

Article

A Comparative Study of the Development of Piano Education in China and Uzbekistan

Jingjing Zhang^{1,*}
¹ South Sichuan College of Early Childhood Education, Neijiang, China

* Correspondence: Jingjing Zhang, South Sichuan College of Early Childhood Education, Neijiang, China

Abstract: Both China and Uzbekistan have developed distinctive domestic piano education systems by integrating the modern and contemporary Western piano tradition with the Soviet pedagogical framework-yet each has forged a unique developmental trajectory shaped by its own cultural, historical, and institutional context. To identify comparative strengths and challenges in piano education and to advance cross-regional collaboration and artistic development of Central Asian piano culture within the broader Silk Road initiative, this paper undertakes a systematic comparative analysis of the current state and defining characteristics of piano education in China and Uzbekistan. Drawing on multiple analytical dimensions-including historical evolution, institutional structures, curricular design, and processes of cultural localization-the study traces how both nations initially prioritized the performance and pedagogy of Western classical repertoire, and subsequently shifted toward incorporating indigenous folk musical resources: composing original piano works rooted in local traditions, cultivating performance practices that integrate native timbres and aesthetic principles, and striving to establish nationally grounded piano schools with theoretical and artistic autonomy.

Keywords: piano education; China; Uzbekistan

1. Introduction

As a universal artistic language, piano art functions as a vital conduit for cross-border cultural exchange and civilizational dialogue. China and Uzbekistan-both pivotal nations along the historic and contemporary Silk Road-share a centuries-old tradition of cultural interaction, within which musical practice has consistently served as a cornerstone of people-to-people connectivity. Situated within the broader framework of mutual learning among civilizations in the new era, this study undertakes a comparative analysis of piano education in the two countries to systematically examine how their distinct yet interwoven musical cultures shape pedagogical philosophies, curricular priorities, and artistic identities. By utilising piano education as a regular and long-term vehicle for exchange, this study aims to facilitate the dissemination of Chinese musical culture to Central Asia, whilst simultaneously incorporating the finest elements of Central Asian folk music and art to enrich the creative and pedagogical dimensions of Chinese piano art. It further seeks to deepen the cultural ties between China and Uzbekistan, promote the inheritance and innovative development of Silk Road culture, and lay a solid artistic foundation for the mutual learning and cultural exchange between the two nations' civilisations.

2. Methodology

The history of piano art in China can be traced back to the late 19th century, when elementary piano classes were introduced at church-run schools. Institutions such as the Medical College of St John's University in Shanghai introduced the piano. During the late Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China period, some students studying music in Europe and America also brought the art of the piano back to China. The beginnings of piano

Received: 17 August 2026

Revised: 23 September 2026

Accepted: 05 October 2026

Published: 09 October 2026



Copyright: © 2026 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

education in higher education can be traced to the period when Mr Cai Yuanpei served as President of Peking University. He vigorously advocated for aesthetic education, leading Peking University to be the first to offer music courses. With the promulgation of the Renxu Educational System in 1922, music was incorporated into the curriculum of primary and secondary schools. In 1927, the Shanghai National Conservatory of Music (the predecessor of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music) was established, with a Department of Piano, marking the beginning of the development of a systematic piano education framework in China. The Russian-born teacher Zakharov presided over the teaching and established the country's first standardised higher education system for piano. In 1934, Zhirpin organised a competition to 'solicit piano pieces with a Chinese flavour', which saw the debut of He Luting's *The Shepherd Boy's Flute*, ushering in an exploration of the nationalisation of piano music. This phase nurtured the first generation of home-grown piano talent; however, due to the impact of war and civil strife, the scale remained limited and was concentrated in only a few cities such as Shanghai and Beijing. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, major conservatoires were successively established in Beijing, Shanghai, Shenyang and Xi'an. The Soviet piano teaching system was introduced, and Soviet experts were invited to teach in China, thereby establishing a complete chain of professional talent development stretching from affiliated primary and secondary schools to universities. Pianists such as Fu Cong, Liu Shikun and Zhou Guangren won awards at international competitions, whilst classic indigenous works such as the *Yellow River Piano Concerto* were composed. During the Cultural Revolution, piano education came to a standstill; teaching and performance activities were drastically reduced, and development was interrupted.

Following the Reform and Opening-up, piano education experienced a comprehensive revival, and musical exchanges between China and the rest of the world resumed. The *National Teaching Guidelines for Undergraduate Music Studies (Teacher Training) Programmes at General Higher Education Institutions*, issued by China in 2018, explicitly called for strengthening the cultivation of musical performance skills. A nationwide 'piano boom' has taken hold, with the establishment of amateur and community-based piano training programmes and a system of piano grading examinations; the piano has gradually evolved from an elite art form into a form of aesthetic education for the general public. The number of domestic competitions in China has increased, young pianists have been making their mark on the international stage, and research into teaching theory and indigenous piano works continues to advance. Chinese pianists (such as Lang Lang and Wang Yuja) have gained widespread recognition in the global mainstream music scene; piano programmes at professional and teacher-training institutions have continued to improve; and new models-such as online teaching, applied piano and improvisation-have emerged. At the same time, the academic community has reflected on the utilitarian nature of examination-oriented teaching, advocating a balance between Western technical training and the integration of Chinese piano works and indigenous musical language, with a view to establishing a piano teaching system with Chinese characteristics. However, issues such as an uneven distribution of teaching staff and regional development disparities persist.

The early history of piano performance in Uzbekistan can be traced back to the amateur musical activities that flourished in Tashkent from the late 19th to the early 20th century. Local intellectuals formed small choirs and orchestras. During this period, a number of foreign musicians arrived in Tashkent, introducing classical music to the Turkestan region and gradually transforming what had been a closed circle of musical activity into a more public one. In 1918, the Turkestan People's Conservatoire was established. Ksenia Uspenskaya, as a teacher at the conservatoire, laid a solid foundation for the teaching and development of piano performance there, nurturing a large number of outstanding musicians. These musicians vigorously promoted classical music and the art of piano performance, exerting a profound influence on the art of piano performance in Uzbekistan. Similarly, the Piano Department of the Tashkent State Music School also trained a large number of musicians.

In the early 20th century, the art of piano playing in Uzbekistan saw new developments in both education and performance. The teaching and performance philosophy of the Piano Department at the Tashkent Conservatoire was originally derived from the Moscow and St Petersburg piano schools.

In the mid-20th century, a group of outstanding musicians emerged, including N. Yablonovsky, Z.

Tamarkina and V. Slonim, who, drawing on their wealth of performance and teaching experience, drove the development of piano art in Uzbekistan. N. Yablonovsky, a highly talented pianist, actively promoted European music, gave concerts and served as Head of the Chamber Music Department at the Tashkent Conservatoire. Z. Tamarkina actively promoted the works of the Uzbek composer G. Mushel and frequently performed foreign classical works at her own concerts. The great piano pedagogue Anatoly Gekkelman not only achieved outstanding artistic success but also made significant contributions to teaching. He trained educators such as D. Daniyar-Xodjaeva, N. Polatkhanova, V. Milova, G. Gulyamova and S. Gafurova, as well as pianists including A. Greenberg, B. Haknazarova and U. Palvanov. He frequently collaborated with the Uzbekistan National Philharmonic Orchestra to stage various concerts, offering different interpretations of the same piece. He also compiled *Methods of Performance and Music Pedagogy*. Another great piano pedagogue of the same period was Galina Kalmykova, who played a significant role in the development of piano art in Uzbekistan. She had been teaching at the General Piano Department since 1959 and joined the Professional Piano Department in 1972. Her teaching emphasised the development of students' analytical thinking skills, and she nurtured leading figures of the Uzbek piano school such as M. Gumarov, S. Gafurova, Zh. Muratbekova and M. Fayzieva. Around 1960, the first generation of outstanding local pianists emerged, including D. Daniyar-Khodjayeva, S. Zakirov, D. Jahangirova and H. Azimov. Ophelia Yusupova, in particular, was the first to bring Uzbek piano art to the international stage. Her repertoire encompassed not only indigenous Uzbek music but also works of various styles and eras. Ophelia Yusupova's teaching philosophy was also highly progressive; she placed great emphasis on cultivating her students' musical literacy, enabling them to interpret the composer's original intent independently, meticulously and accurately, and to gain a deep understanding of a work's essence before performing and expressing it. Furthermore, her teaching placed particular emphasis on training in tone colour and intonation. From the mid-1950s onwards: the pianist and composer Kholmira Azimov began a sustained period of musical composition. His *Piano Method* was the first to establish a comprehensive piano teaching system based on indigenous Uzbek musical material, and it has been widely used in education. During the 1960s and 1970s, numerous teachers and students from the Specialised Piano Department of the Tashkent Conservatoire won awards in inter-regional competitions across Central Asia and Kazakhstan. In 1961, Rudolf Kereel, a graduate of that year, won first prize at the All-Union Piano Competition, causing a sensation in the local music world. Cathedral concerts, teachers' recitals and festivals featuring local composers were held on a regular basis, helping piano practitioners to enhance their professional skills. The Republican Specialised Music School also nurtured a large number of artists in the field of piano. The renowned music educator Tamara Popovich established a distinctive piano teaching method there, training numerous internationally acclaimed pianists (including Alexey Sultanov). During the same period, the piano department at the music school named after Gliere reached its zenith. The development of piano programmes was rolled out nationwide, with piano courses introduced in children's music and art schools across the country, and national piano competitions organised to identify local young musical talent. In 1973, Elmira Mirkasimova, having achieved outstanding results, represented Uzbekistan at the 10th World Festival of Youth and Students in Berlin. During the 1980s, the overall standard of piano playing in Uzbekistan improved significantly, with the 1980 and 1985 Republican Piano Competitions, as well as the 6th All-Union Piano Competition in 1981, all taking place in Tashkent, where a large number of local students won prizes at various levels of

competition. In 1980, Mirkasimova won first prize at the Tashkent Republican Piano Competition; from 1981 to 1983, she completed a teaching assistantship at the Tchaikovsky Conservatoire in Moscow; in 1984, she represented Uzbekistan at several international piano competitions; in 1985, she was awarded a Special Jury Certificate at the All-Union Piano Competition in Riga. In August 1988, the piano maestro Richter travelled to Tashkent to give a concert, thereby promoting the development of piano performance in the region. Marat Gumarov won first prize at the Republican Piano Competition in 1985 and took up a teaching post in 1987. During the 1980s and 1990s, piano art in Uzbekistan experienced rapid development; a local piano school took shape, giving rise to a wealth of indigenous piano works and fostering a performance style imbued with national character; the academic community engaged in in-depth study of contrapuntal composition and modern foreign works by composers such as Bartók and Prokofiev. In the early 1990s, renowned pianists from various countries, including D. Walsh, A. Nashekin, D. Bashkirov and other renowned pianists from various countries visited Tashkent to perform, spurring the advancement of local performance standards.

In 1990, Mirkasimova and her violin partner won third place at the International Competition in Italy; in 1991 (the Year of Mozart), she gave four solo recitals, performing the complete set of Mozart's piano sonatas; In the same year, Alexei Sultanov emigrated to the United States; having previously won an award at the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition, he took part in the 1995 Chopin and 1998 Tchaikovsky International Piano Competitions, where he sparked controversy amongst the judges, and was the first Uzbek pianist to take to the international stage. In 1996, Sayora Gafurova began teaching at the Special Piano Department of the Tashkent Conservatoire. Since Uzbekistan's independence, local piano students have frequently taken part in international competitions, winning a total of over 400 international awards, with participants no longer confined to the capital. International competitions have become a key driving force behind the development of musical schools and international cooperation between institutions. Key piano educators such as Elmira Mirkasimova, Adiba Sharipova, Nargiz Polatkhanova, Marat Gumarov, Gurzamun Guliamova and Sayora Gafurova-leading piano educators who balance performance, teaching and scholarship-have authored numerous specialist textbooks and organised international concerts, masterclasses and artistic projects to promote Uzbek piano music abroad. By the end of the 20th century, the Uzbek national piano school (the Tashkent Piano School), which blends Eastern and Western performance characteristics, had gradually matured and gained international recognition, building upon the Russian and European piano education systems. Outstanding issues to be addressed include: strengthening collaboration among piano teachers across different regions; integrating research and teaching resources; organising concerts and masterclasses in rural areas; improving specialist teaching literature in the Uzbek language; deepening international exchanges between institutions; drawing on overseas experience in music education; and ensuring the continued transmission of the school's traditions.

3. Discussion

A review of the history of piano education in Uzbekistan reveals that it initially developed on the basis of Russian and European piano teaching systems, before gradually incorporating elements of Uzbek folk music and maqam music, ultimately giving rise to a distinctive national school of piano performance that combines Western technical rigour with Eastern tonal qualities and expressiveness. Professional music schools and conservatoires have established a comprehensive talent development system, whilst teachers such as Popovich have developed mature teaching methodologies that lay a solid technical foundation for students from an early age, thereby consistently nurturing world-class performers. Piano competitions, international contests, and performances by visiting international piano masters, coupled with exchanges and tours abroad by Uzbek musicians, have continuously raised the overall standard of performance and teaching. Since independence, a large number of young musicians have won awards at international

competitions, which in turn has enhanced the international profile of the national school and fostered cross-border collaboration between institutions. From the 1980s to the 1990s, local composers produced a wealth of piano works. Teachers juggled performing, teaching, compiling teaching materials, conducting academic research and organising arts festivals; composition, performance and teaching theory mutually reinforced one another, thereby refining the entire disciplinary framework. Even after the school's establishment, issues such as unequal distribution of resources, insufficient collaboration between regional teaching staff and a lack of specialist literature in the local language persisted. For long-term development, it is necessary to integrate teaching and research resources from across the country, extend arts education to the grassroots level, and sustain international exchanges; reliance on a handful of award-winning performers alone is insufficient, and emphasis must be placed on cultivating the overall musical literacy of ordinary learners. The core of the national piano school's legacy lies in balancing the inheritance of tradition with innovation. The new generation of musicians must not only inherit the Russian and European teaching traditions and the pedagogical experience of their predecessors, but also continue to develop their own national piano music, thereby establishing their own position within global musical culture.

Professional piano education in both countries has drawn heavily on the Russian teaching system, with many of the early core teaching staff having been influenced by Russia. Piano instruction emphasises solid finger technique and rigorous training in musical structure, forming a standardised professional training pathway.

4. Conclusion

The origins and early dissemination of piano teaching differed between the two countries. In modern China, the instrument was popularised through church schools and school music programmes; the establishment of the Shanghai National Conservatory of Music in 1927 marked the formal birth of professional piano education. Its development has spanned a longer period, having weathered numerous major social upheavals, including the turmoil of the Republic of China era, the founding of the People's Republic, the Cultural Revolution and the Reform and Opening-up. Professional piano education in Uzbekistan took shape in the mid-1950s, having originated under the Soviet Union's cultural development policies for Central Asia. It did not undergo a prolonged period of independent modern development, remaining for a long time within the unified cultural framework of the Soviet Union; it was only after the country gained independence in the 1990s that it began to engage in international artistic exchanges independently. The source material and stylistic orientations for the fusion of the two countries' folk music also differ. China centres on Han folk songs, opera, and the melodies of traditional instruments (such as the guqin and pipa), as well as the pentatonic scale, pursuing artistic conception and vitality, as exemplified by its representative works. Uzbek piano art, on the other hand, draws upon the maqam and the timbres of Central Asian folk instruments; performances emphasise the dynamism of the toccata form and rich expressive colour, resulting in a style characterised by tension and energy. Following the Reform and Opening-up, piano education in China witnessed a nationwide 'piano craze', with a vast audience for community-based amateur training and piano grading examinations. The piano embodies both the attributes of elite professional art and mass aesthetic education, whilst simultaneously facing prominent issues such as the utilitarianism and hyper-competitiveness associated with grading examinations. Piano education in Uzbekistan has long been dominated by elite professional training, centred on conservatoires and specialised music schools; the scale of mass popularisation is far smaller than in China. Since independence, the country has prioritised supporting young musicians to compete in international competitions, thereby establishing a national school of piano as an international calling card.

Whilst advanced performance techniques from abroad form the foundation, it is only by grounding oneself in one's own traditional musical culture that a distinctive piano school can be established, thereby avoiding mere imitation of the West. A comprehensive

talent development framework and the stable transmission of high-calibre teaching expertise are the fundamental guarantees for the long-term development of piano art. International exchanges and competitions can serve as catalysts for development, but they must not be regarded as the sole criterion for evaluation; equal consideration should be given to both public aesthetic education and the training of professional talent. Both countries need to refine their domestic theoretical literature on piano teaching, promote the dissemination of high-quality teaching resources to grassroots levels, and narrow the educational gaps between urban and rural areas as well as across different regions.

References

1. D. Li, "Analogies and causes between Uzbek music and Xinjiang Uyghur music," *Research on Transmission Competence*, no. 18, pp. 180–181, 2019.
2. Q. Ma, "A history of music in Uzbekistan (1917–1991)," Ph.D. dissertation, Shaanxi Normal University, 2021.
3. M. Wang, "The formation and development of the modern and contemporary Chinese piano education system," *Art Panorama*, 2025.
4. G. Yunusov, "Patterns of identity in Uzbek folk music arts," *European Review of Contemporary Arts and Humanities*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2026.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of Publisher and/or the editor(s). Publisher and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.