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Developing a Popular Piano Textbook for Chinese Undergraduate Music Students: An Educational Science Approach

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AbstrAct

The present study examines how professional piano teaching material is developed in the popular piano teaching world in the framework of higher music education in China. The study acknowledges the fact that research on it is limited and scattered, especially the lack of pedagogically richand localised textbooks, and considers the need of the undergraduate students for practical, style-oriented piano training in accordance with the needs of the music industry. The study is based on qualitative research design, which consists of extensive literature study, in-depth interview with the students, teachers and managers at the Chinese music institution, and expert assessment of the teaching materials which are produced. The findings revealed that there were some issues to be addressed in current curricula: there was no evidence of any structured improvisation training; too much reliance on western teaching models; and a mismatch between available resources and the needs of Chinese students. In response, the study created a textbook called "Curriculum-based textbook on popular music rhythm, harmony, accompaniment and creative arrangement" in order to gradually cultivate the ability of rhythm, harmony, accompaniment and creative arrangement within three styles of popular music including Ballad, Chinese Pop and R&B. It reflects the current development tendency of higher education and educational research, by providing a culturally responsive model for music education, curriculum innovation and embedding creative skill development in the undergraduate music majorstraining in China.

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Introduction

The development of popular music education system in universities and colleges should be considered in numerous aspects. Ho (2017) argues that cultural relevance, globalisation, and new pedagogical practices should be considered when reforming music education in East Asia, including China, in order to be effective. It is a difficult subject with promising prospects of development. Under the umbrella banner of higher education reform and democratisation of arts education in China, to establish a holistic and forward-looking popular music curriculum, not only the renovation of the educational concepts but the streamlining of the curriculum systems, development of teaching methods and the revolution of environments of artistic practice are all necessary. More specifically, music education must be adjusted to the tendencies of the global community and digital culture changes to remain relevant and efficient in the 21-st century.

The world has witnessed a fast development of popular music education which has changed with the music consumption change, industry needs, and learner interest. Digital tools, a variety of musical styles, and pedagogies based on students have been integrated in many institutions in North America, Europe, and some parts of Asia to make the learning of music more modern. The digital culture has affected the students greatly, through online tutorials, MIDI sequencing, DAWs (digital audio workstations), and interactive music platforms the effects of music among students have been drastically changed and particularly in the popular genre. By contrast, Chinese popular music education is yet to establish its identity, and attempts are being undertaken to localise its contents and implement digital strategies within the traditional paradigms of academic education (Xin Di, 2017; Pan Maoyuan, 2017).

The popular piano performance is a mandatory course of the popular music curriculum system. It is a skill course as well as a comprehensive course. It is a creation of the fusion of popular music and piano accompaniment improvisation. It is commonly applied in teaching popular music and school music performance, and performance and singing. According to Piano Improvisation Accompaniment Tutorial by Liu Cong and Han Dong, a good foundation is well rounded and extensive in learning improvisation accompaniment. The most important and core of them is the piano foundation, harmony foundation, and song analysis foundation (Liu Cong, Han Dong, 2014).

This research identifies the beginning point of the innovation of the popular methods of teaching piano playing of popular music among undergraduates of universities, and the experimental subjects are the college students majoring in popular music in the School of Music of university. The research is conducted in accordance with the following ideas after the idea of determining the direction of the research, raising problems, literature analysis, current situation investigation, current situation analysis and improvement strategy, finally, developing a popular music piano textbook that can be used in the higher normal colleges.

The research position of Chinese popular music, popular music education in Chinese universities, piano teaching, the present status of popular piano curriculum setting and implementation, and other content related to this study will be sorted out in this paper in a longitudinal manner. At this point, based on the analysis of the actual background and clarifying the current research findings, under the framework of horizontal investigation and research, through in-depth interviews, case analysis and others, we comprehend and examine the applied issues of the popular piano course of Hunan First University and the needs of the students. The relevant theories of musicology, pedagogy, curriculum and teaching theory, and eventual shape is to create a popular piano book to learn and practise by the students of Hunan First University, in order to reach the ultimate goal of enhancing the popular piano playing capability of students and increasing their popular piano accompaniment arrangement capability.

Statement of Problems

Classical training has been a major focus of piano education in tertiary institutions, and recently there has been a low number of popular styles of music integrated into curriculum. This parochialism has led to a lack of connection between course material and the developing musical interests of students whose

interests have shifted towards contemporary genres, improvisation and accompaniment skills, which apply to the real-world practice of music. The student interviews of undergraduates showed that they were generally not satisfied with the current coursework, which has a lack of structured instructions, out-of-date material and limited emphasis on improvisation and style-specific techniques. The teachers also admitted using Western or non-standardised materials because they did not have textbooks that were localised. Such shortcomings in the curriculum restrain the creative growth of students, technical adequacy in mainstream styles, and interest in undertaking their learning experience.

Research Gap

Although plentiful literature exists on the topic of classical piano pedagogy, there is a considerable deficit of academic interest in the research of popular piano pedagogy in the framework of formal higher music education, specifically in China. Available literature pays little or no attention to the design, implementation, and assessment of systematic teaching models that are responsive to the stylistic, creative and practical requirements of modern popular music. In addition, the majority of the teaching resources available are informal, westernized, or created to be used by amateurs, not providing cultural and curriculum accessibility among the Chinese undergraduates. Little research has also been done to assess the pedagogic efficacy of such materials. This paper fills such gaps by creating and professionally vetting a local popular piano textbook that is student-centered. Therefore, the study focuses on how to develop a popular piano textbook for Chinese undergraduate music students based on the educational science approach.

Research Objectives

- To analyze the problems and specific demands in popular piano teaching for undergraduate students in Chinese higher music education institutions.
- To develop a localized, structured, and pedagogically effective popular piano textbook that addresses the identified educational needs and supports practical skill development.

Review of Literature

When conducting literature review for the study of popular piano teaching, it is important to identify the methodologies and limitations found in the music pedagogy literature, especially in relation to non-classical (popular) piano teaching. Classical piano instruction has been the mainstay of formal music education, which has traditionally focused on advancing technical skills, interpreting and performing Western classical music, and pedagogical approach. Methods in these approaches tend to be based around personalised teaching models, based on complex classical works and may not appeal to students who are interested in popular styles, nor transfer skills to those styles. For example,in China, traditional teaching modes are being criticized for their emphasis on academic training and lack of adequate preparation of applied and practical music skills for various music industries (Xin Di, 2017; Pan Maoyuan, 2017). Some music programs in the world have begun to adopt alternative teaching methods to expand the scope of music teaching, including group teaching, digital teaching, and the addition of music genres. Group lessons have been demonstrated to improve student engagement and learning efficiency through a collaborative and competitive teaching context. Research also supports the effectiveness of digital tools, such as the MIDI ensemble method and video analysis, which enable more interactive learning experiences. While these tools have been shown to fill some of the gaps of traditional teaching with real-time feedback and adaptive learning, there are challenges, including the need for high-quality audio-visual equipment and the limitations in capturing nuanced expressions as compared to live teaching (Johnson et al., 2016; Enbuska et al., 2018). In spite of all these developments, research specifically focusing on comprehensive teaching models that are tailored for popular piano remains limited, particularly in Asian settings. Some, few in number, have explored the distinctive demands of popular piano, including improvisation, chords, and knowledge of popular music styles. Although most research does not provide insights into effective evaluation mechanisms for such programmes, they are needed to assess how

well the skills are acquired and how happy the students are with the programme. This could be achieved by designing and evaluating a widely accepted piano teaching model that is better in accordance with interests of the contemporary students and helps piano graduates to prepare for different occupations in music. The proposed research will contribute greatly to the discipline, as it not only validates the new teaching models in a formal setting, but also offers evidence-based strategies for the inclusion of popular music within the framework of higher education music programs. The approach is designed to increase student engagement, skill variety and overall the applicability of music education in the current demands of the music industry.

Popular Music in Higher Education Curriculum Reform

Popular music has become a major focus in higher education reform, particularly in music departments, which want to revamp the curriculum and serve the interests of students better in the recent years. Green (2006) observes that popular music education advocates student-centred learning and participatory learning and is more in line with the way students listen to music beyond the schooling environment. In China, the music education system is still dominated by the classical tradition and thus genres such as pop, rock, and jazz are not taught in academic institutions. Ho and Law (2009) that the East Asian music curriculum is often strict and examination-based, which does not provide them with a chance to develop creativity and work with the modern styles claim it.

Li (2018) notes that according to the increasing demand,the majority of Chinese universities do not have formal curriculum models or localized textbooks to teach popular piano, and students have to depend on informal learning or foreign resources that might be not relevant to their cultural context. This creates a gap between student requirements and the products of the institution. Lacking organized pedagogical systems, the students do not get a chance to acquire the skills of improvisation, the knowledge of styles, and practical mastery of musicianship required in the work in the contemporary music industries. Revision of the curriculum to incorporate localized popular music pedagogy would not only boost the creative dimension but also bring the teaching of the Chinese music in tandem with the international education and cultural patterns.

Digital Culture and Technological Innovation in Music Pedagogy

The digital technology is changing the way music is taught by rebranding the manner in which students listen to, compose and perform music, particularly in the pop music. Tobias (2013) claims that digital audio workstations (DAWs), MIDI keyboards, and interactive software are instruments that encourage creativity, experimentation, and learners autonomy, which are vital to popular music education. Students are also resorting to the internet (YouTube) or mobile applications to learn the popular piano often to complement or even substitute the conventional classroom learning. Nevertheless, the adoption of these tools in systematic curricula in institutions of higher learning has been slow particularly in more conservative classic centred programs.

According to Savage (2017), the integration of digital resources facilitates informal and project-based learning and promotes collaboration, which are the required skills to succeed in the modern music settings. However other obstacles like absence of infrastructure, training and institutional support are still common. According to Crawford (2017), teacher growth and institutional preparedness are critical to the full realization and execution of blended and technology-enhanced music education. To make popular piano education effective and relevant, the higher education programs should not only adopt digital culture as an addition to their curriculum design, but also as a vital element of the curriculum design. This would help in cultivating technical fluency, creativity and stylistic flexibility among students in a digitally connected world who are training in myriad music careers.

Methodology

Research Method

The research method used in this study is qualintitative to investigate the status quo of popular piano education in Chinese higher education and creating

and testing a localised instructional textbook. The data were obtained, mainly via interviews and thematic analysis, and gave an opportunity to explore the experiences of the students, teachers in depth and the evaluation of the textbook.

The research was conducted in a descriptive and developmental research design with two major phases. The initial step was aimed at determining the current issues and needs of the students in the mainstream teaching of piano. It entailed field interviews and literature review. The second step concentrated on the creation of a structured textbook in advance of the results of stage one. The materials have been designed based on educational theories of Dewey, Ausubel and Bruner (Edgar, 2012). The general structure of the research facilitated feedback and contextual adjustment of instructional materials amongst music majors in their undergraduate level.

Data Collection

The data were gathered through literature review and semi-structured interviews. The literature review was of Chinese and international studies in music education, especially in identification gaps in popular piano pedagogy. Students, teachers and university administrators in a music programme at a chosen university were interviewed on the activities of the programmes they participated in. It was also checked by the specialists of music education to determine adherence to the purpose of the pedagogue.

Study Sample

The sample comprised of 15 undergraduate students studying music (first to third year), 3 music educators, and 2 university administrators in one of the music colleges in China. The participants were chosen through purposive sampling in a way that they were relevant to the area of research, and they were all involved or in-charge of delivering popular music courses. The professionals that reviewed the texts were seasoned university-level music teachers with a concentration in the field of piano or curriculum development in music.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse data obtained through interviews. Themes of concern including absence of support in improvisation, insufficient teaching materials, and irrelevance of the Western-made materials to the needs of the locals were coded and structured. The textbook was structured and written based on these findings. To analyse textbooks, an evaluation of the Items-Objective Congruence (IOC) was determined, which incorporated expert reviewing to clarify the appropriateness and conciseness of each part of textbook (Buasang & Kultawanich, 2024). This gave quantitative feedback of the pedagogic efficiency of the textbook.

Educational Framework

The textbook development was guided by three major educational theories:

- **John Dewey's Student-Centered Learning:** Emphasizing learner interest and real-life relevance (Santi & Gorghiu, 2017).
- **DavidAusubel's Meaningful Learning Theory:** Structuring content from general to specific, supporting concept integration (Ausubel, 2012).
- **Jerome Bruner's Learning Process Model:** Encouraging acquisition, transformation, and evaluation through progressive and creative tasks (Bruner, 1974).

Ethical Considerations

Each of the participants was made aware of the aim of the research and verbal consent was obtained before the interviews. Anonymity of data was ensured and participation was voluntary. During the literature review and development of the textbook,

Table 1: Data collected from different Sources

No.	Data Collection Method	Purpose
1	Literature Review	Identify curricular gaps and theoretical frameworks
2	In-depth Interviews	Gather insights from students, teachers, and administrators
3	Expert Evaluation (IOC)	Assess textbook content for pedagogical validity

the appropriate academic references were followed. The reviewers who were experts were anonymous and their comments were strictly utilised to guide academic analysis. No personal data was gathered that were sensitive.

Results

The results of the study are presented via referring to each objective of the study as in the following.

Identifying problems and demands in Popular Piano Teaching

Through interviews with 15 freshmen to juniors, 3 pop music teachers, and 2 administrators from a university conservatory of music, we have come to the following conclusions after sorting and analyzing the results as follows:

- Undergraduate third-year students have completed the pop piano course. It is generally believed that the pop piano course requires students to have independent creative ideas and cultivate students' creative thinking. Students' performance problems are mainly reflected in the proficiency of skills and the expression of rhythm. Pop songs are students' favorites, and some students also like R&B, Ballad and Jazz. The course should include etudes suitable for different levels, as well as explanations of various pop piano styles and chord applications. At the same time, the course also requires improvisation and composition guidance, explanations of key and difficult chapters, and learning of basic knowledge of pop music theory. Most students prefer face-to-face teaching.
- Undergraduate second-year students are studying the pop piano course. During the learning process, they found that the pop piano course is more practical and has improved their improvisation skills. How to improve improvisation skills is a common problem they encounter. Some students proposed suggestions for improving teaching: formulate personalized learning plans according to the needs and progress of different students, and strengthen basic training for students with weak foundations. Most students are keen to learn pop, lyrical and R&B styles, and can also explore other styles. The vast majority of students prefer face-to-face teaching.
- First-year undergraduate students are about to start learning pop piano courses. Most students learn pop piano keyboards to achieve the purpose of being able to sing and arrange music accompaniment independently, to improve other related skills (such as pop singing). Students are keen to learn pop and lyrical styles, and hope to learn some classical repertoires and improvisation techniques. They believe that an ideal pop music piano textbook should include music theory, improvisation, arrangement techniques, professional practice techniques, complete practice repertoires, etc. Face-to-face teaching is necessary, but video guidance is also provided. They hope to achieve the goal of being able to play a few simple songs completely, understand improvisation, and be able to independently compose, sing and play repertoires of different musical styles through learning.
- Teachers pay attention to students' interests in teaching and design courses according to students' needs, but students' feedback is difficult to understand. The domestic pop music education system is not yet mature, mainly due to the lack of teaching resources and methods for specific courses. The American teaching materials and systems used by teachers are not suitable for China. Teachers hope that schools will strengthen course publicity, provide more performance opportunities, and increase financial support. They also hope to receive training and professional development opportunities in pop music teaching.
- The College understands student needs through questionnaires, seminars and market research, and keeps in touch with companies to understand market trends, especially pop music market trends, to ensure that the construction of the pop music curriculum system can meet student needs and market needs.

Open a pop piano course to meet students' interests and needs, broaden the scope of music learning, cultivate students' skills, and increase employment opportunities.

In summary, based on the relevant surveys and research in this article, we found that domestic research on pop piano teaching is very scattered and not in-depth enough. Academic research mainly focuses on the history and style of classical piano and pop music. Research on pop music piano mainly focuses on social education. We can find a large number of pop piano teaching materials in popular bookstores, but these teaching materials lack professionalisms and are usually aimed at beginners, zero-based students and pop music lovers. The design of the teaching materials is not standardized enough. Usually, there are only simple music score examples, so that students without basic knowledge can also play popular songs that is all.

At present, there is no special popular piano teaching material in China. When teaching students majoring in popular music, teachers usually refer to popular harmony tutorials, applied piano tutorials, popular music styles and history tutorials related to popular piano as reference materials, and teach in combination with their own understanding of the profession. Teachers usually understand and teach according to the needs of the course, and there is no fixed teaching material available.

Therefore, based on the problems and needs obtained from the above survey, this study aims to develop a professional book on popular piano for popular music students.

Developing a Popular Piano Textbook

This section systematically outlines the process of compiling teaching materials and designing instructional content for a popular piano course. The textbook emphasizes not only stylistic recognition and performance techniques but also the development of comprehensive musical practice through arrangement and composition. Based on student feedback and teaching needs, three representative musical styles—Pop Ballad, Chinese Pop, and R&B—were selected as core areas to guide students from stylistic understanding to independent arrangement and improvisation.

This book is a comprehensive tutorial tailored for undergraduate students majoring in popular music. Whether you are majoring in vocal music, instrumental music, composition or music production, you can gain practical and systematic knowledge and skills of popular music from it.

Fig. 1: Textbook Cover

Popular music is a subject that is both artistic and practical. It has diverse styles and rich techniques. Mastering the characteristics and creative logic of different styles is a necessary professional quality for every pop music learner. This book focuses on the three most representative pop music styles - Ballad, Chinese-pop and R&B. From theory to practice, it helps you understand the core elements of these styles from the shallow to the deep, and finally have the ability to arrange and create independently.

1. Textbook Structure and Pedagogical Concept

The textbook consists of four main parts – a theoretical introduction and three chapters based on the different styles. The preface includes a theoretical foundation, including an introduction to chord notation, extended harmonies and techniques for arranging song transitions. The three stylistic chapters are organized in a step-by-step manner with style analysis, rhythm training, chord progressions, accompaniment textures, performing examples and the creation of arrangements, which guarantees systematic and practice-oriented learning.

2. Stylistic Instructional Design and Content Analysis.

Every chapter starts with an overview of the music style, followed by a summary of the melody, harmony and rhythm. This will enable students to understand the content of each genre in a logical fashion. The gentle, lyrical melodies, common 4-chord progressions, syncopated weak-beat rhythms are essential identifiers of Pop Ballads, for instance. Rhythm training involves analyzing and imitating typical rhythmic patterns to enhance students' sense of groove. The harmony section is based on progression of chords in keys up to three sharps and flats, and students learn to be fluent in transposition and arrangement ink.

Students are taught to practice the common texture models, such as broken chords, arpeggios and block chords, which help them to develop strategies of accompaniment designed for the style they are studying. Stylistic variation through examples at slow, medium and fast tempos gives hands-on experience of stylistic variation.
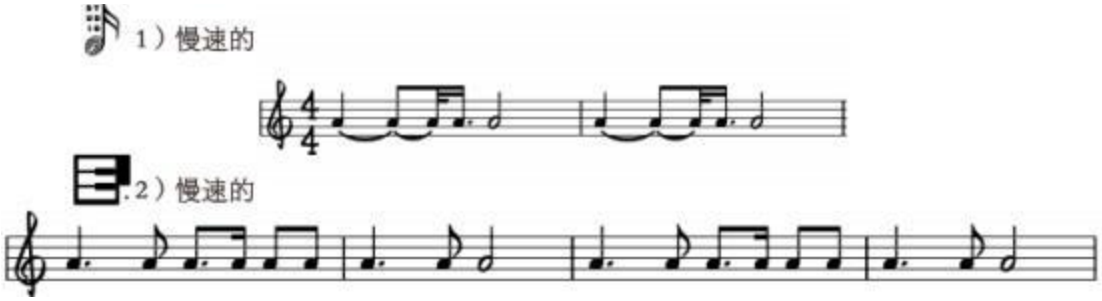
Fig. 2.: Rhythm Exercises

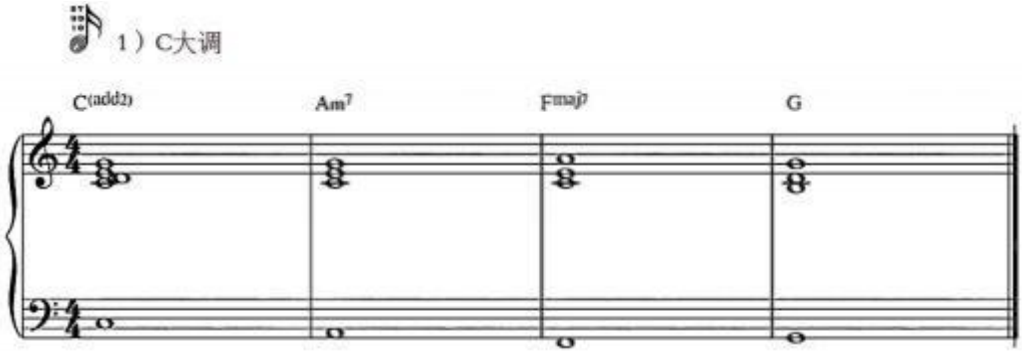

Fig. 3: Chord Progressions
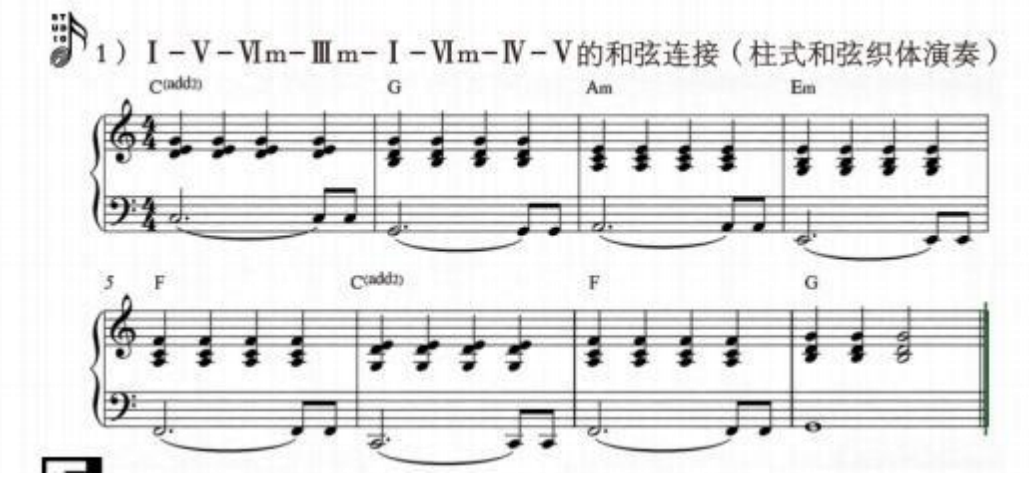
Fig. 4: Accompaniment Textures

Fig. 5: Performance Examples

At the end of every chapter students are led to use the chapter material to create original or improvised arrangements. Individual expression is encouraged and students modify their stylistic approaches according to their major, whether vocal, composition or guitar.

3. Teaching Strategies and Practical Suggestions

It is recommended that students use a project-based teaching approach, working in groups to adapt the style and perform in an ensemble. This further develops collaboration and instrumentation understanding. Non-piano majors are also welcome to join in composition and performance, reading chord symbols, and allowing for cross-instrumental arranging abilities.

Integrating Stylistic learning with Creative Capacity This textbook not only teaches the technical aspects of classic styles, but also nurtures creativity and stylistic awareness. It seeks to create a full circle of education from stylistic identification and play to composition to hands-on practice, leading students to create their own unique musical voice.
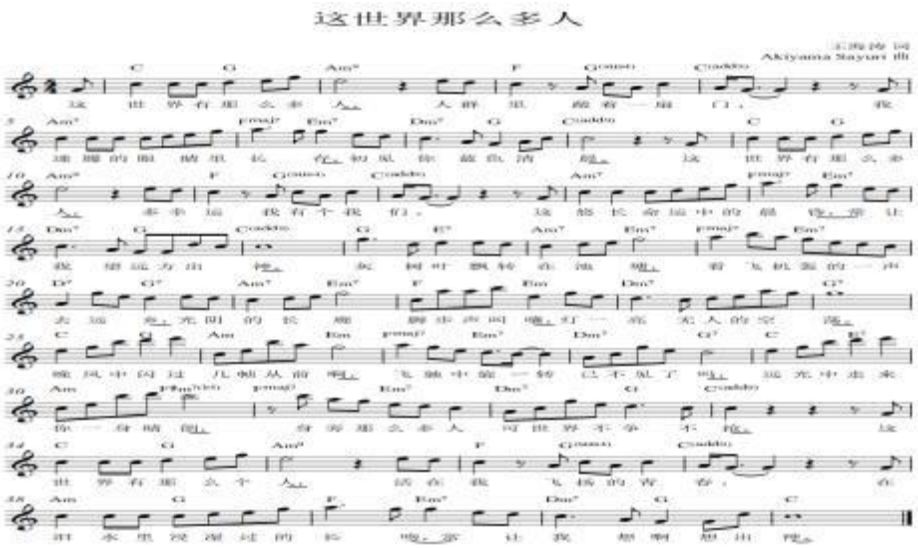
Fig. 6: Arrangement and Composition5

dIscussIon

Gaps in Teaching Materials for Popular Piano Instruction

The results of this paper indicate that there is a dire lack of professional, pedagogically guided, and culturally adequate teaching resources to popular music instruction in Chinese higher education in the field of the piano. In spite of the increasing need of popular music studies among students, the majority of sources that are available, are usually oriented towards amateurs or people who have just started learning; usually, they do not cover deeply enough the theoretical materials and the sequential development of skills. This observation is congruent with Li and Zhang (2018), who have found that the Chinese music education remains based on the old-fashioned or generalized contents that fail to capture the delicate learning requirements of the student seeking more advanced or professional-level training in the field of popular music.

There are no in-depth textbooks to cater to undergraduate learners hence the learning is disdisuncted. Students are left on their own to construct knowledge from various sources, with many of these being imported from external sources and not fitting in the context. These inadequacies in instructional materials are particularly significant in relation to the bigger picture of the Chinese higher education reforms which emphasise the need to localize the content of the curriculum, the need to be innovative and the need to adapt the provision of the curriculum to the industry's needs. In the context of Universities' turn to more inclusive and applied learning models, the lack of systematic materials on the genre such as popular music is a problem that can seriously limit the successful implementation of these changes. Popular music education, from an interdisciplinary point of view, is the point of contact between the performance, composition, digital media, and culture. Time materials should not only enhance instrumental competency, but creative expression, technological skills and cultural awareness. Such integrative resources will be crucial to the curriculum, if it is to engage with the whole child in the 21st century context of music education. Furthermore, the situation has social implications: pupils that are missing the relevant and modern learning resources are not as prepared in the professional paths of the media, entertainment and digital content sectors, increasingly reliant on multi-faceted musical skills.

This study aims to fill this gap by creating a structured and local textbook to cover the gap between students' needs and what is provided by the institutions. It responds to the demand of Li and Zhang (2018) to have more culturally oriented and skill level

appropriate materials and has created a model that can be used by institutions that want to modernise their music curriculum and at the same time offer educational quality and cultural authenticity.

Challenges in Improvisation and Skill Development

The second theme that is significant in the research is that the student has challenges in developing advanced popular piano skills, especially improvisation, chord playing, and genre specific stylistic interpretation. This is inline with the results of Li and Zhang (2020), who also note that improvisation has been one of the least studied conditions of Chinese music education. Improvisational abilities are usually considered as after-school, or even minor, instead of being included in the primary curriculum, which creates technically gifted yet creatively disengaged students.

The interviews made within the frame of the research helped to understand that a significant number of students feel difficulty in improvisation because they do not receive enough instructions, are not exposed to the genre-specific methods, and do not have enough time in the classroom to spend on experimenting with their creativity. Even teachers themselves confessed that they did not have structured training materials and approaches to assist improvisation training. Haroutunian (2019) suggested that, although improvisation is a fundamental element of jazz and popular music education in the Western world, it is not developed in most music programmes across the world because of the lack of qualified teachers and effective pedagogic models.

The role of improvisation informal training must be seen both as a necessary way of learning the style fluency and as a way of developing in himself a critical and musical way of thinking and expressing himself. Improvisational skill is a rudimentary skill in the current digital music world where musicians are expected to compose, arrange, and perform in various styles. Digital tools should be mentioned as well as their role in the process of improvisation and composition. Digital music pedagogy, as emphasized in the research (e.g., Tobias, 2013; Savage, 2017), offers convenient routes to students to explore sound and gain improvisational skills through the use of digital workstations, loop-based composition tools, and real-time audio manipulation software.

Skills such as improvisation can be related to broader education objectives such as innovation, creativity and solutions-oriented working, which are valued in other fields of life outside music, such as in design, entrepreneurship and media production, as well as in other fields of life. However, the issue of improving training of improvisation has only a part of the answer in popular piano education, and harmonising music training with the demands of the very dynamic, momentum-driven economy in which it exists for the training of the competencies it demands is a far larger issue.

The textbook created within the framework of this research paper aims at solving this problem by incorporating progressive improvisation exercises and style-based creative assignments in every unit. The students are advised to go beyond imitation and to take part in arrangement, substitution of chords as well as stylistic modification. This strategy is in line with the advice that Haroutunian (2019) and Li and Zhang (2020) provide of incorporating creative skills into technical teaching, not to consider them as an add-on or elective.

Curriculum and Cultural Misalignment

The third theme that is raised as a result of the research is the incompatibility of imported learning resources mainly American, and cultural as well as pedagogical background of Chinese learners. Student and teacher responses obtained in the interviews all manifested a constant problem of adapting the Western instructional material to Chinese learning settings. The materials can be stylistically unfamiliar, culturally irrelevant or other times language inaccessible to them, which restricts their effectiveness, and even demoralises students to pursue the course content to the fullest.

Liu (2019) also expressed the idea that the prevalence of Western teaching materials in Chinese music schools is one of the reasons that society loses the connexion between the objectives set in the curricula and the experiences of students. Lack of reflecting their own cultural backgrounds in any learning material undermines the relevance and ownership of their musical development in students.

Additional items of the Western material usually presuppose a previous familiarity with the stylistic subtleties, especially jazz, blues, or soul which the Chinese students may not have received in their previous education.

Not only is it pedagogical, but social as well. It is a symptom of the larger issue in relation to post-globalised Higher education – the clash between globalisation and localism. It is important for Chinese students to learn about the musical forms of other countries, but not at the expense of cultural setting. There is need to balance between the importation of best practices and the development of local traditions and pedagogies through education systems. Localised materials, such as the popular piano study that has been produced in this study, are an important step in this direction.

Lastly, this theme is closely related to the contemporary debate on the digital culture. Geographic and stylistic borders have been erased by the international availability of music streaming sites, YouTube, and social media. Modern students can be subjected to a large number of genres and performance practises on the Internet. Nevertheless, unless these styles are supported in a structured curriculum of placing them in a context to critically approach them, a significant portion of this exposure is passive. Localised learning materials will allow students to understand this digital deluge, training them to analyse, adapt and creatively react to the music.

ConcLusIon

The purpose of the study was to supplement the large curriculum, teaching materials, and teaching method deficiencies in the well-known piano teaching in China higher music education institutions. With the ever-increasing interest in popular music by undergraduate students, traditional instruction in the classics as a piano instructor cannot keep up with the needs of the students. The goal of this study was to investigate the specific piano problems that students, teachers andinstitutions face in the teaching of popular piano and develop a systematic and localised pedagogically viable textbook to address these problems. Another aim of the research was also to contribute to the ongoing educational transformation in china by connecting popular music learning with the goals of innovation, cultural relevance and digitalization. To achieve these objectives a mixed method research design (qualitative and quantitative) was employed. It began by literature review to reveal that there was a gap in popular piano pedagogy and piano curriculum. This was succeeded by detailed interviews with undergraduate students, instructors and administrators of a music department in a university in China. The data observed helped to gain insight into some student learning needs, constraints of instruction, and limitations of resources. Based on these results a popular piano textbook has been created and tested with the help of the Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) method with the help of an expert review. The results revealed that three major issues exist regarding the foreign teaching materials: the lack of local and grade-level oriented teaching materials, lack of encouragement for improvisation and the development of creative skills, and the gap between foreign teaching materials and Chinese cultural and pedagogical environment. The new textbook demonstrated high levels of clarity of theory and organisational structure of teaching, but required further development in terms of rhythm training, stylistic representation and level of difficulty. This is relevant to policies and practice. The study proposes the development of standard frameworks and local teaching materials at the policy level to popular music education in China. This means on the practical level, it underscores the need to further integrate digital tools, collaboration-learning strategies and performance-based activities into the classroom. The present study comprehensively provides a theoretical background for the further development of teaching popular piano in the Chinese higher education, not only in terms of pedagogy, but also in consideration of the students' demands, cultural elements and needs of the modern music industries.

recoMMendAtIons

In order to enhance the appropriateness and efficacy of popular piano studies in Chinese institutions

of higher learning, policy and practical level interventions should be initiated. The most crucial aspect of the policy is the creation of the localised teaching materials that would offer the cultural, musical, and linguistic realities of Chinese students. The majority of existing materials are being imported via Western nations and do not consider the stylistic peculiarities and instructional requirements of Chinese students. In the context of the traditional learning style in which learning institutions tend to focus solely on the preferences and tastes of local people, imported music curriculum frequently ignores the local traditions and thus, disengagement and lack of skills transfer occurs (Jiang, 2025). That is why the development of culturally responsive and stylistically diverse textbooks and support materials should be in the scope of the national efforts. The marketable piano textbook that was created in this research shows that it has a scalable model that can be contextualised in different institutions. It is important to work with Chinese music teachers, curriculum developers, and composers to make sure that it is pedagogically correct and culturally appropriate (Wang and Webb, 2024).

The other urgent policy-level suggestion is organised professional growth of popular music educators. Many classically trained instructors do not have confidence or knowledge of the popular genres or the latest methods of pedagogy. The introduction of popular music in higher education necessitates the emergence of new teacher competencies as postulated by Some of the other skills that are included in the concept of digital fluency include the ability to be versatile in genre and Fleming et al. (2021). This is where capacity development in instruction can be taken place through regular training, certifications and knowledge exchange programmes. Furthermore, a nationalized system of a popular music curriculum should be implemented to help to standardize the teaching practices and requirements of the curriculum in institutions. This is inline with what Mullen (2019) who recommend having the same national standards in music education to improve quality, suggest and equity within universities. In practice, it is the ideal time and location for the integration of digital tools in the very popular teaching of the piano. In terms of students' ability to be exposed to improvisation, composition, and performing together, interactive piano applications, virtual jam platforms, and digital audio workstations (DAW) have a significant positive impact, according to Zhang (2025). These are student-driven learning tools that are flexible and are used to promote technical development and creative exploration. The integration of such technology in classroom learning can help to link the classroom teaching to what students do outside of school in music.

Lastly, the peer cooperation and the learning based on performance should be encouraged. Pennill (2019) notes that social learning can be facilitated by performing in an ensemble and peer leadership, which are more representative of a music-making situation. Live or virtual performance opportunities enable the student to create confidence on the stage and the practical musicianship. The textbook worked out in this paper must be further elaborated into a hybrid print-digital format, with interactive tasks, audio examples, and video tutorials. This will enhance access and scalability, facilitating the wider adoption in Chinese universities and the ways of encouraging popular piano training to comply with the requirements of the digital era learning.

Study Limitations And future Directions

The phenomenon of popular piano education and a practical textbook model is the subject of the research in this paper, and the contributions of the research in this paper are informative, but some limitations should be pointed out: the research is limited to the popular piano education model in China, and the research on the phenomenon of popular piano education is still in its infancy. This study was conducted in one university and was not generalizable to other universities and regions in China. Further, the interviews and textbooks reviewed were relatively few, and may not be representative of the broader student and teacher experience. The textbook was not as thoroughly examined by the professionals as it could have been, and there were not many long-term statistics of implementation in the classroom, which would provide additional insight into student achievement and involvement.

Future multi-institutional studies should be done to establish generalizability of results. Longitudinal studies that addressed the effect of the textbook over multiple semesters would provide more robust evidence of the effectiveness of the textbook. The implementation of digital adaptations, integration into music production software and a comparison of the adoption in higher education teaching worldwide would also be advantageous to the development of popular piano pedagogy.

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