

# **The Limitations and Development of China Postgraduate Degree in Music**

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## **Abstract**

This academic article described the development of postgraduate music degrees in China, which declared in the background of postgraduate education, present situation, and development limitations. Postgraduate degrees in China have developed over 20 years. The limitations happened in many conditions, such as the geographical issue and lack of academic staff for postgraduate teaching. The music curriculums need to develop to meet international standards. The analysis and synthesis of knowledge were presented in the recommendation for teaching and learning and curriculum structure of music at the postgraduate level to provide knowledge and information for future development in the music curriculum.

**Keywords:** The Limitations and Development; China; Postgraduate Degree in Music

## **Introduction**

China has gone through 42 years since the reform and opening up in 1978. For more than 40 years, China's graduate education has experienced an extraordinary development process and has achieved many achievements. Primarily after Deng Xiaoping's southern talk was published in 1992, China's economy has developed rapidly, and people's living standards have been improving day by day. Therefore, it urgently demands the development of education to meet the needs of economic and social development and the people. At the third national education work conference in 1999, the central leaders decided to expand the scale of higher education. As of 2011, China has trained 400,000 scholars in doctoral degrees and 2.4 million scholars in master's degrees (Zhou, 2021). These graduate students have become the backbone of implementing the strategy of rejuvenating the country through science and education, leading figures in all walks of life, and a new force in economic and social development.

## **Educational Policy**

The Ministry of Education of China has decided to start full-time training for masters of professional degrees starting in 2009 and issue "double certificates," that is, graduation certificate and degree certificate. In 2011, it continued to implement the policy of transforming graduate student education from cultivating academic talents to developing application-oriented skills and realized the historical transformation and strategic adjustment of the graduate education structure (Yang, 2011).

According to the positioning of the Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council, professional degrees train specific high-level professionals. Unlike academic graduate

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education that focuses on theory and focuses educational research capabilities, professional degree education aims to cultivate innovative talents that combine theory and practice.

A professional degree is a type of degree relative to an academic degree. Its purpose is to train application-oriented high-level specialists who have a solid theoretical foundation and adapt to the needs of specific industries or occupations. ("Introduction to Professional Degrees," 2010) Professional degrees and academic degrees are at the same level, emphasizing training specifications and apparent differences in training goals. Disciplines establish academic degrees. There are academic research-oriented, focusing on theory and research, training university teachers and researchers in scientific research institutions. At the same time, professional degrees are oriented on professional practice, focusing on practice and application, and cultivating professional and technical skills. For high-level talents who have received formal and high-level training, the criteria for awarding the degree should reflect the characteristics of the professional field and the requirements for the high-level skills in terms of professional technical workability and academic ability.

The outstanding feature of professional degree education is the close integration of academics and professionalism. Those who obtain a professional degree are mainly not engaged in academic research but involved in a specific professional background. Due to its precise positioning in training objectives also has unique teaching methods, teaching content, standards, and requirements for awarding degrees.

## **Background of China's Postgraduate Degree in Music**

Postgraduate is a kind of education in higher education, which is generally carried out by ordinary colleges and universities with master's degrees and doctoral degrees and scientific research institutions for postgraduate training qualifications. In China, graduate students are mainly divided into full-time and part-time. Full-time students enrolled through the admission examinations of master and doctoral. Students held by various colleges and universities, with a minimum duration of 2 years or three years; part-time graduate students mainly refer to working graduate students, working while studying for a master's degree. The range of postgraduate students discussed in this article is full-time postgraduate students.

In the last two decades, China's master's degree in music was relatively small, and it was mainly to train academic talents for teaching and research positions. At that time, the professional degree education was mainly aimed at the in-service staff who had already worked to meet their requirements for in-service improvement. To this end, the Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council has opened channels for in-service personnel to pursue professional degree education and implemented part-time training, which greatly meets the desire of in-service social personnel to learn and improve (Bünning, 2011). However, professional degree education in music is to meet the needs of existing incumbents and, more importantly, to attract excellent students, adjust and optimize the training structure of postgraduate students, become the main body of postgraduate education, and become an essential aspect of postgraduate education high-level talent training. Therefore, professional degree education has a dual-task. One is to attract outstanding fresh graduates, implement a full-time learning method, and cultivate the application-oriented talents required by the practice department. It is to provide part-time learning methods for in-service personnel. Two modes, two learning methods, and two recruitment targets, but the same training goals are equally important.

## Areas of Study in Postgraduate Music Degree

The training of postgraduates majoring in music in China is mainly divided into three research directions, namely musicology, music performance, and music education. ("Notice of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance and the National Development and Reform Commission on the announcement of the list of world-class universities and first-class discipline construction universities and disciplines", 2017)

Musicology major mainly emphasizes higher-level academic exploration and theoretical research on the main noumenon of art. At the same time, it also focuses on cultivating students' pioneering thinking and innovative ideas in the process of artistic creation and be able to master the cultural concept and creative mode of thinking of music artists from the philosophical level. There is the direction of Piano Performance Art and Theory Research. The research content is piano performance art and teaching research, piano art theory research. It mainly cultivates advanced piano art theory and skills, a broader knowledge structure, and senior talents capable of piano performance and teaching, theoretical research, and management in schools and other institutions. This direction trains students to pay more attention to improving their music theory level, especially for graduation. It requires students to publish academic papers in academic journals during their studies at school.

Music performance major mainly meets the professional needs of social employment departments and trains advanced technical application professionals who have professional knowledge and artistic literacy of music performance and can master the professional skills of music performance. Attach importance to the ability of graduates in the application of knowledge and technology. The training requirement of piano performance direction in this major is to master music theory, music history, Chinese and foreign folk music, music aesthetics, the necessary technical basis of composition and specific literary skills, and particular emphasis on a high level of music piano performance ability. Students will give at least two solo concerts (including ensemble and chamber music) during their stay at school. The word requirement for a graduation thesis is relatively lower than that for musicology majors. Students graduate from the main jobs to play, such as social art groups, orchestra piano performance, choir piano accompaniment, vocal art guidance, and piano teaching.

Music education major mainly trains and brings up specialized talents with good music literacy and teaching abilities that meet the needs of socialist market economy construction and educational reform and development. In the music education major, students will learn to develop professional skills for music teachers systematically. Mastery of the fundamental theories and methods of music education should use learned knowledge to analyze, solve practical problems, conduct teaching research, and engage in new music education in primary and secondary schools. Students are required to have strong vocal and instrumental performance skills and music appreciation and discrimination skills. Also, the analysis methods of musical works, and have a certain ability to compose music; can organize music education and teaching activities, cultural activities, and competitions, possess particular music education and scientific research abilities. The employment direction of graduates mainly engages in music teachers or management work in primary and secondary schools, enterprises, institutions, and mass organizations. ("Notice of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance and the National Development and Reform Commission on the announcement of the list of world-class universities and first-class discipline construction universities and disciplines", 2017)

## **Limitations of China's postgraduate degree in music**

### **Geographical imbalance**

As China has a vast territory and many provinces, the economic and cultural development of various areas and regions has a certain degree of imbalance, so it is also reflected in graduate education in music disciplines in colleges and universities. The specific performance is as follows: there are relatively many universities in the eastern coastal provinces with high population density and rich resources, so the development of music graduate education is relatively fast. On the contrary, the development of the central and western regions is relatively slow.

### **Human Resources**

Affected by regional and economic development, cities in the eastern coastal provinces have higher living standards, and colleges and universities are more likely to attract high-level music teachers. Music teachers have a relatively high proportion of teachers with high academic qualifications and high professional titles. The central and western regions face more problems in the construction of the teaching staff. These differences in education levels due to the imbalance of teachers' salaries are also a major problem.

### **Imbalance of teaching facilities, education level and communication opportunities**

In China, large cities and capital cities of eastern coastal provinces have unique advantages in education and cultural exchanges. In cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, and other cities, the teaching conditions of universities are excellent, there are many large-scale music venues, and international academic exchange opportunities are very frequent. Music teachers and students have more opportunities for observation, artistic practice, and educational exchanges. They greatly promoted and improved the level of music graduate education in these areas. A virtuous circle pattern has been formed, while other regions do not have such good conditions.

### **The impact of graduate employment on music graduate education**

Graduates in big cities have more job opportunities and positions. The work pay is relatively higher, which will have a particular impact on the enrollment and education of music graduate students. Areas with good conditions are easier to find high-quality students, the quality of teaching improves faster, and students can discover relatively satisfactory jobs after graduation. However, underdeveloped areas need more support and help from society and related education departments to keep healthy development.

## **Development of postgraduate degree in China: case study the master's education in Piano Performance**

### **Overall status**

In the past 30 years, the number of students enrolled in music colleges in China has been large every year, which has led to the increasing number of students enrolled in music majors in universities. The graduate degree education of Chinese Master of Arts began in the 1990s and has been developing for nearly 30 years.

In 2000, "Several Opinions of the Ministry of Education on Strengthening and Improving Postgraduate Training" pointed out that "postgraduate training implements a flexible academic system. The length of study for master students is generally 2-3 years, which is determined by the training unit itself. Graduate students are allowed to complete their studies in stages, and the maximum number of years for students to accumulate is stipulated." In 2009, the Ministry of Education issued "Several Opinions on Doing a Good Job in the Training of

Full-time Master Degree Graduates", and decided to expand the recruitment of full-time master degree majors focusing on fresh graduates, stipulating that full-time master degree graduates The length of study is generally 2 years. In practice, the length of study for full-time master's degree graduates is generally stipulated as 2 years, 2.5 years or 3 years, and many colleges and universities implement 2-3 years of flexible academic system. But at present, most colleges and universities basically implement a three-year system.

In order to ensure and improve the academic standards of graduate education, universities have borrowed the advanced experience of foreign universities and combined with the actual situation in China, regularly adjust and improve each major based on the three principles of "based on research, strengthened practice and meeting the needs of social talents." The training program of the research direction will increase the proportion of credits for thesis writing, teaching practice and art practice.

## Teaching characteristics

China has the following characteristics in the teaching of Master of Piano Arts:

a. The teaching staff has been optimized and strengthened, and the teaching facilities have been improved

Encourage young and middle-aged teachers to pursue advanced studies and communicate with other music schools at home and abroad. Inviting famous visiting scholars and visiting professors to open special lectures for different majors. Actively develop exchanges and cooperation in running schools with foreign music schools, and strive to improve the quality of running schools. Constantly enrich the music equipment and materials, such as grand piano for playing, piano for student practice, modern multimedia teaching equipment, various audiovisual materials, music periodicals, music scores, etc.

b. Try to diversify the teaching reform and explore the reform plan of higher teaching quality

Pay attention to the role of seminar in the course system, encourage students to read more, think and practice writing frequently, conduct in-depth research on music works, dig out its background style and technical processing, etc.; listen to audio materials during the learning process and compare different versions , Analyze the performance style of different works; participate in different forms of concerts to observe and study, draw essence from other people's performances, improve their own shortcomings and so on.

c. Provide students with the opportunity to perform on stage and form a strong music performance atmosphere

Regular music salons are held to discuss related topics. Students regularly take turns in the weekend concert to report on the performance, exercise performance and effectively improve some students' psychological quality problems. Set up special lectures for teachers, invite colleagues from other music colleges to hold solo concerts, let students listen more, watch more and think more, consciously hone their performance level in the atmosphere of frequent music performance.

China's piano master's education, in line with the idea of cultivating students' comprehensive music quality, strives to improve their performance ability in their professional fields, in order to adapt to the future performance and teaching work, and to transport high-quality piano professionals to the Chinese music culture market and educational institutions.

### **Example course setting -- College of Music, Shandong Normal University**

Taking Shandong Normal University as an example, make a general understanding of the course setting of the master student of piano performance in China

#### **Curriculum and credits**

Master of Arts professional degree curriculum is divided into public courses, professional compulsory courses and professional practice, professional elective courses. Public courses should focus on improving the overall quality of graduate students and expanding their aesthetic horizons; professional compulsory courses should focus on improving the level of professional skills of graduate students, deepening and broadening the professional knowledge of graduate students, improving the comprehensive artistic accomplishment of graduate students, enhancing the ability to understand works and the comprehensive ability in creative expression and style presentation of works. The elective courses of major should have a wide range of contents and various forms, provide more choice for students, and provide certain space for students' personality development. Students can take courses according to their interests and professional direction, in order to help improve the comprehensive quality of students.

The total credits of the art master's degree courses and practical links should be no less than 52 credits, of which practical courses and links should account for more than 60%. The specific course credits are set as follows: 8 credits for public courses, 22 credits for professional required courses, 14 credits for professional practice, and no less than 8 credits for professional elective courses (four courses).

#### **Evaluation index of professional practice**

##### **1) Art Practice (4 credits)**

Under the guidance of the instructor, it is necessary to reasonably arrange and participate in art practice activities such as on-campus and off-campus performances. Among them, participate in the on-campus performance projects no less than twice. The instructor evaluates the performance grade, time, level, etc. based on the media or other supporting materials submitted by the student. After passing the test, the student will receive credits.

##### **2) Teaching Practice (4 credits)**

Must be reasonably arranged under the guidance of the instructor, participate in teaching practice of no less than 30 hours and must submit 1. Syllabus, lesson plans; 2. Video of teaching achievement display; 3. Teaching practice summary; 4. Feedback materials from the school where the internship is located. Credits will be given after identification by the tutor.

##### **3) Artistic observation (3 credits)**

Observe all kinds of live stage art performances no less than three times and have to submit 1. Each show program list and show photos; 2. Each performance review article more than 1500 words. Credit shall be granted upon confirmation by the Academic Council of the College.

##### **4) Social Services (3 credits)**

To participate in all kinds of social services, college services, public welfare activities, etc. organized by the College, the individual provides a list of service items, which shall be recognized by the academic committee of the college and given credit.

#### **Graduation appraisal**

Applicants for a master's degree in the arts must complete the graduation requirements for the presentation of professional competence and thesis defense while taking prescribed courses and obtaining prescribed credits. Professional ability exhibition and thesis defense

together as the evaluation basis of professional level of master of arts professional degree applicants. Professional ability shows the professional skill level of the applicant, and the thesis defense reflects the comprehensive quality and theoretical expounding ability of the applicant to apply professional skills. Professional ability display and thesis defense should be open, professional ability display to meet the level of eligibility before thesis defense.

### **Professional competency demonstration**

(1) The performance direction (vocal, piano, electronic organ) requires 2 degree concerts of different repertoires, the first one is in the third semester, the second one is in the fourth and fifth semesters, each pure performance time is not less than 40 Minutes; the type of the repertoire must include solo (sing), ensemble (sing) or chamber music, concerto; the style of the repertoire should encompass multiple periods and multiple genres, and at least include 2 (part) classic works from the 20th century and one excellent modern and contemporary works.

(2) Music education requires 2 teaching demonstrations, the first in the third semester, the second in the fourth and fifth semester, each presentation time is not less than 20 minutes. Teaching content and objects are unlimited, must provide syllabus, teaching plan and courseware.

### **Dissertation requirements**

Applicants for professional degrees in this field should submit their dissertations and complete the defense.

Specific requirements are as follows:

1. The dissertation must be consistent with the content of the professional ability display. According to the theoretical knowledge and professional characteristics, the dissertation should analyze and elaborate the problems encountered in professional practice.

2. Academic thesis should conform to the academic norms and standards and styles agreed by the academic circle, and all misconduct should be avoided.

3. The core part of the thesis (body conclusion) should be no less than 5,000 words (excluding notation and charts). According to their own performance or practice, the paper should be attached to the corresponding audio-visual materials CD-ROM.

### **Graduation Assessment Committee**

The graduation assessment committee is composed of 3-5 experts with senior professional titles in relevant fields to assess whether the professional ability display of degree applicants and the thesis defense have reached the qualified level. The assessment results shall be recorded in the archives based on the results given by the graduation assessment committee, and used as a reference for the defense (for specific assessment methods, please refer to the "Requirements for the Graduation Assessment of Graduate Students of the Conservatory of Music").

## **Conclusion**

At present, the postgraduates of piano playing art in China are mainly trained according to the requirements of the Ministry of Education. The training work of national key universities and provincial first-class undergraduate universities is well organized, and the quality of personnel training is excellent. The vast majority of students who can graduate typically can adapt well to their performance and teaching requirements. However, the work of piano performance postgraduates in remote areas and local universities lags. That is, how to carry out and improve the training of postgraduates in the art of piano performance in local universities, which accounts for a large proportion in number, is a problem that must be faced

in the all-round and healthy development of postgraduate education in the art of piano performance in China. It is necessary to think comprehensively and pertinently and take corresponding measures to promote the education of postgraduates in piano performance in China to move towards a more three-dimensional and characteristic development path.

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