

# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AESTHETIC EXPRESSION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF PERFORMANCE STYLE AMONG CHINESE PIANO MAJOR STUDENTS\*

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## Abstract

In the context of globalization and the diversification of music education, piano pedagogy increasingly faces the challenge of balancing technical training with aesthetic cultivation. This study investigates the relationship between aesthetic expression and the development of performance style among Chinese piano major students. A quantitative empirical design was adopted, integrating musical form analysis, performance comparison, semi-structured interviews, and multi-dimensional data collection. The sample consisted of 20 third-year piano majors from Shandong University (Weihai), divided into experimental and control groups, with Wan Fanjie's Night of the Torch Festival as the core repertoire. Quantitative indicators included performance technical parameters (e.g., key touch depth and tempo variation) and Likert-scale evaluations. The results reveal a strong positive correlation between aesthetic expression and performance style ( $r = 0.81$ ). Following targeted intervention, the coefficient of variation in core technical parameters decreased significantly from 28.6% to 12.3%, indicating

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enhanced performance stability. Moreover, aesthetic expression was found to substantially improve clarity, consistency, and artistic expressiveness in piano performance. These findings provide empirical evidence supporting the critical role of aesthetic training in performance development and offer practical implications for piano pedagogy, particularly in the interpretation of Chinese ethnic piano works.

**Keywords:** Piano major students, Aesthetic expression, Performance style, Teaching strategies, Cross-cultural integration

## Introduction

As an essential element of music education, piano education is undergoing unprecedented changes and challenges due to globalization and diversification. Piano music is a key tool for cross-cultural communication as international cultural exchanges increase. Piano performers must be culturally aware and have cross-cultural aesthetic skills in such an environment (Sun, 2025). The aesthetic expression and performance style development of piano majors are crucial for measuring artistic achievement and developing essential skills for future music careers. Piano education must balance technical and aesthetic development. Some educational institutions overemphasize technical training and neglect students' aesthetic emotions and artistic imagination, resulting in superficial, unappealing performances. With the integration of multicultural music, piano repertoire styles are becoming more diverse, from Baroque to Modernist, from German-Austrian rigor to Russian passion and French delicacy. Learning each style requires deep understanding and unique interpretation. Diversity tests students' technical mastery, aesthetic expression, and performance style (Wang, 2024). Chinese piano works also present new piano education opportunities and challenges. Chinese piano works blend traditional melodies with Western musical expression techniques, blending tradition and modernity.

Performers must master Western musical techniques while understanding Chinese national culture to convey national charm and emotional tension through tone color, rhythm, and ornamentation. In current piano education, how to integrate Chinese piano works into the teaching process and help students develop unique aesthetic expressions and performance styles is still a challenge. This study examines the relationship between aesthetic expression and performance style in Shandong University at Weihai piano majors, the factors that influence their development, and recommendations for pedagogical strategies. We hope to provide a scientific basis for piano education, promote the synergistic development of students' aesthetic expression and performance style, and develop piano talents with a deep artistic foundation and excellent expressive ability through in-depth research. Besides improving piano education, this dissertation helps spread Chinese piano art internationally.

This study reveals the complex interactive relationship between aesthetic expression and performance style by analyzing their intrinsic connection and development path, enriching the content of music education psychology and performance art theory. The proposed cross-cultural integration and innovation concept responds to the diversification and internationalization trend of music education, providing new perspectives for the innovation and development of music education theory. The research results provide a scientific teaching basis for university piano education, helping teachers optimize teaching strategies and effectively improve students' aesthetic expression ability and style formation level. It encourages students to explore multi-cultural musical elements, broadens their artistic horizons, and enhances their professional competitiveness, which is conducive to their long-term artistic development.

## Objectives

1. study the relationship between aesthetic expression and performance style
2. analyze the multifaceted factors influencing the development of aesthetic expression and performance style
3. conduct an empirical research study collecting data from 20 people; analyze the data using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and significance test.

Hypotheses:

H1: Aesthetic expression is significantly positively correlated with performance style maturity.

H2: Technical foundation, cultural background, teaching environment, and personal traits jointly predict the development of both variables.

H3: Diversified integrated teaching strategies significantly improve students' aesthetic expression and performance style.

## Literature Review

### 1. Theoretical Basis

Hanslick's theory emphasizes that the beauty of music lies in the artistic combination of musical tones itself, independent of external emotional content. In piano performance, this theory guides students to focus on the formal elements such as melody, harmony, and rhythm, and convey musical ideas through precise control, avoiding excessive subjective emotional rendering, which helps to form a rigorous and profound performance style (Hanslick, 1980).

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics holds that "understanding" is the way of human existence, and it is necessary to return to concrete historical and individual situations to achieve true understanding. This theory guides the research to pay attention to the unique growth experience and personality traits

of individual students, and understand the formation process of their aesthetic expression and performance style from a holistic and developmental perspective (Gadamer, 2010).

Peter Kevi's theory emphasizes the dynamic balance between historical authenticity and modern aesthetics in musical performance. Performers need to respect the structural logic of the work while integrating personal creative expression. This theory provides a theoretical basis for students to balance tradition and innovation in style formation, and guides them to achieve the unity of technical accuracy and emotional expression (Kevi, 2005).

The core of this theory is that aesthetic communication is a process of meaning generation and transmission through symbolic forms. In piano performance, factors such as aesthetic context, code, and medium interact to affect the effect of aesthetic expression. It guides students to construct a reasonable performance context based on the cultural background of the work and convey complete aesthetic experience through technical means (Feng, 2005).

This study reconciles Hanslick's formalism (emphasizing musical structure) with Gadamer's hermeneutics (emphasizing individual understanding) within the context of Chinese ethnic piano music. Structural accuracy ensures stylistic authenticity, while individual interpretation enriches expressive identity, forming a balanced framework for performance.

## **2. Related Literature**

This research review on piano major students increasingly investigates their aesthetic expression and performance style, highlighting interpretative individuality, technical embodiment, and stylistic awareness as fundamental dimensions influencing artistic identity in higher music education.

Current research shows that the aesthetic expression of piano major students presents a trend of diversification, but there is still a phenomenon of "emphasizing technique over aesthetics" in teaching (Cai, 2025). Technical

foundation, cultural background, and teaching environment are the main factors affecting aesthetic expression (Hu, 2015). In cross-cultural contexts, students' cross-cultural aesthetic ability has become an important factor affecting their aesthetic expression level (Hou, 2024).

The performance style of piano major students is affected by multiple factors such as musical genre, cultural background, and personal traits. Different schools (such as German-Austrian school, Russian school) have distinct style characteristics, which have an important impact on students' style formation (Liu, 2025). With the integration of multi-cultural elements, the integration and innovation of performance styles have become a new development trend (Lei, 2025).

Existing studies have confirmed that there is a mutual influence relationship between aesthetic expression and performance style, but the research on their interaction mechanism and dynamic evolution process is not in-depth enough. Most studies focus on single-factor analysis, lacking a comprehensive exploration of multi-dimensional influencing factors. At the same time, there is a lack of empirical verification on the effectiveness of diversified teaching strategies targeting the coordinated development of the two.

Previous studies tend to rely on qualitative analysis or single-factor testing, lacking rigorous mixed-methods designs. This study addresses the gap by combining quantitative technical measurement, questionnaire statistics, and qualitative interview data to improve validity.

Recent 2024–2025 studies are systematically reviewed to demonstrate the current state of the art in piano pedagogy, aesthetic training, and performance style formation.

## Methodology

### 1. Research Samples

Twenty third-year undergraduate students majoring in piano from the School of Music and Dance of Shandong University (Weihai) were selected. All samples have completed systematic basic piano training, passed the advanced piano performance assessment (technical difficulty level equivalent to Czerny 740), and have no significant differences in gender, technical foundation, and learning background. They have completed the basic learning of "Huobajie Zhiye Song" (Torch Festival Night) by Wan Fanjie and have not received special aesthetic guidance or participated in related performances.

### 2. Methods

The performance variations among the experimental group, the control group, and the instructor were analyzed using Huobajie Zhiye Song (Torch Festival Night) by Wan Fanjie as the practice piece, focusing on three dimensions: structural analysis, technical anchoring, and aesthetic concretization. clarify the relationship among the five-section structure of the work, ethnic elements, core techniques, and aesthetic expression orientation, while quantifying variation in performance through technical parameters such as key touch depth and speed.

Develop an interview framework focused on "the performer's comprehension of form, technique, and aesthetics," integrating abstract notions with particular segments of Huobajie Zhiye Song (Torch Festival Night) to facilitate the elucidation of the interviewee's perspectives. The interview content encompasses the understanding of the relationship between musical form and aesthetics, the aesthetic rationale behind technique selection, and the attribution of stylistic variations.

### 3. Research Tools

Huobajie Zhiye Song (Torch Festival Night) by Wan Fanjie Form - Technique - Aesthetic Correspondence Scale: Self-constructed, encompassing

four dimensions: paragraph structure, core ethnic elements, key techniques, and aesthetic expression orientation, each with 3-4 specific indicators.

Instrument for measuring performance technical parameters: Roland FP-90X electric piano linked to Audacity audio analysis software to record technical metrics including key touch depth, speed variation, and pedal duration.

Semi-structured interview framework: 3 modules, comprising a total of 12 questions, with each question aligned to a specific section of the work.

Huobajie Zhiye Song (Torch Festival Night) Performance Aesthetic Evaluation Questionnaire: Utilizes a 5-point Likert scale, encompassing four fundamental dimensions: musical form perception, ethnic style restoration, emotional transmission, and technical support.

#### **4. Data Collection**

The data collection is carried out in three stages:

Pre-collection stage: Record the technical data of the two groups of students' performances, conduct initial semi-structured interviews, and collect audience evaluation data as baseline data.

Process collection stage: Observe classroom teaching and after-class practice twice a week, fill in the structured observation record form, and conduct brief interviews every two weeks to record dynamic adjustments in students' aesthetic cognition.

Final collection stage: Record the technical parameters of the two groups of students' final performances, conduct final semi-structured interviews, and collect audience evaluation data after intervention.

#### **5. Data Analysis**

Use descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and difference significance test to analyze the collected data. Through the collation and analysis of multi-source data such as performance technical parameters, interview records, and audience evaluations, the relationship between aesthetic expression and

performance style, influencing factors, and the effect of teaching strategies are explored.

## Results

### 1. The Relationship between Aesthetic Expression and Performance Style

#### 1.1 Dynamic Mutual Shaping Relationship

Aesthetic preferences guide the direction of technical selection: 80% of the students in the experimental group with clear aesthetic preferences adopted targeted technical strategies, such as heavy key touch in the introduction section to simulate the timbre of the sanxian, a large traditional Chinese three-stringed lute of the Yi ethnic group, and their performance style was more distinct. Technical selection solidifies style characteristics: after 8 weeks of targeted training, the coefficient of variation of core technical parameters of the experimental group decreased from 28.6% to 12.3%, forming a stable "flexible and unrestrained" style.

#### 1.2 Mutual Restraint Mechanism

Performance style norms the boundary of aesthetic expression: the ethnic style attributes of the work limit technical choices such as key touch and speed, and the key touch depth of both groups in the introduction section is  $\geq 5.5$  mm, which ensures the consistency of the "dignified and profound" aesthetic expression. The depth of aesthetic expression restricts the development level of style: the correlation coefficient between the depth of aesthetic expression and the level of style development is 0.81, and students with in-depth aesthetic understanding have richer dynamic levels and timbre changes.

#### 1.3 Unity of Individuality and Conformity

Individual aesthetic experience endows style with uniqueness: extroverted students tend to adopt fast staccato and strong dynamic contrast

techniques, forming a "grand and magnificent" style; introverted students prefer delicate legato and soft timbre, showing a "lyrical and restrained" style. The inherent attributes of the work limit the boundary of expression: the pentatonic scale purity of all students' performances exceeds 92%, and there is no mode deviation, ensuring the authenticity of ethnic style.

#### 1.4 Co-evolution with Ability Development

Technical accumulation promotes the improvement of basic abilities: the correlation coefficient between technical accumulation and the basic ability of aesthetic expression is 0.76, and the improvement of scale running uniformity and chord connection accuracy directly enhances the accuracy of aesthetic expression. The deepening of cultural cognition promotes high-level integration: after cultural background learning, the experimental group's cultural connotation expression score increased from 2.7 points to 4.0 points, and the performance style evolved from "technical imitation" to "cultural interpretation".

### 2. Influencing Factors of Aesthetic Expression and Performance Style Development

#### 2.1 Technical Foundation

Basic technical ability directly determines the accuracy of aesthetic expression: the correlation coefficients between pitch accuracy, rhythm stability, and other indicators and the accuracy of aesthetic expression are all above 0.75. The mastery of specialized techniques affects the presentation of style characteristics: the mastery rate of ethnic characteristic techniques such as Sanxian, a large traditional Chinese three-stringed lute rhythm simulation for the experimental group, is 75%–90%, and their style presentation score ( $4.0 \pm 0.3$ ) is significantly higher than that of the control group ( $2.7 \pm 0.4$ ).

#### 2.2 Cultural Background

Ethnic cultural cognition strengthens the aesthetic expression of ethnic works: the correlation coefficient between ethnic cultural cognition and ethnic

aesthetic expression is above 0.84, and students who deeply understand Yi ethnic culture can more accurately convey the ethnic charm of the work. Cross-cultural cognition broadens the diversity of style expression: the experimental group's cross-cultural style recognition accuracy reaches 92%, and the number of playable styles ( $3.8 \pm 0.6$ ) is significantly higher than that of the control group ( $2.1 \pm 0.5$ ).

### 2.3 Teaching Environment

The integrated teaching concept of "form-technique-aesthetics" has a significant guiding effect: the experimental group's aesthetic cognitive dimension ( $4.2 \pm 0.5$ ) is significantly higher than that of the control group ( $2.3 \pm 0.4$ ), and the target style achievement rate reaches 75%. The allocation of specialized teaching resources promotes development: the experimental group's aesthetic perception acuity ( $4.2 \pm 0.3$ ) and style detail control ability ( $4.0 \pm 0.4$ ) are significantly better than those of the control group.

### 2.4 Personal Traits and Emotional Experiences

Personality traits determine initial aesthetic preferences and style tendencies: 75% of extroverted students initially prefer a "passionate and unrestrained" aesthetic, while 83.3% of introverted students prefer a "delicate and gentle" style. Rich emotional experiences enrich the connotation of style: the correlation coefficients between the depth of emotional experience and the richness of aesthetic expression, as well as the depth of style connotation, are all above 0.81.

## 3. Promoting Effect of Diversified Teaching Strategies

### 3.1 Cultural Background-guided Teaching

The explanation of the cultural connotation of the work deepens aesthetic cognition: after intervention, the experimental group's cultural background cognition score increased from 2.4 points to 4.3 points, and the accuracy of folk element recognition reached 93%. Cultural comparison teaching expands style adaptation ability: the experimental group's cross-style transition

fluency score ( $4.0\pm0.3$ ) is significantly higher than that of the control group ( $2.9\pm0.3$ ), and the style innovation integration adaptation rate reaches 65% .

### 3.2 Step-by-Step Technical Difficulty Training

Modular technology decomposition reduces learning difficulty: the experimental group's technical difficulty breakthrough rate reaches 89%, and the learning time of key techniques is reduced by 52.9% . The combination of technical and aesthetic training improves expression efficiency: the experimental group's technical-aesthetic adaptation accuracy reaches 90%, and the emotional transmission effectiveness increases from 63% to 92%.

### 3.3 Project-based Learning and Stage Practice

Real projects drive practical application: the experimental group's aesthetic expression practice conversion rate reaches 92%, and the style maturity score ( $4.2\pm0.3$ ) is significantly higher than that of the control group ( $3.1\pm0.4$ ) (Table 22). Stage feedback optimizes expression: the experimental group's style defect improvement rate reaches 85%, and the audience satisfaction score ( $4.3\pm0.4$ ) is significantly higher than that of the control group .

### 3.4 Multi-dimensional Aesthetic Cultivation Strategies

The combination of auditory, visual, tactile, and cultural aesthetics broadens the aesthetic horizon: the experimental group's aesthetic vision breadth score ( $4.4\pm0.3$ ) and style boundary extension ( $2.3\pm0.5$ ) are significantly higher than those of the control group, and the proportion of innovative style expression reaches 65%.

## Discussion

### 1. Discussion on the Relationship between Aesthetic Expression and Performance Style

The dynamic mutual shaping relationship between aesthetic expression and performance style confirms Peter Kevi's view of "dynamic balance between

historical consciousness and modern aesthetics." Aesthetic preferences guide technical selection, and continuous technical application solidifies style characteristics, which is the concrete manifestation of this theory in practice. The mutual restraint mechanism between the two is consistent with Hanslick's music form autonomy theory, which emphasizes that the formal elements of music restrict the boundary of aesthetic expression, and the depth of aesthetic understanding determines the height of style development. The unity of individuality and conformity echoes Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, which requires attention to individual uniqueness on the premise of respecting the inherent attributes of the work. The co-evolution relationship between the two verifies the viewpoint of aesthetic communication theory that "multi-factor interaction promotes aesthetic enhancement."

## **2. Discussion on Influencing Factors**

The technical foundation, as a prerequisite guarantee, is consistent with Hu Min's (2015) research conclusion that "technical support is the basis for accurate expression of aesthetic emotions." The shaping effect of cultural background on the development direction expands Liu Jian's (2021) research, confirming that both ethnic cultural cognition and cross-cultural cognition have important impacts on aesthetic expression and style formation. The guiding role of the teaching environment is consistent with Ding Ning's (2023) view that "comprehensive music literacy cultivation is crucial," and the integrated teaching concept and specialized teaching resources can effectively improve the training effect. The unique role of personal traits and emotional experiences supplements Fan Lizhi's (2024) research, confirming that emotional experience depth is an important factor that enriches style connotation.

## **3. Discussion on the Effect of Diversified Teaching Strategies**

The significant effect of cultural background-guided teaching is consistent with Liu Di's (2025) research on "cultural background guidance enhancing style comprehension." The breakthrough effect of step-by-step technical difficulty

training verifies Chen Xiaoguang's (2024) view that "modular training solves technical bottlenecks." The accelerating effect of project-based learning and stage practice echoes Li Qingxi's (2022) conclusion that "artistic practice stimulates aesthetic connotation." The expansion effect of multi-dimensional aesthetic cultivation strategies makes up for the limitations of single-dimensional aesthetic training in existing research, providing a new path for the coordinated development of aesthetic expression and performance style.

## Conclusion

The research results found that:

1. There is a dynamic reciprocal and co-evolutionary relationship between aesthetic expression and performance style.
2. The development of aesthetic expression and performance style is mainly influenced by technical foundation, cultural background, teaching environment, and personal traits.
3. Diversified teaching strategies significantly promote the development of aesthetic expression and performance style.

There is a dynamic co-evolution relationship between aesthetic expression and the performance style of piano major students, which goes through the development process from basic mutual support to high-level integration.

The growth of both aspects is influenced by four main factors: technical foundation, cultural understanding, teaching environment, and personal characteristics, which work together to shape how students express themselves aesthetically and perform.

The three-in-one training system of "technology-aesthetics-culture" is an effective way to promote the coordinated development of the two. Among them, the combination training of technology and aesthetics is the core

breakthrough point, and the "three-stage training method" (goal anchoring-collaborative training-dynamic optimization) has remarkable effects.

In teaching ethnic works, explaining cultural connotations and conducting cultural comparison are key methods for deepening aesthetic cognition and expanding the ability to adapt to different styles.

## **Recommendation**

### **1. Limitations**

The research sample is small (20 students) and limited to a single university and specific educational stage, which may affect the generalizability of the research results. Some data (such as interview content and audience evaluation) are affected by subjective factors, and the objectivity of the data needs to be further improved. The research method is mainly quantitative research, and the depth of qualitative analysis is insufficient, which cannot fully reveal the complex formation process of aesthetic expression and performance style.

### **2. Future Research Directions**

Expand the sample size and scope, include piano majors from different universities, educational stages, and professional directions, and obtain more universal research conclusions.

Adopt more objective measurement tools (such as EEG monitoring devices) to collect data, extend the data collection period, and conduct longitudinal tracking research to observe the long-term development and changes of the two.

Integrate qualitative research methods such as case studies and action research, select typical students for long-term follow-up observation, and deeply analyze the formation mechanism of their aesthetic expression and performance style.

Introduce an interdisciplinary research perspective, combine theories from psychology, sociology, and other disciplines, and further explore the underlying influence mechanism of aesthetic expression and performance style development.

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