

The Current Problems of the Teaching and Learning Dulcimer Performance at Capital Normal University, China

An Jiayi and Nicha Pattananon

Bangkokthonburi University, Bangkok, Thailand

Corresponding Author E-mail: nicha.musiced@gmail.com

Abstract

The research objectives were (1) To study the current problems in the performance and teaching of the dulcimer at the Capital Normal University. (2) To analyze the playing skills of the dulcimer and to propose solutions based on the existing problems in dulcimer teaching. The methodology was qualitative research which collected data from interviews. Key informants were 8 dulcimer students and 10 music teachers from the Conservatory of Music at the Capital Normal University.

The research findings found that (1) Teachers of the dulcimer Program can arrange group classes according to different teaching contents, objectives, and target groups to make the teaching content clear, and effective. There are several group lessons: chamber music lessons, music appreciation lessons, practical theatre arts lessons, music theory lessons, and expert lectures. (2) the teachers teach the basic knowledge and playing techniques of the dulcimer in class, but teaching the correct way to play dulcimer needs to be addressed. Many dulcimer students report problems with the instrument when playing dulcimer.

Keywords: teaching and learning dulcimer, dulcimer performance, capital normal university, China

Introduction

Research on the teaching of dulcimer has been in a constant state of development since the reform and opening up of the country, especially since the beginning of the new century. Regarding research literature, the formalization of dulcimer teaching started late, and the amount of research literature on dulcimer teaching was relatively small compared to research on the reform of the instrument. The literature of this period came mainly from scholars in colleges, who published their views on dulcimer teaching research based on their own experience of teaching dulcimer, mostly in the form of "superficial discussion," "brief discussion," "exploration," and "exploration." "and "exploration." Most of the research focuses on posture, bamboo holding, string striking, technique, musical expression, and thoughts on developing teaching materials for the dulcimer.

The first is a general view of the teaching of the dulcimer, which is broad in scope, with a general emphasis on teaching the basic skills of the dulcimer, such as playing posture, bamboo holding, string striking, and basic technique, emphasizing the importance of basic skills. Some of the research also covers teaching methods, teaching objectives, training objectives, and the development of teaching materials.

Zhang Rongdi's (1994) *A Little Thought on Dulcimer Teaching* talks about using jazz drums to promote rhythm training on the dulcimer and cites Orff's philosophy of education to support his views.

Rui Lunbao's (1996) 'A brief discussion on the teaching of the dulcimer' also touches on issues such as the aims of dulcimer teaching and the quality of teachers. Regarding textbook research, there were few textbooks on the dulcimer at the time. Most of them were based on basic textbooks on playing methods and the traditional dulcimer repertoire of instrumental pieces, which were relatively homogeneous in content.

With the spread of modern educational concepts, the art of dulcimer, national and global, has drawn on the best of the times to improve its development. Compared with the previous period, the research literature is more concerned with human development beyond the level of technique, emphasizing the student's subjectivity and the integration of different musical cultures, with a broader vision of research and a significant increase in research results. There has been a significant increase in the number of research studies and the number of research outputs. Teaching philosophy, teaching methods, teaching formats and educational objectives, and teacher training have all been reformed and developed.

The dulcimer is a traditional Chinese musical instrument introduced to China in the 17th century and has been transformed into an exotic instrument for over 400 years. During this time, the style and manner of playing the dulcimer have been restricted and modified by regional conditions and economic and cultural influences, and several unique schools have developed. Among the many schools of dulcimer, the northeastern dulcimer is unique in style and technique.

Liu Mingwan (2020) takes the performance techniques and teaching characteristics of northeastern dulcimer as the subject of her study. Through a comprehensive and systematic study and analysis, the performance techniques and teaching characteristics of northeastern dulcimer are clearly understood so that more students can absorb and learn from the experience while learning northeastern dulcimer and achieve the goal of integrating and applying what they have learned.

In the early 1950s, the teaching of dulcimer officially entered the stage of professional colleges. Since the reform and opening up, research on dulcimer teaching has been gradually developed. Dai Shan (2020) used CNKI and the Wenjin search of the National Library of China to collect and organize data, summarised the achievements of current dulcimer teaching research through quantitative visualization research, document classification, and data statistical analysis, and sorted out its historical development. Based on the study and sorting out these research results, we can further understand the development status and shortcomings of dulcimer teaching.

After 70 years of development in New China, Chinese dulcimer education has formed a comprehensive, systematic, and scientific education system from primary and middle school to undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral students. Compared with other countries, this educational system is unique. However, compared with the dulcimer education system, the construction of the teaching material system has yet to catch up. From the 1950s to the 1970s, there were no teaching materials for dulcimer education in China. Teachers used mimeograph printing to compose etudes or music, and they were not officially published. Although many kinds of dulcimer teaching materials have been published, there are still few special teaching materials in colleges. There are no professional teaching materials in ordinary colleges, and even amateur teaching materials are still used. Not only that, there are many problems in these

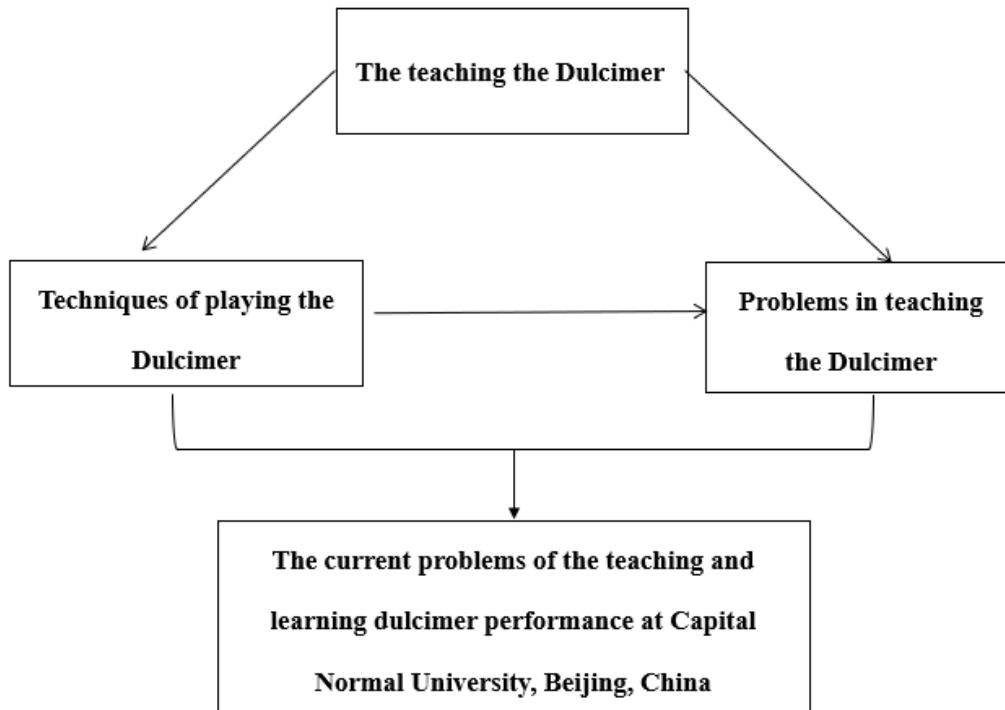
textbooks, such as unreasonable grading, errors in score examples, inconsistent notation, and non-standardization, which seriously affect and restrict the development of dulcimer education. Therefore, the construction of Chinese dulcimer teaching materials, including the construction of teaching materials in normal colleges, is imminent. Professor Li Lingling made constructive suggestions on constructing the Chinese dulcimer teaching material system, focusing on constructing dulcimer teaching materials in normal colleges and improving integration with primary and secondary school music education through the construction of teaching materials.

The classification and characteristics of the dulcimer Ensemble, the creation, rehearsal, and team building of the dulcimer Ensemble, and the teacher's college The effective transformation of the school dulcimer solo and ensemble teaching mode, the characteristics and breakthroughs of the dulcimer ensemble in normal colleges. Teacher Zhang Xia believes that dulcimer ensemble can be divided into mixed and single timbre ensembles, each with its emphasis and characteristics. In the teaching of normal colleges, the effective construction of a dulcimer ensemble can not only solve the performance problems of each student but also cultivate the ability of accompaniment and ensemble, exercise the ability of music perception such as harmony and orchestration, and the awareness of teamwork. Normal colleges and universities should pay more attention to teaching methods when carrying out dulcimer ensembles and to cultivating students' cooperation skills, teamwork awareness, and multi-skilled qualities in addition to technical requirements. Students should make full use of the comprehensive characteristics of normal colleges. While practicing dulcimer ensemble, they should strengthen their study of the chorus, vocal music, impromptu accompaniment, and dance, which will help students improve their comprehensive teaching ability when they are employed.

Research Objectives

1. To study the current problems in the performance and teaching of the dulcimer at the Capital Normal University.
2. To analyze the playing skills of the dulcimer and to propose solutions based on the existing problems in dulcimer teaching.

Conceptual Framework



Research Methodology

This study is based on qualitative research methods, using interviews between teachers and students and classroom observations.

Research Scope

Time: October 2021 to December 2022

Place: Capital Normal University, Beijing, China. This study is limited to teachers and students of dulcimer at the School of Music, Capital Normal University, Beijing. As such, it may only represent the current state of dulcimer teaching in some conservatories in China, especially in private colleges and universities as well as vocational institutions.

Person: A selection of 10 university professors and 10 students from Capital Normal University majoring in dulcimer.

Contents: To explore the current situation of teaching dulcimer in Capital Normal University and the problems encountered in the teaching process, and to analyze the skills of playing and improving the dulcimer.

Research Findings

1. The current situation of dulcimer teaching at Capital Normal University

Founded in 1954, Capital Normal University is a comprehensive teacher training university with a wide range of majors and is a key university that Beijing has invested heavily in the building. A study of the performance and teaching of the dulcimer in the School of Music at Capital Normal University was conducted to analyze the strengths and weaknesses that emerge

in the performance and teaching of the dulcimer and whether the format of dulcimer teaching needs to be updated. The researcher joined the dulcimer program at Capital Normal University as a student and observed classes at different levels. The dulcimer course at Capital Normal University follows the "three small and one big" format, with the addition of a group class (common class) to the original "one-to-one" teacher format. The format is simpler, but the overall approach and requirements of the reform are more comprehensive and include a variety of teaching methods and content.

1.1 Face-to-face individual lessons

The use of offline one-to-one teaching is a necessary teaching tool due to the special nature of the music profession. The dulcimer Programme at Capital Normal University has adopted this traditional teaching method while keeping up with the times and innovating to make the most of offline one-to-one teaching as it should be. The relatively small number of students in the dulcimer program at Capital Normal University has allowed the teachers to provide one-to-one tuition. The School of Music has set up one one-to-one weekly lesson for dulcimer students. The researcher participated in the research process as a student and found that the teachers could teach according to the students' needs while conducting one-to-one dulcimer lessons. The need has two meanings here: Firstly, it is the content of the lesson, the repertoire to be rehearsed, the specific performance requirements, and the content required by the dulcimer teacher as set out in the syllabus; Secondly, the dulcimer teacher will choose the most suitable content for the student and use the most suitable teaching form for that student, which is closely related to the teacher's choice of teaching content and teaching form, and is important for improving the quality of dulcimer teaching.

Most of the techniques require a good combination of fingers, wrists, and arms to produce a good sound when played on the dulcimer, which is the only way to express the piece's emotion with tension and perfectly interpret the musical style of the piece. Since the two-tone technique has always been a weakness in the researcher's studies, and since the researcher has some basic knowledge of the dulcimer and is interested in combining Chinese and Western music, the dulcimer teacher at Capital Normal University decided to teach "Poems and Paintings from the Heavenly Mountains" in a one-on-one, face-to-face lesson. It is set against the backdrop of the scenery and human characteristics of the Tianshan Mountains and unfolds in a unique Xinjiang musical style. The piece is divided into five parts: the poetic and picturesque introduction, the elegant and unpretentious theme, the fresh and transcendental interlude, the powerful and elegant allegro, and the endless recapitulation. Regarding tonal modality, the piece moves from the A Yu Yaku seven-tone mode to a six-tone mode with an E shang and a clear horn, and then to the A Yu Yaku seven-tone mode. In terms of the structure of the piece (Fig. 1), it can be divided into three parts in terms of tempo, reflecting the three-part style of the piece, and the central and repertoire material is unfolded in the presentation part. The composer's distinctive national tunings and adherence to strict Western compositional methods perfectly blend Eastern and Western musical styles, reflecting the cosmopolitan and national character of the dulcimer.

After one-on-one lessons with the teacher, the researcher has made great improvements in the technique of qizhu, which refers to a variety of two-note qizhu, including octave qizhu, in which both hands rise and fall together in different positions. When playing, it is necessary not only to keep the strength and tone of both hands in unison but also to keep both hands rising and falling simultaneously to achieve greater rhythm and volume and enrich the harmonic

effect. There are several places where the qizhu technique appears in the Tianshan Poems and Paintings, firstly in the octave qizhu in the introduction and secondly in the triplets in the large section of the flowery interlude. The third is the harmonic Chihuly at the beginning and end of the Allegro, which propels the music forward. The octave used in the introduction is an example (example 2) where a series of octaves are played loosely, then tightly, then loosely, then with a deep breath, from weak to strong, with the main aim of mastering the slow, fast and slow tightness of the notes. The melodic scale must be clear and coherent, with both hands balanced, reflecting the Xinjiang style of minor key coloring. Therefore, when playing the six consecutive octaves of the first phrase, do not exceed the strength of the mf notation in the score, but let yourself breathe first while driving your arms and wrists to complete the string-striking action to achieve the ideal tone and enhance the color effect of the piece.

When teaching face-to-face, the dulcimer teacher understands and grasps these specific circumstances of the subject matter according to each student's actual situation, level of professional knowledge, ability, degree, characteristics of ability, and even personal character, so that the teaching rhythm can be tightened and relaxed according to the actual situation of the student, starting from the actual situation. For example, when dealing with more introverted and introverted students, the dulcimer teacher will focus on leading the students to analyze the emotions conveyed by the piece, slowing down the teaching rhythm accordingly and leading the students to integrate their feelings into the process of playing. The teacher can use appropriate measures and methods according to different teaching contents, characteristics, and requirements to keep the teaching in a dynamic change, which is beneficial to the teacher's knowledge transfer, make the teaching atmosphere active, and avoid the dullness of the teaching material model. The teacher can teach the students according to their weaknesses and, at the same time, select the music content they like to learn to increase their interest in learning. In a way, this helps to meet the student's individual needs so that the one-to-one format is the most relevant and best suited to solving individual problems.

1) Group lessons

The ultimate goal of music school teaching is to train high-quality and comprehensive musical talents, and the ultimate goal of students' learning is to enter society. For this reason, the professors of dulcimer of Capital Normal University have incorporated many common elements from the perspective of teaching content, such as knowledge of music theory, music dynamics, information exchange, and introduction to experience, and have conducted group classes for students of the same year. Despite the group lessons, all the lessons must be progressive, with the difficulty of the lessons progressing from shallow to deep. Dulcimer teachers at Capital Normal University teach according to their student's abilities, and it is impossible to use the same teaching methods for every student. However, it is still necessary for students to follow a certain learning sequence when teaching. Of course, there is no single, fixed sequence for teaching dulcimer technique from teacher to teacher. Each teacher's approach inevitably has many possibilities and a certain amount of variation.

While observing the first-year dulcimer class, the researcher found that for the dulcimer freshman, the teachers' teaching focused more on the habit formation of playing posture, string striking action, and basic bamboo technique, and the teachers mostly adopted the teaching

method of teacher demonstration and student imitation as the main method, through basic exercises and practice pieces, as well as the basic training of some musical materials, to master the technical movement norms of dulcimer articulation, i.e., to master the five points of "holding the bamboo, striking the strings, touching the hammer, supporting the hammer and giving force." The teacher will also be able to master the five points of "holding the bamboo, striking the strings, touching the hammer, supporting the hammer, and giving force." The basic training of the dulcimer begins with the single bamboo technique. It begins with mastering the technical movements of the wrist and fingers, which are combined with the striking string technique. The training of the wrist and fingers often focuses on developing the single bamboo technique from slow to fast. We should pay attention to the organic connection between wrist and finger movements and the whole arm and even the whole body; to the harmony and unity of force and relaxation; to the adjustment and unblocking of action parts and action forces; to the balanced cooperation between left and right hand; to the granularity and penetration of articulation training. At this stage, basic exercises can be used to lay the foundation. Then some practice pieces can be used to practice repeatedly, focusing on the basic exercises of scales, arpeggios, and chords in different keys and also selecting some musicality, technicality, and concentration of fast playing skills as teaching materials. It is important to make the playing of fast patterns precise, flexible, light, and clean, but also to pay attention to the smooth undulations of fast lines and their musical beauty.

The dulcimer teachers focus more on teaching students how to play the bamboo wheel, vibraphone, and linearity in their second year. Based on the single bamboo technique and balanced left and right-hand coordination, students continue to develop their skills in octave, double tone, and harmonic playing. Generally, basic drills and exercises can be used as the main material. However, the selection of appropriate music should also be taken into consideration. Coordination and synchronization of two-handed strikes result in a flush, whereas coordination and synchronization of two hands during bamboo transportation results in an even. When playing the harmonic levels, the melodic tones must be emphasized and given priority. The wrist and arm should be trained when playing the flush bamboo technique with continuous octaves of double and harmonic tones. Wrists regulate and cushion the entire playing organ (shoulder, upper arm, elbow, forearm, wrist, and fingers) and concentrate force and weight on the bamboo head. At this stage, the teacher also focuses on training students to play linear melodies and singing tunes, mainly through the bamboo wheel (double bamboo wheel, single bamboo wheel, harmony wheel) and bamboo tremolo (left and right tremolo, up and down tremolo), which are important performance techniques and means of expression for the dulcimer. This is an important technique and means of expression for the dulcimer. Starting with basic exercises and varying from a fixed to an odd number of bamboo wheels can lay the foundation. During training, attention should be paid to the strength, density, and evenness of the left and right bamboo rounds and quivers; the coherence, flow, undulation, and articulation of the phrases; and the inner singing and emotional musical expression.

Chamber music lessons

The famous pianist Fu Cong once said: "Without training in chamber music, one does not know the language of music." In many countries, the music education system attaches great importance to teaching chamber music and includes it as a compulsory subject in schools. Chamber music has always been integral to music education and popular culture. Unlike the

performance of a large symphony orchestra, it is more like a gathering of friends who meet and talk to each other, and every time they gain a little insight, a smile comes from the friends. The establishment and refinement of chamber music are one of the most prominent manifestations of collective teaching in the classroom. Dulcimer chamber music teaching increased the practicality and practice of the original teaching, explored and cultivated students' inner potential and comprehensive abilities, focused on practical aspects, strengthened skill training, and encouraged students to build their professional skills based on a solid understanding of the basics to improve skills, expanded professional knowledge and related to the requirements of the time and society so that after graduation they can work in professional groups and schools music and art at high schools and high schools. The study of chamber music makes some similar demands as individual solo playing, but the differences are even more pronounced. Broadens the student's artistic horizons and enriches their musicality; it does not aim to develop individual skills but rather emphasizes the silent collaboration between the voices; teaches the ability to collaborate with others and pay more attention to listening and thinking during the performance; offers the student the opportunity to learn from others and to understand better, appreciate and express themselves; helps develop singing skills during the performance; helps to estimate and imitate changes in pitch; helps improve rhythmic perception. Ability to read sheet music in a combination of simple and pentatonic notation; the opportunity to take exams and practice on stage (in this case, together on stage). Chamber music lessons include duo, trio, quartet, quintet, small ensemble, and accompaniment (and improvisation). The unique tonal and timbral characteristics of the dulcimer (beautiful neutral tone, rich variation in interweaving, added variations, double voices, etc.) play an irreplaceable role in setting the mood, stabilizing the rhythm of the piece, mastering the tempo changes and emotional development of the piece, and working freely with other vocal parts. By using these characteristics, we can offer a wide range of combinations that will broaden the knowledge of the dulcimer and eliminate the problem of learning the dulcimer as a soloist. In addition to combinations according to performance forms and pieces, there are combinations according to grades, combinations according to degrees, combinations according to sex and height for visual effects on stage, when necessary, combinations with vocal music according to special needs, combinations with other ethnic instruments, and so on.

2. The problems and countermeasures in teaching the dulcimer at the Capital Normal University

The study was conducted by interviewing music teachers of dulcimer majors at Capital Normal University to grasp their teaching experience in teaching dulcimer majors. From the interviews with dulcimer majors, some problems of teaching dulcimer majors were identified to analyze how to improve the efficiency of teaching dulcimer majors. Students of dulcimer major at Capital Normal University can be divided into two categories: those with a strong foundation and those with an average foundation, depending on their previous major. Dulcimer teachers at Capital Normal University actively teach both theory and practical classes. In general, the teachers teach the basic knowledge and playing techniques of the dulcimer in class, but teaching the correct way to play dulcimer needs to be addressed. Many dulcimer students

report problems with the power of the instrument when playing. Although the dulcimer program at Capital Normal University offers weekly one-to-one lessons for students, the main purpose of these lessons is to learn and improve, with little attention paid to the students' basic practice. As a result, teachers must emphasize the importance of teaching their students postural discipline as part of the overall teaching of the dulcimer.

Due to the epidemic, students have had very little access to the stage in recent years. The vast majority of students' daily practice is done independently in the piano room, resulting in the majority of students' real artistic practice opportunities being limited to mid-term and final exams each term. The lack of practical stage experience can cause students to become nervous and anxious when performing on stage, which can lead to a significant reduction in their level of performance and even interruptions and lack of musical expression, which can seriously affect their ability to perform at a normal level. Many students report that they cannot feel the piece's emotion when they play it, so their performance on the dulcimer lacks infectiousness. Teachers of dulcimer can help enrich the music content by guiding dulcimer players to use high and low timbres to emphasize the tension in the piece, enriching the performer and satisfying the aesthetic needs of the appreciative audience.

Recommendation

Theoretical Recommendation

In order to effectively promote the teaching of dulcimer, dulcimer teachers in comprehensive art colleges and universities should pay close attention to the scientific design of teaching content by the actual situation of students, the rationalization and application of music teaching materials, and the design of highly relevant, scientific and reasonable materials by the needs of society and the actual situation of students. dulcimer teachers must develop a curriculum that considers the unique characteristics of each of their students, the weaknesses of current teaching materials, and how to improve them to meet the demands of today's students better. In practice, teachers must increase the proportion of theoretical knowledge, such as information on the evolution of traditional and modern dulcimer and the development of dulcimer in the world, when planning the teaching program for students with little contact with dulcimer and do not have basic knowledge. When determining the course content for professional students, teachers must effectively categorize the content according to the difficulty level and organize the teaching program according to the category to avoid boring content. Teachers must also select interesting and specialized materials for students at their own pace to improve their performance skills and give them a real sense of the charm of dulcimer.

Practical Recommendations

Due to time and space restrictions, only Capital Normal University's Dulcimer course was selected for this study, which is somewhat one-sided. Future research is expected to bring innovative perspectives to the teaching of dulcimer and provide more scientific, effective, and accurate suggestions and countermeasures to improve the teaching methods and the heritage of dulcimer as an excellent traditional folk culture. There are still many problems and controversies in the teaching reform of dulcimer, and more in-depth research is needed to

improve the teaching of dulcimer in universities. Hence, future research on the reform of dulcimer teaching can build on previous research, accumulate experience, draw on the strengths of others, use scientific thinking to explore new reform methods and strive to cultivate high-quality dulcimer teachers at the university level.

References

Dai, S. (2020). An overview of research on the teaching of the Chinese yangqin since the reform and opening up. *Art Review*, (16)

Liu, M. (2020). Study on the performance skills and teaching characteristics of the northeastern yangqin. *Yellow River Sound*, (02).

Rui, L. (1996). A Brief Discussion on Yangqin Teaching, *Journal of Nanjing Arts College (Music and Performance)*, (03).

Zhang, R. (1994). A little reflection on the teaching of Yangqin. *Journal of Tianjin Conservatory of Music*, (2)