Musical Identity and Culture: Exploring the Korean Diaspora through the Lens of Piano Pedagogy

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Outline

• Background
• Research Questions
• Brief History of Piano and Hagwon
• Piano Pedagogy
• Findings from Interviews
• Summary and Future Implications
• References
Background

• Societal and cultural conditions affect music learning (Johansen, 2010)

• Identity is understood as one’s belief of self in relation to social groups (Torres, Jones & Renn, 2009)

• Cultural identities are not fixed (Frith, 1996)

• Identity and music are connected through culture (Hebert, 2010)
Culture and Community

- Content delivered reflects control of cultural values (Wright & Davies, 2010)
- Musicians are influenced implicitly and explicitly
- Communities are bound by ways of learning that are specific to its members (Waldron & Veblen, 2008)
Interviews

• Two groups of Korean students
  • 5 University students studying music in Korea
  • 5 University students studying music in Canada

Interviews took place January-May 2010 in London, Ontario and in Cheonan, South Korea
Research Questions

• How is piano pedagogy structured and practiced in Korea?

• What expectations and values are evidenced through the two systems of piano pedagogy?
History of the Piano

- 1885: Keyboard instruments was first introduced to Korea by the missionaries
- Early 1900: First piano was introduced
- 1910-1945: Japanese annexation had crucial influence in Korea including Education
- 1950: Piano was manufactured by Koreans
- 1960: Piano became popular and its growth paralleled with the economic growth
Piano Hagwons

• ‘Hagwon’ – after school private education

• Students attend everyday for 1-2 hours

• Most common Hagwons (English or piano)

• At piano Hagwon, each has their own practice room and works on their own

• The teacher comes into their room for a lesson (3-15 minutes)

Picture of a Typical Piano Hagwon
Piano Pedagogy in Korea

- Nearly all students are trained in the following order

  Piano level: Beginner → Advanced

  Beyer → Czerny 100 → Czerny 30 → Czerny 40 → Czerny 50
Interviews
Hagwon Experience

• “After school, I went to Hagwon and often stayed there until it was closed late at night. I enjoyed the company of my piano teacher and other students so much that I spend all my time everyday. I particularly remember having a very good experience from the Hagwon”

• “I went to the Hagwon everyday after school. First, I chatted with the teacher about my day while I had a snack. Then I went into a practice room and worked on my pieces. The teacher would come into my room about 3-4 times through the hour to check up on my progress”

• “I liked going to the Hagwon. It was fun.”
Hagwon Experience

• “I asked my teacher that I want to play what my friend (a student older and advanced than she was) was playing because I liked what she played. My teacher told me that then I will have to complete the book I was playing, so I did.”

• “I don’t remember the teacher spending long enough time in my room to give me a lesson. It was more like how much I have practiced, and giving out instructions on how much I should practice more.”
“Hobbiest” vs. “Serious” Students

- Serious students: chosen piano as a career
- Switch to private lessons or individualized lessons offered at Hagwon for “serious” students
- High expectation and requirement from both teachers and students
- Extreme work ethic required for entrance audition
“Serious” Students

• “I practiced 10 hours a day. I practiced as my life depended on it. During lesson, my teacher would not let one measure pass by until it was perfect.”

• “I had lessons every day, and every day I was yelled at. I always went home crying.”
Coming to Canada

• Canada is more “liberated,” “multicultural,” and “accepting.”

• “I found kids to be much more free; playing and running everywhere, kids rolling down the hills, playing on the green fields…things like that. And, the fact that the school was considered fun – that was different. Korea is all about studying or tutoring. Canadian kids definitely have more freedom.”
Piano Training in Canada

• “…(my teacher) emphasized phrasing and expression in Western style. I became very frustrated because my pieces weren’t advanced enough to work on expression.”

• “My (new teacher) changed a lot of things with me; I didn’t play musically.”

“Canadian teachers are more focused on details and expression. …Canadians seem to be natural at playing with expression.”
Transition in Piano Training

Korea
- Technicality
  - Clarity in Sound / Precision
  - Strong Playing
  - Fast tempo

Canada
- Musicality
  - Phrasing
  - Detail
  - Expression

University
Autonomy in Learning

Immigration
Transition in University

• “She kept asking me how I felt when I played the music and I became frustrated. I didn’t know why she was wasting my time with feelings, rather than teaching me.”

• “Make it your own (interpretation), that’s what the teacher asked me to prepare for the lesson.”

• “But it was nothing like that in University (referring to her previous piano training). I had to work independently. No one told me how to practice and I was on my own…”
Transition in Piano Training

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**Autonomy in Learning**
Music Is…

Canada

- “An indispensible part of daily life.”
- “My life.”
- “Something I crave, something I need.”
- “Something that comes from the heart, not the mind.”
- “A friend.”

Korea

- “My other half.”
- “My life.”
- “Something that can move you, touch your heart.”
- “Something that you cannot hide inside.”
- “A friend.”
What’s on Your iPod?
Reflections
Repertoire Preference

- “Dreamlike and Blurry”  
  **Korean Students**

- “Stiff and Structured”  
  **Korean-Canadian Students**
Closing Remarks
References


