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A Practical Pedagogical “STEP5” Approach Based on the Learning from Chinese and Finnish Piano Teaching

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Abstract

There are many types of pedagogic approaches and teaching methods for instrument playing applied around the world. China is an example of competitive society, where the aim of piano teaching is intensive program with strict teacher control, measurable results with hard practice, and advanced performance skill development. Although the strict “Pear Garden” training tradition from the Tang Dynasty times has ceased to exist, the Chinese instrumental educators still prefer a lot of mechanical practices and repetition with self-discipline. However, an alternative “Happy music education” approach is popular in Finland, mainly focusing on creativity, expression and student-oriented teaching, in contrast to heavy pressure for achieving quick results. In the mode of happy music education, teachers have enough patience and trust in their students, and particularly the students face fewer formal examinations or assessments.

This study compares the similarities and differences in piano teaching between Chinese and Finnish modes in terms of teaching environment and materials, teaching methods and results (short-term and long-term), and teaching evaluation and organization structure of the music education. The objective of this study is to understand the pros and the cons of the two systems.

As a result of the study and based on more than 25-year practical experience from piano teaching in China and Finland, complemented with experience from music studies in both countries, there might be no “one-size-fits-all” optimal piano teaching method or pedagogical approach for all students. Nevertheless, we have learned that combining superiorities from Chinese and Finnish approaches and developing a comprehensive pedagogical toolbox, both teachers and students can achieve better results. Based on the learning, we have created a practical pedagogical “STEP5” approach that includes five principles: (1) personalization, (2) motivation, (3) effectiveness, (4) sustainability and (5) quality, for achieving better quality of teaching and learning, meanwhile keeping the students happy and motivated.

The purpose of the study is to show that there are many things Chinese and Finnish can learn from each other. For instance, to combine the best elements from Asian and Western approaches would produce new possibilities for developing piano teaching forwards. We also suggest that there is still room for further studies in formalizing the practical pedagogical approach presented and its wide application for further feedback.