Development of Piano Performing Art in China in the 20th Century

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Abstract
The author has raised the questions and elaborated her opinions on a basis of the literatures and documentations screened and collated by the author in respect of piano education and performance in China in the 20th century. This paper is written as a literature review. The development and achievements in piano education and performance in China has been discussed stage by stage in the 20th century. This will provide theoretical basis for the application of such achievements in one’s own piano performance and teaching practices. It is known from the literatures being researched that various piano schools in the world in the 20th century have affected the development of piano performing art in China in respect of piano playing. The remarkable outcomes of these schools have been widely referred to in China. As a result, a piano school with the characteristics of Chinese nation and art of music has gradually come into being. A large number of Chinese native remarkable pianists have been cultivated. So far more of the literatures available in China are on piano education and less on piano performance theories. The researches on piano performance mainly focus on a specific work of art. It is even rare to find any literature on a combination of piano education and piano performance.

Key words: piano playing in China, piano education in China, review.

Introduction
Modern piano emerged in modern Europe as a symbol of musical culture of Europe. Piano, as a musical instrument, reflected the highly developed industrial technologies in Europe. As a representative of European culture, piano has been in China for more than 150 years but the research on the history of piano education and performance in China reveals that modern piano education and performance in China commenced in the 20th century (Song J,2020). Piano education in the
early days in China was composed of piano teaching representatively by western missionaries in public schools and privately. From then on, western music began to enter into China. Cultural exchange also enabled the Chinese music to get known to the whole world. Cultural exchange in music initiated the popularization of multi-voiced music in China, discontinuing the habit of using single voice or heterophony in the traditional folk music in China (Cai M, 2020). Since the 20th century, piano art had been booming in China. Piano worked not only as a necessary and critical musical instrument assisting the music education in China but also an important instrument for solo, ensemble and accompaniment in music performance and recreational activities in China. In respect of piano education, a contingent of piano teachers appeared in the 20th century, composed of Chinese and foreign musicians. Some of them were critically influential in China and even in the world. In respect of piano performance practices, China fostered numerous excellent piano performing artists, who were born and grew up in China. They were well educated in piano both at home and abroad. They also made higher achievements in music performance events and competitions in the world (Zhang Y.N, 2011).

Research Objectives
First of all, the author has divided the development in Chinese piano education and performing art in the 20th century into stages and the basis for such division has been explained. That makes it easy for readers to fully understand the content of the paper. Subsequently, the papers on the development in Chinese piano education and performing art in the 20th century have been screened and collated. These literatures have been overviewed stage by stage as divided by the author. Then the author’s questions have been raised and her opinions elaborated. The development of piano performing art in China in the 20th century has also been discussed.

Literature review
Piano education and development of performing art in China in the 20th century has been divided as follows by the time.

1. Stage 1: Early 20th century – prior to foundation of the PRC
This stage marks the difficult initiation of piano education and performance theories in China. The Xinhai Revolution in China from 1911 to the beginning of 1912 overthrew the imperial Qing Dynasty and established the Republic of China. This revolution had a far-reaching influence on Chinese culture and arts in all aspects. Piano education and performance was greatly extended (Feng X.G, 2008). The Chinese People’s War of Resistance against the Japanese Aggression that broke
out in 1937 inflicted heavy losses on culture and art in China. In such cruel social and historic context, there was a deep shortage of piano teachers. The majority of music schools were unable to continue the teaching and performance activities as usual due to the war. After Japan surrendered in 1945, many schools began to resume the teaching and performance activities successively. The People’s Liberation War broke out in 1946-1949. Some Chinese famous pianists completed their study overseas and returned during this period. They played a critical role in enabling the piano teaching and performance in China to walk out of enlightenment and into learning and reference of western musical culture in a deep and structured manner. This marks the primary formation of first generation of Chinese pianists (Li S.N, 2017).

2. Stage 2: Foundation of the PRC – prior to the Cultural Revolution

This stage represents the exploration and growth of Chinese piano education and performance theories. The People’s Republic of China was founded on October 1, 1949. In such social background, China had unprecedentedly colossal changes in politics, economy, culture and arts. Social steadiness significantly contributed to the great concerns on musical culture. Piano education and performance was developed and a consummate teaching system was established (Tan H, 2013). It was a critical period in the 1950s and 1960s for Chinese piano education and performance being explored and developing. At this stage, many musical colleges were established in many provinces, with emphasis on Central Conservatory of Music and Shanghai Conservatory of Music. In addition to school education, extracurricular piano teaching activities at this stage in China were well developed owing to the benign social conditions after the foundation of the PRC. Many excellent young pianists were not educated in music schools. This tells the fact that in addition to music schools, a good social condition for education can also cultivate excellent pianists. Besides, many musical performance groups were established at this stage in succession across the country including choruses, orchestras and art ensembles. These groups employed full-time piano players and organized various piano events very often. By doing so, piano performance played a radiant role in piano popularization in the society (Wang X.Y, 2010 & Cao J, 2006).

3. Stage 3: Reform and Opening up – end of the 20th century

It was a stage of quick development and innovation of Chinese piano education and performance theories. The Cultural Revolution ended and China started a period of Reform and Opening up. All industries in China were developing rapidly. The initiation of the Reform and Opening up sent piano education and performance in China into a new stage and was brought in line with international practices. Exchange events and activities were organized between countries in respect of piano education and performance. Central Conservatory of Music and Shanghai Conservatory of Music resumed student enrollment. A larger
pool of excellent students began to enroll in the schools. Students with bachelor’s degree became the skilled talents for future piano artistry in China. In addition, students in primary and middle schools attached to the music schools were academically trained. Music colleges and conservatories began to offer master’s and doctoral degree programs and further build platforms for piano teaching, performance and research. It is worth mentioning that the improved living conditions in China since the Reform and Opening up increased the mental and cultural demands. This was reflected on people’s passion for piano learning. As a result, the piano fever emerged in the 1980s. A quick increase in piano demand in a short period of time resulted in a boom in piano purchase in many places. The piano fever also caused many drawbacks existing in non-academic piano education, such as the shortage of qualified teachers in the piano education institutions, limited options of piano instructional materials, kids’ piano learning weariness due to their parents’ aimless intentions of piano learning, etc. To counterbalance these drawbacks, music schools and musicians' associations began to intervene by working out a regulatory practical piano grade examination system, compiling instructional materials for piano learning for various levels and organizing piano competitions of various scales and higher levels for various ages. These actions greatly leveled up the non-academic piano teaching and performance in the institutions(Yang T,2013). China started an age of diversification at the end of 1980s to the end of 20th century, during which, piano teaching and performance in China developed quickly. A new era was unveiled. A complete, structured and reasonable piano teaching and performance system with Chinese characteristics were further set up, which theoretically supported the establishment of Chinese piano school in a steady and powerful manner.

Conceptual framework
The author has found in the databases such as Wanfang Data, VIP Paper Check System and CNKI that many papers on piano performance and piano education are available but without forming a structured system due to insufficient theoretical depth. Literatures regarding the combined piano education and piano performance are far less. As such, the research on the development in Chinese piano education and performing art in the 20th century is practically valuable and moreover pioneering.

Research methodology
This paper is written as a literature review. The practices of Chinese piano education and performance in the 20th century have been discussed in stages. This will theoretically support today’s Chinese piano
practitioners in their piano teaching and performance practices. It will be advised for foreign scholars who will understand the theories of Chinese piano education and performance in the 20th century.

**Research results**

The historical background and social context in which piano education and performing art developed in the 20th century in China has been briefed in three stages as divided above. It has been found in the research on three stages that Stage 1 (Early 20th century – prior to foundation of the PRC) was the start-up stage of piano education and performing art development in China. Information was blocked and there was no structured theoretical research. The author has searched the databases in China but a very few literatures at this stage were available for research. Stage 2 (Foundation of the PRC – prior to the Cultural Revolution) was the exploration stage. Advanced piano teaching and performance concepts from the west began to spread in China. A better piano teaching system was formed. After searching the information, the author has found an increasing number of literatures in this period and the research results were structured and reasonable to a certain extent. Stage 3 (Reform and Opening up – end of the 20th century) marked the rapid development and innovation of piano education and performing art in China. A complete, structured and reasonable piano teaching and performance system with Chinese characteristics was established. Hence, more researches were conducted in this area at this stage. Most of written research results were included in the academic papers and art-specific journals in music schools and conservatories. The author has summarized and collated these research results in respect of piano teaching and piano performance practice in three stages. Literature overview has conformed to the generality-to-particularity law.

**Discussions**

1. Review of research on piano education and performing art development in Stage 1 (Early 20th century – prior to foundation of the PRC)

Institutions of music education at this stage include the followings.

(1) Mission schools in the early 20th century popularize modern piano among Chinese people. This was the result of permanent settlement of missionaries from overseas after China was forced to open its door in the Opium War in the 19th century. Besides, school songs were extensively sung in the music courses in new types of schools across the country, which enhanced the development of piano music(Chen D.X,2001).
(2) The May Fourth New Culture Movement led to establishment of many non-academic music associations in the 1920s. The most influential one was Music Research Association of Peking University. Cai Yuanpei, the famous educator, acted as the President of the Association, who proposed aesthetic education. His proposal was aimed to develop the personality and nobility through arts and music and hence improve the life and the society. Many music majors were available in these music associations. This was an early form of music schools, on which the earliest music education institution was built on.

(3) Departments of music were respectively set up between 1920 and 1927, including Department of Music in Shanghai Teachers School, Institute of Music attached to Peking University and Department of Music in National Peking Art School. Formal piano teaching and performance activities commenced in these departments. It is worth mentioning that Shanghai National Conservatory of Music was established in Shanghai on November 27, 1927 and renamed to Shanghai National Music School in July 1929. This was the very first professional conservatory of music in China. Xiao Youmei, the famous musician, acted as its President.

(4) Qingmuguan National Conservatory of Music and Songlinggang National Conservatory of Music were established respectively in 1940 and 1943 in Chongqing. Foreign experts and teachers from Shanghai National Music School were engaged in piano teaching. After the victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance against the Japanese Aggression, Qingmuguan National Conservatory of Music was relocated to Nanjing in 1946 and renamed to Nanjing National Conservatory of Music. Nanjing National Conservatory of Music was relocated to Tianjin in 1949 and merged with other music schools into Central Conservatory of Music. Songlinggang National Conservatory of Music was relocated to Shanghai and merged with Shanghai National Music School.

Piano educators and their contributions at this stage are as follows.

(1) Foreign pianists include Mario Paci, Boris Zakharoff and Viadimir A Gartz. They highly regarded the strong independence of fingers so that the players could perform piano works of various styles in various composer's stages. This subsequently became a technical characteristic of many Chinese pianists.

(2) Chinese pianists include Li Shutong, Li Shuhua and Wang Ruixian. They not only taught piano practice approaches in a professional and systematic manner but also proposed to raise the piano performance level using a great number of etudes.

2. Review of Research on Piano Education and Performing art Development in Stage 2 (Foundation of the PRC – prior to the Cultural Revolution)
(1) Since the foundation of the PRC, a number of conservatories of music had been established in succession in some key cities in China. These conservatories of music include Central Conservatory of Music, Shanghai Conservatory of Music, Shenyang Conservatory of Music, Tianjin Conservatory of Music, Wuhan Conservatory of Music, Xi’an Conservatory of Music, Sichuan Conservatory of Music and Xinghai Conservatory of Music. Excellent Chinese piano educators and performers gathered in the departments of music there. In addition, foreign pianists were frequently invited to these conservatories of music for lectures, seminars and performance. Middle schools and primary schools attached to these conservatories of music began to be established from the 1950s. On one hand, it was aimed to secure a reserve force for piano performers. On the other hand, it would expand the influence of the conservatories of music and the pool of students. Selection of high-potential talents and development into high-level talents would benefit from such expansion.

(2) Set-up of conservatories of music after the foundation of the PRC greatly enhanced Chinese piano education and performance to develop. Besides, the departments of piano were founded in regional academies of arts in China. The influential ones include Nanjing University of the Arts, People’s Liberation Army Academy of Art, Guangxi Arts University and Shandong College of Arts. Teachers in these schools were composed of Chinese excellent piano educators and performers. In addition, foreign pianists were invited for piano teaching and performance activities.

(3) Since the foundation of the PRC, importance had been attached to cultural education in music in all provinces and cities. Piano became mandatory in the departments of music in almost all normal schools and universities, which are not enumerated herein due to its huge number. In the subsequent development of these schools and universities, piano performance major were successively set up as a result of the increasing number of teachers and the higher potentials of students. Set up of this major further enhanced the piano teaching all over the country(Jiang Y.H,1999).

Piano educators and their contributions at this stage include the followings.

(1) Thanks to the close relationship between China and the Soviet Union at this stage, most of foreign experts came from the Soviet Union. These experts brought the leading teaching and performance methods and ideas to China. They also extended a large number of excellent piano teaching/learning materials in China. These materials were adaptable for colleges and universities and middle schools and primary schools attached to them. They also made up for a deficiency of piano teaching/learning materials in quality and quantity. Students were able to access to piano works of various styles more comprehensively,
broaden their horizon and have structured and all-sided insight into the playing characteristics of Russian piano school. The most representative piano experts from the Soviet Union include ① D. M. Serov, who gave lectures and offered a Piano Master course between 1954 and 1957, and ② Tatiana Kravchenko, the notable female pianist of the Soviet Union and the student of Lev Oborin (the representative of Russian piano school), who came to Central Conservatory of Music and Shanghai Conservatory of Music twice respectively in 1957-1958 and 1959-1960 for teaching activities, being one of the second team of piano experts delegated from the Soviet Union to China(Zhao P.G,2021).

(2) Since the foundation of the PRC, excellent piano educators and performers in China had dominated in Central Conservatory of Music and Shanghai Conservatory of Music and a huge team of piano teachers had formed. A number of excellent piano educators and performers emerged in the departments of piano in the two best conservatories of music in China. The representatives from the Department of Piano in Central Conservatory of Music at this stage include Yi Kajji, Zhu Gongyi, Li Changsun, Zhou Guangren, Hong Shiji, Liu Shikun, Chen Bigang, Li Qi and Yang Jun. The representatives from the Department of Piano in Shanghai Conservatory of Music at this stage include Wu Leyi, Xia Guoqiong, Li Jialu, Li Cuizhen, Fan Jisen, Li Qifang, Zhu Yafen, Hong Teng, Sun Yiqiang, Yin Chengzong, Gu Shengying, Fu Cong, Li Mingqiang and Zhou Guangren (who was mobilized to Central Conservatory of Music in 1955). These Chinese excellent piano educators and performers constituted a mainstay in the piano area in China at this stage. They made great contributions to the piano undertaking in China at this stage(Li S.L,2004).


After tens of years of development in piano education and performing art in the previous two stages, a qualitative leap happened at the third stage. Piano education and performance in China was flourishing unprecedentedly(Li Z,2000). Achievements in piano education and performance became the subject of this stage.

Music education institutions at this stage are shown as below.

(1) After the Cultural Revolution ended, conservatories of music, regional academies of art and normal schools resumed student enrollment. The student pool became larger as teachers increased in number. The scope of teaching was enlarged. The mode of talent cultivation used in the Soviet Union was referred to. Level of education was scaled up to include master’s degree and doctoral degree in piano major. Talents of high level of education and high quality reached a certain number(Ma D,2000).
(2) Chinese people began to improve their living conditions day on day from the 1980s. Many parents began to allow their kids to learn the piano. A piano fever emerged then. Accordingly, musical instrument stores and piano training agencies began to appear and increased in number year on year. Emergence of these piano training agencies facilitated the piano learning of kids. They were able to learn the piano in the cities where they resided. It also played a fundamental role in promoting the development in piano education and performance in China.

Achievements in piano teaching and performance at this stage are shown below.

Reform and Opening up enabled the rapidly booming economy in China, quickening the link of Chinese piano undertaking to the world. Many renowned foreign pianists were invited to China for teaching and performance activities. Foreign teachers taught in many colleges of art including but not limited to Central Conservatory of Music and Shanghai Conservatory of Music. Outstanding foreign piano teaching and performance ideas began to extend in the piano teaching practices across China. Many domestic excellent piano learners went abroad for further study or academic exchange. Development in these aspects further shortened the distance between China and the world in respect of piano teaching and performance level(Zhou Q,2004).

Achievements obtained from rapid level-up in teaching emerged in great number at this stage. Chinese pianists at Stage 3 won far more prizes in the international competitions than those at Stage 2. This indicates that Chinese piano teaching and performance at this stage was n in parallel with the international level.

Stage 3 symbolizes a brand-new age of Chinese piano education and performing art. A piano education and performance system with Chinese characteristics began to take shape, laying a firm foundation for building a Chinese piano school.

Conclusion

1. Stage 1 – initial professionality in piano education and performance

Chinese piano education and performing art underwent enlightenment from the early 20th century prior to foundation of the PRC. The majority of teachers came from other countries. They imparted the playing techniques to the students, laying a firm foundation for Chinese piano education and performance to develop. Chinese pianists returning from overseas constituted the mainstay in the piano education and performance activities in China. Piano teaching theories in China began to take shape.
2. Stage 2 – general professionality in piano education and performance

Chinese piano education and performing art was developing from the foundation of the PRC till prior to the Cultural Revolution. Conservatories were set up across the country and experts invited from the Soviet Union to China for teaching activities. Chinese piano education and performing art was quickly leveled up. Russian piano school influenced most at this stage. Chinese students mostly went and studied in the Soviet Union. Some Chinese young pianists with eminent performance skills won the prizes in the international competitions. Piano teaching theories with Chinese characteristics began to be set up in the process of exploration at this stage.

3. Stage 3 - piano education and performance in parallel with the world

Piano-relevant exchange activities between China and other countries were frequently organized from the Reform and Opening up to the end of the 20th century. Various piano education and performance ideas were brought into China. Chinese pianists came onto the international stage and won the prizes in many critical international competitions. The piano fever nationwide from the 1980s till today has created a benign context for piano teaching and performance. The piano teaching theories with Chinese characteristics became complete, structured and reasonable. This laid a firm foundation for the piano school with Chinese characteristics.

Suggestions

To conclude, Chinese piano education and performing art developed in the 20th century in the specific historical background. Such development was conspicuously featured with a stage-by-stage progression. Literature reviews of research on Chinese piano education and performing art development at all stages in the 20th century makes better understanding of the history and the law of development in Chinese piano education and performance in China. It can be advised for the contemporary and future piano art development in China.

The author affirms that as China rapidly develops in all aspects and multiple cultures integrate with each other worldwide, Chinese piano education and performing art will further boom in an all-round, structured and reasonable manner.

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