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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Cultural Memory in Piano Education: A Study of Hunan and Jiangxi

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ABSTRACT

While piano pedagogy in higher education has historically prioritized Western technical proficiency, regional normal universities in China increasingly utilize the instrument to transmit collective heritage. Drawing on cultural memory theory, this qualitative comparative study examines how piano educators in Hunan and Jiangxi integrate localized and revolutionary repertoire into daily instruction to foster cultural confidence. Grounded in empirical data from 39 semi-structured interviews, eight classroom observations, and curriculum documents across 13 normal universities (six in Hunan and seven in Jiangxi), the findings reveal that regional repertoire functions as a dynamic medium for cultural transmission rather than mere technical exercise. Specifically, Hunan emphasizes localized place identity by weaving folk traditions into works such as "Liuyang River", whereas Jiangxi highlights revolutionary sacrifice and national struggle through pieces like "Yingshan Hong". By demonstrating how bodily touch, guided imagery, and repertoire choices transform piano studios into sites of memory, this study bridges cultural memory theory with music pedagogy, offering new insights into how music education actively mediates between regional identity, national narrative, and artistic confidence.

1. Introduction

Music functions not only as artistic performance but also as a vital medium for cultural transmission, allowing societies to preserve, interpret, and pass history to the next generation. Early memory scholarship emphasizes that collective memory is anchored in social groups (Halbwachs, 1992) and embedded in cultural forms such as music (Nora, 1989). Building on these foundations, Assmann (2011) articulates the concept of cultural memory, illustrating how societies maintain long-term collective identity through texts, rituals, and educational practices. In music education, western instruments such as the piano are increasingly localized to transmit national narratives and cultural heritage. While the national music curriculum provides overarching guidelines (Knudsen & Onsrud, 2023), local universities retain pedagogical space to adapt teaching methods, allowing

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instructors to incorporate regional practices that reflect historical legacy and contemporary life (Smith et al., 2020).

In China, higher music education is structured across conservatories, comprehensive universities, and normal universities (Bai, 2013; Zhu & Su, 2018). Among these, normal universities play a strategic role in training future music educators. However, existing literature focuses predominantly on elite performance standards in conservatories or national policy mandates, leaving a critical gap in understanding how daily piano pedagogy in regional normal universities actively mediates cultural memory and builds cultural confidence. This study addresses this gap by examining how piano educators in Hunan and Jiangxi integrate culturally meaningful repertoire—particularly folk-inspired and revolutionary pieces—into classroom instruction, directly linking technical training with regional identity and historical awareness.

Hunan and Jiangxi present compelling cases for this investigation. Both provinces possess profound revolutionary traditions and rich "red culture" resources; Hunan is celebrated as the birthplace of Mao Zedong, while Jiangxi is home to the Jinggangshan revolutionary base (Ma, 2024). Although piano programs in both regions actively incorporate revolutionary and localized repertoire, their pedagogical strategies differ significantly due to distinct regional histories. Examining these two provinces offers nuanced insights into how regional cultural memory shapes diverse teaching approaches within a unified national framework.

To address this dynamic, this qualitative study investigates two primary research questions: (1) How does piano pedagogy integrate revolutionary and regional music to express cultural memory and foster cultural confidence? (2) How do distinct regional histories in Hunan and Jiangxi shape different teaching strategies in piano instruction? Utilizing data from 39 semi-structured interviews, eight classroom observations, and curriculum documents across 13 normal universities (six in Hunan and seven in Jiangxi), this study bridges cultural memory theory with classroom practice. It demonstrates that piano pedagogy in regional normal universities is not merely technical exercise, but an active, value-laden practice that embeds cultural memory and shapes students' cultural identity.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Cultural Memory and Music Education

Cultural memory refers to the way societies remember their past through shared symbols, traditions, and practices. Assmann (2011) pointed out that cultural memory is preserved not only in books, but also through daily arts education.

Music plays a strong role in preserving cultural memory. Melodies and rhythms can connect people to their shared past, recalling historical events, social struggles, or local traditions (Janata et al., 2007).

In this study, 'cultural confidence' means recognizing and affirming the value of one's own culture (Zhang & Liang, 2019). In music, cultural confidence means affirming China's traditional, revolutionary, and modern socialist music culture, using it as a foundation for education (Zhao & Zhang, 2025).

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Music can bring back memories of past historical events (van der Hoeven, 2014). It plays an important role in shaping personal and social identity. Music not only reflects cultural memory, but also helps build it (van der Hoeven, 2014).

In China, music education supports national goals and cultural narratives (Lin, 2021). During the Mao era, revolutionary music was taught widely to promote socialist ideals (Lei & Ouyang, 2018).

Mao and Du (2022) noted that China has a long history of using music to help govern the country. In ancient times, rulers saw music as a way to shape morals and social order. Music was used to teach harmony and maintain ritual order (Yang, 1981).

During the Zhou dynasty (ca. 1046–256 BCE), the system of yayue (elegant music) was linked to state ceremonies and was seen as a tool of moral education (Yang, 1981). The Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) established the Yuefu (Imperial Music Bureau) to collect folk songs, to reflect the voice of the people (Yang, 1981). In the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE), music was used in court rituals to show state authority and unity (Yang, 1981). Even in the Qing dynasty (1644–1911 CE), court music was still an important symbol of order and power (Yang, 1981). This long tradition explains why modern China also connects music with education and cultural policy (Mao & Du, 2022). According to Mao and Du (2022), building confidence in traditional music culture is a key goal of music education in China.

Furthermore, music is not neutral. It is a socio-cultural construct shaped by political and historical contexts. In education, musical practices can be guided to help form specific cultural identities and shared memories.

2.2. Piano Pedagogy in China

The term 'normal school' originates from the French école normale, referring to 'rule' or 'standard', designed to train teachers through a standardized system (Edwards, 1991). In Chinese normal universities, piano courses are compulsory for music education majors, aiming to develop both performance skills and pedagogical capabilities for future music teachers (Jiang, 2019).

Piano pedagogy in China exhibits distinct institutional models. Music conservatories focus primarily on elite performance skills, while comprehensive universities follow standardized national curricula (Bai, 2013). In contrast, normal universities emphasize a balance between technical proficiency and practical teaching ability (Bai, 2013).

However, existing literature focuses predominantly on conservatory training, leaving a notable gap in understanding how localized traditions and institutional frameworks shape piano teaching in normal universities. This pedagogical selection is not neutral; rather, it reflects how institutions choose specific repertoire to transmit cultural values. This study addresses this gap by examining how local and revolutionary music is selected, interpreted, and utilized in normal university piano classrooms.

2.3. Regional Identity and Localized Pedagogy

Localized pedagogy refers to teaching practices that integrate regional histories, cultural

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values, and local traditions into the curriculum (Gutierrez & Pascual, 2022). In China, regional institutions frequently adapt educational goals to reflect local heritage (Chen, 2009). For example, music educators select regional folk repertoire and revolutionary songs to connect daily classroom teaching with local cultural roots.

Localized teaching fosters a sense of place and belonging among students (Spring, 2013). When students practice music connected to their regional past, they develop a deeper attachment to their local community (Spring, 2013). In this way, pedagogy serves as an effective mechanism for cultural continuity. This dynamic is particularly evident in regions with distinct historical identities, such as Hunan (known for local folk traditions and revolutionary heritage) and Jiangxi (recognized as the birthplace of the Chinese revolution).

While existing literature discusses general music education in China, few studies examine how cultural memory is transmitted through piano pedagogy in regional normal universities. Most research focuses on technical performance, national policies, or elite conservatories. This leaves a notable gap in understanding how piano teaching actively mediates memory, regional identity, and localized educational practices. This study addresses this gap by comparing piano pedagogy across normal universities in Hunan and Jiangxi.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study uses a qualitative research design. The goal is to understand how piano teachers in Hunan and Jiangxi normal universities embed cultural memory into their teaching. Qualitative methods are suitable because they allow the researcher to explore meaning, context, and teaching strategies in depth. The research focuses on Hunan and Jiangxi because of their rich cultural history and strong ties to revolutionary traditions. These areas also have active normal universities where music education plays an important role in teacher training.

The study follows a case study approach. Case studies are useful when the research wants to explore ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions in real-life settings (Argyrou, 2017). In this study, each university is treated as a separate case. This helps reveal local differences and shared practices in regional music education.

The study also draws on educational ethnography. This method focuses on how teachers and students behave in real classrooms and how they make meaning from daily practices. Observing how teachers select and explain musical repertoire helps the researcher understand how memory is taught through music.

3.2. Data Collection

Data for this study were collected from 13 regional normal universities across Hunan (six universities) and Jiangxi (seven universities). These institutions train future music teachers and offer piano classes as a core component of their curriculum. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 39 participants (three from each of the 13 universities, including two piano teachers and one student per institution). The participating teachers possessed at least five years of piano instructional experience. The interviews explored

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teaching goals, repertoire selection, and perspectives on cultural memory, with each session lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes. All interviews were recorded with informed consent, and data saturation was reached when no new themes emerged.

To complement the interview data, the researcher conducted eight classroom observations across selected piano classes within these 13 universities (four in Hunan and four in Jiangxi). During these sessions, detailed fieldnotes were taken regarding repertoire choices, instructional explanations, and student responses, capturing how pedagogical concepts were implemented in real-time classroom settings.

Teaching materials and curriculum documents were collected. This included syllabi, textbook selections, and university-level music education plans. These documents provided context for how cultural memory is written into formal teaching structures.

These three sources showed how piano pedagogy and cultural memory are linked in the classroom. Using multiple sources also helped increase the reliability of the data. These different sources of data helped to confirm the findings and make the results more reliable.

3.3. Data Analysis

This study coded the data with cultural memory, social identity, and cultural confidence in mind. The codes were directly linked to these theoretical constructs. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and key ideas in the qualitative data. This method helps researchers understand how participants make meaning of their experiences and how cultural memory appears in their teaching practices (Braun & Clarke, 2017).

The analysis followed six steps. The researcher listened to all interview recordings and read the field notes and documents several times to gain an overall understanding of the data. Then, key words, phrases, and teaching actions were marked and grouped into initial codes. Finally, similar codes were grouped into broader themes that reflected how teachers and students experienced music, emotion, and identity in piano classrooms.

Codes included ‘revolutionary music’, ‘local identity’, ‘curriculum goals’ and ‘student response’. These codes were the first step to organize the data. They broke the material into small parts, and each code captured an idea or action that appeared in teaching. This step helped the researcher move from raw words to more organized meaning. Coding also made it possible to see connections across interviews, classroom notes, and documents. By grouping related codes, the researcher could identify larger themes that explained how teachers taught and how cultural memory appeared in lessons.

All interviews and fieldnotes were transcribed and imported into NVivo 12 Plus. Coding was done in three stages: open coding marked key ideas, axial coding grouped related codes, and selective coding formed final themes. Consistency was ensured through iterative comparison across transcripts and data sources. The researcher conducted the coding and ensured consistency by re-reading transcripts and comparing across data sources. Triangulation of interviews, classroom observations, and curriculum documents enhanced the trustworthiness of the findings. Data collection stopped at 39 interviews, when no new codes or themes appeared. The sample included teachers and students from both Hunan and Jiangxi to allow regional comparison.

Related codes were grouped into broader themes. For example, codes about historical

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explanation and repertoire choice were grouped under the theme 'Teaching the Past'. The themes were checked against the original data. This ensured that they were clear, supported by evidence, and not repeated. Each theme was given a short, clear definition. For example, one theme focused on how teachers connect music to local history. Another theme focused on how students learn cultural values through piano lessons. The final themes were used to organize the findings section of the paper. After following the six steps of thematic analysis, four main themes were identified. These themes were derived from repeated patterns across interviews, classroom observations, and teaching documents. Table 1 below summarizes the key themes, representative codes, and sources.

Table 1: Summary of Thematic Categories and Supporting Data

Theme	Sample Codes	Data Sources
Teaching the Past	Revolutionary music, historical context, patriotic framing	Interviews, Observations
Local Identity in Repertoire	Hunan folk songs, Jiangxi local works, teacher anecdotes	Interviews, Curriculum Docs
Cultural Confidence in the Classroom	Pride in national history, emotional response, political slogans	Observations, Interviews
Pedagogical Strategies	Linking music to values, simplified storytelling, repertoire design	Interviews, Teaching Notes

To enhance the credibility of the findings, triangulation was applied. This involved comparing themes across different types of data. Table 2 shows how each theme was supported by interviews, observations, and documents.

Table 2: Triangulation of Key Themes Across Data Sources

Theme	Interviews	Observations	Documents
Teaching the Past	✓	✓	✓
Local Identity in Repertoire	✓	✓	
Cultural Confidence	✓	✓	✓
Pedagogical Strategies	✓		✓

These themes formed the basis of the findings presented in the next section. By combining multiple data sources and applying systematic analysis, the study ensured that the results are grounded, credible, and clearly connected to the research questions.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

This study followed ethical guidelines for qualitative research. All participants were fully informed about the study's purpose before interviews and classroom observations, and written or verbal informed consent was obtained.

To ensure confidentiality and privacy, real names of participants and institutions were anonymized. Teachers were assigned codes such as 'T1-Hunan' or 'T2-Jiangxi'. Participation was completely voluntary; participants were informed of their right to skip questions or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Classroom observations focused solely on teaching methods and materials, without direct data collection on students. All interview recordings and transcripts were stored securely in

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password-protected files accessible only to the researcher. Audio files were deleted after transcription, and all research data were fully anonymized. Throughout the research process, the principles of respect, transparency, and confidentiality were strictly maintained.

4. Findings

This section presents the empirical findings derived from interviews, classroom observations, and curriculum document analysis. Through thematic analysis, four main themes emerged: teaching the past, local identity in repertoire, cultural confidence in the classroom, and pedagogical strategies for cultural transmission. The main thematic findings and supporting evidence are summarized below and synthesized in Table 3.

4.1. Teaching the Past

Most piano instructors actively used musical repertoire to teach students about national history. They regularly incorporated revolutionary pieces and patriotic works into their curriculum. Rather than using these works solely for finger training, teachers utilized them to communicate historical experiences and broader national narratives.

For example, one instructor described using piano compositions from the 1950s and 1960s in her lessons (T1-Hunan, Interview 2024). She emphasized that performing works from this era helped students connect with the historical context and sense the social atmosphere in which the music was created.

Before students began practicing a piece, instructors typically introduced its historical background. If a work was composed during a specific historical period, teachers provided a brief historical context. Additionally, instructors integrated visual aids, such as historical videos and archival photos, into classroom practice. These visual materials helped students link musical themes with collective historical memory, making the learning process both personally engaging and emotionally meaningful.

4.2. Local Identity in Repertoire

In this study, 'local identity' refers to the way music reflects and reinforces the cultural features of a specific place. It is not limited to geographical origin but also includes the stories, values, and collective memories that communities attach to music. Scholars note that music can construct a sense of place and belonging by connecting sound with cultural meaning (Stokes, 1994; Frith, 1996). From a broader perspective, music can also act as cultural memory, carrying shared experiences from the past into present practices (Assmann, 2011). When teachers in Hunan and Jiangxi select local folk or revolutionary songs for piano lessons, they are not only teaching repertoire but also transmitting identity. The pieces remind students of their cultural roots and strengthen their sense of belonging to the local community.

In both Hunan and Jiangxi, teachers use regional music in their piano lessons. These pieces reflect local stories and values, helping students feel pride in their heritage. In Hunan, one of the most common examples is "Liuyang River" arranged by Wang (1972). The song was originally composed by Tang (1949) to praise Chairman Mao and the beauty of the Hunan landscape. During the Cultural Revolution, Wang transformed it into a piano solo. While the arrangement carried the spirit of revolutionary optimism, the melody kept its strong

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link to local culture and memory. The lyrics describe the bends of the river. One line states, "The Liuyang River has many bends, the water flows for miles into the Xiang River, and Mao Zedong led us to liberation". This shows how natural scenery and revolutionary history were woven together in the song. Figure 1 presents the original vocal melody with lyrics, which later became the main theme (A) in Wang's piano version (Wei, 2003).

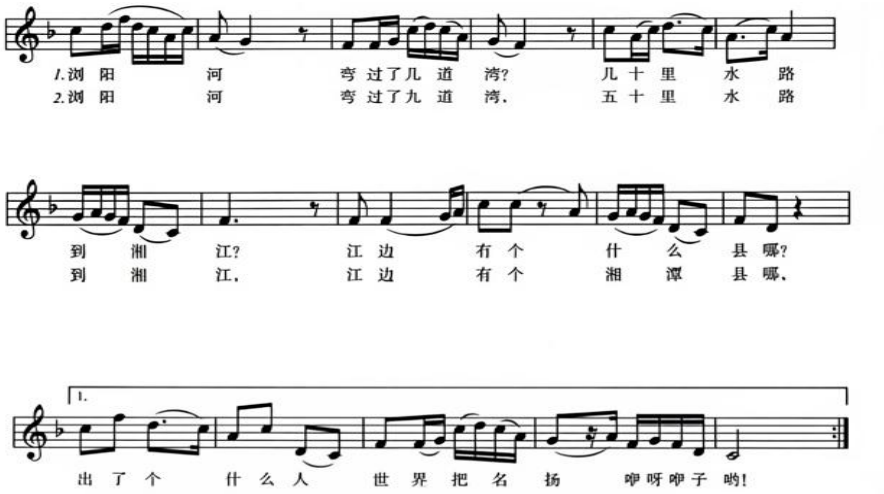

Figure 1: Original melody of the Hunan folk song "Liuyang River" (Tang, 1949/2014), arranged for piano by Wang (1972). Based on Wei (2003) and transcribed with annotations by the researcher. The highlighted line also forms the main theme (A) in the piano version (see Figure 2).

As shown in Figure 2, the 'A' theme preserves the lyrical contour of the folk melody while adding gentle harmonic colour and smoother rhythmic flow. Teachers in Hunan often remind students that, even if they do not sing the lyrics, they should still hear them inside the music. In this way, the piano arrangement becomes more than a technical exercise. It serves as a bridge that links folk roots with present-day performance, and it connects personal feeling with national identity.

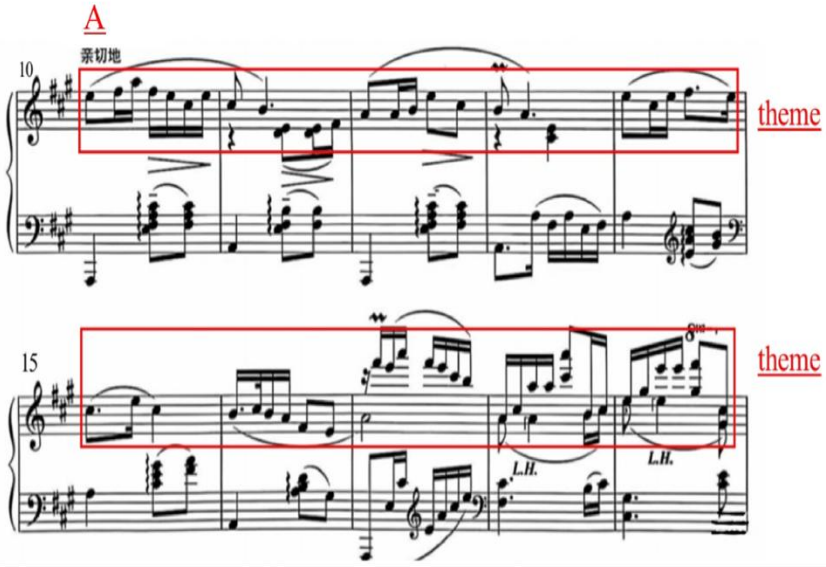

Figure 2: Excerpt from measures 10–20 of "Liuyang River" arranged by Wang (1972). Source: Wei (2003), 30 Famous Chinese Piano Pieces. The passage shows the main theme 'A' as annotated by the researcher.

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In classroom practice, teachers bring this background directly into lessons. Some ask students to sing a few lines of the folk song before playing the piano version. Others show old photos or short videos of the river to help students imagine the landscape and the history. As students perform, they are reminded that the melody is not just a sequence of notes but a story of their home and of Mao's leadership. In this way, learning becomes more personal and emotional, linking piano practice with both local pride and cultural memory (as documented in the author's classroom observations, 2024).

In Jiangxi, teachers often tell their students that the Jinggang Mountains are the 'cradle of the Chinese revolution'. They explain how Mao Zedong and Zhu De built an early rural base there in 1927–1928. Then they connect this history with piano pieces such as "Yingshan Hong" (Zhao, 1975). This work, like "Liuyang River" in Hunan, carries both local memory and revolutionary meaning.

Teachers show students how the piece develops through different sections. In the coda, Zhao quoted the melody of "Red Star Song" (Fu, 1974). Figure 3 shows this passage, where the music changes from sorrow to hope. Professors explain that the melody of "Red Star Song" (Fu, 1974) was well known in the 1970s and is still remembered today.

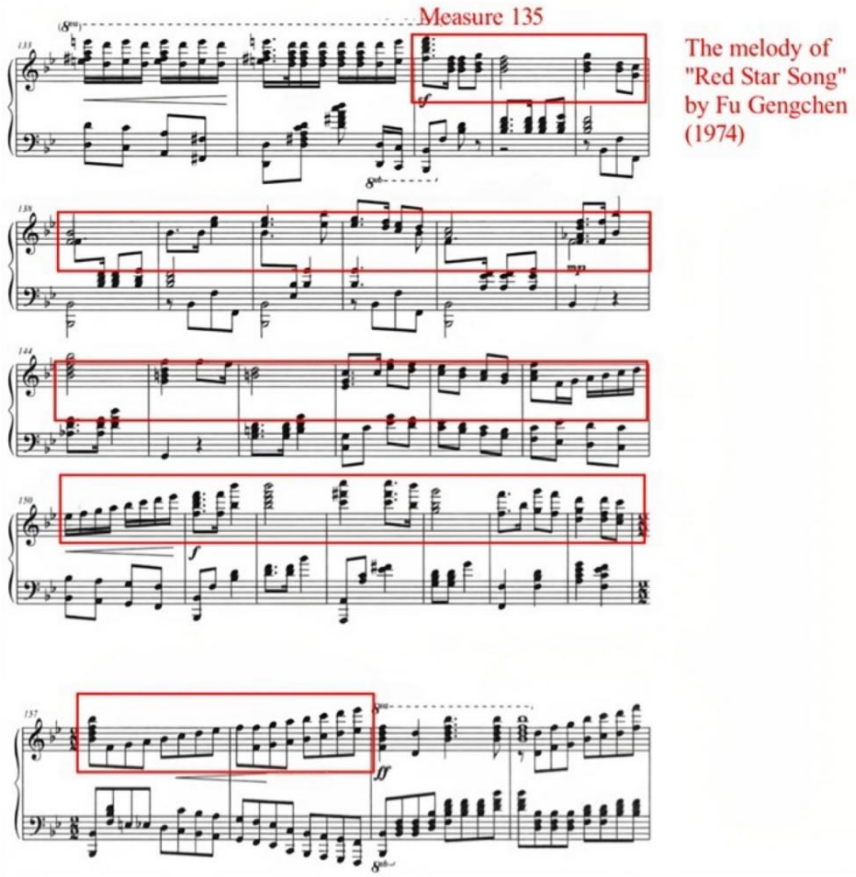

Figure 3: Measures 135–158 of the piano version of "Yingshan Hong" (Zhao, 1975), based on the melody of "Red Star Song" (Fu, 1974), transcribed by the researcher.

To help students recognize it, they sometimes play recordings or show the original lyrics. Figure 4 presents the theme of "Red Star Song" by Fu Gengchen (1974).

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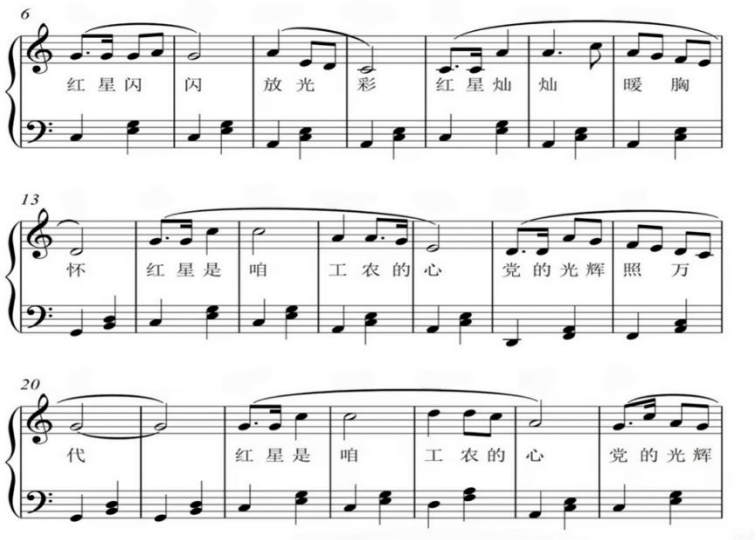

Figure 4: The main theme of “Red Star Song” by Fu Gengchen (1974), transcribed by the researcher.

For many students, the lyrics of "Red Star Song" by Fu Gengchen (1974) remain familiar.

“The Party's glory lights the ages.
Red star shines brightly,
Leading us forward…”

Note： Excerpt of lyrics from “Red Star Song” (Fu, 1974), reproduced from *the Compulsory education textbook: Music (Grade 5, Book 2)* (Lei, 2021).

This revolutionary song was one of the most popular melodies in the 1970s, symbolising revolutionary faith and sacrifice. When Zhao quoted this melody in the piano work "Yingshan Hong" (Zhao, 1975), he connected the visual image of red azalea flowers with the shining red star in the sky, representing hope and victory.

In class, teachers asked students if they were familiar with this melody. Many students realized they had heard it before during their childhood. This moment illustrates how familiar melodies can instantly activate collective memory. Teachers then guided students to imagine the red azaleas blooming across the mountains. Through this guided imagery, the lesson transformed standard piano technique into a meaningful moment where students reconnected with revolutionary history and collective identity.

Taken together, these cases show how local identity is expressed through repertoire choices. In Hunan, teachers use folk music and natural imagery to build regional pride. In Jiangxi, teachers emphasize revolutionary sacrifice and historical struggle. Both approaches link piano learning to cultural memory, while reflecting the distinct history of each region.

Such teaching does more than preserve regional history; it lays the groundwork for students' cultural confidence. The following section will explore how music education further cultivates this confidence and shapes students' emotional connection in the classroom.

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4.3. Cultural Confidence in the Classroom

In Hunan, a professor asked students to perform "Liuyang River" (Wang, 1972). Initially, their playing was technically accurate but lacked emotional depth. After the professor reminded them that the melody originated from their home province and shared its historical background—composed to honor Mao Zedong and celebrate Hunan's natural beauty—the students' focus noticeably shifted. The instructor encouraged them to visualize the river's flow while playing. One student, who had previously struggled with the piece, developed a personal connection to the music and played with greater confidence. Another student noted after class that the melody reminded her of her grandparents who lived near the river, demonstrating how local music evokes familiar personal memories.

In Jiangxi, a similar transformation occurred during a lesson on "Yingshan Hong" (Zhao, 1975). When the section quoting "Red Star Song" (Fu, 1974) appeared, several students recognized the melody from community events and began humming softly along. Their touch on the keys became steadier and more expressive. In post-class reflections, students explained that performing the piece deepened their respect for the Red Army's sacrifices and fostered a sense of social responsibility. The instructor observed that these emotional responses emerged naturally when musical practice connected with collective memory, transforming the piano studio from a site of technical drill into a space of awakened cultural identity (according to instructional records, T3-Jiangxi, 2024).

These observations illustrate how cultural confidence is cultivated in daily classroom practice. In Hunan, it grows through regional folk melodies that foster local pride; in Jiangxi, it develops through revolutionary music that connects students with national history. This shift is reflected not only in the students' physical posture and musical touch, but also in their heightened cultural awareness.

4.4. Pedagogical Strategies for Cultural Transmission

The previous sections showed how repertoire carries local identity and how students develop cultural confidence in the classroom. This section turns to the role of teachers and the strategies they use to transmit cultural values through piano lessons. Revolutionary piano works were not only taught as pieces of music; they were also used as a medium for linking history, memory, and education.

Teachers in both Hunan and Jiangxi described their teaching as more than technical training. They explained that piano lessons offered a space where cultural awareness could be fostered. One common approach was to introduce the story behind a piece before students played it. Instead of beginning with fingerings or rhythm, teachers often started with a short explanation of the people, events, or places connected to the song. This prepared students to see the music as meaningful rather than mechanical.

Another strategy was to use supporting materials. Some teachers showed photos of the Liuyang River in "Liuyang River" (Wang, 1972) or the Jinggang Mountains in "Yingshan Hong" (Zhao, 1975). Others played recordings of the original songs or shared festival videos where the music was performed. These aids helped students connect piano sound with lived culture and memory. Teachers also connected music to community life, performing folk music at local events in Hunan and playing revolutionary pieces during celebrations in Jiangxi.

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Furthermore, traditional Western piano techniques, such as strong chords and rapid tremolos, were used to express revolutionary passion. As students practiced these physical movements, the tension and release under their fingertips created direct tactile feedback. Through the physical action of touch and muscle memory, standard technical exercises were transformed into a personal experience of historical struggle and confidence.

In short, teachers used multiple methods to connect piano lessons with local history and culture. Through these strategies, teachers acted as cultural transmitters. They showed students that music has social meaning and that learning the piano can also be a way of engaging with national identity. This reflects Assmann's (2011) idea of cultural memory as knowledge passed down through shared practices, and Bernstein's (2000) view that curriculum transmits values as well as skills. In this sense, revolutionary piano music provided both a repertoire for study and a channel for education.

The main themes from this study can be summarised across four dimensions: teaching the past, local identity, cultural confidence, and pedagogical strategies. Table 3 presents these themes with examples of supporting evidence.

Table 3: Summary of Thematic Findings with Supporting Evidence

Theme	Key Focus	Supporting Evidence
Teaching the Past	Using patriotic music to teach history	Quotes from Jiangxi teachers, class discussions
Local Identity in Repertoire	Including regional songs and stories	Hunan folk music, adapted local works, teacher comments
Cultural Confidence in the Classroom	Building pride and connection through music	Student reactions, teacher reflections, classroom behavior
Pedagogical Strategies	Linking music to values and storytelling	Teaching techniques, simplified historical explanations

While these themes appeared in both provinces, their focus and emphasis differed between Hunan and Jiangxi. The next section compares these regional differences.

4.5. Comparative Insights: Regional Differences between Hunan and Jiangxi

The comparative analysis reveals clear regional differences in how teachers in Hunan and Jiangxi translate cultural memory into piano pedagogy. In Hunan, piano instruction relies primarily on local folk compositions, such as "Liuyang River" (Wang, 1972). These works combine the regional landscape with Chairman Mao's historical connection to the province. Teachers leverage local stories and natural imagery to foster students' pride in their hometown. Because students possess prior familiarity with these regional melodies, they express deeper personal emotion and feel a strong connection to their cultural roots.

In Jiangxi, teachers place greater emphasis on revolutionary compositions, such as "Yingshan Hong" (Zhao, 1975). Lessons directly connect musical themes to the Red Army, the Jinggang Mountains, and historical sacrifices. Rather than focusing on local folk culture, Jiangxi educators use piano repertoire to convey national history and collective values such as perseverance and unity. Consequently, students in Jiangxi approach these pieces with high respect, developing a sense of historical responsibility toward their shared heritage.

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Instructors in both provinces employ similar teaching strategies, including storytelling, musical simplification, and visual aids. However, their analytical orientations differ fundamentally. Hunan's approach is local and expressive, grounding cultural memory in lyrical heritage, native scenery, and personal affection. Jiangxi's approach is national and historical, anchoring memory in revolutionary struggle, political identity, and collective responsibility.

These contrasting patterns demonstrate that piano education in Chinese higher education is not a uniform practice, but one negotiated through local history. As Assmann (2011) suggests, cultural memory is not static, and it is continually reshaped through localized social practices. While both provinces support national educational goals, each draws on distinct historical resources to engage students. Recognizing these regional nuances illustrates that combining local memory with national heritage makes music education both meaningful and affective for students across different regions.

5. Discussion

This chapter discusses how the findings relate to the research questions and broader literature. It explains how piano pedagogy in Hunan and Jiangxi reflects regional history, cultural values, and national goals. The discussion is organized by the four main themes identified in the study.

5.1. Teaching the Past and Shaping Historical Awareness

This finding supports previous studies which suggest that music can act as a form of "sonic history" (Phillips-Hutton, 2021). In this study, teachers did not select pieces solely for technical training. They chose works that helped students understand China's historical experience. This demonstrates that piano teaching is not only about physical skills, but also about cultural meaning and collective memory.

This finding extends previous research by showing that political meaning is actively reconstructed through classroom interaction rather than merely embedded in curriculum design. As Dong (2023) notes, school music frequently carries patriotic functions. Music education thus serves as an effective tool for cultural preservation, helping shape national identity and promote shared values. By framing music as a link to national history, instructors position themselves not as mere technicians, but as cultural guides. This directly aligns with the state's educational goals (Dong, 2023).

According to Assmann (2011), cultural memory represents the institutionalized form of shared knowledge that shapes collective identity over generations. In piano education, cultural memory is actively constructed through curriculum choices and teaching strategies. The findings show that music teachers in Hunan and Jiangxi act as transmitters of memory, selecting repertoires that connect students to regional or national historical narratives. This strongly supports Assmann's (2011) theory by showing how everyday classroom practice passes collective memory down to the next generation.

However, when revolutionary or patriotic pieces are used repeatedly to reinforce collective identity, historical memory can become selective and normative. Assmann (2011) reminds us that institutions may frame memory to support specific political or cultural values. In piano education, red music functions as a pedagogical tool shaped by current educational goals, which may present a selective view of history by emphasizing

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certain narratives over others. While piano pedagogy strengthens cultural identity, it may also limit historical understanding if critical reflection is absent. Therefore, music education needs a reflective approach that balances cultural continuity with critical engagement.

5.2. Local Repertoires and Regional Identity

This finding suggests that teachers frequently select music that reflects the distinct history and culture of their own province. In Hunan, instructors incorporate folk melodies and works connected to Mao Zedong. In Jiangxi, music tied to the Red Army and the Jinggang Mountains is far more common. These repertoire choices are not random, but reflect a deep connection between physical place, musical sound, and collective identity.

This finding aligns with theoretical perspectives asserting that music active participates in constructing regional identity (Rice, 2007). Teachers utilize local repertoire not only to develop technical proficiency, but also to reinforce pride in regional heritage. As observed in classroom settings, students express greater emotional engagement when performing music that feels culturally familiar.

Furthermore, this outcome demonstrates how piano pedagogy in China is mediated by geography and local memory. Although standard piano pedagogy originally derives from Western traditions, Chinese educators systematically adapt these methods to meet regional needs. This practice represents what Wang (2024) conceptualizes as localization in music education. The present study extends this concept by showing that localization manifests differently across regions. In Hunan, localization operates through folk traditions and natural landscapes, whereas in Jiangxi, it operates through regional revolutionary history.

By teaching music linked to local heritage, instructors help students feel grounded in their native communities. This dynamic directly supports the national policy of building cultural confidence, demonstrating that cultural pride is cultivated not only through broad national narratives, but also through distinct local voices. Ultimately, this indicates that piano pedagogy should be understood not merely as technical skill transmission, but as a culturally embedded practice that actively constructs personal identity and historical memory across generations.

5.3. Cultural Confidence through Musical Emotion

The findings demonstrate that students respond with heightened emotional investment to music that reflects their own heritage. Teachers observed that students exhibited greater focus, interest, and artistic expression when performing patriotic or regional repertoire. This outcome suggests that piano pedagogy fosters cultural confidence by creating meaningful emotional connections between students and their cultural roots.

This aligns with Przybylska's (2021) assertion that emotional engagement serves as a vital foundation for effective cultural education. When students experience emotional resonance, such as pride or curiosity, they interact more deeply with musical compositions. In this study, the piano studio transformed from a site of technical exercise into a space where students explored personal and collective identity.

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Furthermore, these results address a significant gap in music education literature, which often prioritizes technical acquisition over affective response. The evidence indicates that emotional engagement acts as a key mechanism for internalizing cultural values. Beyond reading musical notation, performing patriotic pieces enables students to embody cultural history through physical touch and posture. As instructors observed, students exhibit greater physical conviction and posture when performing heritage-linked music.

This dynamic illustrates the operationalization of cultural confidence within higher education classrooms. Through musical performance, students perceive themselves as active participants in a shared cultural narrative. Educators leverage this affective connection to enhance student motivation and reinforce bonds with both regional history and the broader nation. Ultimately, this underscores the argument that emotional resonance is an essential mechanism for cultivating sustained cultural confidence in music pedagogy.

5.4. Pedagogy as Cultural Transmission

The findings show that teachers in Hunan and Jiangxi act not only as technique instructors, but also as active cultural transmitters. They utilize piano lessons to pass down shared values, historical stories, and a sense of belonging. This supports the theoretical perspective that formal education serves as a primary site for cultural transmission (Kurt, 2015). In this study, instructors employed accessible pedagogical methods, such as storytelling, visual materials, and guided discussions, to connect musical technique with cultural meaning.

This outcome aligns with Lin (2021), who argues that music education in China frequently serves broader social and national goals. However, the present study demonstrates that the agency of the teacher is remarkably active. Teachers do not merely implement a top-down syllabus. Instead, they systematically select, adapt, and interpret music in ways that reflect their local heritage and pedagogical beliefs.

Consequently, classroom pedagogy itself becomes a dynamic cultural act. Teachers shape not only the musical capabilities of their students, but also their understanding of personal and collective identity. Through these everyday instructional choices, educators fulfill national educational aims while simultaneously incorporating regional history into the curriculum. Ultimately, this underscores the argument that piano pedagogy functions as a form of cultural transmission deeply embedded in daily classroom practice.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that piano pedagogy in Hunan and Jiangxi serves as a vital medium for transmitting cultural memory. Through repertoire selection, historical background storytelling, and classroom interaction, piano teachers effectively connect musical technique with regional identity and national narratives. While grounded in the Chinese higher education context, these findings address broader issues in global music education regarding how to balance global instruments with local cultural meanings (van der Hoeven, 2014). Specifically, it reveals how a Western instrument like the piano can be adapted to express localized history and collective memory.

This research contributes to cultural memory theory by showing how memory operates within everyday classroom pedagogy (Assmann, 2011). Practically, it offers useful

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insights for music educators and curriculum designers. It suggests that integrating regional heritage into instrumental training can enhance students' cultural confidence and artistic engagement without sacrificing technical instruction. On the contrary, technical precision and cultural resonance reinforce each other in the learning process.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. It focuses specifically on regional normal universities in two provinces, which may not represent all types of higher education institutions or primary education settings in China. Future research could expand the geographical scope to other provinces and investigate how students critically interpret these historical narratives in their long-term teaching careers.

Overall, piano pedagogy represents a dynamic space where global artistic forms meet local cultural memories. In this process, music education transcends standardized technical training to become an active practice of preserving, interpreting, and renewing collective identity. By honoring local heritage alongside national history, music pedagogy ensures that traditional memory remains meaningful for future generations.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

This study was conducted in accordance with the research ethics guidelines of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). All procedures involving human participants followed institutional ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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