

# **The Development of Piano Teaching Materials and Piano Literatures in China**

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## **Abstracts**

Teaching material is an important part of teaching, and piano works are the main body of piano teaching. With the development of piano art in our country, piano works are constantly improving. Since the publication of "March for Peace," many outstanding composers have emerged in China. They gradually combine Western instruments with Chinese national style music, constantly explore music with Oriental characteristics, and create piano works with Chinese elements. However, these works have yet to be systematically organized, summarized, or fully applied in teaching. Piano teachers even need to learn which Chinese works to learn in which stages of students. This paper collects and arranges Chinese piano works since the 20th century, attempts to classify these scattered piano works, and makes a classified study from three aspects: subject matter, genre, and creation method, to better apply them to piano teaching as supplementary materials for students' interests.

**Keywords:** Development; Piano Teaching Materials; Piano Literatures; China

## **Introduction**

During the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), the Silk Road, an ancient trade route between China and the Mediterranean, opened. In the middle of the Qing Dynasty (1662-1912), specifically after the Opium War in 1840, the international imperialist powers forcibly opened ports in China for trade. When foreign envoys came to visit China then, they would bring keyboard instruments as gifts to the Qing dynasty court. Emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty learned to play the clavichord at that time for fun.

Ocean shipping lanes brought Western capitalism to China. "Foreign goods" became the proper name for imported products from the West. In the mid-19th century, the piano was one of the imported goods from the West. The owners of most of these first pianos were royal families or nobility. In addition, missionaries brought pianos for churches, and foreign people in business sometimes had pianos in their homes.

With the continuous development of Chinese society, the piano became available to the public, but its use was limited to churches, church schools, and high society. The piano grew in popularity during economic and cultural exchanges between the East and the West. Western instrument stores opened for business in Shanghai, Guangzhou, and other rapidly developing cities and sold pianos, organs, and violins. In 1987, British merchants opened China's first piano business in Shanghai. Foreigners and Chinese residents bought instruments from these stores. Because of China's cultural music history and the Qing dynasty's policy of isolation, the introduction of the piano did not have much influence at that time. Therefore,

piano education did not take shape until the 20th century (Chi, 2016).

Piano Teaching in China from the Early 20th Century to the Founding of the People's Republic of China.

## **The Development of Piano Teaching and Study**

With the revolution of 1911 overthrowing the rule of the decadent Qing government and establishing the democratic republic, China's political system underwent major changes. The May 4 Movement in the fields of ideology and culture advocated learning scientific and cultural knowledge from Europe and the United States to enrich China and strengthen the army. This movement touched on all aspects of Chinese culture. New schools and publishing houses were established. Cultural associations promoted the use and dissemination of the piano.

The War of Resistance with Japan broke out in 1937 and lasted eight years, leaving China with political, economic, and cultural problems. With social and political chaos, the conditions for operating music schools suffered. Many educational institutions were closed (or ran secretly), and the number of teachers declined. However, piano teaching continued to develop on a limited basis.

## **Piano Teaching in Churches**

After the Opium War in 1840, foreigners established missionary schools and brought pianos to support Western music teaching activities. The rise of these church schools pushed the development of piano teaching. Through these schools, people in China gradually learned keyboard instruments and piano music.

In churches and church schools, the influence of Western music was not limited to the scope of worship and singing hymns. Some churches held concerts of religious music works for festivals. In addition, church schools, such as the Chinese and Western Women's School in Shanghai, started music major programs. The girls who attended such schools sometimes went abroad to study Western music, returned to China, and established careers as musicians.

## **The Establishment of Music Associations and National Conservatories**

The May 4 movement in 1919 directly influenced Chinese culture and encouraged people to explore new ideas. This movement promoted the development of a new music culture in modern China by establishing various music associations. For example, on January 27, 1919, the "Music Research Association of Peking University" was founded.<sup>4</sup> These societies introduced Western music, organized Chinese music events, held concerts, and encouraged new music composition.

As an outgrowth of these associations, educational institutions were formed. The music department of Shanghai Normal College (1920), the music class of Peking University (1922), the music department of the national Beijing Art School (1926), and other private music programs were gradually established (Zhang, 2015).

In addition to famous Chinese musicians and educators such as Xiao Youmei and Yang Zhongzhi, some foreign pianists were hired as piano professors. Many music institutions established programs based on the educational systems of music in Europe and the United States and taught Western music. In addition, they set up courses or majors related to Chinese national music. The piano study began to develop through these professional music institutions.

At the same time, with the increasing numbers of elementary and middle schools, it became an urgent need to hire teachers with certain professional skills. This need became more urgent as professional music schools were founded.

On November 27, 1927, Shanghai National Conservatory, the first professional music school in the history of China, was founded with Xiao Youmei as president. There were five departments: composition, keyboard instruments, band instruments, vocal music, and Chinese music. Xiao hired Chinese musicians who had studied abroad, Western musicians who were visiting China, and foreign performers to be faculty members. More than ten provinces and cities set up music programs, and music education began to develop.

The first ten years after the establishment of Shanghai National Conservatory were not only a decade of hard work but also included outstanding teaching achievements. Teachers devoted themselves to teaching and implemented strict requirements for students. China's first generation of pianists and professors, such as Li Xianmin, Ding Shande, Li Cuizhen, and Wu Leyi, were trained during this time. They reached a high level of performance in a short period of formal training and became influential pianists in China during this period (Zhang, 2017).

### **Piano Teaching During the War of Resistance**

The War of Resistance against Japan began in 1937 and ended in 1945. During this time, many outstanding pianists trained at the Shanghai National Conservatory moved to different parts of the country. They taught in cities and provinces such as Beijing, Tianjin, Xian, Shenyang, Harbin, Changchun, Wuhan, Guangzhou, Fujian, and Sichuan. They became a main force in the development of the piano program in China.

The years between Japan's surrender and the Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Party) retiring to Taiwan in 1949 were a transition for piano study and performance. Some pianists studying abroad came back to China: Li Cuizhen (in Britain), Li Jialu (in the U.S.), and Wu Leyi (in France). Thus, the first generation of Chinese pianists took shape. Their return from studying in foreign countries played a key role in promoting the spread of Western music and culture in China. During this period, pianists such as Ding Shande, Fan Jisen, Wu Leyi, and Li Cuizhen successfully held solo concerts in China.

### **Representative Figures of Piano Teaching**

Both foreign musicians and Chinese pianists who studied abroad made some outstanding contributions to piano teaching in China. Foreign musicians included Mario Paci (1878-1946), an Italian conductor and pianist; Boris Zakharoff (1888-1943), a Russian pianist and music educator; and Viadimir A. Gartz, a Russian musician. In the early 20th century, Li Shutong, Shen Xingong, Wang Zhichao, and Zeng Zhimin were the first Chinese pianists to study in Japan. Li Shuhua, pianist, theorist, and educator, studied at the Lyon Conservatory of Music in France.

Wang Ruixian was the first pianist to study in the United States. She received Bachelor's and Master's degrees in piano performance from the New England Conservatory in Boston, Massachusetts. These pianists brought new ideas, music, and teaching materials back to China. After returning to China, they worked in middle and normal music schools to educate piano teachers in China and apply their piano teaching philosophy.

Most students needed more access to materials brought back to China from other countries. However, some materials were translated and published in Chinese. Some of these books included Xiao Youmei's *New Piano Textbook*, Zhou Lingsun's *Piano Textbook* Volumes 1 and 2, and Qi Erpin's *Piano Textbook of the Pentatonic Scale* (Li, 2009).

## **Piano Teaching in China from the Founding of the People's Republic of China to the Cultural Revolution**

After the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, the conservatories in Beijing and Shanghai were designated as the major schools for music study. The two conservatories had the most advanced teaching facilities, gathering excellent pianists and educators as lecturers. The piano departments became nationwide centers for teaching, performing, and research.

In the mid-1950s, conservatories in China established a system of affiliated primary and middle schools that ensured the quality of students, trained professional musicians, and strengthened piano education. In addition to the conservatories in Shanghai and Beijing, conservatories were established in other regions of China, such as the Tianjin Conservatory of Music, Shenyang Conservatory of Music, Sichuan Conservatory of Music, Wuhan Conservatory of Music, Xi'an Conservatory of Music, and Xinghai Conservatory of Music. Independent piano departments also were set up in higher education institutions such as local Art Institutions and Normal Universities.

Chinese piano teaching captured world attention during this period, with young Chinese pianists stepping onto the international stage. From 1951 to 1964, 32 pianists participated in eight international competitions, and 13 pianists won 23 prizes. It was an important period for Chinese pianists and a sign of the unprecedented improvement that Chinese pianists had made.

The Cultural Revolution began in 1966 and continued through 1976. During this political unrest, piano education suffered, and developments in music study that had begun in the mid-1950s were severely impacted (Yoon, 2018).

## **The Need for Piano Teaching Materials**

Before founding the People's Republic of China, piano teaching materials in China were limited. The most popular teaching materials were Ferdinand Beyer's *Elementary Method for the Piano* Op.101; Carl Czerny's *Etudes* Op.599, Op.849, and Op.299; selected sonatinas by various composers; and Charles Louis Hanon's *The Virtuoso Pianist in Sixty Exercises*.

Outdated, to some extent, these publications restrained students' creativity and made piano teaching quite rigid.

Even in the late 1950s, some Chinese piano teachers instructed students to place a coin on the back of the hand to develop hand position. Moreover, some teachers believed that playing with rising fingers was the only viable technical approach and ignored other technical approaches that focused on touch and tone color. Consequently, teaching fostered tension in the whole body from the shoulder, arm, and wrist to the palm. This created a sound that was dry and lacked richer tones (Pei, 2016).

Innovative piano teaching materials began to appear in China during this time. Pianists who had studied overseas brought back a variety of new piano works. In addition, some educators wrote materials that included Chinese music as part of teaching materials. Among these newer materials were *Preliminary Piano Lessons for Adults*, edited by faculty from the

Central Conservatory of Music; *Children's Preliminary for Piano Lessons*, edited by faculty from the affiliated primary school of Shanghai Conservatory of Music; *Children's First Piano Lessons* by Ding Shande; and *Piano Etudes in Pentatonic Mode* by Li Yinghai. Piano Teaching in China from the Beginning of the Reform and Opening Policy to the End of the 20th Century.

### **Piano Teaching Flourishes**

China embarked on a new round of historic social changes when the Cultural Revolution was over. In a speech at the end of 1978, Deng Xiaoping set forth the Reform and Opening Policy, giving China a new look. In the field of piano, teachers were allowed to communicate and cooperate with international pianists and educators. In the early period of the Reform and Opening, this communication extended to pedagogy, teaching materials, audio and visual aids, and research related to professional piano teaching. During the rise of piano fever in the 1980s, many talented students were admitted to various professional music schools and departments. It also promoted the development of piano education for amateurs and the standards related to the quality of piano teaching.

The Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing and the Shanghai Conservatory of Music again started to recruit students after the Cultural Revolution. They were approved to offer a master's degree in piano, which provided a more theoretical platform for piano teaching research in piano teaching. Influenced by the two main conservatories, other conservatories and colleges in the country expanded their enrollment and began to offer master's and doctoral degrees in piano. In addition to the existing music schools, many art colleges and universities with piano departments were established in other provinces and cities.

### **Piano Teacher Training Materials**

Several books that presented different perspectives on piano teaching and performance were written during this period. Books on piano pedagogy included *Piano Pedagogy* by Ying Shizhen, *Piano Pedagogy* by Zhu Gongyi, and *Simple Piano Pedagogy* by Wu Tieying and Sun Mingzhu. Other books on piano teaching included *358 Questions of Piano Study Guide* by Wei Tingge and *Children's Piano Study Guide* by Wei Xiaofan. Other Chinese books related to piano performance and teaching were significant for developing piano education. *Basic Training on Piano Performance* by Zhou Guangren and *How to Perform the Piano* by Zhao Xiaosheng discussed subjects related to piano performance. *The Way to Learn the Piano* by Wu Yuan and *Children's Road of Piano Learning* by Wei Xiaofan treated how students progress and learn. Information about piano examinations was featured in *Piano Grading Test and Piano Teaching* by Zhou Mingsun and *The Performance Guide of Piano Grading Test Repertoire* by Zhang Jingwei.

### **Chinese Piano Teaching Materials**

Piano teachers and music publishers worked together to create piano teaching materials to appeal to Chinese students. For example, *Li Chongguang's Selected Piano Music for Children* and *Selected Chinese Polyphonic Piano Music*, compiled by People's Music Publishing House, includes music that features Chinese characteristics. *Children's Finger Exercises* by Li Feilan and *Children's Piano Preliminary Course* by Sheng Yijian, Yang Suning, and Zhang Yongqing, and *Interesting Piano Course for Children* by Chen Fumei are

piano method-type materials for children. *Basic Piano Courses (1-4)* and *Application of Piano Course for Adults (1-2)* by Huang Peiying and Li Juhong were compiled for adults and students at Normal Universities. *Basic Technical Training of Piano* by Li Jialu and *Basic Piano Course -- Scales and Arpeggios* by Chen Qingfeng are books for basic technical training.

## Foreign Piano Materials

After the Reform and Opening, many piano scores of Western music came to the country. These materials featured music ranging from the Baroque period to Twentieth-Century Music. Editions of the major works of Bach, along with classical works by Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert, made this repertoire more accessible to students. Romantic and twentieth-century works by Schumann, Chopin, Liszt, Debussy, Ravel, Rachmaninoff, Prokofiev, Grieg, Bartok, and Schoenberg became readily available.

Because Chinese piano teachers attached great importance to technical training, People's Music Publishing House published several opuses of Czerny etudes, including Op. 139, 599, 849, 636, 718, 299, 812, 748, 588, and 740. Intermediate-level etudes such as those by Burgmüller and Lemoine and advanced etudes by Clementi, Moskowski, Chopin, Liszt, Debussy, Rachmaninoff, and Scriabin became readily available. Introducing and publishing such piano works broadened the selection of piano teaching materials and repertoire for students. At the same time, the music increased Chinese students' understanding of piano art music from around the world.

## Pre-College Piano Teaching in China Today

### The Development and Prosperity of Pre-College Piano Teaching

Following the Reform and Opening Policy, China's economic and cultural development entered a new era. The living standard of Chinese people increased unprecedentedly. This promoted the development of piano education in China so that many ordinary families could access the arts, including piano music.

In the early 1980s, people only could hear piano music through television, radio broadcasts, and recordings, so they barely knew Western piano art. Although Chinese piano education developed rapidly in the mid-20th century, cultivating a large group of professional pianists, piano educators, composers, and international competition winners, the piano was kept from the general public.

When discussing the popularization of piano education in the early 1980s, Zhou Guangren said, "As most people do not understand piano music, they should carry out the popularization of education to promote and improve their music appreciation ability. We are always upon the general public, playing difficult repertoire without thinking about the majority of the audience, which is inappropriate. As a professional piano educator, I feel it is my responsibility to popularize music so people can understand."

To popularize piano music further in China, Zhou founded two private piano schools for amateurs in Beijing in 1983: Xinghai Youth Piano School and Yueyou Piano School. She hired outstanding teachers such as Zhou Mingsun and Li Qifang. Other well-known contemporary piano schools were opened, including the Nieer Piano School, founded by the Shanghai Conservatory, and piano schools, founded by the Central Conservatory of Music in Guangzhou and Taiyuan.

Some other art centers and piano schools were established. These institutions often sold pianos and engaged in artistic performer exchanges in addition to teaching piano. Such schools included Beijing Jiangjie Piano City, founded in 1985; Qinchuan Art School, founded in 1986; Liu Shikun Art Center, founded in 1992; and Tianmu Piano Company, founded in 1992.

In the 21st century, many piano schools run like a business. Piano study is now possible for ordinary families who love music and the piano. The piano is a sign of elegance from Western culture and has become a symbol to the Chinese population. People who play the piano have high cultural and artistic temperaments. The increased interest in studying piano reflects the general population's interest and pursuit of high art while, at the same time, music literacy is increased. Therefore, the basic educational idea of "learning piano from childhood" leads many parents to spend money to buy a piano and to pay tuition for children to begin playing piano at an early age (Qin, 2012).

#### The Popularization of Piano Exams

In 1991, the Chinese Musician's Association was the first organization in China to adopt a grading system that identifies the level of each amateur pianist. It published six sets of materials to prepare for the certification exam. The Chinese Musician's Association Committee edited the newest edition and published it by Xinhua Press in 2007.

Students are required to perform selections in four different areas for the exam. The components of each level follow:

#### Levels 1-2:

1. Scales and Arpeggios
2. Etudes
3. Chinese Pieces

#### Western Pieces Levels 3-7

1. Scales and Arpeggios
2. Etudes
3. Contrapuntal Pieces using Counterpoint

#### Chinese or Western Pieces Levels 8-10

1. Scales and Arpeggios
2. Etudes
3. Pieces from the Baroque to Classical Periods
4. Pieces from the Romantic to Contemporary Periods

The original goal of certification exams in China was to popularize and promote piano education and standardize piano teaching. Through the certification exam, students obtain an evaluation from the committee that encourages them (especially the beginners) and points out their weaknesses. This helps teachers plan for further study for the students.

In his book, *The Latest Piano Lecture*, piano educator Shao Yiqiang analyzed some characteristics of *John Thompson's Easiest Piano Course*. Among the conclusions was that the included piano duets can reduce a child's anxiety in early levels and study. The music with images, titles, lyrics, and illustrations provides children with a clear first impression before they learn a new piece. The music gradually expands the reading range from Middle C so that children grasp the relationship between the score and the position on the keyboard.

Zhou Haihong, a professor of piano at the Central Conservatory of Music, offered a different opinion of this course. He believes it is not an ideal piano method because it does not have a foundation in children's cognitive psychology. He also feels that the arrangement of concepts is problematic. For example, the introduction of rhythm starts from the understanding

of the whole note, and students count four beats before establishing the concept of establishing the pulse. In this way, students mechanically count 1-2-3-4 but may not understand that the four numbers are the pulse. In addition, Middle C is at the bottom of the treble staff on a leger line rather than on the staff itself. The leger line can be confusing if children do not know the relationship between the lines and the spaces.

*Bastien Piano Basics* by James and Jane Bastien, a method from the United States, was introduced in China in 1997. It has five levels, from Primer Level to Level 4. Each level includes a lesson book, theory book, performance book, technic book, and a sight-reading book. The pacing of this course gradually introduces new keys in groups of three and helps students digest and absorb each concept through reinforcement. Students consolidate what they have learned before new skills and concepts are introduced. The method has colorful and attractive illustrations, descriptive titles, and diverse styles of pieces. Many pieces were composed by the authors, while others are arrangements of folk songs or famous classical themes. Five-finger patterns are introduced in various keys before the entire scale appears. The authors of the course have visited China for workshops several times since it was introduced.

In 1998, Shanghai Education Publishing House introduced and published *Europäische Klavierschule (European Piano Method 1-3)* by Fritz Emonts. The concepts and music in this piano method combine with joyful illustrations that feature colorful and refined images to help develop children's imaginations. This series is divided into three volumes and is a comprehensive piano method especially written for beginners. The main concept of this method is "singing – listening – playing" and focuses on cultivating functional skills. The uniqueness of this book lies in the fact that it contains improvisations and accompaniments that help develop children's creative abilities. The music includes European folk tunes set in a relatively simple style.

In the 21st century, Chinese publishers have continued translating and publishing piano methods from other countries in Europe and the United States. Three different methods from the United States have been introduced in this century. A discussion of these methods follows.

In 2002, *Hunan Electronic Audio and Video Publishing House* published *Alfred's Basic Piano Course* by Willard A. Palmer, Morton Manus, and Amanda Vick Lethco. The piano method has seven levels, including a Lesson Book, Theory Book, Recital Book, and Technic Book at the various levels. In this method, new concepts are introduced step-by-step in a reading approach that combines elements from three common approaches from the United States – intervallic, multi-key, and Middle C. The repertoire covers different style periods and genres, allowing students to learn various music from the beginning (Xin, 2010).

Nancy and Randall Faber wrote the Piano Adventures series. It was published by the FJH Music Company in the United States in 1993. In China, it is published by People's Publishing House. This method has six levels: Primer level, Level 1, Level 2 (A and B), Level 3 (A and B), Level 4, and Level 5. Each level has a Lesson Book, Theory Book, Performance Book, and Technique and Artistry Book (Li, 2021).

The pages inside are colorful and set a good pace for beginners. Five-finger positions are presented in different keys, and various fingers are used to play Middle C from the beginning (in opposition to the Middle C method, which always plays the note with finger one). The Technique and Artistry Book is unique because it helps students build technique while incorporating artistic principles. The Lesson Book has a variety of pieces, both traditional and original, in different genres. This method introduces theoretical concepts and functional skills in the separate Theory Book.



*Alfred's Premier Piano Course* was written by Dennis Alexander, Gayle Kowalchyk, E. L. Lancaster, Victoria McArthur, and Martha Mier. It was published by Alfred Music Company in 2005 and introduced in China by Parsons Music. This method has six levels, Level 1 (A and B), Level 2 (A and B), Level 3, Level 4, Level 5, and Level 6. Each level contains a Lesson, Theory, Performance, and Technique Book. In the Chinese books, these four books are combined into two books at each level. The supplementary books include Pop and Movie Hits, Notespeller, Jazz, Rags & Blues, Duet, Masterworks, Sight Reading, At-Home, Assignment Book, and Christmas Books.

*Alfred's Premier Piano Course* offers various activities and exercises with colorful drawings for beginning piano students. This method introduces reading through landmark notes: Middle C, F (in the bass clef), and G (in the treble clef). Students learn to identify rhythms by patterns from the very beginning.

The method also emphasizes the development of a student's musicality and ability to play the piano freely and expressively. Students are taught to use arm weight and wrist movements to create different tone colors and dynamic indications. As students progress through the remaining levels of this piano method, they develop sight-reading skills, understand and expand their theory knowledge, and learn additional technical skills that help them play more advanced repertoire.

Other foreign piano methods published in China since 2000 include *My Piano and Me* by the British piano educators Fanny Waterman and Marion Hayward (2004) and the *Hal Leonard Student Piano Library* by Barbara Kreader, R. Fred, Kern, Philip Keveren and Mona Rejino (2005).

### **The Rise of Chinese Piano Methods for Children**

Additional Chinese methods have been introduced in this century based on the Chinese music culture and from influences of foreign piano methods. Some representative methods from the 1980s include *Piano Course for Children* by Li Wenlan and Dong Gangrui and *The Primer Piano Course for Children* by Sheng Yujian, Yang Suning, Zhang Yongqing, and Zhou Wenying.

Methods published in the 1990s include Xie Geng's *Piano Primer Course for Children*, published by People's Music Publishing House in 1993; Chen Fumei's *Interesting Piano Course for Children*, published by Anhui Literature and Art Publishing House in 1996; and Hua Min and Zhao Xiaosheng's *Piano Primer*, published by China Social Publishing House in 1999.

Methods published in the 21st century include *Piano Course for Chinese Children* by Ying Shizhen; *The New Primer and the Advancement of the Piano*, compiled by Dan Zhaoyi and Wang Yan; *The Colorful Notes of the Piano Primer for Children*, compiled by Cao Li, Liao Peiyan, and Mu Li; and *The New Ideas of Piano Series Course* (Premier Level), compiled by Bao Huiqiao, Zhang Shigu, and Shu Zechi.

Of the Chinese piano methods listed above, some primarily feature Chinese music selected from folk songs and children's songs. Some methods also contain foreign music from different periods. Most methods borrow the Middle C approach to introduce reading from *John Thompson's Easiest Piano Course*. In terms of designs and illustrations, Chinese piano methods are less colorful than those from foreign countries. On the contrary, Chinese piano methods focus more on training fingers and piano technique. Practical skills such as improvisation, accompaniment, sight-reading, and piano ensemble should be more involved. Despite the introduction of foreign piano methods and newer Chinese methods, traditional piano teachings

materials such as *John Thompson's Easiest Piano Course*, Ferdinand Beyer's *Elementary Method for the Piano* Op.101, and Carl Czerny's *Etudes* still are the mainstream of piano teaching.

## Conclusion

Through relevant research, architectural art deeply influences music creation, manifested in structural features, color changes, emotional connotations, and many other aspects. Understanding this kind of creative thinking is of great value for better interpretation and expression of musical works. In the following chapters, the author will describe the research work of this paper from three aspects: a theoretical overview of architectural thinking in music, how to apply architectural thinking in piano performance, and how to help students develop architectural thinking in piano teaching.

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