



Reasons for the Difference of Middle Pedal Function in Upright Pianos in Chinese and American Universities

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Abstract

Piano pedals can affect the performance by changing the volume or timbre. The middle pedals of upright pianos in Chinese and American colleges and universities have different functions. Based on the differences in social development, cultural environment and learning style of piano music between China and the United States, this paper compares and probes into the functional differences of the Middle Pedals in upright pianos in Chinese and American colleges and universities. Different Piano pedals have different functional principles and effects, so it is of great practical significance to explore and analyze the functional differences between Chinese and American Upright Piano pedals.

Subject Areas

Music

Keywords

Universities, Upright Piano, China and American, Soft-Pedal, Hold-Pedal

1. Introduction

Compared with other musical instruments, piano has incomparable uniqueness in range and timbre. Because it has 88 keys, it covers almost the range of sounds in music. In addition to the tone change through the control of touch keys, but also through the use of different pedals to achieve. The middle pedal of upright piano in domestic colleges and universities is the weak pedal, while the middle pedal of neutral piano in American colleges and universities is basically the same as the middle pedal of grand piano, to understand the functional differences be-

tween the weak pedal and the sound-keeping pedal, to explore the reasons of the different pedal in Chinese and American upright pianos, to better inspire the domestic piano settings, learn from the outstanding points of foreign countries, and combine the domestic social and cultural customs, promote the development of Chinese piano music. This paper is divided into three parts, which are about the hold pedal and the soft pedal, discusses the differences between Chinese and American piano music learning from different learning levels, and analyzes the differences between Chinese and American economy and culture, from the above three reasons for the analysis of middle pedal function differences.

2. Hold Pedal and Soft Pedal

As we all know, a piano has three pedals, and different pedals have different functions. "Pedal is an organic part of the modern piano, is the unique wonderful characteristic of the piano, the ideal use of the pedal is also a powerful instrument in piano playing" (Briefly describe the use characteristics of piano pedal) [1]. The left pedal is the soft pedal, the right pedal is the sustain pedal, and the middle pedal has two different types, one is the keep-sound pedal, the other is the soft pedal. This article mainly discusses the function of the keep-sound pedal and the weak-sound pedal.

The soft pedal and the left pedal seem to function very much the same, both making the sound lighter, but the function is still somewhat different. When the left pedal is pressed, the hammer of the upright piano moves closer to the strings to reduce the impact, thus reducing the volume and making the sound very pure and soft. The soft pedal is also called the muffler pedal, the use mechanism of the soft pedal is that after stepping down the pedal, the thick velvet can be lowered above the strings, blocking between the strings and the hammers, greatly reducing the volume. It is designed to reduce the sound. Usually, a fixed device is installed beside the middle pedal to facilitate the long-term maintenance of the soft effect, which can avoid affecting other people's daily life such as rest or study when playing, usually only used at night or early morning when playing the piano, so as not to disturb the peace of the neighbors. Most of them have no practical playing significance. There are also some situations to help the player play more weakly, also to increase the softness of the sound, and to remove any percussive elements in the sound quality.

The function of keeping the tone pedal is to step on the pedal and then continue the note or chord played before. The function of this design is to extend one or more notes according to the requirements of the music score, to avoid unnecessary reverberation, make the melody lines clearer, at the same time, it can liberate the left hand and moderately reduce the difficulty of playing. "When the durations beneath the moving harmonies need to be maintained, the composer may write them as long-lasting notes that the fingers themselves cannot hold" (Piano Pedal Method Guidance) [2]. Especially, in polyphonic or har-

monic works with complex texture, it is used to support the flow of melody, and its role is similar to the base of the orchestra. For example, in the work, the high voice part is more complex, and the left-hand span is large, so the low voice needs to be extended by using the tone sustaining pedal, rather than using the tone sustaining pedal to extend all the tones, so that the melody of the high voice part can be played freely. The middle pedal, as the sound maintaining pedal, is not common in the vertical piano and is specially designed for pianists. The retention pedal was designed in the 19th century, but it was popularized by Steinway in the early 20th century, while the retention pedal of other brands of piano was not popularized until the 1970s and 1980s.

3. Differences in Chinese and American Piano Music Learning

There were only two left and right pedals in the early stage of the piano. The middle pedal was popularized on the deltoid in the late 20th century. When Steinway popularized the middle pedal in the early 20th century, it was not the only case. At that time, many composers did not necessarily use Steinway's piano, nor did they carefully consider the need to use the middle pedal for those songs. In daily practice, the chance of using the middle pedal is much lower than expected. Generally, only new music after World War II really needs to use the middle pedal, and generally, composers will clearly write on the spectrum when they need to use the middle pedal.

In China's piano teaching, teachers generally use unified textbooks, which can also be said to be relatively single, with a slightly smaller range of tracks. "Influenced by the traditional education model, China attaches great importance to the cultivation of test-oriented talents, so most of the ideas of piano teaching extreme emphasis on basic skill training, that is, finger skills." (On the Differences between Chinese and American Piano Education in Colleges and Universities) [3]. For example, in the enlightenment textbooks, most teachers use Thompson. Thompson was a series of very good textbooks more than ten years or even decades ago, but with the development of the times, the methods adopted by Thompson series are relatively old-fashioned (but not wrong), which tends to slow down students' learning progress.

Although Thompson is also an American textbook, with the development of economy and culture year by year, the American teaching mode has changed. "From the early attention to the finger skills in piano playing, to the attention to the music in piano playing, and then to the contemporary attention to the main body of piano playing, as well as many cultural and social backgrounds behind the main body, the concept of contemporary American piano education has undergone a fundamental change. This fundamental change, first reflected in the 'Student-oriented'." (The Idea and Practice of Contemporary American Higher Piano Education) [4]. There are many kinds of textbooks commonly used in the United States. They are designed for different ages, different piano learning

goals, different talents, etc., so that different students can find textbooks that are suitable for them and teach students in accordance with their aptitude. For example, *The Music Tree* is an introductory text, because through systematic training in interval notation, students can quickly access the entire keyboard, rather than being limited to one or two octaves. In addition, because the track does not overemphasize the pentatonic mode and the size mode, it is convenient to train the students' open and receptive ears. Another set of textbooks, *Alfred's Basic Courses*, which is very specific about the pace, content, and arrangement of music, depending on the age at which a student begins playing the piano: 1) Preparatory for young Beginners, ages 5 - 7: slow progress, grades A through F. Start with the Black Key, and then begin to enter the white key practice. During reading, the left and right hands play the same notes in different areas. 2) Basic Piano Library for Beginners, ages 7 to 9: Levels 1 to 6, including textbooks, concert selections, music theory and technical courses. 3) Premier Piano Course, which does not specify the starting age, is more appropriate for older children. Each level offers courses in textbook, music theory, concert selection, pop, theme music and Christmas music. The pace is very fast, new concepts are introduced in each class, there are few familiar melodies in the repertoire, mainly the practice of new knowledge; 4) All-in-one, ages 6 to 8: music, technique and sound all in one; 5) Late Beginners, ages 10 - 11: a fast-paced, comprehensive textbook. 6) Adult Beginners: Self-taught with CD.

In the middle and senior piano teaching repertoire, many professors and students will choose popular works in the classical or romantic period in the examination of domestic colleges and universities, such as Beethoven, Mozart, Chopin, Liszt, Schumann, Brahms, etc., who are all pianists from the piano background and have written a lot of excellent repertoire, and the repertoire is also subdivided into "impromptu", "sonata", "scherzo", etc. As for modernist music and new music, these two periods are generally not singled out in China, but collectively referred to as "music". It can be seen that the attention is not high, so few people play these two types. Part of the reason is that most of the piano teachers in China lack understanding of western music and piano creation in the 20th century, and piano teachers themselves have little understanding and practice of piano works in this period during their learning period. Some teachers cannot appreciate atonal works, so how can we teach students this knowledge? Therefore, piano teachers, based on their own "traditional" teaching model, often prefer relatively traditional tonal music when choosing piano tracks for students to better implement the "learning for application". In the use of vertical piano in China, because most of the works in classical and romantic periods are played, there is little need for the sound pedal. Relatively speaking, the weak pedal will be used more frequently because it does not affect others. If students need to compete or perform, half of domestic colleges and universities will prepare a grand piano for students instead of a vertical piano, so a vertical piano with a sound pedal is dispensable in domestic colleges and universities. In con-

sideration of cost performance, schools usually choose to buy ordinary vertical piano and grand piano for students' daily practice, class, competition and performance.

In the United States, for intermediate tracks, we will use some music collections used in teaching, such as Tchaikovsky, Schumann, Bartok, Hindemith, etc. At the same time, we will also use some songs with low difficulty but strong musicality, such as Chopin Mazurka, Mendelssohn's wordless songs, etc. In colleges and universities, the investigation meeting for professional students is required to cover all important periods, not only the baroque, classical and romantic periods, but also the impressionist, neoclassical, new music and other periods. In the master's entrance examination, a large number of colleges and universities also require preparing impressionist or neoclassical works, as well as the necessary new music works of the 20th century, in addition to the classical, romantic and polyphonic works necessary for the domestic examination. Training students to practice and play works in different periods in American colleges and universities can help students better understand the development and changes of piano music in different periods, and can also become more familiar with some knowledge of western music history; At the same time, it can also enrich the students' repertoire accumulation. By appreciating the piano works in different periods, especially the atonal music in the 20th century, it can cultivate a broader vision and view the creation and performance of piano music from different perspectives. "The overall goal of the music course is to develop each student's ability to experience and create sound as fully as possible." (Philosophy of Music Education) [5]. At the same time, new music and contemporary music are closer to today's students, and will be closer to their lives, which will resonate and trigger thinking in the process of learning piano. As for the new music piano works, there is a requirement to use the sound pedal. Therefore, in the daily contact of American students, the vertical piano with the weak pedal is less important. Instead, the top vertical piano with the sound pedal or even the grand piano is more used. **Table 1** shows the differences of piano teaching in China and America.

Table 1. Differences of piano teaching in China and America.

	China	America
Elementary piano teaching	The textbook unifies and the repertoire scope is small.	Teaching materials are varied and individualized.
Middle and piano teaching	Tends to the tonal music known as classical or romantic music.	Use some Tchaikovsky, Bartok, Hindemith and other teaching collections, as well as some less difficult but strong musical pieces.
Advanced piano teaching	Similar to the repertoire type selection of intermediate piano teaching, the technical difficulty is higher.	The repertoire is required to cover all important periods, including atonal music after the 20th century.

4. Economic and Cultural Differences between China and the United States

China and the United States have different economies and cultures due to their different histories, regions, environments, etc. “The cultural heritage of China is the spiritual wealth of the rise of China, and the natural environment of the United States is the material foundation and security barrier of the rise of the United States.” (A Comparison of the Road to the Rise of Great Powers between China and the United States) [6]. However, economic and cultural differences can affect many details, such as the choice of the middle pedal of a vertical piano. The United States was founded more than 200 years ago, but most of its residents were European immigrants. Most of its knowledge of the world and its own foundation were inherited from Europe, creating the United States of America. In the two world wars, the United States itself was not harmed. It was able to develop its economy and industry with all its strength, and made a lot of money in the war. It faced the Atlantic Ocean in the east and the Pacific Ocean in the west, and its sea transportation was developed and convenient. On this basis, the United States has developed science and technology much earlier than other countries, continued to lead the world, and ultimately maintained its position as the world’s first economy. Many courses in American colleges and universities are supported by well funded scientific research institutions, government agencies or commercial institutions. Therefore, there is no need to worry about the problem that the hardware facilities cannot keep up with due to funding problems. Even the hardware facilities required by American colleges and universities are better than those of domestic colleges and universities. The United States is the fourth-largest country in the world in terms of land area. The plain area is high, but the number of residents is relatively small. The land area per capita is up to 11.655 mu. Therefore, in the case of highly developed economy and large residential space, the vertical piano used in the United States, especially in colleges and universities, can choose the German Karol piano, the German Steinway vertical piano, the Japanese YAMAHA YUS5 top vertical piano and other pianos with a sound retention pedal, and it is not necessary to consider whether they affect the daily life of the surrounding residents.

After two world wars, China was founded in 1949. Since the reform and opening up, China has changed a lot and its economy has begun to develop rapidly. However, because China’s per capita land area is only 0.54 hectares, and because of the uneven economic development between the east and the west, a large number of people gather in the eastern region, resulting in crowded living. As a “foreign product”, the piano has received increasing attention in China. More and more people begin to learn and buy the piano. Due to the living environment problems, when practicing the piano in daily life, it will cause inconvenience to others because of the close distance, sound insulation and other problems. In such an environment, the function of the soft pedal is more important than that of the sound pedal, which can maintain the neighborhood. At the same time, thrift, as a traditional virtue of the Chinese nation, has also affected many

Chinese people. When purchasing non necessities, the choice of cost performance is extremely important. The vertical piano with a weak pedal is cheaper than the top vertical piano with a sound pedal, or even the grand piano. In daily life, the cost of performance is higher than most people. Therefore, in Chinese families or colleges and universities, most of them will choose vertical piano with weak pedal for practice. Only when the piano learners reach a certain stage and have higher requirements for keyboard touch and piano quality; When the family is well off and there is enough space to place it, or universities need several top grand pianos for performance and examination, they will choose to buy top vertical pianos or grand pianos.

5. Conclusion

From the differences between China and the United States in economy, culture and piano teaching repertoire selection, it can be seen that because the United States is economically developed, sparsely populated, and pursues individuality and high acceptance, piano teachers will also cover piano works in various periods in their teaching, and advocate new music, so it is suitable to use the top vertical piano with a sound pedal; Although China is vast in land and abundant in resources, due to its large population, it leads to crowded living environment. Moreover, Chinese people are more cost-effective because of the traditional virtue of thrift and thrift. In addition, piano teachers prefer to use less or even no classical music with sound pedal in teaching, so it is suitable to use vertical piano with weak pedal. The author believes that, on the basis that the economic development is certain to meet people's material conditions and will not affect others, it can be suggested to choose a vertical piano or a grand piano with a sound retaining pedal, which can meet the requirements of piano learners for playing multi style music and promote the development of their piano playing ability.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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