

# The Teaching Methods and Philosophies of Three Leading Piano Teachers in China

Zhe Tang, Ling Zhao and Vivian Li

Natalie Burton  
Arizona State University

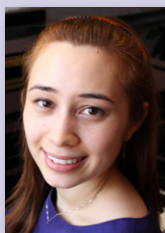
Piano education in China is a complex phenomenon shaped over the past century by many factors: China's rich history of musical traditions, the influence of missionary piano teachers, the establishment of government-formed music conservatories, rapid changes in a political top-down approach and the contributions of Russian piano teachers. Globalization and China's rising economic status in the last four and a half decades have led to more Chinese pianists studying abroad and bringing their education back home. Once a foreign import, the piano is now played by more children in China than anywhere else in the world, and young Chinese pianists are frequently recognized on the world's most competitive stages. As musicians compete on a global scale and international exchanges grow, understanding piano education in China becomes increasingly important.

Three renowned teachers shape today's piano education in China: Zhe Tang (唐哲) at Shanghai Conservatory, Ling Zhao (赵聆) at Central Conservatory and Vivian Li (李穗荣) at Xinghai Conservatory. After studying in both China and the West, they train some of China's best young pianists who are recognized on the world's most competitive stages. This paper shares the teaching methods and philosophies of Tang, Zhao and Li through comprehensive interviews and lesson observations. It aims to enhance the teaching and performance of pianists, while offering valuable insights into piano education in China.

The document explores Tang's methods to inspire characters in the music and achieve balance in timing and sound, Zhao's techniques to position and move the hands and fingers for effortless control and Li's approaches to manipulate natural arm weight to create a variety of tones and sounds. Their teaching presents useful ideas for how to effectively communicate music and how to guide students to become passionate and independent musicians. Techniques taught by Zhao and Li—such as the finger standing stably on the key, grabbing with the hand and differing approaches to the high finger technique—encourage pianists to investigate

the function of different body parts, the interconnectedness of tension and relaxation, where strength should come from, and how to best support weight with ease. Additionally, Tang, Zhao and Li describe the unique aspects of piano education in China.

**Natalie Burton** lived in China four years for a piano master's program and Fulbright research grant before completing her DMA in piano performance and pedagogy at Arizona State University. She now teaches in San Jose, California.



## Full Dissertation:

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