

## **Tone as Strength and Weakness-Research on Teaching Chinese Piano Musical Works**

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**Abstract:** Nowadays, the development of Chinese piano is growing rapidly, and it is also shining on the international arena. Under this circumstance, a number of excellent piano students have emerged in China. However, for the performance of Chinese piano works, some students fail to catch the essence of the emotional expression of the works. This is because students do not have a deep understanding of Chinese history and culture and the meaning of the music itself, and their playing skills are weak. In this paper, the literature review method is used to describe the problems that occur in the handling of strength and weakness in the performance of piano works by piano students at the present stage, to point out the reasons for the problems, and to propose solutions. By using the case study method to explore the use of strength and weakness in Chinese piano works, the paper emphasizes the importance of strength and weakness in the teaching process for the expression of the emotions of piano works, and proposes ideas and methods to strengthen the playing skills of strength and weakness.

**Keywords:** Strong and Weak Processing; Chinese Piano Works

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The literature related to the research of this paper can be mainly divided into two aspects. The first aspect is the study of the contrasting relationship between strength and weakness in piano performance. This kind of literature analyses the influence of the relationship between strength and weakness in piano performance through three perspectives: the significance of beat in the relationship between strength and weakness, the strength level of melody and texture, and the relationship between melodic development trend and strength and weakness. Domestic studies include Li Meng, Zhang Xiaoyan, Liu Qing, Liu Yingnan, in which Li Meng and Zhang Xiaoyan analyzed the significance and influence of the relationship between strength and weakness in music performance from these three perspectives in detail by analyzing various kinds of musical examples (Li & Zhang, 2015; Liu, 2000; Liu, 2021;

Zhang, 2022). Liu Qing teacher analyzed the emotions represented by the expression marks in the works from several different periods from Baroque to Romanticism, and from Beethoven's compositions of different periods (Liu, 2000). The second aspect is mainly from the perspective of the performance technique of piano works, through the analysis of the works to illustrate the importance of the strong and weak treatment of the piano works for the expression of the emotions of the works. Zhang Daheng and Li Minghui suggested that the performance of piano works requires the integration of one's own feelings and emotions into the performance process (Li, 2021; Zhang, 2022). Chen Jing and Mu Zixuan suggested that the melody of Chinese traditional music has a unique and irreplaceable nature (Chen & Mu, 2022), and the emotional expression is presented differently depending on the melody. Kang Xue pointed out that nowadays people pay more attention to the piano playing skills and neglect the expression of emotions (Kang, 2015), so the piano playing is like a shell without a soul. From the above, it can be seen the importance of the relationship between strength and weakness in the process of music playing. However, at the present stage, students can't express the relationship between strength and weakness accurately in the process of playing. Many students still have a superficial understanding of the relationship between strength and weakness, and they do not have a thorough grasp of the details of the relationship (Brahmstedt & Brahmstedt, 1997). This study will take Chinese piano works as an example, make a summary of the treatment of strength and weakness in the works, and explain the role of strength and weakness in Chinese piano works in a more targeted way through the actual score examples.

## 2. PROBLEMS OF STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS PROCESSING IN MUSIC PERFORMANCE

### 2.1 Problems in Playing Skills

(1) The problem of body posture causes students to have difficulty in transmitting strength in playing. The transmitting of strength is carried out by the contraction and relaxation of the muscles in the body and the transfer of the centre of gravity. It is common for students to have power transfer problems during playing, usually due to their sitting posture. (2) Inadequate control of strength and weakness due to finger function. In the process of learning to play the piano, students' basic skills are just like the foundation of a building, whether the foundation is good or not

determines the quality of a building and whether it can be built into a tall building or not. If the students' basic skills are good, they can get twice the result with half the effort in the subsequent learning process. Piano playing skills are coherent, and only when they have fully mastered the simple skills can they quickly master the more difficult and more profound skills (Chen, 2012).

## 2.2 Problems in Understanding the Style of Works

(1) Students do not have a thorough understanding of the style of music. Traditional Chinese music is composed in various styles, which makes it difficult for students to understand the spiritual connotation of the work and the emotions that the author wants to express if they lack a thorough understanding of the material and the background of the work in the process of learning the work. (2) Students are not interested in traditional Chinese music. Traditional Chinese music, with its more varied melodies, more complex patterns and deeper contents, is not valued and loved in today's environment. (iii) Problems of playing psychology. Chinese piano students have a common problem, that is, playing music is also very smooth in a relaxed mood in the process of practicing the piano, but when they return to the class or on the stage to perform, their psychology will be involuntarily tense, afraid, resulting in poor playing performance (Guo, 2017).

## 3. CONCEPTS OF STRONG AND WEAK TONE TREATMENT AND ITS CHARACTERISTICS IN CHINESE PIANO WORKS

### 3.1 The Concept of Strength and Weakness in Piano Playing

In piano teaching, the improvement of students' expressive power is essentially to require students to control the strength of each note and each phrase, that is, the expression of strength and weakness, and the change of "strength and weakness" can be said to be the most important thing. When practicing, students can roughly divide the strength into three ranges: weak, normal and strong. Normal strength is the strength commonly used in playing the piano, in this state, the student's whole body is the most relaxed and the normal force when playing, in this state, the interpretation of the skills in the work is also the most relaxed. Strong is the opposite of weak. Weakness is a light sound (Hou & Isaiah, 2021). The strength and weakness in the performance of the work is not only these three strength, but also including gradually strong, gradually weak, suddenly strong, suddenly weak

and so on.

### 3.2 Characteristics of Strong and Weak Tone Treatment in Chinese Piano Works

In Chinese works with bowed instruments as the main body, the texture of the work is usually strong and clear or melodious, full of staccato musical moods in the performance, and the work often imitates the common playing techniques of bowed instruments such as glissando, tremolo, vibrato, etc. The strong tones of bowed instruments are high and bright, with a clear and coherent tone, while the weak tones are more subdued (Jing, 1991). For example, the piano work “Pihuang is based on the imitation of the sound of the bowed instrument “Jinghu”, especially in the introduction (Figure 1: Case 1 of Genealogy), which begins with three consecutive vibrato notes. The strength notation is *mf*; *p*; *f*. Through the overlapping of the harmonies, the sound effect is similar to that of the “Jinghu”, which is strong and smooth, loud and clear, and this is very motivating.

**皮黄（京剧）**  
Pi Huang (Peking Opera)

张朝曲  
Composed by Zhang Zhao

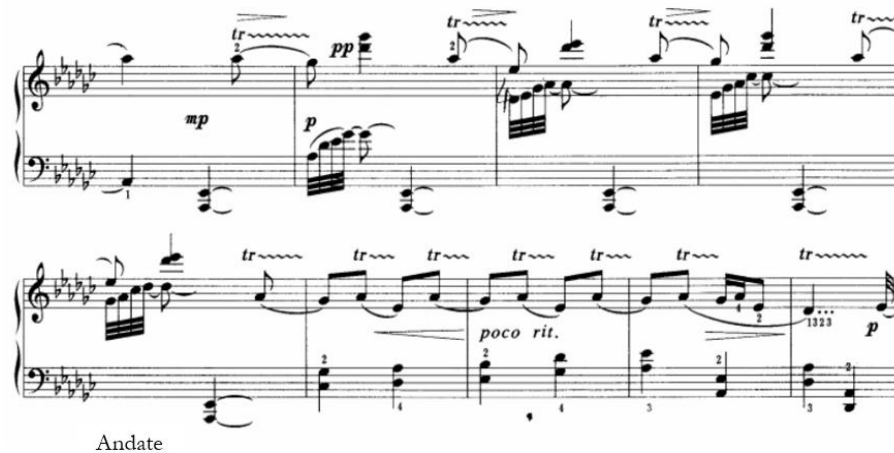
[导板]  
Rubato

una corda      tre corda

**Figure 1:** Case 1 of Genealogy

When playing this type of work on the piano, students need to control the muscles of their fingers to play vibrato to imitate the glissando of a bowed instrument. In this case, students are generally unable to control their fingers well enough to make a strong or weak sound, which leads to a lack of clarity in the vibrato, and an inability to make a tight or slow singing effect. This is because the students are doing in the wrong way in the daily practice, such as often shaking the wrist, inflexible fingers and

other problems. In order to solve this problem, practice can be made by making a gradual strong and weak to assist the practice, through the above means of force, the fingers touching the keys to change the part, so that the students can have full their own finger support, the wrist centre of gravity shifting and lift the wrist to feel the more fully. When practicing wrist lifting, lift the wrist gently to the front of the fingers, gradually change the finger's key position and the point of force, control the strong and weak strength, bring into the wrist's centre of gravity transfer in the process of vibrato to achieve the effect of gradual strength. Students can also use the arm to assist the force, imagine the whole arm to the finger as a larger finger, and through the arm's slight sinking, to make the effect of weak tone (Jing & Jia, 2021). Imitating the sound of pizzicato in plucked instruments is also often seen in Chinese works. Pizzicato are performed by pulling and picking, which reflects the dexterity of the player's fingers. In piano playing, in order to interpret the pulling and picking more vividly, it is often used to drop and roll, vibrato, finger staccato, chord grasping and other playing techniques. In many works, a large number of identical notes are used to imitate the pipa's sweeping technique. When playing the pipa, students need to slow down and speed up, from weak to strong to imitate the pipa's fast, clear, and layered vibrato and sweeping technique. In the piano, this is called tautophony, in which the palm joints gradually release force and extend it to the wrist. By using the vibrato to change the fingers, the state of the fingers is emphasised during the playing process, and the overall acoustic effect is controlled by controlling the relationship between the strength and weakness of each finger (Jinjin & Isaiah, 2020). In the Chinese work "Sunset Drums," which features the pipa, guzheng, and drums as the main plucked instruments, the drums are classically depicted. In the example (Figure 2: Case 2 of Genealogy), the right hand melody with trills and legato unfolds a scene of a dragonfly pointing at the water with ripples, while the left hand, as a foil, imitates the low sound of the Chinese drums with a modal progression of fifths, with the sound of the drums going from weak to strong, and the sound of the drums echoing each other in a quiet and dynamic manner, presenting a beautiful scene. When playing the drum sound imitated by the low voice, the left hand should be fixed in the handle position, with the small arm sinking in the way of fast key down force, the fingers stick to the key, the palm joints control the fingers to lift up, and then drop down quickly to pronounce the sound, and play a concentrated, powerful and penetrating notes (Kailing, 2018).



**Figure 2:** Case 2 of Genealogy

When playing drum-like notes, students need to use the key grasping technique to make the harmonies neat and tidy, so that the sound will be cohesive at one point, and the bass of the left hand will pave the way for the harmonies of the right hand, and deal with the relationship between the strengths and weaknesses of the left and right hands. The whole section needs to play with the body and the strength of the arm, imagine the whole arm as a whole, the strength from the body to the keys, play the momentum, play a more loud sound. To express the author's high emotion, the technique of grasping the keys can also be practised by pushing against the wall. When playing the double tone here, students need to pay attention to the support of the fingertips and the independence of the fingers. When practising, they can focus on slow exercises combined with high finger lifts to train the independence of each finger and to make sure that the metacarpal joints are open and that you are able to turn the fingers quickly. In the continuous double-tone running exercise, students can simplify it by practising the first two sets of double-tone running, connecting the first two sets of double-tone running, and then adding the third set, the fourth set, etc. This may seem slow, but it is an effective way to quickly master the continuous running of double tone. In the process of playing double tone, the players need to pay attention to the relationship between the strength and weakness of the melody (Lee, 2007). Chinese works of wind instruments is deeply melodic and imitates the mood of nature. The strong notes of wind instruments are often used to portray a loud and clear horn or a sharp or smooth bird call. The weak tone is a low humming sound. When depicting a strong horn-like sound, the entire body is used to push the large arm against the keyboard, giving it a thick, high-pitched acoustic effect. Among the works for wind instruments that imitate birdsong, the piece *A Hundred Birds Chanting the Phoenix* is a classic, with *suona* and

sheng as the main body of the piece, and opens with a multi-part melody (Figure 3: Case 3 of Genealogy), with intensity *f*. The harmonic effect created by the chords of the multiple parts creates a bustling scene, and the sound of the birdsong is a great influence on the sound. The harmonic effect of the multiple chords creates a lively scene. The acoustics of the *suona* and the *sheng* are imitated here. In the polyphony, the main theme of the right hand high note is highlighted to imitate the sound effect of the *suona*, which is loud and clear. When playing, players need to rely on the shift of the wrist's centre of gravity in order to make a contrast between the strength and the weakness: by drawing a circle through the small arm, they can drive the wrist to transmit the power to the fingertips, and change the centre of gravity in the process of drawing the circle in order to change the strength and the weakness of the sound effect. Then the chords are used to imitate the acoustic effect of the *sheng*, making the scene even more grandiose. In bars 9-12, intensity *p*, here the image depicts a vivid scene of birdsong dispersing in all directions in the woods, and the overall sound goes from near to far, an ethereal sense of slowly dispersing into the distance. The left hand proceeds through successive double tones, and formed the harmony with the right hand, which depicts the ethereal sound of the bird's call spreading into the distance (Li, 2018).



Figure 3: Case 3 of Genealogy

#### 4. SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEMS ARISING FROM THE TREATMENT OF STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES IN STUDENTS' PERFORMANCES

##### 4.1 Skill and Technique Level

- (1) Correct sitting posture training: the correct sitting posture in playing

the piano should be as follows: sitting on the buttocks at 1/3 of the piano bench, leaning forward slightly, not clamping the arms inward but opening them slightly to both sides, and imagining the arms as a water pipe resting on the keys. Such a sitting posture can make the student's centre of gravity shift forward, so that the student can use the body to assist the force in the process of playing, and the arm can be fully stretched without causing the force to be stuck in the joints (Ng, 2006).

(2) Maintain a good hand form: A good hand form can also help the student to transmit power. A good hand shape is basically the finger joints protruding, the palm joints open, and the whole palm shows a triangle or arch shape. As we all know, the triangle and arch are more stable shapes, so the palm is a more stable structure, which enables students to feel the transmission of power during the process of practicing the piano. In the process of emphasizing the hand shape, the left and right hands can assist each other in fixing the shape of the hand: the left thumb clasps the "pit" at the root of the right thumb and the wrist joint, the left three and four fingers against the right hand four and five fingers and the palm joint joints of the right hand, and then the right hand clasps the keys, the palm joints protrude, and the four fingers of the right hand remain upright, standing on the keys. In this way, the right hand forms a standard hand shape, and the same method can also be practised with the right hand to assist the left hand (Ng, 2015).

(3) Strengthening finger muscle training: The most common methods to improve students' finger function are high finger lifting exercises and key sticking exercises. Finger lifting exercises are performed by lifting the fingers and dropping them down to pronate. The purpose of this exercise is to open up the metacarpal joints of the hand and at the same time exercise the muscles of the fingers. This allows the fingers to run more flexibly and paves the way for more difficult playing techniques. Sticking to the keys exercise is to keep the fingers stick to the keys under the case of downward force, excise the process of finger muscles tense force, joints open, the whole finger support and in the end to the relax finger muscles, so as to keep the fingers standing on the keys. The main purpose of the exercise is to support the muscles and joints of the fingers (To, 2020).

#### 4.2 Cultural Level

Firm cultural confidence and strengthen cultural output: build a harmonious teacher-student relationship in the classroom, make teaching interesting, focus on practice, give students more opportunities to practice in the classroom, take students as the main body, guide students, so that



students gradually understand and love Chinese music. In the classroom, the background and meaning of the music should be integrated into the classroom and combining professional education and ideological education, so that students can feel the charm of traditional Chinese music in the process of learning, bolster cultural self-confidence, and establish a platform for the inheritance and innovation of traditional Chinese culture, and under the inheritance and innovation of a group of music enthusiasts, let our music go global in a well-structured way.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Strength and weakness in the performance of Chinese piano works is very important. Since the expression of emotion and the use of skills have a great impact, mastery of the subtle changes in strength and weakness not only improves the ability to play but also enhances the aesthetic ability of the music. Nowadays, foreign cultures have a great impact on the excellent traditional Chinese culture, so that more and more people neglect the inheritance and development of traditional Chinese culture. The development and inheritance of Chinese culture is urgent and vital. We should not only introduce the excellent western culture to China, but also pass on the traditional culture of China, let the local Chinese culture go to the world, create more excellent works in a more innovative way, and let more people feel the charm of Chinese traditional culture.

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