Piano Education of Children in China

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Abstract

This thesis offers an overview of the development of the piano in China, the popularization of piano education, and the specific pedagogical methods and materials used in the piano education system.

With detailed explanations and illustrations, it traces the history of the piano as an instrument in China from its earliest introduction and its gradual spread to its highly popular status of today, from which one can obtain a clear picture of how this Western musical instrument has become a household favorite in China.

The increasing popular demand of the piano as an instrument in Chinese households has also changed the face of pedagogical methods and materials in the last thirty years.

This thesis will examine current pedagogical methods and materials used in Chinese piano study from the beginning to intermediate levels.
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Introduction

Piano study has grown into an important part of current Chinese culture. Today, China is experiencing piano popularity with an estimated 40 million children now learning to play. The instrument is increasingly in vogue among China’s burgeoning middle class, who have more financial resources to invest in lessons and expensive pianos. Spurring them on is the phenomenal success of Chinese superstar concert pianists Lang Lang and Yundi Li, the latter of whom is currently on a 30-city sell-out tour of his homeland. Tickets for the Beijing leg of the tour were snapped up within minutes. “Now it is easier for people – now you just need to be able to afford it.” (Montefiore, 2013) Having a musical skill is widely accepted and praised in society and people love to take pleasure in that. Children who study music may find it easier to enroll in higher level schools, and this encourages families to provide music lessons for their children.

The Chinese Piano Education system has proven to be very successful over several decades. Many wonderful artists, like Yundi Li and Yujia Wang who emerged from China, were trained in this system.

The Chinese piano education system’s output of successful artists suggests a sound pedagogical approach. Because of the success of this system, the global piano teaching community may benefit from examining Chinese teaching approaches and methods. This thesis will examine the rise of the piano in China; the history of piano pedagogy, and the evolution of the piano educational system. The piano study of
young children in China will be particularly discussed, as well as examination of teaching techniques, materials, practice methods, and repertoire selection. It is hoped that the following discussion will provide a greater global insight on how piano study is approached in China.

**History of the Piano in China**

In order to understand the evolution of piano study in China, it’s important to understand the history of the piano in Chinese society and the evolution of piano study that followed. In 1601 CE, the Italian missionary Matteo Ricci was a guest of the emperor of the Ming Dynasty in Beijing. Among the gifts he presented was a musical instrument that was referred to in Chinese history books as the “Seventy-two String Zither.” The zither was very similar to the fortepiano of the 17th century and was considered a predecessor of the modern piano. Emperor Wanli was fascinated by this keyboard instrument as soon as it entered the palace. He ordered four eunuchs to learn how to play this instrument under the tutelage of the Spanish missionary Diego de Pantoja, who traveled with Matteo Ricci. These four eunuchs were thus the earliest piano students of China, while Pantoja was the earliest known foreign piano instructor in China (Yang, 2008).

Despite the Emperor’s interest in the keyboard, the piano was not popular in China at this time. Piano education in the real sense did not start until the late nineteenth-century. The following will examine the evolution of piano study in the
nineteenth-century, which are categorized into five “models” according to Guanyu Cao (Cao, 2009). These five models of early Chinese piano education are:

The “Church” Model

After 1840, Christian churches were set up in many coastal cities in China. When a church held its Sunday ritual, the piano music and accompanying hymns during the services attracted many people. These churches provided the earliest known exposure of the piano as an instrument to the public. However, the piano entered Chinese society, not through churches, but through classroom instruction. Chinese students were able to study piano as an extracurricular activity in religious-based schools. Piano classes were taught at schools such as the Shanghai Zhongxi Girls Middle School, where the piano instructors were missionaries. These missionaries did not possess a high level of piano skill. Most of them could only play hymns and simple tunes but lacked the training in correct and systematic piano playing. As a result, there was a lack of adequate training to properly teach pianists. However, the church model was important in that it was the forerunner of piano education in China.

The “Foreign Instructors” Model

Under the “foreign instructors” model, the Italian and Russian schools of playing were established in China. These foreign instructors trained the very first generation of what was to be considered “well-trained” Chinese pianists. The most memorable
piano instructor of this model was Mario Paci (1878-1946) from Italy, who held his piano recital at the Shanghai German Diaspora Club in 1904. This was the first piano concert in Chinese history. Not only did Paci train the first Chinese masters such as Bianmin Yu and Junwei Zhang, but many piano masters after them, such as Gongyi Zhu, Guangren Zhou, and Cong Fu, also studied under Paci. Another foreign piano instructor was Boris Zakharoff (1888-1943) from Russia, who is known as the teacher of the first generation of Chinese piano masters. Among this first generation of Chinese piano masters trained by Zakharoff were Xianmin Li, Shande Ding and Leyi Wu.

Shande Ding (1911-1995) initially studied the Pipa, a traditional Chinese instrument, during his childhood. After he took the preparatory course at the Shanghai state-run Conservatory of Music, he transferred to the piano major and became the student of Russian teacher Boris Zakharoff. In 1934, he recorded an album which was the first piano album in the history of Chinese music. He became interested in composition in 1940 and travelled to France in 1947 and studied composition at the Paris Conservatoire Nationale Superieur de Musique.

Leyi Wu (1919-2006) was from a musical family and her mother was a piano teacher at an American mission school in Shanghai and she was the beginning piano teacher for Dr. Wu. Leyi won the second prize in the music competition for the 100th anniversary for Schubert when she was 9 years old in Shanghai. Among the judges were Boris Zakharoff and Mario Paci. She entered the Shanghai state-run
Conservatory of Music and studied with Boris Zakharoff in 1934. In 1950, she obtained a chance to study at the Paris Conservatoire Nationale Superieur de Musique and studied with Yves Nat. She met Shande Ding at the conservatory and they became good friends. After three years of studying at Paris Conservatoire, she graduated and became Marguerite Long’s first Chinese piano student. She returned to China in 1956 and became the Chairman of the Piano Department of Shanghai Conservatory.

The “Studying Overseas” Model

The “studying overseas” model represents distinguished Chinese pianists who sought training outside of China and returned to their country as prominent teachers. Pianists Youmei Xiao, Zi Huang, and Yuanren Zhao respectively trained across Europe and the United States.

In 1901 Youmei Xiao studied pedagogy, piano, and voice in Japan. In 1910 he then attended Leipzig University and Königliches Konservatorium der Musik zu Leipzig (now the University of Music and Theatre Leipzig), where he completed his Ph.D. In 1916, he entered the philosophy department of Berlin University where he continued research. He returned to China in 1920. In 1921, he served as the director of National Beijing University's "Music Research Group." In 1922, in accordance with his recommendation, this group was formally renamed "Music Research Institute of Beijing University." He also became the institute’s managing director. In
1927, Yuanpei Cai joined Youmei to form China's first specialized institute of higher education for music, the National College of Music. In September 1929, according to his plan, which was upgraded to the National Institute for Music. In 1949 it was renamed the Shanghai Conservatory, which remains today. He served as the president of the institute until his death in 1940.

Zi Huang went on to study psychology at Oberlin College in Ohio, United States, in 1924. In 1928, he was accepted into Yale University, where he studied Western music. During his time at Yale, he composed his overture "In Memoriam", which was considered the first large-scale orchestral work composed by a Chinese composer. In 1929, Huang returned to China and expanded the use of Western music theory.

Yuanren Zhao studied piano in his childhood. He went to the United States as a scholarship student in 1910 to study mathematics and physics at Cornell University. While in college, his interests had turned to music and languages. He returned to China in 1925 and became a professor at Tsinghua University where he taught Mathematics, Physics, Chinese Phonology, Chinese Modern Dialects, Chinese Music and Staff, and a Western music appreciation. He also published more than one hundred piano works and art songs, and composed his first piano piece "Peace March" in 1915. He then published six volumes of songs which are "New Poetry Collection" (1928), "Children’s Day Collection of Songs" (1934), "Xiaozhuang Songs" (1936), "Mass Education Collection of Songs" (1939), "Xingzhi Collection of Songs" (1981) and "Yuanren Zhao Collection of Songs" (1981). His most famous art song "How
could I help thinking of her” is still popular more than half a century later. “He leads the Chinese Music to a new era” stated by Youmei Xiao (1928).

The “Amateur Education” Model

This model greatly increased piano education in China. After the Xinhai Revolution of 1912, the Ministry of Education in the new Republic of China promulgated the “Implementation of Guidelines for Secondary Education,” in which it stipulated that a “music and songs” class of one hour per week be established at every secondary school and that music be treated as a compulsory subject. At this time, the piano was also becoming more popular in China. To satisfy the needs of piano education, the Commercial Press published a series of foreign piano books in 1918. *A Collection of Marches* was the first of this series and was also the earliest piano textbook published in China. This book contains over 60 musical pieces in a wide variety of styles: some are excerpts from Italian and German operas; some are tunes depicting children’s life such as *The Frost Fairy March* and *The Kindergarten March*; some are musical pieces depicting various countries and cultures, such as *The Java March* and *The Beautiful River*; others include *The Washington March*, which celebrates the American Independence War of 1776, and the French national anthem *Marseillaise*.

In 1922, The National Education Association called together specialists of all disciplines to draft new curricula for elementary and secondary schools, which further
promoted the publication and popularization of music textbooks for these schools. *A Piano Textbook for the New Curricula* compiled by Youmei Xiao and published by Commercial Press (1922) was considered the most prominent among all publications. It includes three sections: *Basic Practices, Elementary Techniques,* and *A Collection of Famous Tunes.* This book gives a brief introduction to the development of piano education in China as well as the techniques of piano playing. It is a textbook intended for piano beginners, and has played a significant role in promoting the piano and music education in elementary and secondary schools. Many higher education institutions were established during this same time period, such as Beijing Teacher’s College, Guangzhou Teacher’s College and Wuchang Teacher’s College, which all offered music courses in their curriculum. All these endeavors greatly promoted the popularization of piano education in the general population of China.

“Professional Education” Model

In 1927, the first independent higher education institution for music instruction, Shanghai National Special School for Music, was established. From this point on, piano education in China had become professional and reached a higher level. Most of the first generation Chinese piano educators were trained at this school. This marks the starting of a formalized and systematic piano education in China.
The China Economy and Popularization of the Piano

The dramatic rise in piano study in China in recent years reflects the strong economic growth the country has experienced. “Chinese children and young people have developed such great passion for the instrument that China has become the most dynamic piano market in the world”, says Yuankai Feng, deputy secretary-general of the China Musical Instrument Association” (Chen, 2013). According to Yuankai, "China has about 5 million children and youths learning the piano, and about 80 percent of the pianos sold in China each year are for them." (Feng, China Daily Europe, 2013)

Yingqun Chen, in his 2013 online article, “Passion for the Piano” (China Daily Europe), explains the magnitude of the piano’s recent popularization in China and its economic impact:

“The (China Musical Instrument) association says that in 2012, China made 380,000 pianos, which was 77 percent of global production and worth 6.8 billion yuan ($1.12 billion; 814 million euros). China imported 106,800 pianos in 2012, which was an increase of about 16 percent from 2011, and it exported only 50,000 pianos.

Production has been stable for the past few years, but demand for high-quality pianos has increased. In 2007, the average price for a piano in China was about 13,000 yuan, but in 2012 it was 18,000”.

Yingqun further adds,
"Imports of higher-quality pianos - mainly from Europe, the United States, and Japan have increased. By the end of the third quarter of this year, China had imported 88,525 pianos, an increase of 11.8 percent from the previous year and 2.5 times the number in 2007. The improvement in the financial situation of many Chinese in the past 30 years has made the piano, which used to be a luxury item for most people, more affordable for many families. This is the one reason for its current popularity."

Yingqun also discusses the competition culture that remains an important part of China's music education and further reflects the piano's popularity:

"As well, more children and youths are doing well in international competitions and some become famous pianists, such as Lang Lang and Yundi Li, who have also become role models for China's legions of young piano players. Such success stories make parents even more passionate about their children's piano lessons. Every year, there are hundreds of large piano competitions in China, which are organized by professional institutions, governments and companies." (Chen, 2013)

**Pedagogical Trends in Piano Education**

Today, with years of pedagogical history, the development of the Chinese economy, and the increasingly higher standard of living in the country, large numbers
of music schools have been established, and piano study has dramatically increased.

The 1990s saw some major development in piano education in China. In 1992, the Chinese Musicians Association established and popularized the National Piano Performance Evaluation Tests (PETS) for non-professional players of musical instruments (mainly the piano). This test, which has been around for twenty years in China, aims to promote piano education for amateurs. All musical pieces used in the tests come from *A Collection of Compositions for the National Piano Performance Evaluation Tests*, New First Edition, compiled by the Evaluation Tests Committee of the Chinese Musicians Association, edited by Mingsun Zhou. The tests are usually held during the month of August, although in some areas they are held during the International Labor Day holiday in May or during the winter break of schools. The tests have ten levels. A student can ascertain his or her level with the guidance of a teacher and then registers for a target level and its relevant evaluation and assessment.

In each level, the following areas are assessed:

1. Basic Practices
2. Technique Test
3. Chinese Music
4. Foreign Music

A more detailed examination of skills and repertoire of all levels can be found in Appendix A.
Current Pedagogical Materials and Methods in China

With the popularization of the piano over the years, there have been fairly big changes in the selection of piano textbooks for young children. In the 1980s, when more children were starting to learn how to play the piano, many instructors were still using textbooks introduced in China during the first half of the twentieth-century, such as *Elementary Instruction Book for the Pianoforte* by Ferdinand Beyer and *Practical Method for Beginners, Op. 599* by Carl Czerny. During this time, John Thompson’s *Easiest Piano Course*, a popular American piano method series published in 1953, was widely adopted as a beginner’s textbook for children that best represented the educational theories of its time (Yao, 2007). However, it was not introduced into China until 1986, when it was republished by the People’s Music Publishing House. As a result, it did not have a widespread impact in China prior to that. Representative textbooks of that time period include *The Young Children’s Piano Course*, compiled by Feilan Li and Gangrui Dong published by the People’s Music Publishing House (1983) and *Beginning Piano Lessons for Children*, compiled by Jianyi Sheng, Suning Yang, Yongqing Zhang, and Wenying Zhou, published by Shanghai Music Publishing House (1984).

In addition, great emphasis was placed on Chinese composers in the 1990s when many of their works were beginning to be published (Bian, 1996). In 1997, Shanghai Columbine Communication & Publications published *First Lessons in Bach*. This book is designed for beginning level students to encourage correct practice habits. It
includes 28 pieces, most of which are in two-voice polyphonic texture. Using this book enhances students' skills in legato, staccato, leaps, mordent and repeat signs. It is the pivotal book for polyphonic study.

These are all excellent textbooks brought into China from other countries. The following represents the best representative textbooks (Bian, 1996) used in China today and their distinctive features:

_A Beginning Piano Course for Young Children_ by Geng Xie. People's Music Publishing House, 1993

1. Emphasis on landmark notes on the grand staff which provides standard reference points for note recognition and significantly improves children's ability to read music. These landmark notes have very distinctive positions that are easy to remember and can be used as reference points for learning the neighboring notes. This way, children are able to quickly expand their note reading across the whole keyboard from the very beginning.

2. Introduction of intervallic reading at an early stage is featured through visual and tactile exercises, thus developing principles of fingering and sight reading abilities at an early stage for children to observe the specific visual features of different intervals on the staff and then use these features to discover the principles of fingering, thus improving
their sight reading abilities.

3. “Note bundles” are used as an entry point so students can experience how important the weights of the arms are in playing. This takes into consideration the fact that young children have weak fingers when they first begin.

4. Basics of harmony and composition of simple tunes provides an opportunity to cultivate holistic music knowledge and develops musical abilities in a balanced manner instead of limiting students to simple and mechanical fingering practices.

*A Fun Piano Course for Children* by Fumei Chen (Anhui Literature and Arts Publishing House, 1999) features pieces with lyrics. This encourages children to have more fun while playing and singing at the same time. Most of the tunes and lyrics in the book are composed by the author, Fumei Chen. In addition, he offers arrangements of other tunes and supplies his own lyrics.

The first decade of the twenty-first century has witnessed more and more music activities related to the popularization of piano education, increasingly active piano competitions, and more frequent exchanges with foreign countries. As a result, an increasing number of foreign piano textbooks for children have been introduced and published in China. In 2000, the People’s Music Publishing House published Bela

**Pedagogical Approaches in Teaching Beginners**

Most children who learn piano today have their first contact with a piano when they are four or five years old. At this age, children have already formed considerable comprehensive skills and self-control. Therefore, it is an appropriate and ideal time for starting piano lessons and learning about music. Many current research studies have found that learning to play the piano not only can help children develop mental concentration, but physical coordination of the whole body. In addition, piano study gives a solid foundation in music reading, as well as basic memorization skills. Organizational and problem-solving skills are also significant benefits of piano study. As a result, it lays an excellent foundation for future study in all areas. (Li, 1993)

The following will introduce how guidance, interaction, and instruction are provided at the beginning stages when children are starting to learn the piano. Since the piano is what children are studying to play, it is necessary to explain the construction of the piano. The piano is composed of many different components which include keys strings, soundboard and hammers, so it is important for
students to learn the function of each component. Many children are most interested in the pedals, so it is necessary to give a good explanation of the pedals' location and their function.

A good rapport between the teacher and the student is essential for effective piano instruction and learning. The piano teacher should be friendly, creating an environment where the students are comfortable. The role of the teacher—someone who imparts knowledge, provides guidance, and answers questions—should come second. As young children are still at an early stage of cognition and understanding, the teacher should be able to communicate with them on their level of understanding. Teaching should start only after the child has obtained a fairly good understanding of the teacher's personality and style. With good rapport between the teacher and student, it is easier to transition into piano instruction. Through friendly conversation and simple, clear explanations from the teacher, as well as demonstrative teaching activities such as piano playing, children will gradually establish an affection and admiration for the teacher. As a result, the student will be more willing to follow the instruction from the teacher and be more comfortable with studying the various aspects of piano playing. (Huang, 2001)

After a good rapport has been established between the teacher and the student, it is important to form a correct posture for playing the piano. Using the proper playing posture from the very beginning makes it possible for children to press the keys and make sounds using the body weight and strength correctly, therefore increasing
freedom in playing in the future.

After children gain a basic understanding of the piano and form a basic sitting posture, the teacher can start having them sit at the piano and do some very basic learning. For example, to learn keyboard geography, tape color strips on the “Do” keys and allow the student to discover the location and number of keys that exist. As the student locates each key, they should be guided on the differences in sound as well as location. Another important step is to introduce them to the middle C of the piano and surrounding keys. It is also useful to the student locate and sing aloud note names and the corresponding solfege syllable for each key (C= do, D= re, etc.). This is also a good time to introduce finger numbers.

There are specific features of how young children behave. Moreover, the psychology of young children also tells us that children who are four or five years old only have an attention span of about twenty minutes (Dan, 2001). As a result, the instruction mentioned above—basics of the piano, requirements of the sitting posture, the position of the hands, and the initial contact with the piano—is conducted in two to three sessions so that children can master the fundamental concepts.

Next is a detailed examination of common textbooks used in the beginning stage of a piano student’s education, along with how they are used in the progression.

**Beginning Piano Textbooks**

*The Young Children’s Piano Course* (revised edition) by Feilan Li and Gangrui
Dong (People’s Music Publishing House, 1999) is based on the Middle C approach. This is an effective and common teaching technique which allows the student to become comfortable with a small range of the keyboard before moving beyond the octave range of Middle C. The child learns the keyboard in a limited range of the piano, rather than over a larger range of two to three octaves. The method of starting with the third finger, learning to apply weight on the key, and then gradually broadening to the other fingers is widely recognized as the best approach in China. (Cen, 2000)

This textbook consists of two volumes and a total of six instructional stages. These textbooks progress from the beginning to the intermediate level of piano study. This takes an average of a year and a half to two years to complete.

“Stage One” is titled “non-legato” and starts with the usual foundation of proper posture, fingering, and upper body movement. Both text and illustrations are used to show contrasts between correct and incorrect hand positions to facilitate understanding.

During instruction, the teacher helps the student achieve correct posture and cultivates good habits by using standard and detailed demonstrations and explanations. In addition, guidance and assistance are provided during practice and instruction. As the student practices, the instructor corrects posture and identifies any bad habits that may be forming.
Visual aides are also important in the development of rhythmic reading in the early stages. Rhythmic flashcards are used as shown Example 1. Rhythmic note values are presented ranging from large print for large notes values and smaller print for shorter note values. Through flashcard games, the student learns time values and smaller subdivisions of each note value. This exercise can be practiced not only in class, but also at home by parents and children together. This way, children will develop a clear mental and visual image of the time values and can react to them instantaneously. Concrete examples are also used to describe the shape of musical notes. For example, a whole note is shaped like an egg, while a quarter note resembles a tadpole. These rhythmic flashcards can also be used to teach students to beat time by clapping their hands, and using a fixed high note to accurately sing basic time values of the whole, dotted half, half and the quarter note.

Next is an introduction to the staff, the ledger line, the bar line, and the double bar line. This section mainly teaches the structure of the staff. Here, children are
taught to correctly identify the line and space notes. Introduction to the grand staff, the clefs, and Middle C follows.

After learning these fundamental concepts, children can move on to the next stage: learning to play non-legato by way of simple tunes using single fingers while reinforcing finger numbers and pulse (from the whole note to the quarter note).

Arm relaxation is stressed in the beginning stage. The natural weight of the arm is stressed with the arm initiating wrist and hand movement. The weight of the arms is concentrated on the tip of the finger with the rest of the arms relaxed, the first knuckle of the finger should be steady, and the palms arched. Children will learn to recognize the proper playing technique through repetition of this exercise. During practice, this exercise can be played up or down an octave to familiarize children with the location of the keys as well as training their listening skills. It is recommended that children play with the third finger of each hand. After they become familiar with the tune, the time values of the notes can be changed to dotted half notes or quarter notes in order to enhance the strength of the finger and relax the arm. An additional recommendation is that children put their third finger on the key before pressing it down. This teaches how to support the first finger knuckle and how to play with an upright hand posture.

The student learns a non-legato piece which is supplemented by a teacher accompaniment part. Children first watch the teacher demonstrate and practice learning by ear without looking at the music score. Students can also practice learning by ear without reading the music score by playing and singing at the same time with
the lyrics alongside the score. Here, the important concept of sight-reading is introduced to children. While playing, forward eye movement is stressed.

The next unit teaches how to use the first, second, and third fingers around the middle C. This part contains five tunes, designed for learning and playing notes in different octaves. In this section, students will also gain a further understanding of the 4/4 and 3/4 meters and start to learn more basic expression markings such as \textit{mf} and \textit{crescendo}.

The following section increases use of more fingers by extending to two or three notes on both sides of the middle C (the first, second, third, and fourth fingers). In this section, students need to further enhance and strengthen the independence of their first, second, and third fingers, relax their arms, and continue to learn how to correctly play with four fingers. Also, they need to maintain correct hand posture, with special attention to bending the fingers naturally and keeping the tip of the fingers straight so as to avoid tension from pressing the keys too hard.

In the latter half of the first stage, the concept of finger independence is added. During the practice, all first joints of the finger have to be well supported. The thumb should not be sticking up or hanging above the keyboard. In addition to finger independence, students also learn the basic notational symbols such as the sharp, flat, and natural sign.
Stage Two: Non-Legato (Eighth Notes)

In this stage the tunes are expanded to 8 to 16 measures. It consists of four major sections:

I. Eighth notes in steps and eighth notes in skips
II. Introduction of F major and G major
III. Introduction of D major and B flat major
IV. Practice of cross-hand positions and alternating two hands while playing

Stage Three: Staccato, Double Notes, and Chords

Here students get their first exposure to key signatures with three sharps. Building on what they have learned in Stage One and Stage Two, they will practice staccatos, double notes, and chords and further strengthen the support and flexibility of the wrist, the palm, and the knuckles. This stage includes four sections:

I. Introduction of the double notes in the same hand
II. Introduction of staccato playing
III. Practice of parallel motion and staccato skipping in octaves
IV. Introduction of the A major and the I chord

Stage Four: Legato

This stage introduces notes that are two octaves from the middle C on both sides as well as key signatures within four sharps and flats. Students will learn the proper
way of pressing the keys when playing the staccato and experience how the central point at the tip of the middle finger transitions during the staccato. They will also exercise the flexibility of the knuckles, and enhance the independence of the fingers.

Stage Five: Five-Finger Position

This stage is designed for training the coordination and strength balance between the two hands through Alberti bass and other simple accompanying forms. Through exercises with various techniques, students achieve richer expression and technique. Ear training and transposition exercises are also used in the five-finger position, developing their abilities to the next level.

Stage Six: Crossing the Thumb under the Hand or Turning over the Thumb

In this last stage, a large number of small pieces are introduced to train the fingers (especially the thumb) for dexterity and to enhance the adaptability of the wrist. Through practices that include sixteenth notes, students can improve the speed of their playing as well as play with a greater degree of detail. Pieces of various styles are included to help children better understand the music and enhance their imagination and expressiveness, especially in terms of singing and rhythm.

Another popular Chinese textbook is *Piano Playing for Young Children* by Yin Huang by Hunan Literature and Art Publishing House (2013). This is an entry level series specifically written for children between 3 and 5 years of age. Based on
the characteristics of young children, this textbook progresses from playing with one hand at a time, to playing with both hands, to playing for a sustained time period. It stresses the importance of a proper pedagogical approach and maintaining the interest level of children, and can be a fairly good foundation.

This textbook set consists of 5 volumes. The first volume covers basic note reading and time values. There are six features in it:

I. Restriction of Note Range:

The first volume specifically restricts the number of notes for children to learn. It only introduces the middle C, the 5 notes above middle C, and the 4 notes below middle C. Each lesson introduces one note and each lesson builds on the previous one. This way of teaching not only enables children to easily recognize a newly appearing note among many notes, therefore reducing the difficulty of learning new notes, but also reinforces all the notes that have been studied before.

II. Basic Note Values:

In this first volume, the time values of the notes only go from the whole note to the quarter note. With the limited pitches, children are able to practice with great repetition and accuracy, and as a result, build a solid foundation for further study.

III. Extensive Training on Basic Techniques:

Basic techniques (fingering, sitting posture, hand posture, etc.) are the
prerequisite and foundation for piano playing. In this first volume, new methods of technique appear with each new piece. For example, due to the fact that when children first begin to play the piano, their joints are still rather weak, this volume includes staccatos for strength training of the fingers as well as training for the support of the first joints. Exercises are used in which children raise their fingers high in order to train the mutual support of the fingers as well as their dexterity. These exercises provide a foundation for ease of playing later on.

IV. Large Repertoire of Children’s Songs both from China and Abroad:

This book contains a large repertoire of carefully selected Chinese and foreign children’s songs, songs from cartoons and animation movies, and songs from popular TV programs for children. They can both be played and sung by the children and therefore can engage them better and improve their performances.

V. Short Tunes, “Simplified pieces”:

Most pieces in this volume come with carefully written accompaniments for the teacher. They are rich in sound and lively in character. Through these pieces, children feel the beauty and harmony of music from the very beginning. They can also start playing with the teacher, a good preparation for playing duets in the future.
VI. Visual Illustrations:

In addition to the textual explanation of how to play various notes and tunes, this volume has many illustrative photos of model pianists. This serves as an excellent visual aid to help children understand and master specific skills.

In Volume Two of this textbook set, children learn and master a large range of notes and begin to learn various playing techniques such as note reading, time values and basic techniques. The range of the music is further broadened. In this volume, the playing range is widened to two octaves, (i.e. from C3 to C5). It is organized the same way as Volume One: in each lesson, children learn one new note, and each lesson includes a review of the notes in previous lessons. Thus, children learn by building on previous knowledge.

The duration of the music is increased. On the basis of the first volume, the whole rest, the half rest, and the quarter rest are added, which allows the student to play more diverse pieces.

New ways of playing are introduced. Staccatos and fingers stretching techniques appear in this volume, which improves the skills with which children play.

Through simple coordination of the body, children gradually transition from playing single notes one after another to encourage independence which lays the foundation for multi-layered thinking (synchronized thinking on multiple levels).

Volume Three introduces more complicated rhythms and new experiences in
playing such as piano with four hand repertoire. Other notable features include:

I. More varied rhythms are present. This volume introduces the quarter note, the eighth note, and the eighth rest, allowing more interesting rhythms. Moreover, children practice the eighth note repeatedly in C major and attain a good grasp of the eighth note rhythm.

II. Children start to play on their own. In this volume, children play more with both hands, using simple intervals. This marks the point where they have developed multi-layered thinking in the thought process.

III. Children are trained to read the score and physically sway with the music. More variations of treble and bass clef are used such as double clef reading for both hands. This prepares students for playing piano with four hands in the next level.

IV. Children start to play the piano with four hands. This volume is designed with sections for children to play the piano with four hands. Two children play together with both hands, alternating with each other. Through this they learn to cooperate with each other and develop the skill of listening for harmonies.

In Volume Four, children mainly learn to play variations of notes and play with different forms. This means they have advanced to the stage of beginning level performances. The following are distinctive features:
I. Children get the chance to play pieces that vary greatly in keys and styles and expand the repertoire of the music they can play.

II. Besides Chinese children’s songs, many classic foreign pieces by composers such as Beethoven and Brahms are also presented, which exposes children to more classic standard literature.

III. Many different techniques of playing are introduced. Building on finger movement and strength in the previous three volumes, “finger jumping” is introduced. This is where the student jumps to various locations on the keyboard while playing. In addition, pieces featuring tied notes and staves are frequently featured, encouraging students to keep wrists raised and therefore execute slurs with fluidity. These technical concepts enhance the student’s ability to play in a wider range of the keyboard and increase their technical ability to interpret different kinds of music.

IV. Goals are clearly presented and practice instructions for each piece are very clear and provide straightforward textual explanations. Both the parents and the children understand the goal clearly and know what to reach for.

V. Story telling with pictures is another feature of this volume. Every tune is illustrated with colorful pictures and lively cartoon figures. Through this form of storytelling with pictures, children become more interested in learning and can attain a deeper understanding of the musical works.
Volume Five is the last volume of this textbook set. It reviews all previous learned concepts and presents new content as well. As such, it serves as a final review and prepares the student to play at the intermediate level.

I. Breakthrough by Review:

Through prior training in technique, musical interpretation, and ensemble playing in the previous four volumes, children have made significant progress in music reading, finger dexterity, and general command of the keyboard. This volume is the coming-together of all that has been learned in the previous four. Children have grasped the concept of applying all they have learned and have also improved their comprehensive performing skills.

II. Flexibility in Playing:

With the wrist-raising technique in the last volume as the basis, the idea of “falling and rolling” is introduced in which the hands and fingers move in curve-like waves, making it possible for young children to play more technical pieces with fluidity.

III. Emphasis on Piano “Performance”:

This volume has several descriptive pieces that are written for performance, such as Good Bunny, Jasmine Flowers, and Little Drivers. These can guide the children into piano performance with musical imagination.

IV. Higher Level of Thought Training:
In this volume, children slowly progress into the more complicated method of playing with both hands. They move from the simple double-layered playing to multi-layered combinational playing and acquire better skills for stage performance.

In addition to *The Young Children's Piano Course* by Feilan Li and Gangrui Dong and *Piano Playing for Young Children* by Yin Huang, Bela Bartok’s first three volumes of *Mikrokosmos*, represent another very important entry-level textbook used in Chinese piano training (Cen, 2000). Through this collection, the student plays not only major and minor keys, but has exposure to modal and polytonal music. Children have early contact with the black keys of the piano, as well as various key signatures. Polyphonic writing has a strong presence as well.

After a student has successfully progressed through aforementioned method books, it is common to further develop polyphonic playing. The following collections are often used: *First Lessons in Bach, 28 Short Pieces for Piano Solo* by J.S Bach, edited, published by Walter Carroll by Shanghai Columbine Communication & Publications (1997) and *Various Short Preludes and Fugues of Bach* by J. S. Bach edited by Jiang Chen, published by Shanghai Education Publishing House (2003) (Cen, 2000).

For corresponding technique exercises, teachers often use *Practical Method for Beginners (Op. 599), 24 Studies for the Left Hand (Op. 718)*, and *30 New Studies in*
Today's piano education system in China is at its peak. The piano's role in China has gone through a great transformation since its introduction in the 1600's. This can be credited by Western influences in teaching and pedagogical materials over several decades, the recent dramatic rise of the Chinese economy, and the great popularization of piano ownership, study, and performance. Current teaching materials are of highest quality and works of Chinese composers are being recognized more than ever before. The National Piano Performance Evaluation Test continues to encourage the study and performance of quality repertoire and maintains a high standard for teachers and students.

More and more successful Chinese pianists are active in the world and presenting their music on the stage. Through this, China is setting a global example of a successful piano education system that has a bright future.
APPENDIX A: National Piano Performance Evaluation Test (PETS)

Edited by Mingsun Zhou, 2007

Content for each Level:

**Level One**

Basic Practices:

Scales hands separately two octaves

Broken chord progression in C, G, D Major; a and e harmonic minor with hands separately


Foreign Music: *Sonata in G Major, Hob XVI: 8 IV. Allegro* - Haydn

**Level Two**

Basic Practices:

Scales hands separately two octaves

Broken chord progression hands separately in:

C, G, D, A, F Major; a, e and d harmonic minor

Technique Tests:

*Gavotte* - François Couperin;

*Elementary Studies, op.176 no.14* - Jean-Baptiste Duvernoy.

Chinese Music: *Children’s dance with a bunch of flowers* – Aiping Jin
Foreign Music:

*Ecossaise in G major, WoO 23* - Beethoven

*Innocence, Collected Studies for Piano, Op. 100 No. 5* - Burgmuller

**Level Three**

**Basic Practices:**

- Scales hands separately three octaves
- Arpeggios two octaves hands separately
- Chromatic scales two octaves hands separately in:
  - C, G, D, A, E, B and F Major; a, e, b, d, g and c harmonic minor

**Technique Tests:** *Etudes Enfantines, Op.37 No.10* - Henry Lemoine

**Chinese Music:** *Love Song in Kangding* – Hongduo Chen

**Foreign Music:**

*The Wild Horseman, Album for the Young, Op.68 No.8* - Robert Schumann

*Ballade, Collected Studies for Piano, Op. 100 No.15* - Burgmuller

**Level Four**

**Basic Practices:**

- Scales four octaves hands together
- Arpeggios four octaves hands together
- Chromatic scales two octaves hands together in:
C, G, D, A, E, B, F, B flat and E flat Major and the relative harmonic minor keys.


Chinese Music: *Walking in the countryside* – Shande Ding

Foreign Music:

- *Waltz Op.12 No.2* - Grieg
- *Neapolitan dance* - Tchaikovsky

Level Five

Basic Practices:

- Scales four octaves hands together
- Arpeggios four octaves hands together
- Chromatic scales two octaves hands together in:

Technique Tests:

- *Preliminary School of Finger Dexterity, Op. 636 No. 6* - Czerny
- *Invention in B flat Major No.14, BWV 785* - Bach

Chinese Music:

- *Aba Tibetan night rendezvous* – Huwei Huang
- *Playing ball in Chinese Acrobatics* – Haiying Li
Foreign Music:

*The Seasons Op. 37a, April: Snowdrop in B flat Major* – Tchaikovsky

*Sonata in D Major, HOB XVI: 51 II. Finale* - Haydn

**Level Six**

Basic Practices:

Scales four octaves hands together

Arpeggios four octaves hands together

Diminished seventh arpeggios (start with b, c and #c) in:

C, G, D, A, E, B, F, B flat, E flat, A flat, D flat and G flat Major and the relative harmonic minor keys.

Technique Tests:

*The School of Velocity, Op. 299 No. 11* – Czerny

*Preliminary School of Finger Dexterity, Op. 636 No. 10* – Czerny

*Invention in G Major No.10, BWV 781* - Bach

Chinese Music:

*The Buffalo Boy's Bamboo Flute* – Luting He

*Dance of Waterweeds (From ballet ‘The Mermaid’) – Zuqiang Du, luxin He*

Foreign Music:

*Butterfly, Op. 43 No. 1* - Grieg

*Sonata in G Major, HOB XVI: 27 I. Allegro* - Haydn
Level Seven

Basic Practices:

Scales and arpeggios four octaves hands together

Diminished seventh arpeggios (start with b, c and #c)

Dominant seventh arpeggios in:

C, G, A, Bb, Eb, F# Major and the relative harmonic minor keys

Technique Tests:

The School of Velocity, Op. 299 No. 19 - Czerny
60 Studies for Piano No. 17 selected - Bulow (J. B. Cramer)
15 Sinfonias in b minor No. 15, BWV 801 - Bach

Chinese Music:

Chengdu’s suburb at spring - Huwei Huang

Selling of Groceries - Peixun Chen

Foreign Music:

Sonata in B flat Major K570. III Allegretto - Mozart

Sonatina in C major Op. 13 No. 1. III Presto - Kabalevsky

Level Eight

Basic Practices:

Scales and arpeggios four octaves hands together

Dominant seventh arpeggios in:

D, E, B, Ab Major and the relative harmonic minor keys
Technique Tests:

The School of Velocity, Op. 299 No. 24 - Czerny
60 Studies for Piano No. 21 selected - Bulow (J. B. Cramer)
Three – Voice Sinfonias No. 13 in a minor, BWV 799 - Bach

Chinese Music: Embroider a golden plaque – Jianzhong Wang

Foreign Music:

Sonata in D major K.311. I Allegro - Mozart
Sonata in C major K.330. I Allegro - Mozart
Nocturne Op. 9, No. 2 in E flat major – Chopin
Impromptu Op. 142, No. 2 in A flat major – Schubert

Level Nine

Basic Practices:

Scales four octaves hands together

Dominant seventh arpeggios in: C, G, D, F, Bb Major

Diminished seventh arpeggios in: a, e, b, d, g minor

Technique Tests:

Art of Finger Dexterity for the Piano, Op. 740 No. 4 - Czerny
15 Etudes De Virtuosite, Op 72 No. 5 in C major - Moszkowski
Das Wohltemperierte Klavier II, Prelude and Fugue No.15 in G major, BWV 884 - Bach

Chinese Music: Embroider a golden plaque – Jianzhong Wang

Foreign Music:

Sonata in A minor K.310 I. Allegro – Mozart
Sonata in F minor Op. 2 No. 1 I. Allegro – Beethoven
Polonaise in A major Op. 40 No. 1 – Chopin
Level Ten

Basic Practices:

Scales:

- F Major and D Minor
- B flat Major and G Minor
- E flat Major and C Minor
- A flat Major and F Minor
- D flat Major and B flat Minor
- G flat Major and E flat Minor

Technique Tests:

- 15 Etudes De Virtuosite, Op 72 No. 1 in E major - Moszkowski
- 15 Etudes De Virtuosite, Op 72 No. 2 in G minor - Moszkowski
- 15 Etudes De Virtuosite, Op 72 No. 11 in A flat major - Moszkowski
- Etude No.1 in F sharp major - Hongjin Ni

Polyphonic Music:

- Das wohltemperierte Klavier I, Prelude and Fugue No.21 in B flat major, BWV 866 - Bach
- Das wohltemperierte Klavier I, Prelude and Fugue No.2 in c minor, BWV 847 - Bach
- Sonata in E Major K.380 - D. Scarlatti
- Sonata in C Major K.159 - D. Scarlatti

Chinese Music:

- Under the Sunshine - Lisan Wang
- Wedding Dancing - Zuqiang Wu and Mingxin Du
- Grain Dancing - Yiqiang Sun

Foreign Music:

- Sonata No. 8 in C Minor Op. 13 I. Grave - Beethoven
- Sonata No. 10 in G Major Op. 14 No.2 I. Allegro - Beethoven
- Sonata in C major Hob. XVI: 50 I. Allegro - Haydn
- “Fantasie” Impromptu, Op. 66 - Chopin
The following books are provided as reference points for the ten levels. For each of these levels, one should have finished studying the following works:

Level One: *Elementary Instruction Book for the Pianoforte* by Ferdinand Beyer

Level Two: latter half of *Practical Method for Beginners, Op. 599* by Carl Czerny

Level Three: first half of *Thirty New Studies in Techniques, Op. 849* by Carl Czerny

Level Four: second half of *Thirty New Studies in Techniques, Op. 849* by Carl Czerny

Level Five: first half of *The School of Velocity, Op. 299* by Carl Czerny

Level Six: second half of *The School of Velocity, Op. 299* by Carl Czerny

Level Seven: *The School of Velocity, Op. 299* and *60 Studies Selected by Bülow 12 Grandes Etudes Mélodiques Op. 107* by Cramer

Level Eight: *Art of Finger Dexterity for the Piano, Op. 740* by Carl Czerny

Level Nine: *15 Etudes De Virtuosité, Op. 72* by Moritz Moszkowski

Level Ten: *Chopin Etudes Urtext Op. 10 and Op. 25 Etuden*
Bibliography

Books


Scores


Internet

