

APPLIED PIANO PEDAGOGY: A NEW AGE IN PIANO LEARNING

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ABSTRACT: *The Xindi Applied Piano Pedagogy (XAPP) has been operating at the Music Education Institute of Xinghai Conservatory of Music (MEIXHCM) in China for the last three years. This self-formulated pedagogy was solely conceived by Professor Xindi, Director of the institute, in 2001. Since its inception, this somewhat innovative teaching method has proven quite controversial, with reactions from scholars, teachers and musicians within the field of professional music education. At the same time, this particular pedagogy has become an increasingly popular component of the swiftly growing market of community piano education nationwide, with the XAPP also having recently been introduced in several major cities in Australia and the US. Xin's advocacy of practicality through the XAPP in piano education is considered comparable to John Dewey's Pragmatism in education in many ways. However, in this article the commonalities they share are interpreted and discussed in accordance with two particular aspects, namely, the value of education and the reflection of education's authenticity. Within the context of such discussion, this article investigates whether the XAPP is able to survive against the dominance of traditional piano methods in the modern era.*

KEY WORDS: applied piano pedagogy; self-entertained learning, practicability, interest cultivation, accelerated learning

INTRODUCTION

The piano learning market in mainland China of recent years has diminished in popularity, especially under the impact of the resurrection of the Chinese national music culture, in conjunction with the immediate development of the internet and digital music industry. Piano learning was an aspirational endeavor undertaken by thousands of young Chinese people, but today it seems that the standards have become unattainable and so many do not begin to learn piano. Chinese contemporary piano education appears to have plunged into the pursuit of techniques and difficulty levels. When educators only focus on technique training and/or the pursuit of difficulty levels, the interest cultivation in piano education becomes an extravagant hope. Not only is the student's learning constrained by the rigid techniques and

evaluation criteria, but also their primary intention of acquiring an aesthetically self-entertaining method is eventually distorted.

Among many inventive interest-oriented piano teaching methods of late, one which originated in mainland China called the Xindi Applied Piano Pedagogy (XAPP) has earned a popular reputation across the nation virtually overnight. Whilst steadily increasing its popularity nationwide, it has also attracted additional attention and commendable recognition in several major cities in the United States and in Australia, since 2017. Recently *The Los Angeles Post* (11 August 2019) reported that,

Innovated [Diverging] from traditional piano teaching method[s], the Xindi Applied Piano Pedagogy not only promotes the development of quality education in music, which guarantees both teachers and students to optimize their practice with piano, but also combines the highbrow music art with popular music in a way that common people love.

The XAPP was invented by Xin in 2001 and has been regarded as the most distinctive, innovative and practical piano pedagogy in contrast to the many traditionally rigidly- formulated methods ever since (Chen, 2017). With the teaching philosophy of Happy piano learning, Interest-based piano learning, Accelerated piano learning, and Creative piano learning, Xin has prioritized the learner's interest, creativity and collaborative ability (Xindi Music Education Academy (XMEA), 2019).

Research questions

This article investigates whether the XAPP is able to survive against the dominance of traditional piano methods in the modern era in mainland China. The XAPP was invented specifically for improvising, singing-playing and accompanying for beginners and classroom music teachers. Most of the followers of the XAPP are able to confidently play their preferred tunes with improvised accompaniment within a short period of time, substantiating Chen's (2017) findings that this accelerated pedagogy could become a possible solution to the serious problems caused by traditional methods. With increasing global recognition, the XAPP is deemed to be user-friendly, interest-cultivating, accelerated, self-entertaining and pressure-free (Chen, 2017).

Since the late 20th century, the piano education reform in mainland China has been well researched. Interest cultivation and practicability, for many piano beginners, are the two essential forms of engaging their focus on the piano field whilst naturally paving the way towards a wider and larger world of comprehensive musicianship (Chen, 2017). Interest-based practicable methods may engage and accommodate

piano playing at all levels. This study explores the XAPP, conceived by Professor Xin who was motivated to reform piano education in mainland China. Translated quotations from a series of interviews with Xin are included throughout the findings and the discussion.

METHODOLOGY

To investigate the popularity, practicability, efficacy and general operation of the pedagogy, collective case study was decided as the most appropriate research methodology to be employed (Tang & Yang, 2016). In this study, the cases chosen may be similar or dissimilar to each other and the understanding of the collection of the cases will possibly lead to a larger and deeper understanding of the XAPP. Semi-structured interviews and Participant observations were jointly used to collect data.

Semi-structured interviews are commonly used in social science and behavioral studies, allowing “a greater flexibility of coverage” whilst leading the interview “to go into novel areas” with richer data (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 57). For the purpose of this study semi-structured interview is considered to be the most appropriate as it allows the interviewees greater freedom to open up and respond without being confined to the questions that I have carefully devised. The interviews were categorized into three groups, including the staff group, the learners group and the critics group. The reason for such categorization is because every group plays an independent, yet important role in gaining a comprehensive and thorough understanding of the research subject, the XAPP. Along with Professor Xin, three key instructors from the XMEA were chosen as the staff-group interviewees. The three instructors have all graduated from the MEIXHCM with a Master of Music Education (Applied Piano Performance and Teaching) degree and have been studying and teaching the XAPP for over seven years. The learners-group interviewees included the three representative followers themselves, their parents and their XAPP customers.

The critics group consisted of two professors of Music Education at Nan Yue University (NYU), two freelance concert pianists in GZ and a scholar of the Chinese Higher Education field. I have devised open-ended interview questions for this group’s interviewees with extra consideration of their concerns about causing any possible conflict with Professor Xin. These interviewees only expressed their critical opinions towards the XAPP in random conversations that they previously had had with me rather than through any public audio or textual references. Moreover, I also conducted semi-structured interviews with one former faculty director and a former teacher who had previously worked at the MEIXHCM. Responses from these two

particular interviewees were provided in a completely natural, yet predictable manner, and therefore were discounted.

Participant observation is a type of Observation approach and is also a commonly used data-collecting tool in the field of educational research. Participant observation allows researchers to fully immerse into the subjective dimensions of the phenomenon he/she studies for detailed and deeper understanding of the research subject (Johnson & Christenson, 2004; Burns, 1995). In this study, the participant observations were conducted through my participation in four classes of two difficulty levels in the MEIXHCM where the XAPP of tertiary level was operated. The official documents about the XAPP which comprehensively describe the pedagogy were also analyzed and incorporated in the research findings and discussion. I found these documents in the latest Handbook of the XAPP and was aware of the fact that they were written and edited by Professor Xin, himself, and several key staff members at the XMEA. Though the data collected from these documents was first-hand, they were subjective at the same time, rendering the reliability of such data questionable.

In terms of data analysis, I investigated the XAPP followers' understanding of their most important experiences with the pedagogy in both their studies and personal lives. The analysis was undertaken on texts generated through interviews, observations and document analysis. The first step in this analysis was to analyse the official documents which were written by Xin, himself, and several key staff members at the XMEA. The texts generated from such analysis provided four major aspects of the XAPP, including the teaching mentality, teaching materials, key features and efficacy. Despite the fact that the wording in these documents was rather self-promoting and advertisement-like, they provided a clear and consistent structure for introducing the XAPP through the aforementioned four aspects. This result allowed the texts generated from transcribing interviews and observations to be categorized systematically. Once the document analysis and the categorization were completed, the transcripts of the interviews and observations were read and re-read carefully. Marginal notes were made to identify significant messages conveyed through the data. The notes were then used to begin to identify an emergent theme - criticism. This theme was written up and translated quotations were used to illustrate specific points. The names of the three representative cases were replaced by pseudonyms as requested by the participants' preference of remaining unidentified.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Teaching mentality

Xin describes his self-invented pedagogy as revolutionary as it is cutting edge in

terms of breaking away from the traditional methods, i. e. exam-driven, competition-driven and technique-driven ones, which have been dominating Chinese piano education for decades (Interview on 12/9/2018). Xin further describes the “uniqueness” of the XAPP in his inventive teaching theory of "Eight First and Eight Later". The Eight First includes: "General education first, individual education later; Group teaching first, one-on-one lesson later; Public education first, elite education later; Amateur teaching first, professional teaching later; Affectional cultivation first, rational guidance later; Practical resources first, classical materials later; Interest motivation first, technique training later; and Learning first, succeeding later" (XMEA, 2019). On top of emphasizing interest cultivation, the XAPP also stresses the cultivation of the learner's creativity. Xin strongly believes that no one's piano learning should be comprised of classical compositions only, without integrating any of the learner's own improvisations or creative works.

Teaching materials

Xin has written 62 books so far for the XAPP to address various essentials for both teachers and learners. These books are thought to cover the majority of requests associated with piano learning, naming keyboard techniques, theories, singing-playing skills and related repertoires, from the very beginning to the ultimate advanced levels (XMEA, 2019). According to different learners' underlying learning purposes, Xin has categorized his 62 books into twelve models: (1) piano education for early childhood; (2) piano education for school children; (3) piano education for adults; (4) piano foundations; (5) piano performance; (6) singing-playing with piano; (7) piano for four hands; (8) piano accompaniment; (9) transpositions on piano; (10) piano composition; (11) piano harmony; and (12) Jazz piano. The complete set of Xin's books is noted for its comprehensiveness, flexibility, variety and practicality. Of all these features, the fundamental essence is the capability for motivating, cultivating, activating, developing, and preserving both teachers' and learners' interest in music (XMEA, 2019). However, Xin stresses that “interest-based teaching does not necessarily mean learning piano without incorporating any theoretical elements, especially harmony” (Interview on 12/9/2018).

In Xin's textbooks, harmony marks are introduced at the primary level. The learners are encouraged to visually familiarize with the marks first, immerse themselves in the harmonized sound effect through adequate practice and, eventually, to be instructed and explained in detail by the teacher. The twelve models are regarded as the pioneer of the curricular reform of tertiary music education in mainland China. Over 200 tertiary educational institutions have selected suitable models from the set of twelve in conjunction with corresponding books as initial guides and teaching materials. Xin has given many lectures upon the invitations from over 200 universities nation-wide (XMEA, 2019).

Key feature and efficacy

Xin believes that every piano learner should acquire the ability of accompanying his or her singing when needed. It is one of the fundamental purposes of learning this instrument especially in terms of interest cultivation and coordination between vocal and physical movements (Interview on 24/3/2019). Hence, singing-playing skill is the key feature of the XAPP for learners at all age levels (XMEA, 2019). My investigations found that among many of the traditionally trained piano learners, very few have a relatively strong ability in singing-playing. This ability requires the learner to vocalize the melody in a piece of music work whilst accompanying their own singing by playing two other parts on the piano.

In some pieces, the vocal part shares the exact same content with the right hand part of the piano accompaniment which makes the task less difficult to accomplish. However, in most cases the learner needs to virtually manage three completely different parts simultaneously and often the piano accompaniment requires to be improvised spontaneously by the learner as the music progresses. Xin insists that singing-playing is a vital skill for all piano players, including those who play piano as a profession (Interview on 24/03/2019). In the XAPP, singing-playing learning is placed as a key point throughout the entire process for all learners, not only for the talented ones (XMEA, 2019).

Three case studies

(1) Zhou Yidan, a grade five girl of Guangzhou, China. Yidan began learning piano at the age of five with one of her mother's friends who is a professional piano teacher at one of the top music conservatories in China. After three years of learning under the, then, teacher's technique-driven piano teaching system, Yidan showed little progress in her learning and eventually became seriously rebellious against piano playing. Her mother had no choice but to pull her out. Yidan's first contact with the XAPP was when she met her current school music teacher two years ago. The music teacher's singing-playing performance of a popular song on the keyboard at lunchtime greatly attracted Yidan's attention. The teacher then asked Yidan to try and play the same music under her easy-to-grasp instruction. Yidan managed to do so within 10 minutes and later on became a student of the music teacher's and has continued under her instruction to this day. She expressed herself happily, stating that "I am now able to entertain my parents, classmates, friends with singing-playing the music that *I* like" (Interview on 13/02/2019). In left hand accompaniment of the fixed patterns, Yidan is able to compose short and simple melodies on the right hand as well. The XAPP "has made a tremendous change in Yidan's life and makes me happy too", says Yidan's mother (Interview on 13/02/2019).

(2) Chen Kai, a Music Education majored sophomore student at Xinghai Conservatory of Music. Kai was a sophisticated piano player before his enrolment in the conservatory. He played Etude in G-Flat Major by Chopin and Piano Sonata No.17 in D minor by Beethoven in the entering-exam set for the MEIXHCM two years ago. However, Kai expressed his concern about not being able to play the piano without having any music scores in front of him. He also struggled with locating the suitable chords on the piano to accompany his singing of the popular songs when he felt like singing. Kai explained in the interview that “The XAPP is compulsory for every Music-Education majored student at the conservatory. Freshmen are required to study piano accompaniment and transpositions on the piano. Harmony and singing-playing skills are to be studied by all sophomores” (Interview on 17/5/2019). After one and half years of studying and training, Kai is not only able to accompany his own singing with relatively simple structured accompaniment, but is also able to accompany others’ singing with constant key-changing. Kai added that “I never thought I could manage to change keys with pieces that I’m new to without any practice. I can do it on the spot now” (Interview on 17/5/2019).

(3) Yuxuan Zou, a senior piano teacher for amateurs and the owner of a private piano school. Yuxuan graduated from one of the top music conservatories in mainland China in 2002 and started her own piano teaching business a year later. Throughout these years of teaching as well as managing the piano school, Yuxuan expressed extreme gratitude for her discovery in the XAPP. She claimed that “As a classical-repertoire-trained pianist, I often struggled with playing non-classical music in accordance with the environment where relaxed and casual music is suited” (Interview on 23/06/2019). The XAPP not only helped Yuxuan with her improvisational skills which enabled her to play music in free-style, but also provided a new marketing possibility for her business from which many of her students have benefited. Liu Zhen and Huang Tongtong are Yuxuan’s two adult-customers. They both volunteered for the interviews. Liu claimed that “There are many advantages of the XAPP, but we are advocates for the XAPP because of the singing-playing skills that we have acquired from it”. Huang added that “We can actually enjoy playing piano with our children now and this is definitely beyond my expectations when I first brought my son here merely for his piano learning” (Interviews on 23/6/2019).

Among the 10 thousand or more of the XAPP followers, the aforementioned three single cases are representative but not necessarily universal. I believe that every piano learner has his or her unique learning characteristics and, therefore, the XAPP is not necessarily beneficial for each individual, or results in similar learning outcomes. What is worth arguing, though, is the fact that the XAPP can be regarded as an advocate for the practicality in today’s piano education, in contrast to the traditional methods in mainland China. The most valuable perception that the XAPP

has brought to my attention is the fundamental theory that Xin has embedded in his pedagogy.

Xin believes that in music education, the core of knowledge and skills is practicality which enables the knowledge and skills not only to be seen, heard, memorized, and understood, but also to be applied. This is one of the major reasons that the XAPP is becoming worldly recognized. It is fair to say that the so-called “best education” does not exist, but only the most suitable education can be available (Xin, interview on 16/11/2018).

DISCUSSION

Dewey’s theoretical basis of Experimental Education and Pragmatism as rationale for the XAPP. Educational practice must be interpreted in its social context. My study examines the XAPP’s presence in the field of piano education in today’s mainland China. I focus on the underlying core of the XAPP’s practicality, discussing whether this pedagogy is a new age for traditionalists, or just another short-lived cultural phenomenon. I have been involved in the music and ESL educational research fields in China for a number of years. I consider that the educational theories of John Dewey concerning pragmatism are the most suitable theoretical platform for discussing the practicality of the XAPP.

John Dewey was well-known for his theory of *Pragmatism*. Of all the Western philosophical trends introduced into mainland China to the present day, none - save for Marxism - could be compared with the impact and over-arching influence of Dewey’s Pragmatism in its rocky journey throughout this communist country (Fangtong, Liu & Yajun, Chen, 2017). During the last century or so, the attitude of mainland Chinese scholars towards Pragmatism has undergone a turbulent transformation, which reflects the complicated attitude of mainland Chinese people towards this popularly received theory by Western societies. After the enormous amount of effort that several generations of Chinese scholars have dedicated themselves to, the introductory translations of Dewey’s Pragmatism have made remarkable inroads, with research on Pragmatism reaching a new historical highpoint in mainland China (Liu & Chen, 2017).

On the basis of his philosophical, sociological and psychological background, Dewey extended his pragmatic view into the field of education. In the 20th century, the inspection of Dewey’s Pragmatism Education signified the establishment of the “modern pragmatism education system” (Xiao, 2011). Dewey discussed education from the perspective of the value of practicality. He believed that education was the condition for the existence of society from the perception of the transmission and

continuation of life experiences. From his viewpoint of exchanging life experiences, education was the basis of the common life of the society. Hence, he put forward "education and life", advocating that education should be part of the process of life itself rather than just a form of preparation for one's future life. Adding to this, Dewey advocated that schools should integrate education with the child's present life, guiding children to adapt to the current living environment (Xiao, 2011).

Dewey intended to locate a method in order to maintain an appropriate balance between enabling children to learn from pre-existing knowledge and from experiencing. He described this balance as a combination of direct experiential learning and indirect experiential learning. Xin's advocacy of practicality in music education parallels with Dewey's Pragmatism in education in many ways, but in this article the commonalities they share are interpreted in accordance with the following two particular aspects.

The value of education

Education should center on its value orientation. Dewey insisted that the value of education is determined by its usefulness. Further, education should have its roots in learners' characteristics, interests, performance and emotions. I have realized that many of the traditionally trained young learners can only manage to play a maximum of five solo pieces after reaching the top grade of the exam because that was all they had "memorized". In other words, whatever was learned prior to the last exam was completely forgotten. Xin regards this type of piano learning as "learn to forget" as the repertoire is seriously disconnected to the learner's daily life (Interview on 24/3/2019). I believe that the value of the learned musical knowledge and skills should be manifested through the utilization and practice for optimizing the learner's daily life. The value of piano education should serve the learner's personal musical needs such as playing favourite tunes with ultimate chords as accompaniment, improvising at the piano to address different entertaining scenarios, or being able to compose on the piano even at the early stage of the learning process.

The classical repertoires are pleasant to listen to but usually require complicated techniques to accomplish. In terms of expressing one's emotions and feelings through playing such types of music, the learner needs to spend a significant amount of time on practising, in conjunction with endless perseverance and patience. According to my observations over the past five years, in today's mainland China, children from the ages of five to twelve are heavily pressured with heavy loads of academic work, not to mention also having to spend quality time on practising piano techniques on a daily basis. Hence, piano learning under the traditional manner is not only time consuming, but also an interest killer. In the XAPP, the value of music education is reflected in its usefulness in entertaining, relaxing and rewarding the learner

him/herself through systematic and professional learning. The results achieved in the aforementioned three cases can be regarded as demonstrations of the usefulness of the XAPP.

Reflection of authenticity

Dewey found that good education must be authentic and the authenticity is able to be reflected in society and the changes occurring within that particular society. In the XAPP, the authenticity of education is interpreted as the practicality of what's learned from and for life-experience for people of any age group. Xin emphasizes that good music education should always be applicable to the major population of the society (Interview on 24/3/2019). Piano education in mainland China should "evolve" in accordance with the cultural development for different individuals and should serve the purpose of constantly engaging each individual with their positive and active learning participation. This is where and how the authenticity of music education is reflected. The XAPP acknowledges the importance of elemental learning in one's musical life, and three out of the twelve models of the pedagogy are designed and used for children. At the same time, adult learners are also recognized by the XAPP as a vital component of the music learning society. Model 3, clearly named as Piano Program for Adults, is specifically designed for adults with nil technique foundation and are pathetic in music literacy.

The repertoire included in Model 3 consists of world pop music, classic Chinese folk songs; and famous tunes from drama series and movies (XMEA, 2019). The advantages of incorporating such repertoire include :

- (a) The familiarity of the tunes frees the learners from learning brain-wracking musical notations, rhythmic patterns and other aspects required by familiarizing with new tunes.
- (b) The learners are allowed to focus more on the learning of accompaniment, harmony, and improvisations which are essential to their interests so that their limited time is more efficiently utilized;
- (c) With the accelerated structure, the adult learners are able to demonstrate their learning outcomes within a considerably short period of time. The learning process is, therefore, time-efficient, self-satisfying, as well as self-rewarding.
- (d) The learner's demonstrations on popularly received tunes can be easily recognized by others and possibly generate a positive morale within both their social and family lives.

These aspects can be seen as where and how the authenticity of the XAPP is reflected.

Critical voices and the major obstacles

The critical voices toward the XAPP have never diminished since its inception. On

numerous occasions, various traditional piano teachers have disparagingly described the XAPP as a type of “fast-food” of piano training through their casual conversations with me. Professor Zhao Liguang from NYU put forward in the interview that he has spent considerable quality time studying Xin’s 62 books and found that some of them share the “exact same contents”. Overlap and repetition are two serious problems and such problems make the value of the contents questionable (Interview on 21/6/2018). As the parent of a 11-year-old piano learner, the Chinese Higher Education scholar in the interview firmly believed that the XAPP was more suitable for amateur adults, and could not possibly guide someone towards becoming a professional concert pianist (Interview on 2/4/2019).

Zhang Chao, one of the interviewed freelance concert pianists confirmed that he had had a close look at the pedagogy and made some attempt on the keyboard merely out of curiosity. He concluded that “Not many textbooks out of the 62 are suitable for people with zero music background” (Interview on 27/11/2018). Augmenting his view, another concert pianist, Yu Miao Miao, expressed that in fact, many of the XAPP teaching materials require solid and sophisticated piano playing skills, techniques and theoretical knowledge in order to be grasped, and that these prerequisite abilities can only be acquired through traditional methods (Interview on 28/12/2018).

Professor Liang Yan from the NYU expressed his concerns about children who begin their piano learning with nothing but the XAPP. He believed that “These children may maintain their interest in playing piano, but might hardly develop their appreciation abilities in the art of piano because of the lack of finger exercises which provide an important foundation of the beauty of the technique and art of piano” (Interview on 4/4/2019).

In contrast with the increasing numbers of followers and launching of new training and examination centers, the obstacles that the XAPP is facing towards its future development are also both obvious and inevitable. Compared to the impediments in its development within social music education, Xin is more concerned with the obstacles which come from the tertiary education domain. He insists that the only way to overturn the current piano education from the classical repertoire-dominated traditional manner into a practicability-centered system is to change the curriculum at his institute (Interview on 2/7/2019). Sources of criticism include the on-campus defenders of the traditional teaching methods, the currently enrolled students who are not prepared to accept the XAPP as their major studying program at the school wherein Xin is Dean, and the evaluation criteria of the entrance examination system.

The evaluation scheme for the current enrolment to the MEIXHCM has been in

operation for over a decade. In order to further expand the XAPP, for example, converting the current voice teaching curriculum into one which has the characteristics of Xin's applied theories, it is necessary to reform the criteria of the examination for enrolment to the institute. The skills and techniques of piano playing or singing of Music Education majored students should not be evaluated according to the same criteria for enrolment to the departments of Piano Performance or Voice and Opera.

The evaluation system plays an important guiding role towards the development of the XAPP-based music curriculum. It also determines the depth and breadth of the development of the XAPP. Since the curricular development incorporates new teaching concepts into the curriculum, a reform of the evaluation system for entrance to the institute will become an immediate necessity. This priority is not only reflected within the rationale and professional nature of the evaluation system itself, but also within the integration of the evaluation system, the school's personnel training program, and the socially-oriented mechanism of the music education market.

CONCLUSION

The success of the XAPP can be attributed to its characteristic user-friendly mode which enables it to cater to both seriously-minded and recreational piano players on a large scale. Practicality – a form of practicable simplicity of piano learning, in tandem with the interest-cultivation factor inherent within the XAPP, enables accelerated learning through customized repertoire, enhancing the overall accomplishment of piano playing.

The XAPP will always have its critics. Primarily, criticism will emanate from the traditionalists who will condemn the pedagogy as nothing more than another component in the commercial mechanism of mass-consumption and mass-production. However, in this high-tech age of digitization, commercialism and consumerism go hand-in-hand with mass-education concomitant with increased population, including and especially the ever-expanding global middle-class with characteristic high levels of disposable income. This is particularly relevant to mainland China, with a middle-class exceeding 145 million, within a population of 1.4 billion. Add to this, the comparably populous middle-classes of America and Australia, it is hard to ignore Xin's XAPP potential to attract a huge global market with its easily accessible system of piano instruction.

The novelty of this pedagogy, in conjunction with its practicability in piano learning, has never stopped in its exploratory steps towards playing an important role in the

development of the music industry, marketing of education, cultural economics and social business in mainland China. Furthermore, under the new historical era of information globalization, the innovation of Chinese piano education has also attracted the mutual interest of music scholars throughout the world. The nature of Chinese piano education has gone well beyond a profession of instrumental teaching and is playing a vital role to the reforming of national music education, as well as the development of world music culture through its process of diversification.

In line with Dewey's pragmatism education theory, I believe that the form of practicability that the XAPP advocates and practises is an active examination of the process of pragmatism in piano education in mainland China. However, at the same time, due to the rigidity of technique-driven piano teaching methods and evaluation system that are still receiving a great deal of audience appraisal, the XAPP, as a forerunner of applied piano education appears to be conflictual, confrontational, controversial and, seemingly, against all odds, particularly in the aspect of teaching objectives, teaching materials and teaching outcomes. Consequently, the XAPP's further development is riven with uncertainties in the face of a broad spectrum of obstacles.

Upon clarifying the fundamental value of piano education, it is suggested that the XAPP should position itself in the field of piano education with an intentional balance with other existing reputable, professional and formal piano teaching methods in today's mainland China. The characteristics that the XAPP features in terms of practicability and interest-cultivation should not be manifested only in its own teaching activities. In other words, the nature of the XAPP's existence should not be centred on its own survival or development as an individual teaching method in isolation of other methods, but, rather, on the basis of its value as a prime and indispensable contributor towards the integral enhancement of Chinese piano education in the modern era.

Orienting from the swiftly growing market of applied music education, this paper has investigated the XAPP's characteristic practicability in contrast to the dominant traditional methods, especially, the classical-repertoire based technique-driven ones. It also presented a coherent exploration of the XAPP and drawn its conclusion through the systematic and logical process of the research motivation and the research findings. It is hoped that the academic viewpoints and research results presented in this paper can provide a reliable future academic reference for the positive development of piano education in today's mainland China.

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