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Comparative Study on Non-Elite Clarinet Education in China and Australia: Cultural Influences and Educational Approaches

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Abstract: This paper presents a comparative study of non-elite clarinet education in China and Australia, focusing on differences and similarities in historical background, teaching focus, teaching methods, and music culture. Both China and Australia were colonies of Western countries and were deeply influenced by foreign cultures, showing a cultural characteristic of the interweaving of local and foreign cultures. The differences in local culture have led to the development of a unique educational philosophy. Chinese clarinet education, influenced heavily by traditional Chinese concepts and Western classical music, emphasizes technical mastery and exam standards, while Australian clarinet education focuses on individual expression and exploring diverse musical genres. The study reveals how each system reflects cultural values and educational philosophies unique to each country. The paper proposes that combining the technical rigor of Chinese education with the creativity-oriented approach of Australian education could foster a more comprehensive and engaging learning experience for non-elite clarinet students in both countries.

Keywords: Non-elite clarinet education, cultural influences, teaching methods, diverse music.

1. Introduction

Clarinet is an ancient musical instrument. The history of clarinet can be traced back to the early 18th century in Europe. It was designed by Johann Christoph Denner, who is an instrument designer from Germany. He improved on an instrument of the time called the "chalumeau" [1]. It is a single-weed woodwind instrument with a limited range, and Denner greatly expanded the instrument's range by adding windways and keys. That was one of the prototypes of the modern clarinet. Over the next three hundred years, the clarinet continued develop along with the development of Western music. During this period, many great musicians and educators emerged, and their appearance also greatly promoted the status of the clarinet and development of clarinet education, such as Austrian composer Mozart and China's first generation of clarinet musician Mu zhiqing.

Clarinet teaching is diverse around the world, and teaching methods of China and Australia have their own characteristics. The clarinet teaching of China is deeply influenced by European traditions and Chinese local culture of music. While Australian clarinet teaching methods has formed a systematic teaching system due to the influence of European and American countries and multiculturalism. This article will explore the similarities and difference between the non-elite

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clarinet teaching in the two countries from four aspects: historical background and current situation, teaching focus, teaching methods and music culture.

2. Literature Review

This literature review explores existing research on non-elite clarinet education in China and Australia, focusing on historical background, teaching approaches, and cultural influences. Research indicates that Chinese clarinet education was introduced by Western missionaries in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with initial growth spread by church music and military bands (Zheng). Over time, as the development of China's economy, Western music concepts became well integrated, and the non-elite clarinet education began to emphasize technical rigor and examination standards aligned with East Asian values of measurable success (Hou and Chernaya; Meng and Goopy).

Australian clarinet education is similar rooted in 19th-century military and church music, was shaped by European influences, particularly from Britain and Germany (Skinner; Stirling). However, Australia's multicultural environment encouraged a more flexible, individualized approach, allowing students to explore diverse music genres, including jazz, pop, and folk (Dunbar-Hall).

While Chinese clarinet instruction often involves structured, exam-oriented practice with a focus on Western classical repertoire, Australia's non-elite clarinet education emphasizes enjoyment and creative engagement, integrating ensemble work and improvisation. Combining elements from both systems—China's technical rigor and Australia's genre diversity—could offer a well-rounded model for non-elite clarinet education.

3. Historical background and current situation

To trace back the introduction of clarinet's entry into China, according to document literature, it is commonly believed to have been carried by western missionaries, diplomats and musicians in the late 19th century to early 20th century. Missionaries played most important roles for the introduction of the clarinet. They established church schools in China to do missionary work and the church music is an important way for clarinet to spread in China. Missionaries also introduced the clarinet into China's school system and church ceremonies through music teaching, promoting the integration of western music with oriental music. The Influence of military music is also a key factor in promoting the popularity of the clarinet in China. Especially in the late Qing Dynasty and the early years of the Republic of China, Western military music gradually replaced wind and drum music and became a significant part of official activities and military parades. As one of the main instruments in the military bands, the clarinet is widely used in military parades, celebrations and other formal occasions [2].

With the rise of the "school music" movement in the early 20th century, Western music was gradually introduced into China's education system. School music is an important starting point for modern music education in China. It uses new-style schools as a carrier to spread a large number of Western musical instruments and music knowledge. As an important instrument of this new music movement, the clarinet began to appear in China's schools and early music colleges. During the Republic of China period, with the establishment of music colleges and art schools, the clarinet gradually became a part of formal music education. The efforts of China's first generation of clarinet players, such as Mu Zhiqing, laid the foundation for the teaching and performance of the clarinet [1]. They not only played the clarinet, but also promoted the teaching and development of this instrument.

In the mid 20th century, with the established of People's Republic of China, China has gradually an independent foreign policy. The cultural exchanges between China and the West have become frequent. During this period, some specialized music colleges have emerged. The clarinet was gradually incorporated into the teaching system of music colleges. Until 1978, with the

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implementation of reform and opening, China entered a new period of economic and cultural development. Economic improvement brought a richer cultural life, and the social demand for music education also increased [2]. Against this background, western music concepts and instrument teaching methods were quickly introduced into China, and the Clarinet was widely popularized. Prosperous economy promoted the development of the music industry, the number of music schools increased, and the level of music education became advanced. At this time, China's clarinet teaching gradually became internationalized, more and more students went to Europe and the United States to study, bringing back advanced playing skills and teaching methods. Major music schools have opened systemic clarinet courses and cultivated a batch of excellent clarinet players such as Zhang Wu, Tao Chunxiao and so on, their contribution promoted the basic education system for China's clarinet education.

Nowadays, China's music education is divided into 4 parts, including regular school music classes just like "K-12", teacher education, social music education and professional education. The professional music education system emphasizes professionalism, especially in conservatories of music such as the Central Conservatory of Music and Shanghai Conservatory of music. These professional music colleges provide not only systematic clarinet teaching strategies which progress from elementary to advanced stages, but also teach modern music, jazz and folk music. Students learn classical repertoires and involve modern music, improvisation and other fields. And they have opportunities to enter music-affiliated schools from an early age and receive rigorous professional training [3]. However, this access is difficult and expensive for most ordinary students. For those students who do not intent to take the professional performance career with clarinet, most of them learn clarinet through teacher education and social education, and programs that they received focus more on exam and rigorous technical training, dedicates to improving students' skills in order to perform well in exams and competitions. These non-elite students in China have had music lessons since kindergarten, but these courses in ordinary schools only let students understand music and cultivate their interest, most of which are mainly vocal singing, and not focused on specialized learning of specific instruments [4]. This means that if students want to learn the clarinet, they must spend more money on a specialized institution. For those clarinet students who are not particularly talented, they are more inclined to study in regular schools and develop clarinet as a personal interest or hobby.

To evaluate the level of amateur performers, just like most Western countries, there are several clarinet grading agencies that offer clarinet grading tests. Currently, the mainstream clarinet grading institutions in China are the Central Conservatory of Music, the China Conservatory of Music, and the Chinese Musicians Association. Different institutions have their own dedicated grading textbooks, but the content and judging standards are similar. Most grading institutions have amateur grades from 1 to 9 and a professional grade of 10. The grade test not only examines the student's performance ability, but also examines the student's music theory knowledge. China's music education system is mainly implemented in the non-elite field through ordinary schools and community music courses, and the grading system provide a platform for those amateur students to evaluate their stages of performance.

The introduction of clarinet in Australia can also be traced back to the 19th century. It was brought by British colonists with other Western instruments. Here is similar to China, the earliest clarinet performances were mainly in military bands and church music [5]. Early settlers here established armies, and Western instruments became an integral part of military bands. And because of the religion, church music with orchestras became the mainstream and Australia's native music gradually declined with the colonial rule.

In the early 20th century, with the development of Australian music education, there gradually formed its own music education system. Because of the establishment of music colleges and art

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schools, the foundational clarinet courses were spread in Australia [6]. Some advanced music schools such as the Sydney Conservatorium of Music and the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music began to train clarinet players and develop symphony orchestras [5]. During this period, clarinet teaching in Australia was mainly influenced by European countries, especially the United Kingdom and the Germany [7]. A number of music educators and clarinet performers from Europe immigrated to Australia, bringing their performance skills and teaching methods. European classic music became popular than the native music, and clarinet became one of the important parts in Australian orchestras.

After World War 2, the post-war economic recovery provided Australia an opportunity to promote the development of music. With the prosperity of economy and culture, music teaching became more popular among people. Australian clarinetists emerged on the international stage more often such as Billo Smith and Murray Khouri. Some of brilliant musicians went to Europe and the United States to study and brought advanced teaching techniques and performance techniques back to Australia [5]. Since the efforts of those clarinetists, Australia clarinet teaching system gradually formed its own characteristics based on the influences of Europe and the United States. Especially in advanced music education, the clarinet teaching system has been increasingly improved, Includes from fundamental performance skills to difficult techniques and principles [7].

At present, Australia's music education system is more diverse, covering more comprehensive music education from primary school to university. Its non-elite clarinet education benefits from a more inclusive system that integrates instrumental music into regular school programs and community ensembles [7]. The style of clarinet performance has shown a gradually diversity. Except traditional classical music, jazz, folk music and contemporary music were also spread among the people. The development of jazz was significant in the late 20th century, and famous jazz clarinetists such as Benny Goodman had a profound impact in Australia's clarinet culture. Many Australian clarinetists imitated Benny's performance style and improvisational music. Due to jazz is more acceptable to the public, the clarinet became more popular in Australia. Under the influence globalization, Australia's clarinet education has become more diversified [8]. Not only music colleges and conservatories, but community music teaching have begun to add jazz, modern music and improvisation into music curriculum systems.

Today, Australian clarinetists have made remarkable achievements in the world. Many outstanding Australian clarinetists frequently participate in international competitions and music festivals, and then they joined into overseas excellent orchestras [6]. However, for those students who do not take the professional route, they stay in community or school to teach, thereby cultivating more students interested in clarinet. In addition, the development of modern technology has also promoted the clarinet performance and teaching. Online courses and international exchange students allow Australian clarinet players to easily access the new international music resources and interact with global musicians, both amateur and elite students are benefits from that [9]. These opportunities influenced by Australia's multicultural environment, encourage students to explore diverse musical styles, thus providing a richer and more varied music education experience for non-elite learners."

In terms of evaluation systems, it is similar to China. Australia also has a level assessment exam institution. It is the Australian Music Examination Board (AMEB), which is the main standard for clarinet learning in Australia [6], providing a graded examination system to encourage students to participate in learning in schools and community music groups. The AMEB has eight foundational levels 1-8 for classical clarinet players. Above these basic exams of clarinet performance levels, there are Australian Music License Diploma (LMusA) and the best-known exam called Australian Music Scholarship (FMusA). It can be seen that non-professional clarinet education in Australia also pays more attention to the study of classic repertoire.

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4. Teaching focus

In China, the focus of amateur clarinet teaching is largely on technical mastery and performance standards. Clarinet students are often taught with an emphasis on development of highly published techniques [10]. This focus on technical improvement is based on the Utilitarianism in Traditional East Asian Culture. In the history of East Asian society, especially in China, South Korea and Japan, Utilitarianism can be said to be a social consensus. For example, in China's imperial examination system, successful participation in the imperial examination can gain prominent social status and political power, which makes education and utilitarian pursuits important goals in many people's lives. In modern East Asian culture, especially in the process of economic development, utilitarian values have also been strengthened. For example, the emphasis on education, economic success and social status are often regarded as important goals in life. Under these concept, China's clarinet education will of course emphasize rigor, practice and mastering skills. Chinese clarinet students are expected to learn a wide range of skills in a short time, such as breath control, finger technique, intonation, tone quality and interpretation of different musical styles. Teachers rely on repetitive practice to build students' muscle memory and technical fluency, ensuring they meet performance standards required by grading exams [4]. Some of them are also asked to master 2-3 pieces of classic clarinet music in 1 year for competitions and examinations.

The curriculum focuses on daily technical exercises, such as scales, arpeggios, and other practices which are designed for development of finger dexterity [10]. Teachers emphasize significantly on music theory and sight-reading to enhance students' overall musicianship and help them better understand the structure of the pieces they play. Especially after 2018, China's clarinet grading system has been reformed. Before that year, students taking the exam were not required to take music theory and solfeggio, all they had to do is take an instrument test. But since 2018, the grading agency of China Conservatory of Music divides the music theory exam into three levels. Students with instrument grades 1-3 need to take the first level of music theory, students with instrument grades 4-6 must take the second level of music theory, and students with instrument grades 7-9 must take the third level of music theory. Students must obtain the three levels of music theory certificates in order while taking the instrument graded exam.

The above are students who are non-majors or want to study clarinet in regular colleges and universities, most of these students go on to teach basic clarinet after graduation, for example in music education institutions or primary schools. For students who want to study at a conservatory of music, they are introduced to a wide range of repertoire, focusing primarily on Western classical music from the Baroque, Classical and Romantic periods [11]. As they reach higher proficiency levels, they may also explore 20th-century and contemporary music, as well as pieces written by Chinese composers that blend Western music techniques [3]. The final goal is for students to achieve a high level of performance, both technically and expressively, preparing them for participation in world-class competitions, conservatory auditions and public performances.

Australian clarinet education focuses on cultivating a comprehensive musical experience that balances playing skills with creative expression. The teaching approach is generally more relaxed compared to China, emphasizing the fun of performance and the development of a personal connection to music [12]. This concept reflects Australian music teaching emphasize more on individual, creativity and diverse cultural influences. But foundational skills such as breath support, tone production and embouchure are still important, Australian clarinet instruction often takes a more holistic approach. Teachers encourage students to explore a wide range of musical genres beyond just classical music, including jazz, contemporary, pop and folk music, promoting a more accomplished understanding of the clarinet. Jazz, in particular, plays a significant role in shaping and motivating clarinet instruction among students, with improvisation being a key element that encourages students

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to think creatively and to develop their own voice on the instrument. Students are also encouraged to experiment with diverse music styles and sounds, rather than following strictly to one stereotyped way of playing.

Ensemble playing is another crucial aspect of clarinet teaching in Australia. School bands, community orchestras and chamber music groups are common than China, Australia's students are encouraged to participate in regularly organized group performances and activities [7]. Such activities not only enhance the students' technical skills but also cultivate their aural awareness and sense of collaboration. The Australian teaching approach is generally more relaxed compared to China's rigorous, performance-focused education structure, and there is an emphasis on making music enjoyable and accessible to all students, these kinds of students may not pursue a career in clarinet but will make clarinet as a lifelong interest.

In addition, Australia also has the elite clarinet education system like China. It is aims to nurture talented young clarinetists. This education system in Australia is predominantly by its prestigious music institutions, such as the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music and the Queensland Conservatorium. These institutions offer specialized programs for highly talented students, often beginning from primary school or earlier age. The entry of these programs is competitive, with the test of both technical skill and musicianship [5]. These conservatories have structured curricula designed to develop performance techniques, musical understanding and prepare students for professional careers. Students in these institutions are offered courses with experienced clarinetists from all over the world. It provides them a global perspective and connections, exposing students to a variety of playing styles and methods.

The key characteristic of non-elite clarinet education in Australia is its focus on personalized instruction. In Australia, non-elite clarinet education providing students with a relaxed and enjoyable learning environment, allowing them to develop gradually while enjoying music. Unlike elite programs, non-elite instruction is not geared toward professional performance but instead aims to foster a lasting interest in music and a personal connection to it [12]. Teachers typically tailor lessons to the interests and abilities of each student, introducing a diverse range of musical styles, including jazz, pop, folk, and basic classical music. This flexible approach helps students explore various musical possibilities and encourages self-expression in their playing, rather than simply meeting technical standards.

5. Teaching methods

In China, teaching methods for non-elite clarinet instruction are highly structured and systematic. The curriculum emphasizes a step-by-step progression, from beginner to advanced levels [11]. The first clarinet lesson for most of clarinet students is long note practice, this is an essential practice for embouchure and breath control. Students are asked to play long notes starting at the mouthpiece and then adding a part of clarinet after each set, aiming for a clear round tone that is consistent across all register of the instrument. Through daily practice of technical exercises, including scales and arpeggios, helps students develop solid finger agility and precision. These basic techniques are rigorously practiced before students' move on to more complex repertoire. China's clarinet pedagogy also emphasizes strongly on classical Western repertoire, which is often used as the foundation of the curriculum [10].

In the early stage, clarinet teachers In China always emphasize sound quality, posture and finger coordination [11]. Teachers often require students to engage in repetitive practice to build muscle memory and technical fluency. With students' progress, they are gradually introduced to more complex pieces, including those by Mozart, Brahms and other classical composers. The instruction is highly focused on technical mastery and students are expected to perform in regular exams and recitals to assess their progress [3]. To the higher level, school orchestras and wind ensembles are

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also important parts for non-professional performance students in Chinese universities. Because through regular competitions and ensemble rehearsals, students' abilities of cooperate are developed.

Masterclasses are common in instrumental teaching, allowing students to observe and learn from renowned clarinetists. In addition to traditional classical repertoire, they also introduce some contemporary and Chinese compositions to expand students' musical expression. For instance, clarinet pieces by Chinese composers that blend Western techniques with traditional Chinese melodies offer students a broader perspective for music understanding.

In Australia, the teaching methods are more flexible and varied, reflecting the country's diverse cultural influences and relaxed educational approach. While technical mastery is still important, Australian clarinet education often incorporates a broader ranges of music styles, including classical, jazz, folk, and contemporary music. Unlike the traditional structure found in China, Australian students may have more freedom to explore different genres and develop their personal musical expression.

One-on-one lessons are basic of Australian clarinet teaching, particularly at their higher levels. Teachers in Australia focus on tailoring their content of lessons to meet each students' needs [12]. Lessons often incorporate improvisation, especially for students who interested in jazz or contemporary music. For example, students may be encouraged to play instrument along with recordings or participate in small group performances to improve their improvisational abilities.

Ensemble work is also a significant part of Australian clarinet pedagogy. Students learn the importance of listening, blending and collaborating with other musicians by regularly participate in school bands, community orchestras, or chamber music groups. This focus on ensemble playing allows students to develop strong aural skills and adaptability in different kind of performance tasks.

Australian music education takes a greater emphasis on developing the students' overall musicianship, rather than just focusing on technical development. While students do practice scales and other technical exercises, there is more flexibility in lesson content, and teachers often integrate creative activities, like composing or improvisation to keep students engaged in classes. Students are also given the opportunities to explore non-classical music, which helps them to become more well-rounded performers [6].

6. Music culture

In non-elite clarinet education, cultural influences in China and Australia shape both the content and approach to music instruction, creating unique educational experiences for students in each country.

In China, non-elite music education is deeply rooted in structured, exam-oriented learning that combines with the broader cultural emphasis on achievement and measurable success [13]. For students who do not pursue professional and performance music careers, clarinet education is often seen as an extracurricular skill to enhance academic profiles or personal development. This utilitarian approach is clear in China's grading exams, where students are required to demonstrate technical proficiency in scales, arpeggios, and specific classical pieces. The curriculum is highly structured, and most non-elite clarinet instruction relies on repetitive practice of technical exercises, aiming to build a foundation for examinations rather than encouraging artistic exploration [2]. Because of this emphasis, the repertoire is primarily focused on Western classical music, with limited opportunities for students to explore genres such as jazz or contemporary music unless they reach advanced levels or attend specialized music schools.

In China, teacher education plays a significant role in music instruction for a majority of non-elite clarinet students. This educational pathway is vital for developing a skilled and knowledgeable music educator who will shape the next generation of musicians in turn. Music teacher education programs emphasize a strong foundation in music theory, pedagogy, and performance, providing future teachers with the technical skills and instructional strategies necessary to guide students effectively. For many

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clarinet students, especially those not pursuing performance careers, these programs offer a structured guide into the field of music education, offering them with the qualifications needed to teach in schools, private studios, and community programs.

In addition, Chinese non-elite music education often incorporates elements of traditional Chinese music, which helps to foster a sense of national identity and cultural pride [2]. Some clarinet pieces composed by Chinese musicians combine Western classical techniques with pentatonic scales and folk rhythms, allowing students to experience a blend of Western and Eastern musical cultures. However, this approach remains largely within the classical and traditional framework, and students are rarely encouraged to experiment with other genres.

Conversely, non-elite clarinet education in Australia reflects the country's multicultural and inclusive approach to music. For non-professional students, clarinet education is widely accessible through community music programs, school ensembles, and local music organizations, rather than solely through private lessons. Unlike in China, where exams are a primary focus, Australian non-elite clarinet education emphasizes the enjoyment of music and the development of a lifelong passion for playing. The Australian Music Examination Board (AMEB) offers a graded examination system similar to China's, but exams are generally optional and are seen as a complement to the learning process rather than a central goal [6].

Australian clarinet students are encouraged to explore diverse genres, with classical, contemporary, folk, and popular music incorporated into the curriculum. For many students, clarinet education is a long journey of discovery where they can experiment with sounds beyond traditional expectations [12]. This flexibility fosters an environment where students are able to develop personal interests and connect deeply with the music they play, regardless of its style. While jazz remains popular in Australia's clarinet instruction, educators also incorporate other genres like pop, rock, and world music, allowing students to perform music that feels relevant and enjoyable to them [6]. This flexibility, combined with Australia's multicultural influence, creates a vibrant learning atmosphere where students are motivated to explore and create.

7. Conclusion

In summary, non-elite clarinet education in China and Australia reflects the distinct educational values and cultural priorities of each country. China's clarinet instruction, with its rigorous and structured approach, aligns with East Asian educational philosophies that prioritize measurable achievements and technical mastery. This system offers students development of strong technical foundations but may limit their abilities of creative expression and play diverse musical genres, as the focus remains on Western classical music and exam preparation.

On the other hand, Australia's non-elite clarinet education is more inclusive and flexible, encouraging students to explore a wide range of musical styles, participate in ensembles, and engage in improvisation. This teaching system is based on Australia's multicultural background, where music is seen as a personal experience. Students are encouraged to find their own musical voices, develop their interests, and appreciate music for what it is rather than only for academic and measurable achievement.

Both systems offer valuable perspective. Incorporating some of China's rigorous approach to technical skill-building and Australia's creativity-oriented, genre-inclusive model could create a balanced non-elite clarinet curriculum. By blending technical rigor with artistic freedom, clarinet programs in both countries could support a well-rounded, enjoyable, and effective learning experience for students [14].

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