

Chinese and American piano education in different cultural contexts

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Abstract: *This paper compares the different characteristics of piano education in China and the United States through the cultural differences between China and the United States in terms of development history, social environment, training goals, education system, teaching methods and teaching materials. An in-depth understanding of Western piano teaching models promote the faster and stronger development of piano education in China.*

Keywords: *piano education; cultural background; teaching methods*

1. Introduction

Piano education in the United States has a history of more than two hundred years. China's piano education has gone through more than 100 years of history since the rise of "school music" at the end of the 19th century. Although the gap between the two is not far away in terms of time, China's professional piano education has only begun to prosper since the eighties of the last century. This boom is also limited to large and medium-sized cities, and piano education has not yet been introduced in many remote rural areas. By comparing the similarities and differences between piano education in China and the United States, this paper allows us to better know ourselves and each other, especially at the current stage of economic and cultural globalization, which is of great significance to promote the healthy development of piano education in China[1].

2. The difference between the historical background of piano education in China and the United States

The piano originated in Europe, and its main connotations and ideas are inseparable from the history and culture of the West, which is the lifeblood of piano music. Therefore, in order to accurately understand and master foreign music, Chinese piano art learners must first start by understanding the history of the development of Western piano culture[2].

From the ancient piano to the modern piano, piano music can be mainly divided into Baroque style, classical style, romantic style and impressionist style. In Europe in the 18th century, with the formation and maturity of the Baroque and Viennese classical music genres, coupled with the historical opportunity of the development of the ancient piano to the modern piano, the earliest Western piano teaching theory was produced, but its research was aimed at the performance and teaching of the ancient piano. From the middle of the 18th century to the 19th century, a large number of excellent pianists emerged in Europe, and at the same time, piano teaching theory also underwent significant development, and teaching methods gradually diversified. In the 20th century, with the rapid progress of society, culture, science and technology, piano teaching theory made new breakthroughs, and began to quantify and explain the phenomenon of movement skills in piano performance from a scientific point of view[3].

2.1 The history of piano education in the United States

Compared with the long human history of Europe, the United States is an emerging immigrant country and the most famous multi-ethnic settlement country in the world. Therefore, its piano education situation has its own unique characteristics. Just as the native culture of the United States is essentially the product of the cultural agitation and integration of countries around the world, the American piano education method also integrates the style and characteristics of piano teaching around the world. Especially during World War II, due to the impact of the war, many outstanding musicians from various countries fled to the United States, bringing with them their own musical culture. These include British

music, German music, Russian music, and African black music in Europe, which made the American music industry, like other disciplines, rapidly develop and eventually form a complex and diverse American music culture. After several generations of hard work and accumulation, by the beginning of the 20th century, American music had achieved the same important position as the music culture of Western countries[4].

Musicians from all over the world who came to the United States brought very unique teaching methods of their respective nationalities, and these teaching methods with different styles have not only been comprehensively developed in the free country of the United States, but also constantly improve themselves. Therefore, the so-called American-style piano education is actually a combination of piano education methods from all over the world. Its richness and diversity are evident[5].

2.2 History of Chinese piano education

At the beginning of the last century, with the influence of the Ming and Qing dynasties, the piano began to enter the musical life of Chinese. The spread of piano culture in China was initially carried out through different forms of training activities. This form originated from Western piano culture and germinated the early prototype of Chinese piano education. The initial scale of China's piano education system mainly draws on the disciplinary ideas of primary and secondary schools affiliated to Western Conservatory of Music, which provides a good foundation for building professional piano education in China. The idea of "restoration" promoted the Chinese people's attention to the introduction of the new school teaching model, and piano music as a supporting role also played its prominent role in the "school music" activities, and was gradually regarded as the main music discipline and further developed. The piano teachers at this stage are mainly foreign people such as missionaries, and the teaching materials are also selected from foreign versions, which are mostly elementary stages in terms of degree. Among them, there are also very few Chinese involved in piano teaching, such as Uncle Li. Under the influence of the piano education of "School Music", some Chinese also began to study with private piano teachers in their spare time, thus opening up a new field of piano education in China and training the first generation of Chinese pianists such as Fu Cong, Zhu Gongyi, Zhou Guangren and so on.

Before the establishment of professional music schools in the late 20s of the 19th century, piano education in China had made certain developments. From the aspects of curriculum setting, selection of teaching materials, teaching progress, teaching methods, teaching employment, etc., the Westernized teaching mode has been adopted, and it has also achieved relatively successful results, aroused the enthusiasm of Chinese people to learn piano art, and laid the foundation for the arrival of professional piano education in China.

3. The difference between the goals of piano education and training in China and the United States

3.1 The training goal of piano education in the United States

In the United States, artistic life is an indispensable part of people's daily lives, and people's pursuit of art has long become a common habit and hobby. In such a strong musical atmosphere, piano education in the United States focuses on the development of personality and the exploration of potential. On the one hand, this is greatly related to the strong economic strength, rich resources, developed education system, and emphasis on investment in music education in the United States. On the other hand, this is also inseparable from the United States' advocacy of individualism, attaching importance to individual strength, and having a relatively fair playing field.

Due to cultural differences such as history and clan, piano primary education in the United States seems to be much more "casual" than in China in terms of children's education. Parents basically do not force their children to learn the piano, but more resign. Most of the primary piano education in the United States comes into the family with children's interests and hobbies. So we often see that although the teachers are very professional, American children are either extremely talented piano children, or piano children who play quite poorly, and the polarization is extremely obvious. Higher music education is mainly concentrated in specialized music colleges and music schools of comprehensive universities, and its teaching purpose is to cultivate first-class high-end talents in piano art, but the purpose of the two is slightly different. Specialized conservatories, such as the Juilliard School, whose purpose is to "train performers and first-class full-time musical talents", that is, to train performers; The purpose of education in the conservatory of music of a comprehensive university is multifaceted, it trains both academic talents and various music teachers and professional music performers.

3.2 The training goal of piano education in China

With the continuous development of China's economy and the continuous improvement of people's living standards, in the context of vigorously advocating quality education, piano art has been loved by the broad masses of people, and more and more people choose to improve their artistic accomplishment by learning the piano. Since the reform and opening up, China has set off a "piano fever" frenzy that has surprised the world, and its popularity has only increased. In China, in every university, middle school, primary school, and even kindergarten, there are more than a dozen, as few as two or three, almost all of them have amateur piano students. In such a large team of piano children, the level of learning is uneven, and the purpose of learning the piano is also different. The training goals of piano education in China are mainly divided into two categories. One is the utilitarian training goal of interest induction, and the other is the non-utilitarian goal aimed at quality education.

Limited by historical reasons and the stage of social development, a larger part of Chinese parents are easily affected by factors such as comparison psychology and herd mentality, and training their children to learn piano often has a certain utilitarian color. Its purpose is nothing more than to let their children have a skill, and some parents are more directly want to pave the way for their children to get extra points in the future. This utilitarian training purpose often ignores children's interests and hobbies, so that piano education is reduced to a means of coping with piano examinations and winning competition awards. This has indeed brought a series of achievements in reality, such as winning almost all world-class piano awards in recent years, and the winners are getting younger and younger, but whether they can become future piano masters has to be seen. Another part of non-utilitarian parents let their children learn the piano, which is almost the same as the starting point of Western culture for cultivating children, that is, to cultivate temperament and improve their aesthetic ability to art. Through learning the piano, children develop their observation, hearing, memory, rhythm, creativity, etc., cultivate children's excellent will quality, so that children can get comprehensive development. From a scientific point of view, in the long run, the mentality of taking quality education as the goal of cultivation is more conducive to children's piano learning, and has a more important and far-reaching impact on children's character formation and personality formation. At present, in China's higher music education, there are still problems that do not attach importance to cultural accomplishment, the teaching goals are relatively rigid, single, and utilitarian, and focus on cultivating professional players rather than overall quality. However, in recent years, with the rise of China and more and more international exchanges, with the improvement of people's living standards, the goal of piano teaching has changed more humanely and edutainment.

4. Different educational systems for piano education in China and the United States

4.1 The piano education system in the United States

Primary piano education in the United States is inseparable from music education in primary and secondary schools in the United States. Music classes are offered in ordinary public primary and secondary schools in the United States, and both music theory and musical instruments are taught in elementary school classrooms. By the secondary level, students are divided into band groups and non-band groups. Students who do not participate in the band, like Chinese middle school students, take singing, music theory and other courses in music class, once a week; Students who participate in the band have to attend classes every day, and all the original music, art, and craft time are basically used to practice musical instruments, and parents must also supervise their children to practice for ten minutes every day and sign autographs. Schools are divided into different groups according to different ages and different levels, and are taught by special teachers, so almost everyone in the United States can play one or two musical instruments. The rich choice of instrumental music courses stimulates students' autonomy, and since the instruments they learn are their favorites, once students are interested in further study, their consciousness of practicing the piano is not to worry. In addition, there are group rehearsals for learning musical instruments at school, and students often have the opportunity to showcase their talents at school concerts and various recreational activities in the nearby community, which greatly stimulates students' enthusiasm for learning.

Higher piano education in the United States is mainly concentrated in specialized music colleges and music schools of comprehensive universities, and colleges and universities in the United States implement a credit system and adopt a strict entry and exit management system. Only one-third of piano students' study programs are music-related, such as instrumental accompaniment, music education,

choral singing, etc. The other two-thirds of the curriculum is not related to music, and mainly focuses on extensive intellectual courses, such as humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, etc. American students have a broad knowledge through a variety of subjects, which helps students understand and think about music from different perspectives.

4.2 China's piano education system

In China, music lessons are listed as one of the compulsory courses in primary and secondary schools, with prescribed class hours and unified syllabuses and teaching materials. The school also cultivates children's interest in music through various forms of specialty classes such as choir, dance team, electronic piano class, recorder class, etc. Families with conditions allow their children to learn their favorite musical instruments in their spare time, such as piano and violin. Primary piano education is generally carried out in piano training institutions or piano teachers' homes. Piano training institutions will regularly hold concerts of different levels according to the schoolage and performance ability of piano children, so that students have the opportunity to show themselves on stage and communicate and learn from each other. With the deepening of piano performance, some piano children stop learning to a certain level, and the other part chooses to embark on the road of piano major, continue to learn from famous teachers, and enter special music colleges.

China's higher piano education is mainly concentrated in the music departments of major music colleges and various universities, in addition to piano courses, students learn theoretical courses mainly include basic music theory, Western music history, harmony, music analysis, polyphony, etc. The curriculum is abundant, but there are fewer courses that are not related to music. China's colleges and universities also adopt the credit system, but due to the limitations of the college entrance examination system, the cultural course scores of art candidates are generally relatively low. Students usually spend most of their time and energy on the study of music practice, while the study of music theory is more relaxed. Many theory teachers also have the habit of giving students review lessons and key points before the exam, as well as the problem of lax examination marking papers, which leads to some students' music theory knowledge is not very solid. Due to the limitation of cultural accomplishment and comprehensive strength, it has affected the understanding and innovation of art.

5. Different social environments for piano education in China and the United States

5.1 The social environment of piano education in the United States

The American people are deeply influenced by local culture, coupled with a large number of immigrants from Europe and Russia, and generally have a high yearning and pursuit of art. The entire American society is rich in culture, and various artistic activities are loved by people. In the United States, schools offer musical instrument rentals to students. For expensive musical instruments, students are temporarily unwilling to buy them themselves or cannot afford them, so they can rent them from the school at a low price. Rental musical instruments are guaranteed and disinfected by a dedicated person, so parents do not need to worry about various hygiene issues, and students have the opportunity to touch more musical instruments. In addition, the U.S. government strongly supports a wide variety of musical performances, exempting them from taxation. Many groups and individuals in American society are also very willing to sponsor various music competitions and activities, and the music education industry in the United States presents a vibrant scene.

It is particularly worth mentioning that because American society has a high-level artistic life, there are a large number of public art facilities such as museums and concert halls and are well-equipped, which provides a good environment and superior material guarantee for art education. These gorgeously decorated concert halls and opera houses with excellent musical effects are staged with concerts and cabarets almost every day. The school will often organize students to enjoy concerts and song and dance performances, under the influence of such an elegant artistic environment, stimulate children's desire and pursuit of art. In recent years, due to the rise of popular music, the United States has also appeared less and less classical music lovers dilemma, surveys show that most of the audiences of various classical music performances are middle-aged and elderly, young support is becoming less and less, how to spread this ancient cultural form, which is also a new problem facing piano education in the United States.

5.2 The social environment of piano education in China

China has an absolute advantage in terms of population, including the population learning piano. In today's society, more and more Chinese families have begun to let their children learn piano, for whatever reason, this is a good phenomenon and a good opportunity for the vigorous development of piano in China. However, compared with the United States, China's social development stage is still a certain distance from it, and the economic strength of some regions is relatively backward, and the per capita income is low. Therefore, in China, art can only be a "luxury" for families with relatively rich economic power. The high cost of piano learning and the cost of purchasing a piano have left many ordinary families in the dust. In addition, China's art training industry is still relatively commercial, and many gifted and art-loving children have to be constrained by their family's financial ability to rub shoulders with art. If the government can increase investment in music basic education and piano basic education in compulsory education, adopt the form of piano interest classes in schools, and provide free or low-rent public piano rooms, it can greatly reduce the economic burden of learning piano and promote the development of piano art from aristocracy to national development in China.

In addition, "examination fever" is a unique social phenomenon in Chinese piano education. "How many levels to pass" has become the "standard" for measuring piano performance ability in society, and this fallacious idea of level-based theory has deeply affected the development of piano education in China. Due to the commercialization of the piano training industry and the influence of the social "examination fever" trend, most children will face great pressure for examination when they first enter the initial stage of piano learning. The annual examination is usually arranged during the summer vacation, and many parents and teachers will strongly encourage their children to go to the examination. On the one hand, it is to promote the intensity of children's piano practice, and on the other hand, it is also eager to let the child's piano level be recognized. For a long time before the exam, most children practice those exam songs over and over again every day, and over time they will be bored and resistant to piano practice and grading. This huge external pressure makes the source of children's learning piano gradually change from interest to task, which greatly reduces the fun and enthusiasm of children learning piano. In fact, the piano examination is only an evaluation of the achievements of piano education, which is a good opportunity for students to check their learning and exercise themselves, which should be completed naturally after a certain stage of learning. However, due to the great influence of the utilitarian nature of social examinations, China's piano education has largely changed from quality education to exam-oriented education, making a large part of children lose the real purpose and meaning of learning piano.

In addition, China's investment in public art facilities is also relatively limited, except for Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen and other megacities, the number of professional concert halls and opera houses in other cities is still limited. It is difficult to meet the artistic needs of more people. Starting from the height of the state and the government will definitely greatly accelerate the promotion and popularization of elegant art in China, and of course, it will also promote the rapid development of piano education in China.

6. Different teaching materials used in piano education in China and the United States

The art of piano not only has profound professional theoretical knowledge to learn, but also highlights the practical nature of art. Excellent teaching materials are not only the basis for professional knowledge learning, but more importantly, they have a profound impact on artistic practice. Therefore, the choice of teaching materials for piano teaching is very important.

6.1 Selection of piano teaching materials in American piano teaching

There are many types of piano teaching materials in the United States, freedom of choice, no unified standards, and there are more than a dozen primary enlightenment tutorials alone. Teachers will choose different teaching materials that are conducive to the development of their interests according to the needs of teaching and the characteristics of the practitioners. The main piano textbooks in the United States include "Thompson Simple Piano Tutorial", "Bastian Piano Tutorial", "New World Children's Piano Enlightenment Textbook", "Piano Practice Every Day", "Happy Piano Enlightenment Tutorial" and so on. These materials usually select excerpts from classical music compositions and American-style jazz, blues, pop music, and many American folk song materials. For example, "Yankee Song" in "Thompson Piano Simple Textbook", this song is a very popular song during the American Revolution. The textbooks written in the United States pay more attention to the comprehensiveness of the piano learning process

and the comprehensive development of students' comprehensive musical ability.

6.2 The selection of piano teaching materials in Chinese piano teaching

The selection of teaching materials for Chinese pianos is more uniform with the public, basically following the various teaching materials imported from Europe or the United States. Most teachers will use high-profile teaching materials with high popularity and good teaching effect on the market, such as "Baie", "Thompson Modern Piano Tutorial", Cherny series of tutorials, etc. There are also some teachers who choose teaching materials written by excellent domestic piano educators, such as "Piano Tutorial for Young Children", "Piano Finger Practice for Children", "Preliminary Tutorial for Children's Piano", "New Idea Piano Series Tutorial" and so on. Due to the lack of understanding of emerging teaching materials, most teachers choose teaching materials that are still relatively old. In recent years, various versions of teaching materials have gradually increased, and various latest versions of teaching materials have also appeared, which are worthy of vigorous promotion among piano teachers and schools. The fly in the ointment is that there are still relatively few Chinese-style piano teaching materials, and if more nationalized teaching materials are added to piano learning, it will undoubtedly play an important role in developing our own culture, promoting international exchanges, and enhancing the patriotic feelings of piano children.

7. Different teaching methods of piano education in China and the United States

7.1 American piano teaching methods

The United States advocates the educational concept of "the brain is more important than the hand", promotes heuristic teaching, and encourages students to self-direct. In piano lessons, when the students finish playing, the teacher will ask the students to say the strengths and weaknesses of their performance, and then let the students play a second time. During the second performance, students will begin to consciously and independently think about what they should pay attention to and how to improve their handling. American piano teachers believe that a good piano teacher is not to tell students which tone is wrong and where the rhythm is wrong, but to enable students to learn to guide their own performance, and clearly know the sound effects, advantages and shortcomings of their playing.

Piano teachers in the United States advocate that students understand the musical background before learning the repertoire. When first exposed to the works of Chopin and Mozart, such as waltzes, the teacher will let students first watch some video clips of dancing scenes in the European court, so that students can feel the rhythmic characteristics of waltzes immersively. In this way, students can intuitively experience the style and characteristics of waltz, which is very helpful for students' own performance. Musical art itself is an abstract thing, so teaching sometimes needs to borrow the assistance of visual materials to help students understand this abstract thing. For example, when they first came into contact with Debussy's work, it was difficult for students to understand what the Impressionist style was, no matter what the teacher said. If you first take students to visit an exhibition of Impressionist paintings and tell them that Impressionist music is developed from Impressionist paintings, it should be much easier for students to understand.

When holding a concert, American teachers will let students choose the repertoire for the concert, and which repertoire to choose is arranged by the students themselves, but the teacher will ask the students why they are not selected. In the concert students, the teacher will not only ask each student to play a different repertoire, but also ask the students to try to play some music that is not a household name. Therefore, few American students play Beethoven's "Tempest" sonata, "Moonlight" sonata and other familiar works in concerts, and students usually look for some repertoire that is not widely known. In this way, because one classmate chooses a little-known work of a certain composer, other students will also know that such a nice work exists. In this process, students learn from each other and invisibly increase a lot of knowledge. For the performers, because others have not heard much of their chosen repertoire, they are particularly comfortable in the performance process, and because they are not constrained by too many predecessors to play, it is relatively easy to make appropriate secondary creations of the work according to their own understanding.

7.2 Chinese piano teaching methods

China basically adopts the traditional "one-on-one" piano teaching model. Students are accustomed

to the traditional way of first practicing music reading in class, then being guided and commented by the teacher in class, and then repeatedly modifying the practice after class. Chinese teachers generally believe that the integrity of the music is very important, and pay more attention to the training of techniques and difficult techniques in teaching. Most teachers use etudes as the main teaching content, while others like to use difficult works. Although this may allow students to improve their degree faster, it is very easy to cause students to lack emotional mechanical performance and blind pursuit of the undesirable phenomenon. Therefore, among Chinese piano players, it is easy to have the problem of impeccable technique, but relatively poor art, of course, this is also related to the cultural habits of Chinese being more diligent, not good at performance, and paying attention to hard work.

In terms of teaching methods, China prefers a teacher-led model. The teacher-based model helps students grasp the learning content faster and minimize unnecessary errors. However, the long-term existence of this model is bound to make students rely on the teacher's teaching, and lack of active analysis and thinking about music works, making music performance lack appeal. Due to the limitation of discipline settings, Chinese colleges and universities will list harmonies, music style and composition analysis, music history and other courses as the learning content of the first and second years of colleges and universities, rather than as subjects for the entrance examination of music majors, which makes most students lack professional theoretical knowledge in these aspects, which to a certain extent causes the phenomenon that most students have poor overall musical ability.

In terms of the selection of performance repertoire, most Chinese teachers prefer to choose the right repertoire for their students, and students are more accustomed to having the teacher arrange the repertoire. On the one hand, teachers can strengthen training for students' weak links, plan students' learning progress, and try to avoid students taking detours in the learning process, or overestimating or underestimating their own playing ability. However, on the other hand, it also hinders students' self-learning ability and extended learning of music knowledge. Students rely too much on the teacher's teaching, and cannot have a good self-grasp and self-learning, so it is difficult to establish their own learning methods and performance styles.

Although China's piano teaching methods need to be further optimized and improved, there is no doubt that the potential of Chinese students is very large. Chinese piano education pays attention to the training of skills, and students' basic skills are relatively solid, but they lack musical appeal and expression. When many Chinese students first study abroad, their grades are often low at first, and their performance is considered lifeless. However, through the comprehensive improvement of musical ability and the stimulation of potential, most of the later performances have made great progress, and often have much better results than students in other countries. The reason is that because Chinese students have solid basic skills, once they make a breakthrough in comprehensive musical ability, their performance level is easy to improve. Of course, this is inseparable from the excellent qualities of Chinese students who respect teachers and study diligently.

To sum up, although the piano teaching methods in China and the United States are different, they have their own advantages. The biggest difference is mainly reflected in the fact that Chinese teachers focus on students' skills training, while American teachers focus on students' personality development. Technique training enables students to have excellent skills to deal with technical problems in performance, but too much technical training will also lead to students' lack of vitality of mechanical performance. Conversely, American teachers pay attention to the development of students' personalities, and to a certain extent, they pay more attention to students' skill training. Without strong performance skills as support, the expressiveness of music will inevitably be affected.

8. Different teaching effects of piano education in China and the United States

8.1 Teaching effects of American pianos

Although there are not many students who have really become pianists in the United States, because of the musical quality education from an early age, the recognition of American music by teenagers is quite high. Therefore, as long as an American has some basic training in classical music, they can simply play jazz and blues and other popular music. As long as Americans who studied piano as a child, most of them can improvise these music at banquets to achieve the purpose of entertaining themselves. This is the envy of many in other countries. In addition, due to the high popularization rate, wide coverage and strong musical atmosphere of music education in the United States, the music literacy of the American people is generally high and the ability to appreciate music is usually very strong. At the same

time, the United States is also a country that attracts talents, and famous international piano masters and top music academies attract a large number of students to the United States to further their piano skills.

8.2 The teaching effect of Chinese piano

Due to the tradition of Chinese piano education focusing on technique training, the mastery of students' finger skills is widely known. However, the lack of sufficient musical expression in Chinese students' performance cannot be ignored. Compared with foreigners, Chinese students' performances are generally thinner and the musical effects are not grand enough. Ms. Wu Hanna, a famous piano professor in China, once said: "Chinese play the piano with their fingers, foreigners play the piano with their bodies." The performance of Chinese is generally a mechanized finger movement that lacks inner emotions, and only if the inner emotions are rich and the inner emotions are organically combined with the movement of the fingertips, such a performance will have vigorous vitality. Despite this, for a country with only a hundred years of piano education development, China has emerged a number of piano players who have impressed the world, such as Lang Lang, Li Yundi, Chen Sa, etc., and these achievements in China's piano education are undoubtedly worthy of recognition. Chinese students respect teachers, study diligently, and are highly skilled, which is also recognized by all countries in the world.

9. Conclusion

Before the reform and opening up, under the influence of historical factors, China's cultural and artistic atmosphere was closed for a long time, the channels of cultural and artistic exchanges with foreign countries were closed, and little understanding of the development of culture and art in the world was known. However, at this stage, China has gradually become a superpower, with the support of various policies, cultural exchanges and development are thriving, and China's piano education is in a golden opportunity. In order to develop China's piano education, we should conduct in-depth comparison and learning with Western piano education from many aspects such as institutional methods, environmental atmosphere, cultural edification, and training goals. Taking its strengths and eliminating its weaknesses, the ultimate purpose is to serve the revitalization of China's piano industry. Through the piano, a universal "world instrument", we can better communicate with people all over the world, transmit Chinese traditional culture, and express our own national soul with piano!

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