “three points”. The first point refers to the force point where the right hand exerts force on the bow. In general, when playing at the tip of the bow, the index finger should exert more power on the bow stick; when playing at the frog, the pinky should support the bow. The force point of the right hand on the bow is changing all the time to keep the balance of the bow and sound quality consistent. The second point is where the left hand finger contacts the string, which also changes. The third point is the sounding point. Many factors can affect the sounding point, such as pitch, bow speed, the thickness of strings, and bow pressure. Only when these three points work well together, can a full, beautiful tone be produced.
(3.) **Rhyme Title:** “四换” 线不断

**Literal Translation:** Four Changes.

**Translation of Rhyme Text:**

“换”字不断气

“When making changes, the Chi never stops,

脑中不断来

the brain keeps thinking.

左手珠一串

The left hand makes the pearl,

弓子来穿线

string the pearls with the bow.

“换” 字易冒尖

Changes can be too easily obvious,

“时间”与“空间”

focus on the time and space.

认真攻“换”字

Work on the changes seriously,

不断又粘连

glue the string and bow hair together

without breaking them.”

This rhyme is an extension of the opposites of “time and space” that are mentioned previously in this document. It refers to the importance of connection when there are changes in the left and/or right hand. Lin summarized that there are four playing considerations to which one should pay extra attention. They are shifts, string crossings, changes of the left-hand fingers, and bow changes. In the Chinese language, these four terms use the same character “换” (换把, 换弦, 换指, 换弓). Therefore, Lin titled them the “Four Changes”.
Lin believed that there was “chi” in the bow arm movements; there also is “chi” \( (气) \) in music. The musical “chi” cannot be interrupted by the “four changes”. For example, when playing works from the Romantic Era, the musical flow should not be interrupted by noticeable bow changes. It should sound like one breath. There should not be accents or unwanted sounds when playing string crossings, whether using separate bow strokes or playing multiple notes in one bow. When shifting, it is vital to decide the timings of lifting the preceding finger and allowing the new finger to fall down.

**Mnemonic Rhymes for Practicing**

(1.) **Rhyme Title**: 用心思考找规律

**Literal Translation**: Looking for Rules.

**Translation of Rhyme Text**:

提琴规律经常找     “Frequently look for the rules of the violin,

用心思考不能少     attentive thinking is indispensable,

科学指导练琴好     good practice is achieved with scientific guidance.”

Lin proposed that there are rules to follow when learning and practicing a piece. In the first phase, technical problems should be solved rationally and calmly. After the first phase, one can do performance practice. During performance practice, two things should be kept in mind. The first is the structure of the piece that is being practiced. Comprehend the piece as a whole, even if with some minor mistakes, still play it from beginning to the end without stopping. The second is to think of the situations in which the performer interacts with the audience’s emotions, while not being affected by any occasional reactions from the audience.
(2.) Rhyme Title: 慢练

Literal Translation: Practice Slowly.

Translation of Rhyme Text:
快即是慢 “Fast is slow,
慢即是快 slow is fast.”

In his teachings, Lin reminded violinists that “slow is fast”, and “to build and not to destroy”. To explain his concept of “slow is fast”, Lin made an analogy. He said, practicing an instrument is like constructing a highway. It seems a slow process to build a highway, especially to build a high-quality highway. However, once the highway is completed and people drive on it, it will be gone through much faster. Therefore, the slow process is for improving fast technique, which is also the building process behind it.

The author of this document (hereinafter referred to as “the author”) raises a question: what should slow practice be? The author has two points of view. Firstly, repeat what is accurate. Some people believe that practice is just repetition. However, the author believes that effective practice should involve accurate repetition. If someone repeats a wrong movement many times, it is even worse than not repeating it. Secondly, effective practice should involve careful thinking processes. Some students spend lots of time practicing with unsatisfactory improvements. The main reason is that they do not reflect critically enough while practicing to improve the quality of their playing. As Professor Lin endorsed in his teaching, it is important to set goals in order to practice effectively, and to guarantee that the desired practice quality will be achieved in order to reach the desired
goals. If these requirements are met, eventually, all of the effective practice habits learned specific to mental and physical practice can later be transformed into instinctual habits.

Speaking of instinct, Professor Lin’s teacher, Yuri Yankelevich, is mentioned along with the psychological concept of “Classical Conditioning” in Vladimir Grigoryev’s Yankelevich’s Methodological System:38

In the course of his teaching, Yankelevich’s ideas underwent certain changes. He closely followed developments in both the methodological literature and the more specialized literature of psychology and physiology. Wherever possible, he attempted to apply the latest scientific achievements to his pedagogical activities. Thus, he examined Pavlov’s theory of conditioned reflexes and concluded that the skills of playing the violin are similar, if not identical, to these types of reflexes.39

Ivan Petrovich Pavlov (1849-1936) was a Russian physiologist. His “conditioned reflexes” theory is more commonly known as “Classical Conditioning”. “Classical conditioning” is “a type of learning in which an initially neutral stimulus—the conditioned stimulus (CS)—when paired with a stimulus that elicits a reflex response—the unconditioned stimulus (US)—results in a learned, or conditioned, response (CR) when the CS is presented.”40 In brief, the conditioned reflex results from a learning process in which the unconditioned

39 Ibid., page 2 of 54.
stimulus is transformed into a conditioned stimulus through pairing with a stimulus from the outside.

During violin practice, the outside stimuli are from the music score, auditory stimuli, and the intended goal/s of the practice. The unconditioned stimulus is human beings’ innate reflexes, and the conditioned reflex results from the practice process. The more complex the task is, the more brain area involved. From another perspective, the learning and practice process is brain training in essence. Therefore, in practice, the brain must be used both actively and passively.

(3.) Rhyme Title: Focus on Fundamentals

Translation of Rhyme Text:

不在乎区区小技 “Do not worry too much about fancy techniques,
只在乎能够驾驭 only care about the ability to master.”

Professor Lin believed that the fundamentals of playing are much more crucial than those fancy and uncommonly used techniques. For example, one might not be able to play left-hand pizzicato, but it will not affect a person from becoming a great violinist. As long as one can use the bow freely and control all the elements well, they still can play beautifully. The technical and musical fundamentals are like the air, which is indispensable, whereas the showy techniques only add to the overall impression.

Musicianship and Musical Interpretation

In the book, *The Essentials of Lin Yaoji's Violin Teaching Method*, the author Yang Baozhi also mentioned Professor Lin’s opinions about the art of performance. Firstly, Professor Lin believed that having a comprehensive knowledge of music is important.
When learning a piece, it is not only about playing the instrument, but also a secondary creation process. Therefore, it is essential to know the piece’s form, and harmony, as well as the composer’s style. Playing pieces by different composers may require different interpretive musical colorings, and even composed by the same composer, the sound should vary according to pieces. In addition, in different times and for different composers, the features of *rubato, trill, and vibrato* vary. For students, the more pieces they have learned, the easier to master these styles and features.

A second facet of Lin’s approach was the idea of accumulating emotional experiences. The researcher behind the current document proposes that music, as a form of art, is not like literature or painting. Both literature and painting deliver information and emotions by describing or portraying concrete objects with text or brush strokes. However, music conveys moods and feelings with sound. Consequently, one might argue that this attribute makes music a more abstract art form. Therefore, the emotional experience is particularly significant for musicians. How might they then accumulate their own emotional experiences? Professor Lin suggested that students should pay attention to their experiences in both nature and their own lives, to experience various moods.

Thirdly, Professor Lin proposed that using the violinist’s imagination when playing would add to the beauty of the musical imagery. The first step in the process advocated for by Lin, would be to identify and interpret the meaning of the terminology from the musical score. For example, when the term “*grandioso*” appeared in the music, Lin suggested that his students should consider and contemplate how “grand” that particular section of the work should be, and to what extent the concept of “grandness” would impact how aspects of technique and musicality would be performed. Lin believed that there was infinite room
for the application of imagination when interpreting the meanings behind the terminology used in a musical score for students to both explore and improvise with.

Fourthly, Professor Lin believed in the concept of disconnecting oneself from the violin to allow the performer to think about the overall violin performance away from the instrument. While some students often listen to a recording of a piece that they are learning to help them to get to know the piece sooner, and Lin theorized that to do so was not good for the cultivation of general musicianship. Lin believed that in addition to listening to the pieces that they are learning that it was more important for violin students to listen to various genres of music, such as chamber music, opera, and solo pieces for instruments other than the violin. He also advocated listening to multiple conductors, comparing how they interpreted the same piece. All of these recommendations were based on the idea of helping students to find their own style of playing.

Another strategy that Professor Lin endorsed for his violin students, was to have them think about and plan an overall design for the music that they were playing. The elements to be considered in the design should include such aspects as: when the climax occurs in the music; the type of tone color, atmosphere, mood, that they want to create; and other considerations. The plan of these elements for any specific piece will instruct students to apply their techniques to the interpretation—in other words, using the musical goal to command techniques.

Finally, Professor Lin stated that even when there are many changes of tone colors, moods, and expressions within one piece (especially for larger compositions), that performers still need to find something consistent to unify these musical aspects with, and that this is the idea known as “chi (气)”. The concept of “chi” is explained earlier in this
document, in the section titled “Mnemonic Rhymes for the Right Hand” (p. 34). In reference to the bow arm, Professor Lin believed that there should be “chi” inside the bow arm, and that it is “chi” that connects the joints to make all the parts of the arm work together flexibly. In relation to musical interpretation, Lin believed that “chi” could occur throughout a piece. An example from Yang Baozhi’s book uses Max Bruch’s Violin Concerto No. 1 in G minor to illustrate this idea. In the first movement of the Bruch, when playing the introduction (see Figure 14), the “chi” must not be interrupted by the technical challenges of bow changes, string crossings, or shifts. The “chi” also cannot be interrupted by the rests in the violin melody each time the theme enters (see Figure 15).

![Image of Max Bruch Violin Concerto No. 1 in G Minor, Op. 26 I. Vorspiel mm. 1-10.]

*Figure 14: Max Bruch Violin Concerto No. 1 in G Minor, Op. 26 I. Vorspiel mm. 1-10.*
Figure 15: The theme of the Vorspiel (the rests are circled).
Chapter V: Personal Thoughts on Violin Education Inspired by
Lin Yaoji’s Violin Teaching Method

Reflections on Musical Interpretation and Techniques

In discussing violin education in China, it is important to note that there is a general impression that Chinese violinists pay more attention to technique than to musical interpretation. The author of this document agrees that there is merit to this impression. There are several supporting reasons. Firstly, the emphasis on basics such as scale practice, the pursuit of sound quality, and good intonation is a strong focus of violin instruction in China. This approach was inherited from the former Soviet Union tradition. Secondly, China did not come into contact with Western music until the twentieth century, which meant that the rules of Western music and musicality were less familiar to those learning the violin. This also meant that prior to the 20th century that China did not promote an atmosphere suited to cultivating classical musicians. This lack of familiarity with Western music influenced how violin teachers treated musicality in their teaching.

So, what role should musicality play in teaching? The writer of this document recalls one of Professor Lin’s rhymes.

“内心歌唱率两手，两手顺从跟着走；
基本要求匀准美，胆大心细精益求精。”

This rhyme was explained in the previous chapter. It means “Lead two hands with internal singing, both hands accept the leadership. The basic requirement is even, accurate, and beautiful, achieve excellence with bravery and carefulness.” (on page 29 of this document)
The first two sentences reflect Professor Lin’s point of view on the relationship between music and technique, and the idea that internal singing should lead the hands.

There are two opposite ways of approaching the teaching of violin, whether in China or the United States. While some maintain that musical interpretation can only be added if the technical aspects are solved first, others suggest that an understanding and plan for musical interpretation can assist in guiding the approach to technique. It is my belief that musical interpretation and technique can be worked on separately to complement the other, but they can also be worked on together as one when the situation warrants it. In this way, technique and musicality can be seen by the teacher not as "either/or" but rather another unity of opposites. For example, when it comes to slow practicing, the student is able to work on the techniques, but they also should exaggerate the expression of musicality involved. Additionally, when practicing scales, the student should not only work on the intonation and connection of bow strokes, but also try to merge them with elements of musicality, such as vibrato, and crescendo/decrescendo.

Undoubtedly, making beautiful music is the final goal. If a teacher only focuses on a student’s superficial problems like intonation and rhythm, their students will probably misunderstand that the musical interpretation should not be considered an important part of their daily technical practice. On the contrary, if the teacher does not provide help with their students’ technical problems and only emphasizes the musicality aspects of playing, the result will be that the students cannot ever meet the teacher’s expectations. In addition, applying the techniques that the students already have in combination with principles of musical interpretation at the same time can also be an effective approach to learning the violin.
Both pedagogical approaches are common in actual violin teaching practice. It is the belief of this author, that the best approach is to guide the students so that they know what their final goal will be for the music, so that they may practice accordingly. More importantly, when the students cannot determine an appropriate path to execute their musical ideas or do not know how to overcome a purely technical problem, the teacher should be able to give practical advice, which means that the teacher themself should be clear in knowing, defining, and articulating what the accurate practice approach regarding the specific technical problem is.

In Maya Glezarova’s *Aspects of Yankelevich’s Teaching Methods,* a number of pedagogical tips from the Russian Violin School were shared. According to the article, Yankelevich was quoted as follows:

The more the violinist is in command of the instrument, the less his or her attention is diverted to the technical side and the more he or she is able to concentrate on musical content. Insufficient technical mastery limits the violinist and becomes an irrepresible obstacle in fulfilling his or her musical intentions.

This passage serves as documentation that Yankelevich was not in agreement with the teaching phenomenon that focuses on the musical side of teaching without solving technical problems at the same time. Therefore, Yankelevich devoted great enthusiasm and

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42 Ibid., page 2 of 16.
insistence to helping his students work on etudes, exercises, and scales. According to Glezarova:

When working on scales, Yankelevich developed and perfected all aspects of violin technique—agility, facility, clarity, rhythmic discipline of the fingers in the left hand, and shifting—while at the same time working on a singing and even tone, perfecting bow changes and bow distribution. Scales were covered with many different variations in rhythm and fingerings.43

Yankelevich attached a lot of importance to bow strokes, and called them “the most important elements of expression.” Work on bowings would start from the very first stages of learning the violin. In Yankelevich’s class, bowings were studied according to a specific system. The main principle of the system was to increase the difficulty gradually—starting from détaché and progressing to staccato and ricochet. One would start by working on all the elements of détaché strokes in different parts of the bow and then connecting them. This established the main movements of the right hand and arm in all parts of the bow.44

In Yankelevich’s personal approach to pedagogy, he used Kreutzer Etudes along with scales to improve the bowing technique. This approach may have led Yankelevich’s students to believe that only with a detailed and scientific system of solid fundamentals could brilliant performance outcomes occur. However, on the other hand, Yankelevich also emphasized that playing musically was the ultimate goal, and that the violin technique should serve these musical goals. As Glezarova wrote: “How mistaken were those who referred to Yankelevich’s detailed work on various skills as ‘overly technical.’ Every scale

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43 Ibid., page 2-3 of 16.
44 Ibid., page 2-3 of 16.
and etude studied was later put to the service of music in order to help uncover the artistic meaning of the composition.”

The author of this document believes that while musicality and technique can be taught and practiced separately, that there are also times when they can and should be taught and or practiced in combination as one entity. In Maya Glezarova’s *Aspects of Yankelevich’s Teaching Methods*, “He (Yankelevich) often liked to repeat Abraham Yampolsky’s favorite expression in his lessons: ‘Sing!’ And Yankelevich did not just want the cantilena to sing but all aspects of technique—accents, passagework, *sforzandi*, and so on: A singing tone is not just a natural gift but is one of the most important aspects of violin technique, an intrinsic component of mastering the instrument, which requires lengthy and concentrated effort.” The singing tone is not only for musicality but also an aspect of violin technique essentially.

In this writer’s opinion, no matter what the era, nor the country or origin, the universal truth in violin teaching and playing is that technique is for the service of musical interpretation, but that beautiful musical interpretation and playing is the ultimate goal. There is no doubt, then, that to perform music well, the prerequisite must be to master perfect skills comprehensively. These skills include good quality of sound, good intonation, and correct rhythm. These three elements are fundamental to all music. However, this is

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only the most basic level of techniques. The more mature techniques need to be mobilized by music. When the player has an idea of what the music should sound like, skilled playing techniques can bring this effect into actual performance. Moreover, it is important for any violinist to master their technique comprehensively. In the book *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching*, Galamian says:

Such a complete mastery over the technical equipment is not only necessary for the soloist who wishes to achieve his own interpretation of the music, but also, in equal measure for the player who has to yield his own ideas to those of a leader (such as the conductor of the orchestra), or who must, in playing chamber music, coordinate his playing with that of the other members of the group. Without the mastery supplied by an adequate interpretive technique, a player can neither properly lead nor properly follow.\(^{47}\)

This illustrates how important it is to master the technique of the violin completely in order to play beautifully.

For a successful performance, besides perfect technique, what else is needed? There should be content in the performance. A good performer should not only be able to play with good sound, intonation, and rhythm, but also let the audience clearly hear what they are expressing. Some musical pieces have specific content, like program music. There are also many examples in the violin repertoire, such as Vivaldi’s *The Four Seasons*. In this group of violin concertos, there are lots of descriptive languages written at the beginning.

and in the middle of the music. For example, in the first movement of the concerto No.4 L’inverno, it is written on the music score: “Aggiacciatotrematràneivialgenti”, “Al Severo Spirar d’orrido Vento”, and “Correr battendoi piedi ogni momento”, which means “shiver in the snow”, “the cruel winds were blowing hard”, and “run and stamp feet at every step”. These are specific to musical content. For music without musical style indications, it is up to the performers to use their imagination and sensibility. Imagination is one of the most important abilities in musical interpretation. The performer can think of a picture from a melody, or a color and so on.

Finally, the performer should be able to add their own emotion to the music. The writer of this document would like to share her experience. For example, when the writer learned Robert Schumann's Sonata No.1 in A minor for Violin and Piano, Op.105, the writer liked it very much. The writer thinks that its beauty lies in the interweaving of sweetness and happiness with pain and sadness. Therefore, when practicing this piece, the writer cannot help thinking of her own experience, those experiences of both happiness and pain, and integrating these emotions into the performance of this piece.

In the above four points, techniques and musical content are relatively objective matters, while imagination and personal emotion are subjective issues. The writer thinks, this is why Professor Lin emphasized to learn from the nature and get inspiration from the nature and one’s own experiences. With these four aspects, there is the possibility of a successful performance. However, there are other factors to consider when performing publicly in a concert hall. That is how to convince the audience of the player’s performance. In this writer’s opinion, the performer must involve himself into the performance. An important analogy is included in Galamian’s book:
A speaker will rarely move an audience if every word, every inflection, and every gesture gives the impression of careful, studied preparation. The same words would be infinitely more impressive if they seemed to come to the speaker’s mind in the very moment at which they are uttered, and if the intonation of his voice, his pauses, his gestures, and all other features of his delivery seem to be genuinely and spontaneously prompted by the thoughts he expresses at the time. In other words, the less rehearsed the speech sounds, the more effective it will be.48

This paragraph does a nice job of explaining the importance of the performer’s involvement. In such a state, some improvisational elements will be inspired, which makes people feel that the performance at the moment is the performer's current state of mind. In this way, the performance will be persuasive and appealing.

Finally, Professor Lin mentioned how to find one’s own performing style. There is one more important point that the author of this document would like to mention here. The worst way to learn a new piece is to listen to a virtuoso’s album first. This learning approach will undermine students' ability to think independently and creatively, because listening to the record first creates a preconceived impression of the music to be learned. Students are inevitably influenced by recordings. While this approach is one currently favored by proponents of the Suzuki Method, I would suggest that when learning a new piece, that students should first study the music score, find out the meaning of all the terms, and try to develop an internal concept of what the piece should sound like based on the musical

48 Ibid., p. 7.
expression terminology, the style of the composer, and the style of the period. Finally, the student should then play the work according to their own imagination. The next step should then be to share their work with their teacher and compare it with other violinists’ recordings to see how others deal with the piece. In this way, can students not only develop their independent thinking ability, but also discover their own mistakes.

Reflections on the Application of Psychological Knowledge in Violin Teaching

Professor Lin’s teacher, Yankelevich, had profound beliefs about the application of psychology to violin teaching. Psychological factors can influence the violinist’s performance and can also play a crucial role in the teaching process. Yankelevich believed in “general norms and laws—anatomical, physiological, psychological, physical, and acoustic—which, when broken, lead to failure.” Then, what are the interactions between these factors and students’ learning process or performance? Firstly, Yankelevich believed that “method is not a procedure, but a creative process.” In this process, the teacher’s psychological knowledge and skills play an important role in shaping students’ personalities. Therefore, teachers should master adequate psychology knowledge and skills. Yankelevich “classified students primarily according to their nervous constitution,” like “strong-willed, concentrated, lazy.”

Secondly, Yankelevich also proposed that discovering a student’s personality was not only the teacher’s job, that the students themselves should also be able to detect their

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50 Ibid., page 6 of 54.
51 Ibid., page 6 of 54.
52 Ibid., page 7 of 54.
own strong and weak points objectively. In this way, the pedagogical process could be stimulated from both sides and more productive. Then, the teacher should initiate this work. During uncovering a student’s personality and talent, the teacher should be able to protect the talented student’s gifts and be cautious about not turning them into an average player. Yankelevich also believed that a teacher “needs to develop a ‘sense for talent’ in respect to every student. This means knowing the student’s strong points and being able to envision the student’s future.” 53 Ultimately, making every student trust their teacher, understand their requirements, and then get the motivation to achieve the requirements independently.

In addition to the long-term benefits of digging and shaping students’ personalities, psychological knowledge has a prominent impact on the actual violin performance. In Professor Lin’s same rhyme:

内心歌唱率两手，两手顺从跟着走；
基本要求匀准美，胆大心细精益求精。

the last sentence reflects the influence of psychological elements on actual performance. “Achieve excellence with bravery and carefulness”—the fearless and confident psychological state can stimulate physiological abilities and make people perform well. Students’ worries about a difficult place are often what hold them back.

The current writer’s personal experience is that when practicing a difficult place in the music, the violinist should ignore worrying, and not be afraid to make mistakes or fully expose playing mistakes in practice. As a result, difficulties are often solved while ignoring

53 Ibid., page 8 of 54.
such worries. For example, when I was practicing the shifting of the opening theme in the first movement of Tchaikovsky’s *Violin Concerto* (see Figure 16), I was worried about the inaccuracy of the note after the shifting, but this worry was useless and hindered in solving the problem. Therefore, I decided to defy the scruple, and shift boldly while singing the note in my heart. If it is out of tune, repeat the shifting until I master the distance between the two positions. I think the reason behind this may be that in the process of shifting, the worry affects the timing of the finger sliding and falling on the string. Once the worry is eliminated, there will be no effect on the timing of the hand’s movement. Then, the practice will just be mastering the timing of the shifting. Galamian also mentioned such an example in his book. He said:

> One of the commonest faults found in shifting is that of shortening the note preceding the move. The reason behind this fault is always a psychological one. The player worries about the shift to the point that he loses rhythmic control and nervously anticipates the correct moment for the move. This gives a feeling of insecurity and great unevenness to the passage.\(^{54}\)

This shows how important it is to remove negative psychological elements in practice.

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Reflections on Being a Violin Teacher

The author of the current document thinks that there is an objective and basic requirement for all violin teachers, that is that the teacher themselves has a thorough and correct knowledge of the violin. The teacher cannot teach incorrect information to their students. This seems like a simple requirement, but in reality not every teacher is qualified. This is a complicated issue with many reasons, and since this document is based on Lin Yaoji’s teaching method, it will not be discussed here.

As a qualified teacher, after meeting the above basic requirements, each violin teacher still should be able to teach students in accordance with their specific aptitudes. The writer believes that this ability is the key to successful teaching. Successful teaching is when the teacher and student form a joint force to make progress fast. Acquiring students’ trust and cooperation is also an achievement for a teacher. These successes require teachers to know about their students’ personalities and adopt different approaches according to individuals. There is a Chinese idiom from the Analects of Confucius, it is "因材施教", which means “according to the individual differences, use different teaching approaches.” The advantage of such an educational philosophy is maximizing students’ potential. This principle, of course, is not only specific to followers of the writings of Confucius in China, but it is also a principle of education worldwide.

Similarly, when applying Professor Lin’s teaching method to the violin, teachers must be student-oriented and use it flexibly. In China, it is not uncommon that some teachers copy Lin’s teaching method mechanically and apply it to every student in the same way. Such thoughtless teaching can sometimes be harmful to students. Every student has
different strengths and weaknesses—for example—the right hand. Lin said that when holding the bow, the right hand should be relaxed. Some students hold the bow already rather relaxedly, but the teacher still asks them to relax, then students feel confused, and they may think: “What on earth is relaxed? To what extent that I need to relax my hand?” Such unwise teaching is not only unhelpful but also misleading to the students. Another example, some teachers keep focusing on students’ bow hold persistently and require all the students to follow what they think is right. As a result, some students experienced changing their bow holding from one teacher to another.

Yankelevich had talked about bow holding in his document Setting up the Violin and Bow Hold. He said, “In pedagogical practice it is not uncommon to encounter dogmatic approaches to setting up the violin and bow hold. In these instances, teachers advocate certain positions without taking into consideration a student’s hand structure and individual way of adapting to the instrument.” Yankelevich listed several significant works of literature concerning the positions of their left-hand thumb as an example. The treatises he compared are from Leopold Mozart, Bartolomeo Campagnoli, Leopold Auer, Joachim, Gustave Koeckert, and Viktor Valter. Through the comparison, Yankelevich concluded:

All of the expressed opinions belong to respected authorities holding important places in the history of violin playing. These contradictory opinions naturally lead to the puzzling question: Who is correct? It turns out that all these authors are, to a certain extent, both correct and incorrect. Each

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found the positioning for himself that proved to be the most efficient.

However, to turn an individual solution to a problem into a general rule (i.e., to dogmatize) is incorrect.56

There is indeed a standard to judge whether a student has a correct bow holding— it is whether his or her bow holding is the most efficient and suitable for him or her.

In addition, it is worth mentioning that sometimes teachers should clearly explain their requirements to students. For instance, Professor Lin emphasized the importance of slow practice. He said “慢即是快，要建设不要破坏”, which means “slow is fast, to build and not to destroy”. As explained in the previous chapter, slow practice is not only playing slowly but there are lots of requirements in the process. Every time to repeat a sentence or phrase, students should aim to achieve the goals on sound quality, intonation, dynamics, expressions, and other elements. However, in actual teaching practice, some teachers only tell students to practice slowly but do not explain how to practice slowly. This leads to the fact that students only slow down the tempo but fail to achieve any goals in the process. Such slow practice does not have any effect except for wasting time. Therefore, the teacher should make it clear to students.

On the other hand, a teacher should not only be able to provide actual help to students’ practice, but also be able to support the students spiritually. Yankelevich and Lin emphasized the importance of applying psychology knowledge to teaching. Imagine that students do not get help when they are experiencing a hard time in their practice. This will lead to two possibilities. The first is that the student does not give up, but it will take a long

56 Ibid., p15 – 6.
time or even years to solve the problem. The second is that the student has not solved the old problem yet and has encountered new ones, and with more and more problems, the student may gradually lose confidence and give up the willingness to actively seek solutions. Over time, the student may fall into a situation that is similar to Learned Helplessness.

In the field of psychology, the term “Learned Helplessness” refers to the belief that one cannot change the outcome of the event no matter how hard they try. This belief is a psychological state of giving up, that results from the process that one suffers an uncontrollable situation and experiences a certain kind of learning. In the context of violin learning, the uncontrollable situation can be that the student encounters a difficulty that cannot be solved by himself during the practice, and the learning process refers to the student’s practice without progress and hopeless struggle without the help of the teacher. Once the student starts not to believe their ability, he is likely to lose the motivation to continue learning the violin. Therefore, it is crucial for a teacher to provide practical help to their students in time and support their students spiritually and not discourage them.

Finally, the teacher needs to be passionate about teaching and love their students. Professor Lin was such a passionate teacher who developed a set of rhymes that were convenient for Chinese students to recite. Also, Professor Lin was full of love for the students. The writer of this document would like to share a story of Professor Lin. In November 1980, when his student Hu Kun participated in the Sibelius International Violin Competition in Finland, Finland was icy and snowy. At that time, Professor Lin did not even let Hu Kun carry the instrument by himself, he carried it for him. Professor Lin was afraid that if Hu Kun fell and injured himself in the snow, he would not be able to play well
in the competition. As a result, Hu Kun won the fifth place in the competition. Although it was only the fifth place, it was the first time that China had won the ranking in an international violin competition.

**Conclusion**

An expert violin pedagogue teaches students the facts of playing the violin and should also have realistic expectations for them based on the nature of each student’s personality and their musical abilities. Lin Yaoji’s violin teaching method is such a system, in that it caters towards each individual student’s specific needs, as well as provides a scientific practice approach towards practice and performance. Choosing to use this approach puts higher demands on teachers. Lin’s travels and studies outside of China in Eastern Europe resulted in him taking back to his home country a wonderful collection of pedagogical ideas from the Russian school of playing, which he then adopted and transformed using his own ideas, and influences from Chinese culture to create his own unique pedagogical approach to violin playing. The fact that the author of this document is a citizen of China, now studying violin in the United States, and is translating Lin’s work into English and sharing the story of his life and pedagogical approach by doing so, brings the legacy of Lin’s approach full circle.
References


