

# The Value Expansion of Collaborative Piano in College Education - Taking the Teaching Practice of “The Sea-Sky Book” As An Example

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## Abstract

This paper focuses on the functional evolution and value redefinition of collaborative piano within the context of holistic education in higher institutions. Using the teaching practice of the symphonic song The Sea-Sky Book as a case study, it argues that collaborative piano should not be confined to traditional accompaniment or technical performance guidance. Instead, it ought to integrate deeply with literary interpretation, historical contextualization, and cultural value elucidation, thereby serving as an interdisciplinary pedagogical nexus and central vehicle that connects musical practice, humanistic literacy, and value cultivation. Through detailed analysis of the musical translation of poetic imagery, the construction of emotional narrative, and the artistic expression of maritime sovereignty consciousness in The Sea-Sky Book, this study proposes a tripartite pedagogical model-“literature-music-critical thinking”-that collaborative piano can implement in university curricula. The research offers practical references and theoretical insights for the deeper integration of artistic specialty courses and ideological-political education within the aesthetic education framework of higher education.

## Keywords

collaborative piano, curriculum-based holistic education, The Sea-Sky Book, poetry-music integration, cultural interpretation, aesthetic education in higher institutions

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## 1. Introduction: The Paradigm Shift of Collaborative Piano in the Context of Educating People

Currently, aesthetic education and the integration of ideological and political elements into curricula in higher education are advancing in depth, with a core emphasis on embedding value guidance throughout the processes of knowledge transmission and skill cultivation. Against this backdrop, a crucial and pressing issue in collegiate aesthetic education is how arts courses-particularly performance-based practical courses-can transcend the limitations of purely technical training to tap into the inherent humanistic spirit and ideological-political resources within the curriculum. Traditionally, collaborative piano has focused on collaborative techniques with vocal or instrumental performance and the command of musical styles, yet its embedded potential for holistic education remains underexplored and underactivated.

The creation and dissemination of the symphonic song *The Sea-Sky Book* provide a fitting medium for exploring the pedagogical practice of collaborative piano. This work draws inspiration from the national intangible cultural heritage known as the “Geng Lu Bu” (traditional Chinese nautical logbooks). It transforms the profound content of ancient maritime texts, the rich historical heritage of the South China Sea, and a deep sense of national belonging into an accessible, perceptible, and thought-provoking artistic piece. This integration is achieved through a poetic-musical-translational fusion, featuring lyrics by Li Qian, composition by Zhao Xiaochen, English translation by Zhao Yanchun, and vocal performance by Wang Yuanyuan. Beyond being a mere musical composition, this work carries core connotations of historical memory, cultural identity, and civilizational dialogue, thus serving as a cultural text of significant educational value.

For collaborative piano, when engaging with works such as *The Sea-Sky Book* that carry profound cultural and historical depth, the traditional pedagogical model of “harmonic analysis–texture treatment–collaborative coordination” is no longer sufficient to meet educational needs. Coach must first delve deeply into the work’s meaning and accurately interpret its value, guiding students to thoroughly understand the literary imagery behind the lyrics, the historical context of the piece, and its system of cultural symbols. This comprehensive understanding must then be translated into musical expression that is both profound and emotionally resonant. This shift signifies that the core task of collaborative piano has moved from the technical level of “how to collaborate with the vocalist” to the interpretive level of “why such expression is meaningful”-that is, a paradigm transition from “performance guidance” to “cultural navigation.”

## **2. The Educational Substance of The Sea-Sky Book: Value Embodiment in Literary Imagery and Musical Narration**

To fully leverage the role of *The Sea-Sky Book* in the context of higher education, vocal coach must first engage in a deep interpretation of the work itself, accurately identifying the multidimensional educational resources it embodies, thereby laying a solid foundation for subsequent teaching practice.

### **2.1 The Acoustic Reconstruction of Historical Memory: From the “Geng Lu Bu” to the Transmission of National Heritage**

The lyrics of *The Sea-Sky Book* draw heavily upon the historical document “Geng Lu Bu”. The line “Sea-routes stand as steles-each reef, each isle, All are China’s blood, all the while.” imbues the abstract navigational route (“Geng Lu”) with solemn, eternal historical significance. It forges an intimate connection between concrete geographical features (“reefs” and “islands”) and the destiny of the nation, underscoring their status as inalienable parts of Chinese territory. When guiding students in performing this passage, the vocal coach must foster a profound understanding of the solemn, eternal quality embodied by the “monument” and the significance of national unity conveyed by the “bloodline.” Through the combination of resolute, deep piled chords and undulating melodic lines, the musical expression constructs students’ historical identity in sonic form, conveying the Chinese nation’s consciousness of sovereignty over the South China Sea territories.

### **2.2 Poetic-Musical Translation of Cultural Symbols: Conveying National Wisdom and Traditional Aesthetics**

This work skillfully incorporates numerous Chinese cultural symbols. For instance, “The Dipper threads, the Morning Star draws.” draws on celestial navigation phenomena to embody the traditional wisdom of harmony between humanity and nature. Similarly, “Porcelain waves resound with E’er.” merges the visual and auditory qualities of ocean waves with the visual, tactile texture, and cultural connotations of celadon porcelain, achieving a multisensory expression.

In guiding students, collaborative piano must help them decode the original meanings and poetic transformations of these cultural symbols. For example, in interpreting the “rhythm of celadon,” the performance may employ crystalline, clear tones in the upper register and sparse, ethereal harmonic textures to convey the porcelain’s qualities of clarity, brittleness, and smoothness. Through such pianistic practice, students learn to translate traditional cultural connotations into contemporary aesthetic expressions, thereby deepening their understanding and appreciation of China’s rich cultural heritage.

### **2.3 Emotional Narrative and Value Elevation: The Progression from Personal Sentiment to National Ethos**

The lyrical content of *The Sea-Sky Book* follows a clear emotional arc. It progresses from the intimate nostalgia evoked by phrases like “Fair Luna lights the ocean,” to the national pride embodied in “The dragon-soul surges past the ninth sky’s floor!” and culminates in the contemporary confidence and forward-looking vision encapsulated in “We write to praise our time.” This structure creates a deliberate evolution from individual feeling toward collective national sentiment.

Here, the piano part transcends the role of mere accompaniment. It assumes a narrative responsibility, actively propelling emotional development and reinforcing the expression of values. For instance, at the rhetorical question, “Ask the blue: who lifts the long scroll to Heaven’s door?”, the performance can utilize rhythmic punctuation and suspended harmonies to establish a solemn, contemplative atmosphere. Conversely, at the declarative line, “Stride the blue--I ride long winds as waves roar,” the piano must provide robust musical momentum and resplendent textural support. This achieves a synchrony between musical progression and ideological expression.

## **3. Practical Approaches in Piano Pedagogy: From “Literary Interpretation” to “Musical Realization”**

Building upon a profound understanding of the educational dimensions embedded within *The Sea-Sky Book*, collaborative piano in higher education can systematically implement its educational function. This involves developing a structured and practical teaching methodology to achieve a complete transformation from textual analysis to sonic expression.

### **3.1 Introducing Literary Context and Analyzing Imagery Clusters**

Taking *The Sea-Sky Book* as an example, before students come into contact with music scores, the collaborative piano can organize students to carry out special seminar activities and guide students to systematically study the relevant materials of “Geng Lu Bu”, The text of the lyrics and related literature of “*The Sea-Sky Book*” focuses on the analysis and understanding of the folk navigation wisdom contained in the “Mountain-shaped Water Potential Diagram” and “Six Flush Methods”. It also pays attention to the core image groups in the lyrics, conducts classification analysis and piano performance expression. The image groups in “*The Sea-Sky Book*” are divided into three categories, namely the natural image group (such as the moon, stars, sea, wind, waves, reefs). This type of image requires students to conduct divergent thinking based on the characteristics of the image, think about the corresponding piano pitch, timbre, intensity and texture processing methods, and establish the connection between natural images and musical expression; the cultural image group (such as compass, dragon, stele, celadon, silk road), which can organize students to explore the symbolic meaning of various images. meaning, and discuss how to express the connotation of imagery through piano performance (such as using heavy tones to reflect the solemnity of the “stele”; crisp tones to reflect the texture of “celadon”); the most important thing is the emotional image group (hiding, asking, stepping, continuing). This part needs to drive students to analyze the emotional tension behind the verbs contained in the text, clarify the change curve of the music, think about the fluctuations in intensity and speed changes, and lay the foundation for emotional expression in subsequent performances.

### **3.2 Dialogue Design between the Expression of Musical Language and Literary Imagery**

The design of dialogue is the core of the collaborative piano, teaching practice and education. The collaborative piano needs to cooperate with the students and design a piano music expression plan that conforms to the connotation of the work based on the results of literary image analysis.

First of all, structurally, it is necessary to sort out the succession and transition in the lyrics and combine them with the musical form structure to achieve the unity of literature and music. For example, the opening nursery rhyme part (“Fair Luna lights the ocean...”) can choose bright tones and simpler music materials to correspond to the intimacy of looking back on history; the middle part can reflect the hardships of the voyage and the waves of historical development through more complex textures and constant tonal changes.

Secondly, in terms of timbre and harmony, it is necessary to design corresponding piano timbre and corresponding harmonic color according to the specific image of the lyrics. For example, the sentence “Stars fall from the masts” can be played with extremely pianissimo (ppp) skipping or overtones in the high range, and dissonant chords can be used to echo it to create a picture of falling stars; or when interpreting “Our Sires’ Sea...”, a solemn bass in the low range can be used, coupled with a plump and stable tonic or dominant chord, to depict the deep affection and solemnity contained in the “Our Sires’ Sea...”.

Finally, in terms of rhythm, rhythm needs to focus on analyzing the regularity and sentence reading characteristics of the lyrics, discussing its internal rules, and transforming them into rhythms in piano performance for expression. For example, in the lyrics “Routes spread where ink’s cast; Long long roads write the blue vast.”, the openness contained in the “vertical and horizontal” can be expressed through arpeggios or chords with a large span. The word “luo” in “Luo Mo” has a sense of frustration, which can be reflected by dotted rhythm or syncopated rhythm. The leisurely and long “writing about the vastness” can be expressed by flowing sixteenth notes or cadenza sentences.

### **3.3 Guiding Value Resonance in Collaborative Rehearsals**

With a solid theoretical foundation in place, the practical rehearsal stage becomes a crucial means of evaluating and validating that theory. During collaboration between piano and voice or other instruments, the focus of the collaborative piano should shift from purely technical coordination to fostering interpretive synergy and emotional resonance, encouraging students to express their personal understanding of the work through the collaborative process.

In collaborative rehearsals, the collaborative piano can guide and refine the performance through three key approaches:

**Ensuring Interpretive Understanding:** This involves confirming-through preliminary seminars and ongoing dialogue-that every performer comprehends the lyrical content, historical context, and intended meaning of the text. This shared understanding prevents a performance that is technically proficient but emotionally hollow or disconnected from the vocal expression.

**Building a Unified Narrative:** Performers must be clear about the emotional intent behind each musical phrase and section. The collaborative piano should guide all participants, despite performing different parts, to cultivate a shared sense of expressive purpose, working collectively to build the emotional arc toward its climax.

**Reflection and Nuanced Refinement:** By reviewing recordings, the group can assess both the musical execution and, more importantly, whether the emotional delivery accurately conveys the work’s literary imagery and core spirit. This process allows for continuous adjustment of details, ensuring the unity of musical expression and value communication.

## **4. Pedagogical Outcomes and Conclusion: Constructing an Integrated “Text–Music–Reflection” Evaluation Framework**

Taking *The Sea-Sky Book* as a case study, a pedagogical framework for collaborative piano in higher education can be established. Its assessment system moves beyond the singular evaluation of technical proficiency toward a comprehensive model that integrates text, music, and critical reflection. This multidimensional framework evaluates students holistically across several dimensions, including literary comprehension, artistic realization of musical ideas, internalization and expression of values, and interdisciplinary awareness.

Literary comprehension may be assessed through written reports or in-class presentations, evaluating whether students can clearly articulate the general meaning of the lyrical text, its core imagery, emotional trajectory, and cultural symbolism. Artistic realization can be evaluated through performance practice and written design proposals, determining whether students can creatively transform their literary understanding of the work into idiomatic pianistic treatments that reflect the piece’s inherent meaning. Value internalization and expression may be gauged through the overall communicative impact of the performance, reflective journals, and similar means, assessing whether students are able to naturally convey the work’s sense of

national belonging, cultural confidence, and historical responsibility within the collaborative process. Interdisciplinary awareness can be observed in regular classroom practice through students' contributions to comprehensive seminars, evaluating their capacity to connect music with multiple disciplines and demonstrating their cross-disciplinary thinking.

Through the pedagogical practice and exploration exemplified by *The Sea-Sky Book*, a notable transformation emerges: students' approach to piano study shifts from passively reading the score to actively interpreting culture. Not only does their musical expressiveness improve, but their analytical engagement with texts and their identification with China's maritime history and culture also deepen. Moreover, students develop the ability to translate meaning through the piano, conveying cultural connotations and value propositions. Concurrently, the role of the piano instructor evolves quietly from a behind-the-scenes collaborative partner to a classroom leader in cultural value education—fully realizing the educational potential inherent in piano artistry instruction

## 5. Conclusion

Through the case analysis of collaborative piano in the teaching practice of “*The Sea-Sky Book*”, it can be shown that in the art training system of colleges and universities, piano art guidance is fully qualified and should assume a more important task of educating people. Through in-depth analysis of the literature, history and ideological connotations of the works, piano art guidance can guide students to cognitive sublimation from “technique” to “emotion” to “ideology”, gradually improving humanistic qualities and enhancing value pursuits. The process of “literature-music-thinking” proposed in this article is essentially to transform the piano art instruction course into an interdisciplinary education platform, so as to achieve the organic integration of music skill training, humanistic literacy cultivation and value shaping. This teaching practice provides new ideas for curriculum reform in colleges and universities, especially professional curriculum reform in art colleges. Encourage piano art instructors to focus on contemporary Chinese works that are rich in cultural heritage and ideological and political connotations, such as “*The Sea-Sky Book*”, try to develop systematic teaching plans that integrate “literature-music-thought”, and build piano art instruction courses into a model that implements the concept of “three-round education” and strengthens students' cultural confidence. An important position, and finally realize that the black and white keys of the piano can not only convey pleasant music, but also an important means that can carry historical heritage, convey cultural blood, and highlight the spirit of the times, playing an important role in giving full play to the vocal coaching in the aesthetic education and ideological and political construction of the curriculum in colleges and universities

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