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*Research Article*

## Study on the Problems Existing in Chinese Piano Education and Improvement Measures

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### Abstract

Along with the increasing abundance of material wealth, the comprehensive quality of the Chinese people has been greatly improved, and more and more families have begun to put forward new requirements for the pursuit of spiritual culture. However, there are still many problems in the piano education in China, such as strong utility of the purpose of piano education, lack of faculty, single teaching method and closed teaching contents. In order to alleviate the predicament of piano education in China, this study combines the actual situation of Chinese piano education, analyzes the problems existing in Chinese piano education, and puts forward corresponding improvement measures, hoping to help the development of Chinese piano education.

### Keywords

Piano education • Problems • Educational mode

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Since 1987, the amateur piano grading system has been implemented in mainland China for more than 40 years. Along with the deepening of reform and opening up, the social material wealth of mainland China has increased sharply, and the material life of the people has improved remarkably. Along with the introduction of the piano grading system, the upsurge of learning piano has appeared in the mainland China. According to the statistics of relevant data, the proportion of piano learning has reached half in the investigation of learning musical instruments, especially in recent years, a large number of international piano players have emerged in China, such as Lang Lang, Li Yundi and Chen Sa. These successful piano players have gained great fame and wealth, have produced great influence on the society and have become public figures. In China, both parents and young piano lovers are very familiar with these piano players. Many parents begin to send their children to piano training institutions for learning, which directly or indirectly promotes the popularization and development of Chinese piano education. The popularization of piano education also shows the trend of rapid development. Through simply combing the data issued by the National Bureau of Statistics of China, this study finds that the sales volume of pianos has increased sharply, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Chinese Piano Production and Consumption (10,000 stand per year)*

Year	Domestic production	Domestic performance consumption
2010	39	32
2011	32	28
2012	33	33
2013	36	37
2014	35	38
2015	36	44
2016	37	46

In addition, according to professional statistics, there is a rapid increase in the inventory amount of pianos held by urban residents in various regions of the country. Piano education has become an emerging growth point in education, so countless children and young people learn the piano with the expectation of their parents so that piano education continues to develop in China.

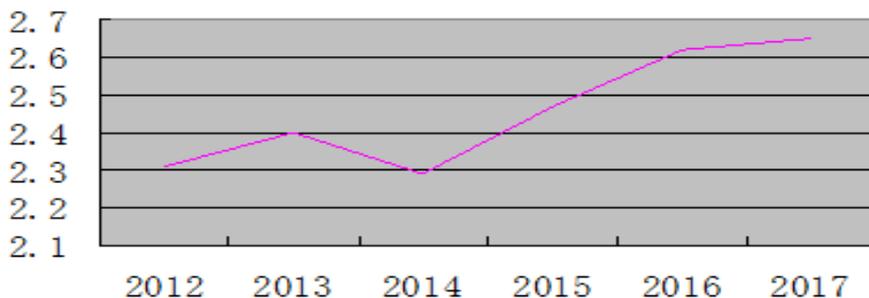


Figure 1. The number of pianos per 100 households in China's urban residents in 2012-2017 (Unit: stand)

With the establishment of the piano examination grading system, the number of people taking the piano examination shows explosive growth in China, which leads to the vigorous development of piano education and training. The quantity of pianos possessed in the cities and towns in China is constantly increasing, especially in economically developed cities, as well as in areas where piano education has developed earlier, as shown in Figure 1.

Take Shanghai known as Oriental Magic Capital as an example, the number of piano examiners in Shanghai has increased to 50,000. The development of piano education in Shanghai is amazing. At present, the piano education in Shenzhen is also in the forefront in the whole country, and its development degree is also very high. At present, Shenzhen's families have 100,000 pianos and piano education and training institutions spread throughout the city (Tan, 2012). With the development of new curriculum reform in depth and breadth in China and the adjustment of the new curriculum standards, the current curriculum standards of the Chinese government on music education in primary and secondary schools make clear that the study of instrumental music should be included in the important content of basic education according to the established policies and laws, which provides solid policy support for the development of piano education and has far-reaching influence on the popularization and development of piano education.

### **Main problems in Chinese piano education**

Although piano education in the mainland China develops vigorously, we should also see that opportunities and risks coexist. The development of piano education in mainland China has appeared in different degrees of problems, among which artistry of piano is more prominent. The rigor of piano art begins to go down the road, which lacks appreciation. At the same time, piano education has gradually become a means of making a living, among which the educational utilitarian purpose is increasingly prominent. Besides, piano teaching method is single and teacher's level of piano is uneven (Egilmez, 2012).

#### **Strong utilitarian purpose of learning piano**

Although there are more and more students learning piano in mainland China, most of them are for grading examination. These people make up a large proportion. From various aspects, it can be considered that the main reasons why many students learn the piano for grading examination include two aspects. One is that many parents don't form a systematic understanding of the concept of piano. Many parents just think that taking piano grading examination is to reach the highest level, then their children's piano level is the highest, but ignore that the music study is a long-term process and is endless. The road is very long and will take a long time to complete (Lai et al., 2015). The other reason is that many parents have a blind comparison mentality. In order to enable their children to grow up better, many parents hold high hope for their children and send their children to learn the piano. In this way, piano learning and grading are taken as the only goal. Based on this utilitarian psychology, many students only study the contents of the examination, but neglect the comprehensive study of piano. In order to pursue the rise in level, they don't attach importance to the basic study of piano. Only a single

practice will make the student's learning style relatively narrow and limited, which isn't conducive to the cultivation of students' artistry (Chan, Jones, Scanlon & Joiner, 2004).

### **Increasingly single piano teaching method**

The piano education in China was also carried out according to the traditional teaching mode at first. The traditional Chinese teaching was carried out in a one-to-one way, which is the performance of the examination-oriented education. Therefore, it is inevitable to be influenced by the traditional teaching mode in the field of piano education, and one-on-one teaching is also carried out in the piano education. However, this simple teaching method has great drawbacks. For the children and young people who have just studied piano, the teaching method will be very boring. At the same time, for a lot of professional piano students, these basic interests will be erased, so they will have antipathy to learning (Vass & Deszpot, 2017). At present, the piano education in China only focuses on the piano and doesn't include other instruments in the teaching scope, lacking systematic teaching vision, which isn't very beneficial to students' study. We take Beethoven's piano sonata as an example. Beethoven's sonata runs through many instruments such as violin, cello, trumpet and drum. If students aren't familiar with these instruments, they can't experience the feeling of playing and touching keys better. Learning is a process of expanding the field of vision. Students should continue to expand their scope of knowledge and conduct a comprehensive learning of string music and symphonies. They also need to be familiar with national musical instruments. However, many teachers and students mistakenly believe that piano is a western musical instrument and national musical instruments have no substantial help. However, this study holds that the style and characteristics of national music play a great role and are very helpful to play a lot of Chinese piano music, especially the piano music adapted from national music.

### **Uneven quality of piano teachers and low teaching quality**

With the continuous expansion of piano teaching scale, more and more students begin to learn the piano, which demands more and more piano teachers. At the same time, as many piano training institutions become larger and larger, their level is constantly improved. Under the new historical conditions, Chinese music teachers need to constantly improve their own comprehensive quality. Both their theoretical level and scientific research capabilities need to carry out an overall improvement. Although some schools have conducted reform and carried out quantitative evaluation on a number of teachers, music teachers can certainly be no exception. Among music teachers, piano professional teachers are also important groups. Unlike music teachers, these professional teachers are more professional and they need to improve their skills which need to be strengthened and trained. However, in the current piano education in China, there are still many problems for the piano professional teachers. With the expansion of the scale of piano education, many institutions and schools lack piano professional teachers and high-quality teachers, leading to that the quality of piano teaching in many institutions and schools is low. There are still a lot of teachers whose teaching abilities can't be greatly improved because of various reasons, including the large amount of teaching hours so that many teachers don't pay attention to the improvement of their own professional skills for busy teaching (Doherty & Miriam, 2017). AS

time passes, this will lead to a decline in the level of research and professional skills of many piano teachers. These skills are directly related to the quality of teaching. In addition, most teachers tend to focus on scientific research and the improvement of professional skills instead of teaching, so they are perfunctory in teaching and don't provide good guidance to students so that students can't get much improvement in their study.

## **Basic path of eliminating the problems of piano education in China**

### **Diversifying teaching mode of piano**

In order to meet the requirements and objectives of new talents training, Chinese piano education needs to adjust teaching mode, and reform teaching materials and teaching methods under the background of new curriculum reform. At the same time, it should be based on the original individual class and collective class to construct a scientific, complete and effective teaching mode of professional piano education. To this end, we can discuss the problem from teaching, lectures and concerts.

First of all, the individual teaching mode can be adopted. As a teaching method that has been used for hundreds of years, individual teaching is still of great value mainly because individual teaching can enable most teachers to focus mainly on the study of students and to further observe the problems existing in students' piano so as to make the teaching guidance pertinent. At the same time, individual teaching can be conducted according to students' aptitude and carried out on students of different learning degrees, which is very important for the progress of students of different degrees. The current group class is mainly the expression form of the collective class. The number of students in the group class is mainly a few, a dozen or a few dozens. These students form a group and collective teaching is carried out through electric piano. In this way, most of the students can be taught, which makes the teaching efficiency of teachers higher (Crocco, Madill & McCabe, 2017). The teaching in the group class must unify the teaching materials, and the progress should be unified. The current group class should focus on the basic knowledge, requirements and methods, and should focus on solving the common problems in the piano learning. Therefore, this kind of teaching form is suitable for a large amount of students whose piano level is low.

In addition, lectures and discussions are also very good teaching methods because they can effectively make up for the deficiency of teaching. In piano teaching, teachers can give special lectures on the contents of teaching by doing and discussion. The discussion of different ranges can promote the effective development of teaching. At the same time, the lecture can be theoretical or academic. The teaching demonstration and experience exchange can be carried out in the lectures. The discussion contents can be relaxing topics selected by students independently so that students can freely show themselves in the lectures and the discussions.

Besides, the piano teaching can be performed in the form of concert for on-the-spot teaching. Piano training institutions or schools can hold piano concerts from time to time, or allow students themselves to organize various forms of concerts. In this way, students can spontaneously study and exchange piano skills, go out of the piano room and classroom, go on the stage and accept the review of students. On the stage, they can show their talents and learning achievements. These are the learning forms that piano learners can't bypass and

students of music education major must carry out to provide other students and teachers with a chance to communicate and study through the form of concert (Nouwen et al., 2016).

### **Strengthen the cultivation of students' aesthetic sense of music**

Generally speaking, in ancient China, playing the piano was called “operating the piano”, including practice, operation and manipulation. As Mr. Zhao Xiaosheng, a famous musician, said, “Operating the piano needs hands and heart.” Although there is just a word of difference between “playing the piano” and “operating the piano”, they are greatly different in connotation and expression. The former is more focused on the simple operation of the keyboard and proficiency while the latter emphasizes a kind of realm that integrates people and the piano into one and pays more attention to the artistic feeling and experience to the music (Agostini, Persson & Shrivastava, 2016). Therefore, this study holds that we should pay more attention to the artistic cultivation and edification of the aesthetic feeling of music in the piano study. We should have a good mentality and appreciate the deeper meaning of music on the basis of solid basic skills so that we can experience more fun in the learning process and improve our own artistic accomplishment.

### **Improving the overall ability of piano teachers by introducing and training famous teachers**

For the piano teaching teachers around the world, many of them are required to have certificates. In the United States, all piano teaching teachers are required to have teaching certificates. If they are engaged in piano teaching without certificates, they will be severely punished. At present, there are no hard rules in China. Piano teachers must have certificates. Therefore, we can set up a system of piano teachers holding certificates and perfect this system at the legal level for reference from foreign experience (Harding, Sammler, Henry, Large & Kotz, 2019). For the piano education in China, there is no hard management system and policy or there is no access system for teachers, which leads to the uneven quality of teachers and restricts the improvement of teachers' professional level. Therefore, China can increase the introduction of famous foreign teachers and strengthen the professional ability training of its own piano teachers so as to effectively enhance the overall teaching ability and level of piano teachers.

## **Conclusions**

At present, the objects of piano education in China are a wide range of groups involving all walks of life, ages and degrees. In the face of different objects, the methods and contents of education should also be different. At the same time, the piano students themselves should set up a good mentality, find fun in the study and experience the aesthetic sense of music so that they can enjoy the piano learning with heart. Only in this way can the piano learning lasts balanced and improved level by level. At the same time, schools should create a good learning atmosphere for students' piano learning, take quality-oriented education as a starting point, and pay attention to students' aesthetic feeling of music. Besides, they can introduce excellent teachers to provide a good foundation for piano teaching.

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