Fryderyk Chopin University of Music

Field of art, artistic discipline: musical arts

Xinyi Zou

Perspectives and directions for the development of contemporary Chinese guitar music based on the methodology and analysis of Latin American works for classical guitar.

Description of the artistic work

Doctoral dissertation written under the supervision of Dr. Agnieszka Marucha, Professor at the Fryderyk Chopin University of Music. Co-supervisor: Assistant Professor Leszek Potasiński

Warsaw 2025

Statement by the supervisor of the doctoral dissertation

I hereby declare, that this thesis was prepared under my supervision, and I confirm that it meets the requirements for presentation in a doctoral defense.

Date …… Signature of the thesis advisor ……

Statement by the author

Aware of my legal responsibility, I hereby declare that this doctoral dissertation titled *"Perspectives and Directions for the Development of Contemporary Chinese Classical Guitar Music: Methodological Guidelines Derived from an Analysis of the Development of Latin American Classical Guitar Music* was written by me independently under the supervision of my advisor and does not contain any content obtained in a manner inconsistent with applicable regulations.

I also declare that the presented thesis has not previously been the subject of procedures related to the award of a Doctor of Arts degree.

I further declare that this version of the thesis is identical to the attached electronic version.

Date …… Author's signature ……

Artistic Work

(CD)

Title: *Follow Your Heart*

I. Time: 20:38

1. Barrios Mangoré – *Un Sueño en la Floresta* [*A Dream of the Forest*].....7:07
2. Joaquín Rodrigo – *Invocacion y danza* [*Invocation and Dance*] 7:21
3. Leo Brouwer – *Elogio de la danza* [*In Praise of Dance*].....6:10

II. Duration: 40:01

4. Tan Dun – *Seven Desires* 13:10
5. Xia Weinan – *Whisper of the Wind* 3:40
6. Xia Weinan – *Love at Night of Tulips* [*I'll tell you what I want to tell you on a night full of tulips*] 4:10
7. Xia Weinan – *Carefree* [*A Carefree Journey*] 2:30
8. Xia Weinan – *The Flow* [*Water and a cloud between them*].....4:30
9. Zou Xinyi – *Follow Your Heart* [*Follow Your Heart*].....5:71
10. Zou Xinyi – *Verdant Peaks* [*A Thousand Hills and Emerald-Green Hills*] (guitar and piano).....6:20

Total time: 59:00

Performers: Xinyi Zou – classical guitar, Szymon Paruzel – piano Guitar model: SAKURAI MA-RF-SC-Premium 2016

Size: 650 mm

String model: SAVAREZ 510 MR Sound

engineer: Piotr Grinholc

Recording location: Polish Radio Studio S2, 59 Z. Modzelewskiego St., 00-977 Warsaw

Recording dates: May 24, 2025, and July 29, 2025

Foreword

“Follow Your Heart” is Xinyi’s debut album. The inspiration for this album stems from her years of studying, performing, and traveling across Europe, which led to deep reflections and insights on music and life. This album revisits classics from the twentieth century alongside masterpieces by contemporary composers of the twenty-first century. These works, like polished gems, radiate a clear and brilliant light, revealing the composers’ inner worlds and painting vivid images of the guitar’s unique charm and character as seen through their eyes.

Through this album, Xinyi offers a fresh interpretation of nearly a century of guitar repertoire with a youthful yet expansive vision. She invites listeners to immerse themselves in these timeless works, experiencing the enduring allure of classical guitar through changing eras, while also sharing her own sincere passion and depth on her musical journey.

– Prof. Dengmin Ye, Shanghai Conservatory of Music, China

I first had the chance to meet Xinyi online in 2019, when I heard her wonderful playing. Eventually, we began working together at the San Francisco Conservatory, where she became my student. Since then, she has grown remarkably as an artist. Her natural musicality, highly flexible technique, and artistic curiosity form a truly unique combination—one that you will be able to discover on her debut CD.

– Prof. Judicaël Perroy

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Abstract

This doctoral dissertation addresses the development of the classical guitar in China within a broad, multicultural context. Using a multifaceted research methodology, including musical analysis, surveys, and interviews, it is presented and argued for the first time in a systematic manner that indigenization is a key element in building cultural identity and supporting the sustainable development of foreign instruments in a new cultural environment.

The study combines a personal interpretive performance with an analysis of three classical works from the Latin American and Spanish guitar repertoire, which, from a comparative perspective, further confirms the significance of the indigenization process for the development of the classical guitar.

The dissertation reveals that Chinese classical guitar music currently faces the problem of an insufficient number of original compositions, the deeper causes of which lie in the lack of creative actors. Based on a reinterpretation of the characteristics of Chinese music, this study indicates that the core of Chinese music is not limited solely to the pentatonic scale, but lies in its diverse modal system and unique method of shaping individual notes.

On a practical level, a comprehensive analysis was conducted of the only piece for solo classical guitar to date by Chinese composer Tan Dun, a Grammy and Oscar winner, which allowed for the verification of its potential.

This work not only describes the development of the classical guitar in China but also brings a new academic perspective to intercultural research on classical guitar music.

Introduction

I. Background and Significance of the Research

The Current State of Development and Potential of Classical Guitar Music in China

The author's many years of educational experience at music academies in various countries have enabled her to establish valuable academic connections with distinguished guitarists and researchers representing different cultural . These intercultural exchanges and collaborations not only broadened the author's research horizons but also led to a key conclusion: indigenization is the fundamental driving force behind the sustainable development of Chinese classical guitar music.

Currently, the classical guitar is experiencing a period of intense development in China. This process is reflected in the growth of systematic educational programs, the emergence of outstanding performers, and the increasing activity of Chinese guitarists on the international music scene. At the same time, there is a growing interest among renowned composers from various countries in Chinese musical culture, which manifests itself in the creation of guitar compositions inspired by Chinese tradition. Among these creators are, among others, the Italian composer Carlo Domeniconi, the British composer Stephen Goss, and the Brazilian composer Sérgio Assad, who incorporate elements of Chinese music into classical guitar compositions in their works. In the context of global challenges in classical music, the development of the classical guitar in China demonstrates exceptional vitality and creativity, allowing us to speak of another "golden age" in its development[1] .

It is worth noting that Latin American guitar music has become one of the most significant genres in the context of classical guitar. Although these regions were strongly influenced by Spanish colonization, they developed their own unique styles

[1] D. Belcher, *An Interview with Stephen* Goss, Classical Guitar Corner, 2016, https://www.classicalguitarcorner.com/an-interview-with-stephen-goss/ [accessed: 10/07/2023].

musical traditions and forged a cultural identity in this regard. It was precisely the development of distinctive musical characteristics and the formation of a distinct cultural identity that allowed the Latin American guitar tradition to occupy a fundamental place in the canon of classical music. In this context, China, as a country with a rich musical tradition and multiculturalism, possesses significant potential for the development of guitar music. Traditional painting, literature, and philosophy constitute an inexhaustible source of inspiration for guitar music composers. However, despite the availability of these valuable cultural resources, this potential in the field of guitar music remains largely untapped to date.

In summary, the development of guitar music in China holds enormous potential, stemming not only from educational and market needs but also from the country's exceptionally rich historical and cultural heritage. However, in recent decades, the guitar education system in China has relied almost entirely on Western repertoire, while the exploration and integration of indigenous musical elements have remained at a relatively limited level. Consequently, this study points to indigenization as an effective path to resolving this issue.

The Significance of Indigenization in the Development of Classical Guitar Music

Looking at the history of guitar music, one can observe that many prominent artists have woven elements of indigenous music into their works, which demonstrates the effectiveness of an approach based on indigenization. One example is the Spanish guitarist Francisco Tárrega, often called the "father of modern guitar music," who incorporated elements of Andalusian music into his compositions. The self-taught Brazilian composer Heitor Villa-Lobos drew inspiration from his country's folk music and wove it into his guitar compositions. The famous Paraguayan guitarist Agustín Barrios also incorporated national motifs into his works; he toured the world, and during one of his performances, he made such a profound impression on the young Venezuelan composer Antonio Lauro that the latter abandoned the piano and violin in favor of the classical guitar and created

many outstanding works for this instrument, including the famous Venezuelan Waltzes, which today form part of the standard guitar repertoire[2] .

Indigenization in the development of classical guitar music can be understood as the process of gradually establishing the guitar's cultural identity—both within a new artistic milieu and in relation to a broader cultural context. This process reflects idioms, sounds, and values rooted in local tradition. However, it does not mean a simple imitation of folk music or folklore, but rather a conscious and artistically transformed incorporation of elements of native heritage into the language of classical guitar music. In this way, the guitar becomes not only a vehicle of cultural identity but also remains part of the global circulation of classical music. From the perspective of the development of classical guitar music, this process appears crucial not only for the instrument's enduring presence in various cultural contexts, but also for expanding the boundaries of its expression and aesthetics on an international scale.

Key Factors Limiting the Development of the Classical Guitar Repertoire Through in-depth research, the author discovered that in many important documents on composition, both performers and composers did not sufficiently understand the specific nature of the guitar because they often used incorrect descriptions of the instrument. This phenomenon not only explains why prominent composers rarely wrote pieces for the guitar, but also underscores how important it is today for guitarists to actively engage in original composition.

The French composer and musicologist Jean-Georges Kastner (1810–1867), in his work *General Treatise on Instrumentation* (*Traité général d'instrumentation*, 1837), excerpts of which (Figure 1) were included in the curriculum at the Paris Conservatory, made a significant contribution to research on instruments[3] . It was the first

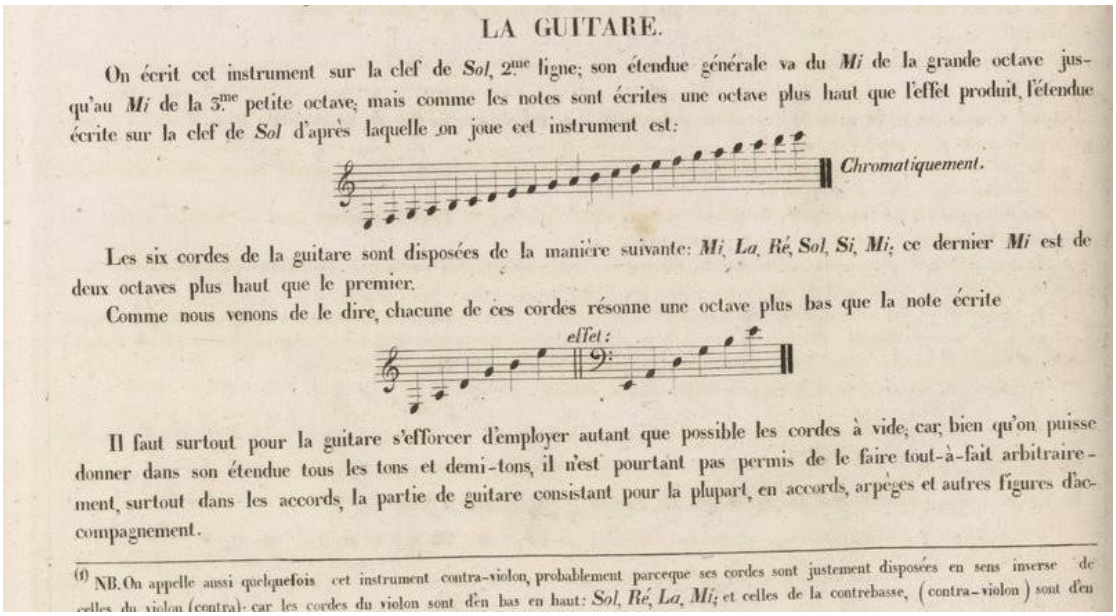
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[2] E.P. Frank, *The Venezuelan Waltzes of Antonio Lauro*, doctoral dissertation, Florida State University, 1994, p. 10.

[3] P.J. Woodward, *Jean-Georges Kastner's Traité Général d'Instrumentation: A Translation and Commentary*, doctoral dissertation, University of North Texas, 2003, https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc4165/m2/1/high_res_d/thesis.pdf [accessed: 1/12/2023], p. 2.

a monograph devoted to standard orchestral instruments, which influenced, among other things, the creation of Hector Berlioz's important work *Modern Instrumentation and Orchestration* (1843)[4] .

However, the description of the guitar in Kastner's publication is brief and superficial, and some information, such as that regarding its scale, is not entirely precise. Kastner also notes the phenomenon of insufficient familiarity with this instrument among young composers[5] .



LA GUITARE.

On écrit cet instrument sur la clef de *Sol*, 2.me ligne; son étendue générale va du *Mi* de la grande octave jusqu'au *Mi* de la 3.me petite octave; mais comme les notes sont écrites une octave plus haut que l'effet produit, l'étendue écrite sur la clef de *Sol* d'après laquelle on joue cet instrument est:

Chromatiquement.

Les six cordes de la guitare sont disposées de la manière suivante: *Mi, La, Ré, Sol, Si, Mi;* ce dernier *Mi* est de deux octaves plus haut que le premier.

Comme nous venons de le dire, chacune de ces cordes résonne une octave plus bas que la note écrite

effet:

Il faut surtout pour la guitare s'efforcer d'employer autant que possible les cordes à vide; car, bien qu'on puisse donner dans son étendue tous les tons et demi-tons, il n'est pourtant pas permis de le faire tout-à-fait arbitrairement, surtout dans les accords, la partie de guitare consistant pour la plupart, en accords, arpèges et autres figures d'accompagnement.

(f) NB. On appelle aussi quelquefois cet instrument contra-violon, probablement parceque ses cordes sont justement disposées en sens inverse de celles du violon (contra): car les cordes du violon sont d'en bas en haut: *Sol, Ré, La, Mi;* et celles de la contrebasse, (contra-violon) sont d'en

Illustration 1. Original French description of the guitar's range according to Jean-Georges Kastner in *Traité général d'instrumentation*, Paris 1837

Hector Berlioz was one of the few famous composers who could play the guitar. Even in his youth, despite having almost no formal musical education, he displayed extraordinary talent and was able to compose pieces for local chamber ensembles[6] . Although he later took professional guitar lessons, even in his famous publication *Contemporary*

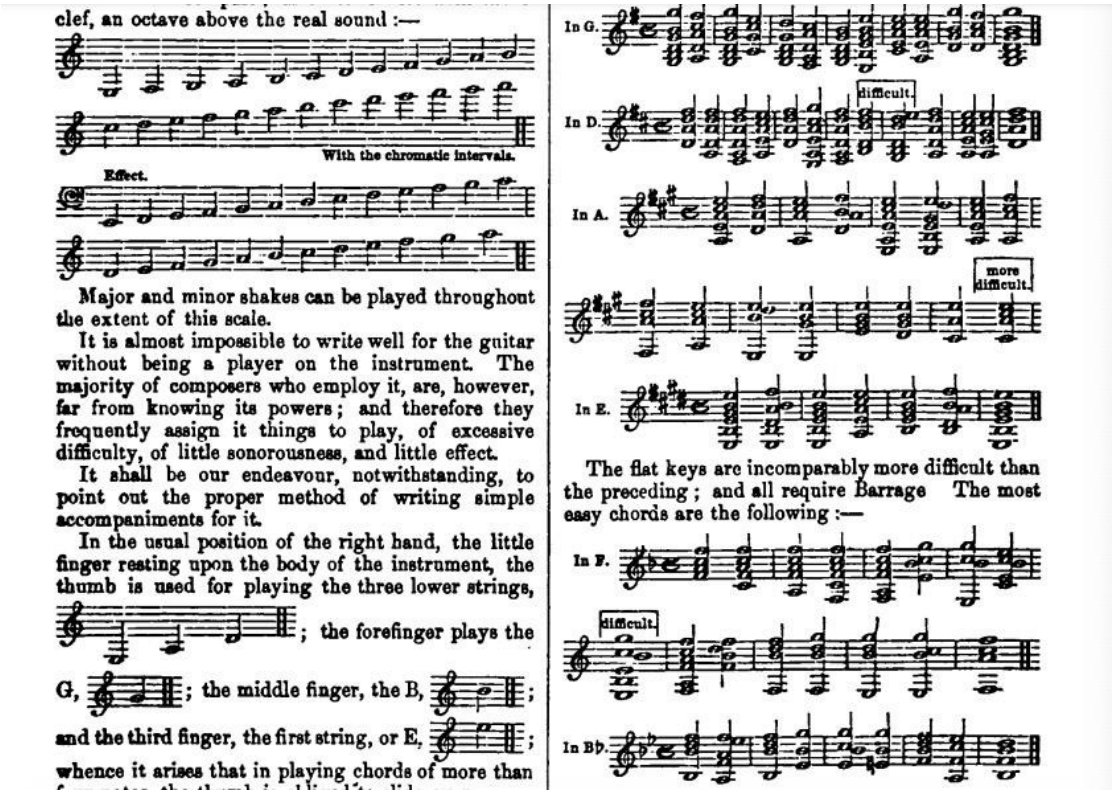
[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., pp. 87–92.

[6] J. Barzun, *Hector Berlioz,* Encyclopedia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/biography/ Hector-Berlioz/additional-info [accessed: 10/11/2023].

Modern Instrumentation and Orchestration (1843). He described the guitar in a manner that was not entirely precise [7] , for example, he considered it a harmonic instrument suitable for vocal accompaniment and made errors in the description of chords (Figure 2). This shows that even outstanding musicians are unable to fully grasp the logic and specifics of playing the guitar, which attests to the extraordinary complexity of this instrument.

Figure 2. Hector Berlioz's **Modern Instrumentation and Orchestration** (1843)



Hector Berlioz also explained this phenomenon in his publication:

> Creating a great guitar piece is practically impossible if you aren't a guitarist. However, many composers fail to fully appreciate the guitar's unique charm when using it, which results in the creation of difficult pieces with unsatisfactory sound quality and poor effects. However, if you don't play the guitar yourself, it is extremely difficult

[7] Ibid.

> to write polyphonic works, carefully design parts, and fully exploit the instrument's potential[8] .

Although the above observations date back over a century, their insight remains highly relevant to contemporary compositional practice. For composers without experience playing the guitar, writing pieces for this instrument often involves numerous technical challenges. The specificity of the guitar as a stringed instrument lies in its ability to construct polyphonic textures and in the way it shapes sonic continuity; these characteristics are not commonly found in other instruments of the string family.

Faced with these technical complexities, many composers tend toward relatively conservative compositional strategies, simplifying harmonic structures and textural density to avoid potential notational difficulties and performance issues[9] . However, this compositional approach often results in works that do not fully exploit the guitar's sonic potential, particularly in terms of polyphony and timbral layers. Works of this type are typically characterized by limitations regarding sound effects, exhibiting features of a sparse sound and restricted expression.

Such a simplified approach to compositional practice has far-reaching aesthetic consequences. Avoiding technical challenges leads to uneven quality in the works, which to some extent reinforces the public's stereotypical perception of the guitar, limiting a full artistic understanding of the instrument. On the other hand, this phenomenon may be one of the key factors contributing to the fact that many prominent composers are less likely to undertake the creation of works for the guitar.

A good example of this phenomenon is the biography of Alberto Ginastera. The Argentine composer Alberto Ginastera is considered one of the most important composers

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[8] H. Berlioz, *A Treatise Upon Modern Instrumentation and Orchestration*, trans. M. Cowden Clarke, J. Alfred Novello, London 1856, pp. 67–70.

[9] Ibid.

of 20th-century classical music in the Americas[10] . He had been encouraged to compose music for the guitar since his student days. However, it was not until after four decades of artistic work that he made his first attempt at composing for this instrument, at the request of the Brazilian guitarist Carlos Barbosa-Lima. This is how *the Guitar Sonata*, Op. 47, came into being—Ginastera's only classical work for guitar, which took him four years to complete, as he himself remarked: "[...] the complexity of the task delayed my creative impulse"[11] .

Although composing music for the guitar is a major challenge for composers who are not guitarists, some outstanding artists, such as Joaquín Rodrigo and Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, have written many pieces for the guitar. Interestingly, even these works, created by outstanding composers specifically with the guitar in mind, require guitarists to choose and select musical material and adapt it to the instrument's specific characteristics.

For example, thanks to his exceptionally keen musical intuition, Rodrigo was able to accurately assess the guitar's potential. He composed highly acclaimed guitar pieces, such as *the Concierto de Aranjuez*, but even these outstanding compositions had to be appropriately modified and adapted to the guitar's requirements (by the first performer—guitarist Regino Sainz de la Maza [12]). The situation was similar in the case of composer Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco (1865–1968), whom the outstanding guitarist Andrés Segovia asked to write a piece. Tedesco admitted that he had no idea how to compose for this instrument. Segovia provided him with guidance on tuning and

[10] A. de la Vega, *"Trends of Present-Day Latin-American Music*," Journal of Inter-American Studies 1959, no. 1(1), pp. 97–102.

[11] A. Ginastera, *Sonata for Guitar*, Op. 47, Boosey & Hawkes, London 1978, program notes.

[12] L. Neri, *Rodrigo's Concierto de Aranjuez through the Writings of Regino Sainz de la Maza*, "Soundboard Scholar" 2023, no. 9(1), pp. 1–52.

sample compositions for analysis. As Segovia recounted, this was the first time he had met a composer who grasped so quickly how to write for the guitar[13] .

These examples show that even works by composers of exceptional creative talent often require additional revisions and adaptations by performers in order to be played on the guitar. Toward the end of the 20th century, as more and more guitarists came to view works composed by individuals outside the guitar community as unsatisfactory, there was a renewed interest in the works of guitarist-composers[14] . Today, classical guitar programs are widely available at the world's leading universities, which has allowed for the training of a large group of guitarists with a high level of technical skill. However, compared to the growing level of , the number of guitarists possessing compositional skills has not increased proportionally, indicating a clear imbalance between these two aspects.

Therefore, this study demonstrates that encouraging and developing the ability for independent creativity among guitarists is currently the simplest and most effective way to advance classical guitar music.

II. Research Objectives and Significance

The objective of this dissertation is to demonstrate that the process of indigenization is a key pathway for the development of classical guitar.

The significance of this research lies in the development of a specific methodology to support the development of Chinese classical guitar music, enabling both Chinese and international audiences, including composers, to gain a deeper understanding of the specific characteristics of Chinese music and its creative application in the context of the guitar.

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[13] M. Peraza, P. Francisco, *Andrés Segovia's Influence in the Realization of Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco's Sonata Omaggio a Boccherini, Op. 77: A Comparative Analysis of Tedesco's Manuscript Versus Segovia's Edition*, doctoral dissertation, University of Arizona, Tucson [AZ] 2020, p. 92.

[14] M. Titre, *Thinking through the Guitar: The Sound-cell-texture Chain*, doctoral dissertation, Leiden University, 2013, https://hdl.handle.net/1887/22847 [accessed: 05/03/2022], p. 48.

The analysis reveals that the limited repertoire for classical guitar in China stems largely from insufficient familiarity with the instrument among composers who are not guitarists, which hinders the creation of high-quality original works . In response to this observation, the study points to the need to integrate performance training with the development of creative competencies in guitar education, which may contribute to expanding the repertoire and to the sustainable development of Chinese classical guitar. Furthermore, the process of indigenization serves here as a key tool for building local musical identity, strengthening the expression of Chinese culture, and supporting its presence in the global music scene.

III. Methods and Scope of the Study

This dissertation employs methods of musical analysis, comparative research, and case studies to provide a comprehensive discussion of the need for and possibilities of indigenizing classical guitar music in China. This study is pioneering in nature, as it focuses not only on enriching the repertoire but also on shaping a distinct artistic identity for the classical guitar within the local cultural context. **Scope of the study**

Theoretical and Methodological Introduction (Introduction). The background and significance of the research are presented, including the current state of development and potential of Chinese classical guitar music, the importance of the indigenization process for the development of the classical guitar, and key factors limiting the development of the repertoire. The objectives, significance, methods, and scope of the research are defined.

History of the Development of Classical Guitar in China (Chapter 1). The analysis covers the historical development of classical guitar in China—from its emergence and popularization, through a period of challenges and stagnation, to a phase of popularization and development. The current state of musical aesthetics within the context of the Chinese guitar tradition is also presented.

Analysis of selected works from the guitar literature of Latin America and Spain (Chapter 2). In this section, two works by Latin American composer-guitarists— , and —and one work— —by the Spanish composer , , who is not

a guitarist, from the author's interpretive perspective. The aim is to highlight processes of indigenization in Latin American guitar music as examples of successful integration of local traditions with the classical guitar form, which may serve as inspiration for the development of Chinese guitar music.

Analysis of selected works of Chinese classical guitar music (Chapter 3). The study covers representative compositions by contemporary Chinese composers, illustrating the diversity of styles and aesthetic approaches. Particular attention is devoted to the analysis of elements of Chinese musical culture present in these works and the author's artistic response to these inspirations, including preliminary attempts at the author's own guitar compositions.

A Presentation of Chinese Music and Culture in an International Context (Chapter 4). This chapter aims to challenge stereotypical perceptions of Chinese music prevalent in the international community and to present the distinctive features of Chinese music and culture in a way that facilitates a better understanding and application of Chinese elements in the classical guitar repertoire by foreign artists. Given the immense richness of Chinese cultural tradition, the analysis is introductory and inspirational in nature.

Practical Outcomes (Chapter 5). This chapter presents preliminary attempts to apply the research findings in the form of the author's creative inspirations and ideas, as well as initial compositional achievements. This part of the work is exploratory in nature and constitutes an initial artistic expression resulting from the theoretical analyses conducted.

Conclusions and Implications (Chapter 6). A summary of key research findings, a definition of the work's theoretical contribution, an indication of the practical significance of the results, and a general summary of the study along with suggestions for further research directions.

It is emphasized that the process of indigenization requires the long-term commitment of many generations of artists and researchers. The author expresses the hope that this work will inspire

further studies on the indigenization and rooting of the classical guitar not only in the repertoire but also in the educational and cultural contexts, contributing to its sustainable development.

Chapter 1. The History of Development and Current Status of the Classical Guitar in China

1.1. The History of the Classical Guitar in China

1.1.1. The emergence and first attempts at adaptation

The guitar is an instrument with a centuries-old tradition; its history dates back much further than that of the piano and the violin. As early as the time of one of the oldest civilizations—Mesopotamia—guitar-shaped instruments had already appeared[15]. But when did the guitar reach China? And when and under what circumstances did people begin to use it there?

Western music was already present at the Chinese court during the reign of Emperor Wanli of the Ming Dynasty[16] . In December 1600, the Italian missionary Matteo Ricci, along with others, presented the Ming emperor with an instrument similar to a harpsichord[17] . According to historical sources, the first Western orchestra in China was formed in 1749, consisting of fourteen young eunuchs, who performed at court exclusively for the emperor[18] . No definitive sources confirming the presence of the guitar in China have yet been found for the period under study, making its early introduction to the region unlikely. The author leans toward the hypothesis that the chances of the instrument making its way into China were limited primarily due to its construction at the time—a small body and relatively modest sound projection, which meant that the guitar was rarely included in instrumental ensembles and orchestras.

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[15] Mesopotamia, an ancient region located between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (now mainly within the territory of Iraq), is considered the cradle of civilization. As current research indicates, the history of the guitar can be traced back some three thousand years, as evidenced by discovered Hittite stone sculptures. See T. Çogulu, *The Concise History of the Classical Guitar*, VDM Publishing, Saarbrücken [DE] 2011, p. 38.

[16] Z. Xiping, *Following the Steps of Matteo Ricci to China*, China International Press, Beijing 2006.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

However, it can be concluded that during the Qing Dynasty (1616–1912), the guitar did indeed reach China.



Illustration 3. Qing Dynasty Navy Military Band

In *his* book **Biographies and Bibliography of Jesuits in China**, written between 1870 and 1877, missionary Louis Pfister (1833–1891) mentions missionary Karel Slavíček, a Czech Jesuit who was one of the first to systematically study Chinese music. In 1716, he was sent to China, and on January 2 of the following year, he arrived in Beijing. According to the account: "Slavíček was particularly skilled at playing the six-string guitar, and the emperor and courtiers enjoyed listening to its sound." In those days, the guitar was regarded merely as a Western novelty, serving to satisfy the curiosity of the aristocracy[19] .

Subsequently, the Xinhai Revolution (October 9, 1911 – February 13, 1912) overthrew more than two thousand years of feudal rule in China; however, a period of conflict between the new and old orders persisted for a long time after the revolution[20] . It is therefore unlikely that the guitar underwent any development during this period.

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[19] L. Pfister, *Biographical and Bibliographical Notes on the Jesuits of the Former Mission in China (1552–1773)*, Zhonghua Shuju, Beijing 1995, p. 230.

[20] ibid.

The Republic of China period marked an important stage in the development of Western music in China, which was revived by intellectuals, particularly students returning from Europe, America, and Japan[21] . This period spans the time between the Qing Dynasty and the People's Republic of China (January 1, 1912 – September 30, 1949), but it was during this period that Japan invaded China and the 14-year War of Resistance against Japan began (September 18, 1931 – September 2, 1945)[22] . During this war, the Chinese people endured countless hardships and sacrifices. Shortly thereafter, a civil war broke out in China, which lasted until October 1, 1949, that is, until the founding of the People's Republic of China. Although the country was constantly engulfed in wars during this period, the guitar nevertheless began to enter the consciousness of the Chinese people[23] .



Illustration 4. The Nanking Massacre (1937) took place during the occupation of Nanking by Japanese troops; it led to mass killings and atrocities and is one of the most tragic events in Chinese history. Oil painting *The Nanking Massacre* by Li Zijian

The May 4th Movement (May 4–June 28, 1919) was a major cultural and intellectual revolution, initiated primarily by student youth. Although it lasted little more than a month, it became one of the most significant social transformations in

[21] Z. Ying, 中国近代史十五讲 [*Fifteen Lectures on Modern Chinese History*], Peking University Press, Beijing 2021, p. 32.

[22] Ibid., p. 10.

[23] Ibid., p. 12.

modern Chinese history, exerting a profound influence on music and art[24] . This movement symbolized the rebellion of Chinese intellectuals against feudal tradition and the beginning of a search for a new cultural and ideological system to replace outdated paradigms. In the field of music, the May Fourth Movement brought about the emergence of new compositions inspired by Western musical languages. Prominent artists of this period, such as Nie Er, drew inspiration from the movement's ideas, ushering in the era of modern Chinese music[25] . During this time, the guitar, as an instrument, also entered the consciousness of the Chinese people and gradually became widespread[26] .

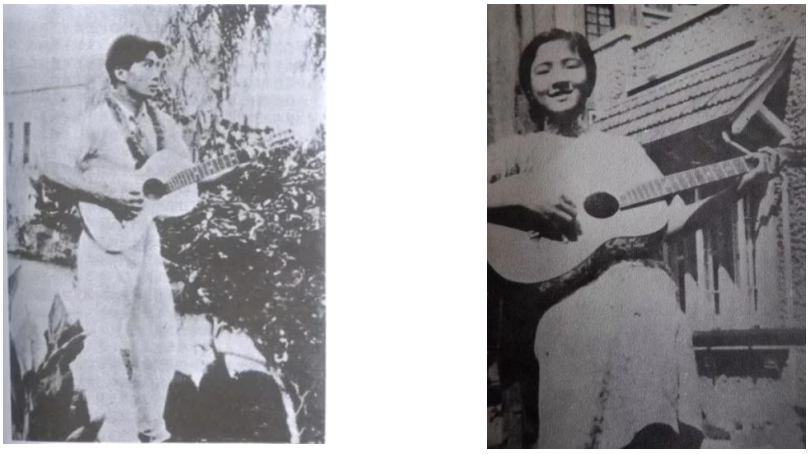


Illustration 5. Chinese musician and composer Nie Er (1912–1935, left); Chinese singer and educator Zhou Xiaoyan (1917–2016, right)

In September 1929, guitar virtuoso Andrés Segovia arrived in Shanghai[27]. This historic event was reported in *Shen Bao*, a renowned newspaper from the late Qing Dynasty and early Republic of China era, which was founded on April 30, 1872, and serves as a reliable source (Figure 6).

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., p. 13.

[26] Ibid.

[27] "Shanghai Shenbao" 上海申报, September 28, 1929.



西班牙音樂家散哥維亞

▲今晚市政廳第一次奏演

西班牙音樂家散哥維亞(Andres Segovia)以奏六絃琴(Guitar)而得名，與提琴大家哈菲次克里斯惠等齊名，今由旅滬外僑司托洛克氏訂約，來遠東各地奏演，昨日已搭輪由馬尼拉來滬，定今晚(二十八日)九時一刻起，在南京路市政廳奏演，今晚爲第一次，所選之曲，均屬各名家之傑作，氏未來滬前，曾在馬尼拉連奏四次，

Illustration 6. Copy of "Shanghai Shen Bao" from September 28, 1929

The newspaper reported:

> Spanish musician Segovia will perform today for the first time at City Hall. Spanish artist Andrés Segovia, renowned for his masterful playing of the six-string guitar, is mentioned in the same breath as such virtuosos as Heifetz and Kreisler. This time, at the invitation of Mr. Strolock—a foreigner living in Shanghai—Segovia has embarked on a concert tour of the Far East. He arrived in Shanghai from Manila yesterday and will give his first concert tonight (the 28th) at 9:15 p.m. at the City Hall on Nanjing Road. The concert program will consist of a selection of works by many famous composers. Before arriving in Shanghai, Segovia gave four consecutive concerts in Manila [28].

Based on the above research, it can be concluded that the guitar appeared in China as early as the beginning of the 18th century. However, for various historical reasons, it remained virtually unknown at first and did not become widely popular. This situation persisted until the founding of New China (after 1949), when the guitar began to appear among specific social groups, such as government elites and wealthy capitalists. Ordinary people had virtually no access to this instrument at that time[29] .

1.1.2. Challenges and Stagnation

[28] Ibid.

[29] Z. Ying, 中国近代史十五讲 [*Fifteen Lectures*..., op. cit.], p. 34.

It can be said that the development of the guitar in China faced many difficulties. However, as the above research shows, the guitar had already reached China by the early 18th century, but China's tragic history in the first half of the 20th century prevented the development of guitar playing during that period. At the beginning of the People's Republic of China, the country focused on economic development. When music and art fell into ruin, another catastrophe began—the decade-long "Cultural Revolution" (May 1966–October 1976). In this cultural catastrophe, Chinese folk musical instruments were labeled the "Four Olds" and were among those slated for destruction. The guitar was viewed as a symbol of the decadent culture and lifestyle of the Western bourgeoisie, and its use was banned and strictly restricted[30] .

Professor Chen Zhi, regarded as the father of Chinese classical guitar music, experienced this dark period and, in his speech on October 19, 2023, clearly described the situation of the guitar in China at that time:

> I am now 87 years old. When I look back on the development of the guitar in China, especially during those times, it was truly a dark period. The guitar was then viewed as an "instrument of hooligans." Playing the guitar or teaching it was strictly forbidden. This story is almost unimaginable—in movies, to portray a degenerate character, a guitar would always hang on the wall as a prop.
>
> I remember that during lessons, when we were teaching, we had to cover all the windows and doors with blankets so as not to attract attention. When playing the guitar, we stuffed cotton and towels into the strings to muffle the sound. Despite such difficult conditions, there were still enthusiasts who stubbornly continued to learn to play the guitar in secret.
>
> At that time, even at the risk of arrest, I secretly continued teaching guitar […] I was also self-taught; I had no teachers and had to figure everything out on my own, which was extremely difficult. In 1982, I founded China's first guitar school, which was a private school. In those days, private education was not permitted, and the recruitment process was very difficult. However, I persevered and reached out to my friends abroad, so it wasn't as difficult for me as it was for others [...][31] .

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[30] Ibid., p. 45.

[31] Zhi Chen, speech from October 19, 2023.

Based on Professor Chen Zhi's personal experiences, we can summarize the difficult situation of the guitar during the "Cultural Revolution" as social stigmatization, political persecution, bans on playing and learning, and high-risk clandestine teaching. This period posed a serious obstacle to the development of the guitar; however, some people persevered and secretly taught guitar, laying the foundation for the future development of the discipline.

1.1.3. Popularization and Development

The above research indicates that the guitar appeared in China as early as the beginning of the 18th century, but it was not until the 1970s and 1980s that its arduous journey of development began in that country. In just a few decades, the guitar, much like China as a whole, underwent a tremendous transformation. The development of the classical guitar in China is inextricably linked to the figure of Chen Zhi[32] . He was born in 1936 in Shanghai to a family of a high-ranking official. His mother was a Christian, which gave him access to Western culture from a very young age[33] . At that time, Shanghai was already an international city, attracting prominent figures from around the world. Among its residents were many Russian aristocrats who had emigrated after the October Revolution[34] . It was within this social circle that the guitar enjoyed great popularity, and it was through them that Chen Zhi first encountered the instrument. The guitar made a huge impression on him, leading him to further study the instrument.[35] .

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[32] S.C. Liu, *Comparative Study of the Development Status of Classical Guitar Art in China and Abroad*, "Northern Music" 2020, no. 40(1), pp. 180–182.

[33] Ibid.

[34] **The October Revolution**—a political upheaval that took place in Russia in October 1917, culminating in the overthrow of the provisional government and the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks, which led to the establishment of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic. This revolution triggered a wave of emigration, including numerous members of the Russian aristocracy. See O. Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891–1924*, Jonathan Cape, London 1996, pp. 601–605.

[35] Interview with Chen Zhi, "Classical Guitar Magazine," Dec. 22, 2007.

In 1982, Chen Zhi founded China's first classical guitar school in Beijing[36] . During the Cultural Revolution, most musicians were persecuted, and teaching guitar was completely banned—even touching the instrument could result in imprisonment. It was not until 1990 that the first degree program focused on guitar performance was established in Chinese higher education[37] .

Visits by Western guitar masters also had a huge impact on the development of the instrument in China. The first Western master of classical guitar to visit China was the Spanish guitarist Andrés Segovia. His performances during two trips to China in the 1940s and 1950s had a profound impact on guitar education in the country[38] . Segovia not only gave a series of concerts in China but also conducted classes, sharing his performance and pedagogical experience. These activities sparked a keen interest in the classical guitar among many young musicians[39] .

In the wake of the reform and opening-up policy, the Chinese music scene began to open up more and more to international collaboration, which attracted further masters of the classical guitar from the West to China. Among them, the famous British guitarist John Williams played a special role; in the 1980s, he visited China on numerous occasions, actively engaging in the education and promotion of guitar playing. Williams not only performed in concerts but also conducted masterclasses and collaborated with Chinese musicians, making a significant contribution to the development of classical guitar in China[40] .

Another master who had a huge influence on the guitar community in China was the Spanish guitarist David Russell. He, too, visited China on numerous occasions, giving concerts and workshops and exchanging experiences with Chinese

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[36] Ibid.

[37] S.C. Liu, *Comparative Study…*, op. cit.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

students[41] . Russell's outstanding performance and teaching style gained wide recognition among young guitarists, effectively supporting the development of guitar education in China.

The visits of the aforementioned Western classical guitar virtuosos not only provided valuable experience and guidance for guitar education in China, but also introduced Chinese guitar enthusiasts to a broad musical vision and high-level playing skills. Their influence contributed to the rapid development of the Chinese school of guitar and laid a solid foundation for subsequent generations of Chinese guitarists, facilitating their presence on the international music scene.

Over the next thirty years, all major music academies in China introduced classical guitar programs, and in recent years, an increasing number of universities have gradually opened such specializations.

1.2. The current state of musical aesthetics in China

In his book **Chinese Folk Music: A Living Instrumental Tradition** (1995), Stephen Jones presents an analysis of the Chinese music scene from the perspective of a British researcher. The author observes positive trends in the form of growing interest in integrating folk music with other art forms and highlights the valuable contribution of Chinese artists to the development of music, even those working abroad. At the same time, he notes that some avant-garde composers, despite their international success, face difficulties in China due to historical, cultural, and social factors[42] .

However, since the publication of Jones's work, China has undergone dynamic socio-cultural development. The author of this study, observing contemporary Chinese reality, takes a more active stance regarding the potential for the development of Chinese music, particularly in the field of classical guitar. In order to obtain an up-to-date picture of aesthetic attitudes, a survey was conducted with the aim of understanding

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[41] Ibid.

[42] J. Stephen, *Folk Music of China: Living Instrumental Traditions*, Clarendon Press, Oxford [UK] 1995, p. 168.

current views of Chinese society on classical guitar music and to further verify the feasibility of indigenization processes in this area.

The survey was completed on December 1, 2023. A total of 152 responses were received during the survey. The distribution of respondents is shown in Figure 7, with shaded areas indicating the distribution of respondents.



Figure 7. Distribution of respondents

The following charts show the responses to individual questions in the survey.

Question 1. Gender of respondents (Chart 1).

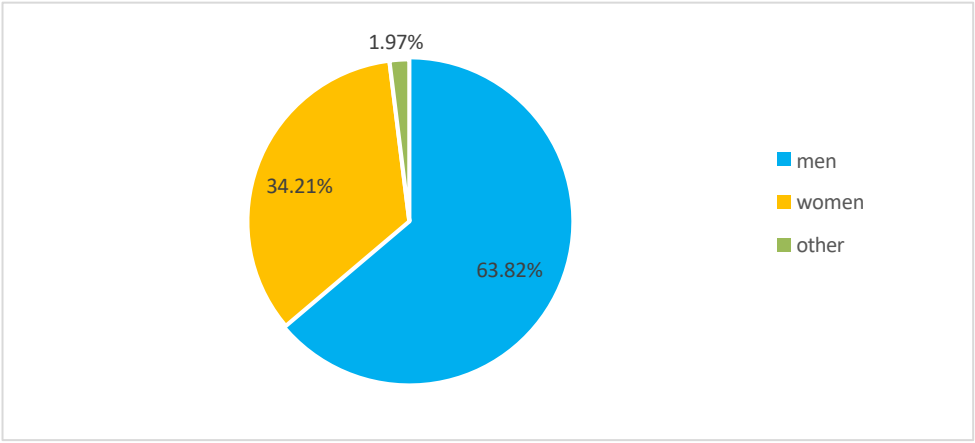


Chart 1. Gender distribution of respondents

Question 2. Age of respondents (Chart 2).

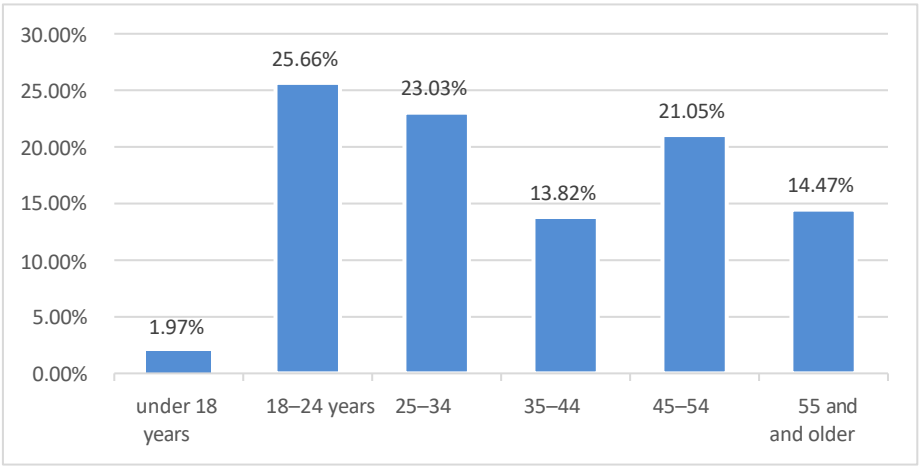


Chart 2. Age distribution of respondents

Question 3. Educational level (Chart 3).

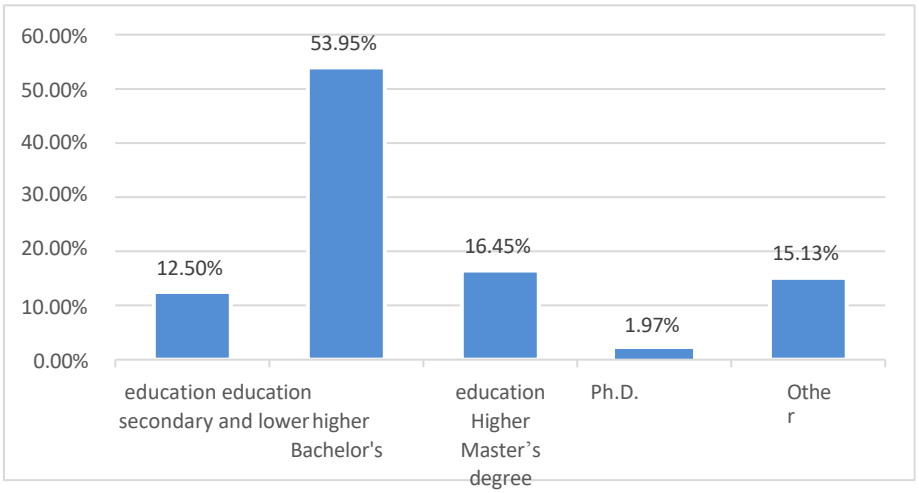


Chart 3. Distribution of respondents' educational levels

Question 4. Level of musical knowledge (Chart 4).

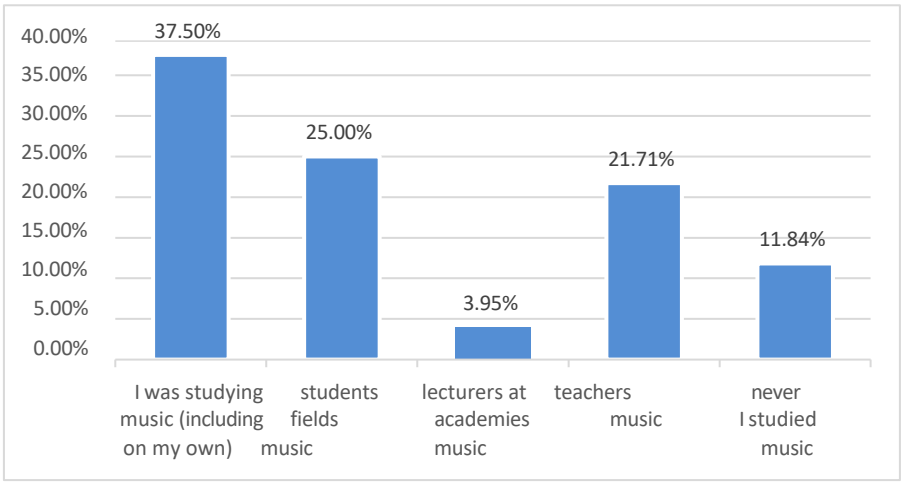


Figure 4. Distribution of respondents' level of musical knowledge

Question 5. In your opinion, what is the status of traditional Chinese music in contemporary society?

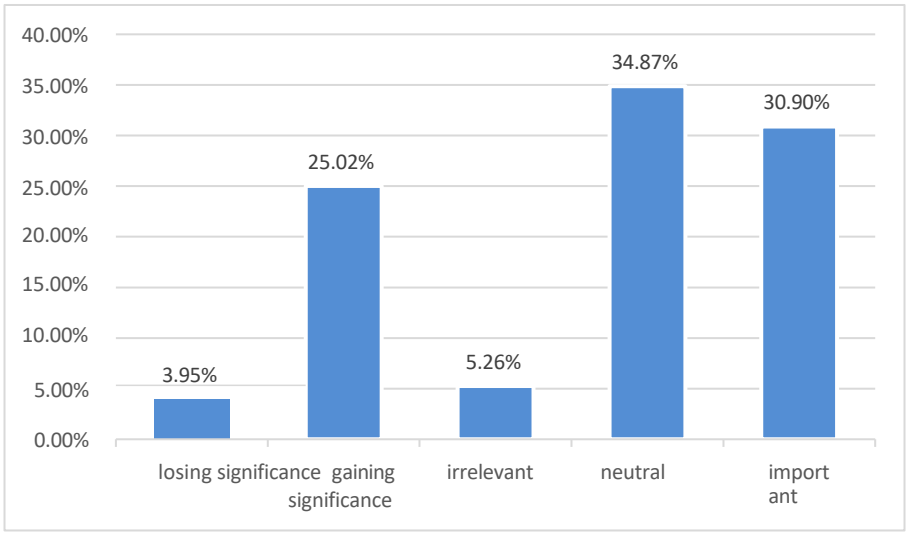


Chart 5. Distribution of the status of Chinese music in society according to respondents

Question 6. Do you come into contact with Chinese music in your daily life or do you appreciate it? (Chart 6).

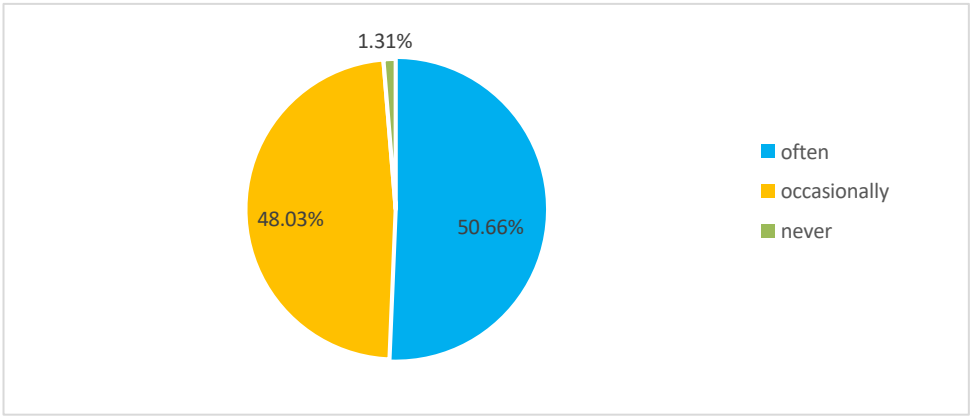


Figure 6. Distribution of respondents' exposure to Chinese music in everyday life

Question 7. In your opinion, what role does Chinese music play in international cultural exchange? (Chart 7).

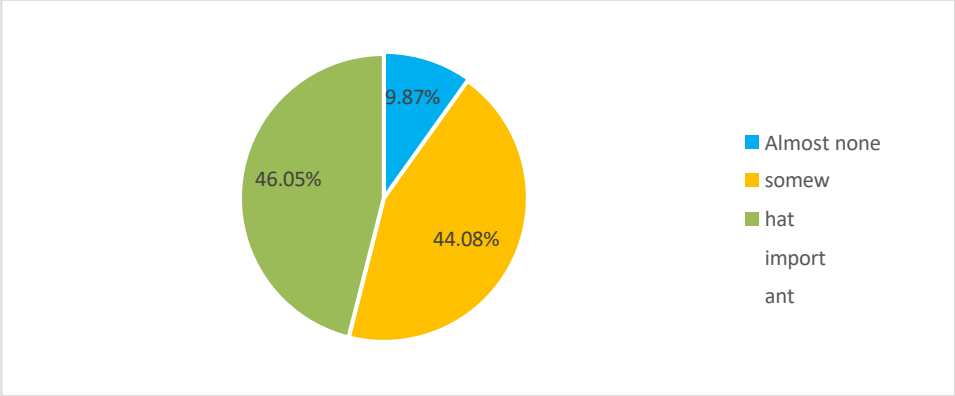


Chart 7. Distribution of the importance of Chinese music in cultural exchange

Question 8. What type of music do you prefer? (Chart 8)

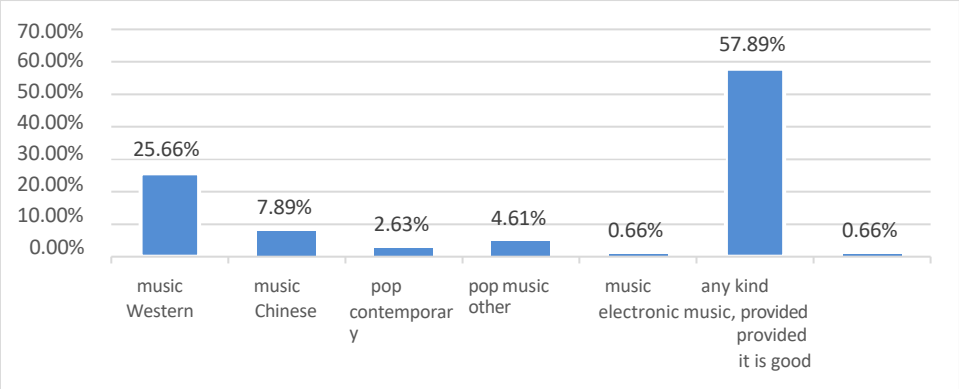


Chart 8. Distribution of respondents' musical preferences

Question 9. Do you think that traditional Chinese musical culture has been sufficiently preserved and developed? (Chart 9).

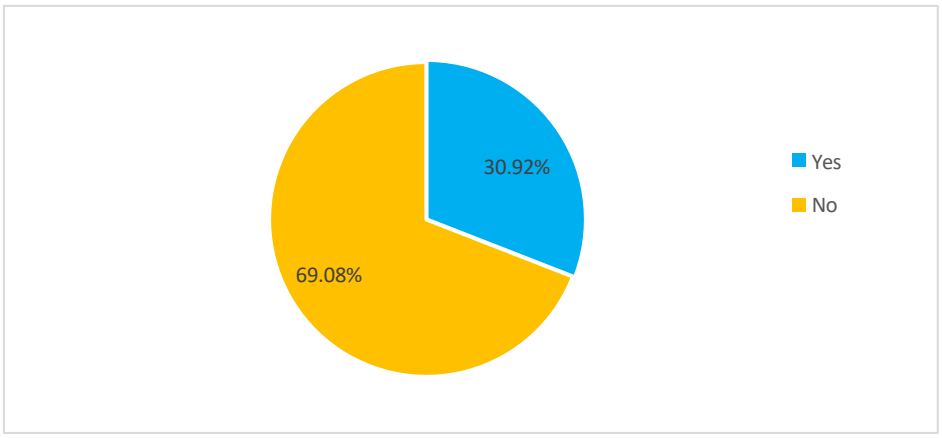


Chart 9. Distribution of responses regarding the degree of inheritance and development of Chinese musical culture

Question 10. Do you support the incorporation of Chinese elements into classical guitar compositions? (Chart 10)

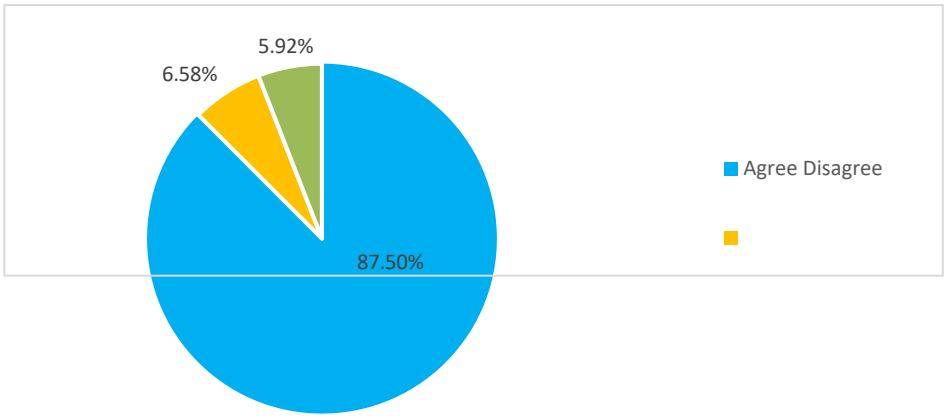


Figure 10. Distribution of responses supporting the incorporation of Chinese elements into classical guitar compositions

Question 11. Which elements of Chinese music, in your opinion, are best suited for adaptation when composing classical guitar pieces? (Chart 11)

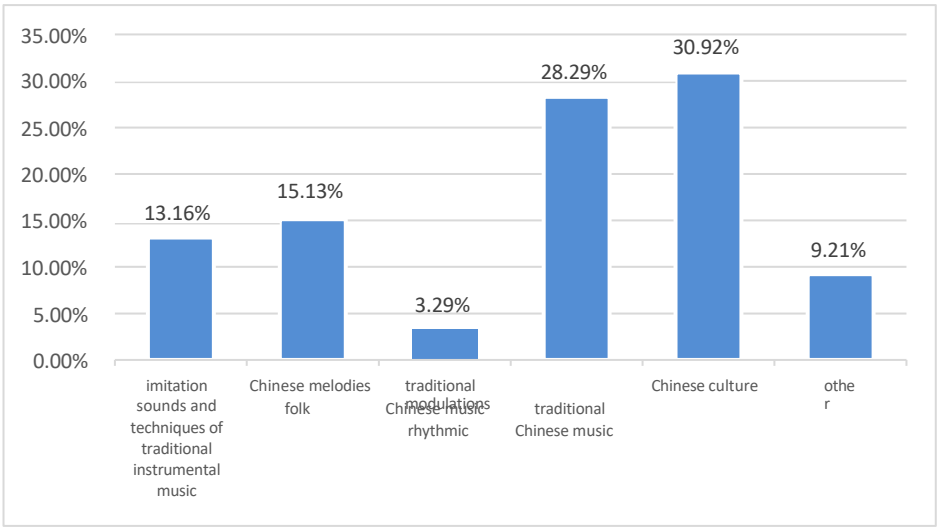


Figure 11. Distribution of respondents' answers to the question about the best Chinese elements to integrate into classical guitar pieces

An analysis of the survey data (N=152) allows us to draw several significant conclusions regarding the reception of traditional Chinese music, its role in contemporary society, and the prospects for implementing a process of indigenization in classical guitar music in China. The conclusions are as follows:

1. The profile of the respondents indicates a broad social and educational spectrum: more than half have a bachelor's degree

(53.95%); a significant group also consists of individuals with a master's degree (16.45%) and music teachers (21.71%). It is noteworthy that as many as 62.50% of respondents have contact with music through their studies or professional work, which lends the survey results a high level of credibility within the music community.

2. The status of traditional music in public consciousness is viewed positively: 30.90% of respondents consider it important, and another 25.02% state that its significance is growing. Although 34.87% remain neutral, only 3.95% indicated that it is being marginalized. These results suggest a growing awareness of the value of traditional musical culture.
3. As many as approximately 98% of respondents confirm daily contact with Chinese music (50.66% frequently, 48.03% occasionally). Only 1.32% have no contact with it. This indicates the enduring presence of musical tradition in everyday life, which lays the foundation for further efforts toward its integration with other musical forms.
4. The international role of Chinese music is highly regarded: 46.05% of respondents consider it an important element of cultural exchange, while another 44.08% see potential in it. This result demonstrates a growing recognition of the significance of Chinese musical culture in the global artistic dialogue.
5. The respondents' musical preferences demonstrate openness and the absence of rigid genre boundaries: 57.89% choose any type of music provided it is of high artistic quality. Only 25.66% indicated Western music as their dominant preference, and 7.89% chose Chinese music. This indicates a growing willingness to integrate different musical traditions.
6. The preservation and development of musical traditions still raise concerns: 69.08% believe this process is insufficient. This result points to an urgent need to strengthen efforts to protect and creatively develop traditional musical culture.

7. The combination of elements of traditional Chinese music with classical guitar music is met with a clearly positive reception—as many as 87.5% of respondents support this direction. This is direct evidence of public support for the process of indigenization, which not only enriches the guitar repertoire but also supports the building of a distinct cultural identity.
8. The most desired elements of integration are primarily Chinese culture as a whole (30.92%) and specific features of the musical language, such as traditional modulations (28.29%) or folk melodies (15.13%). Noteworthy is the relatively low percentage for rhythm (3.29%), which suggests that the melodic and modal idiom is more important to listeners than the rhythmic layer.

The collected data demonstrate that there is a clearly positive attitude toward the process of indigenizing classical guitar music within Chinese society. Respondents not only recognize the need to incorporate elements of local musical tradition, but also view this process as a significant step toward building a lasting and recognizable cultural identity. The survey results confirm that the adaptation of traditional Chinese elements in the creative process for classical guitar enjoys strong public support and can serve as a foundation for the sustainable development of Chinese guitar music. At the same time, the study reveals an awareness of the insufficient continuation of tradition, which further reinforces the significance of this research and points to the need to deepen reflection on the role of music in the process of building China's contemporary cultural identity. Importantly, these results also reflect the current state of Chinese aesthetic sensibility in the realm of music, pointing to its openness, diversity, and growing awareness of the value of its own heritage.

The renowned Chinese sociologist, anthropologist, and ethnographer Fei Xiaotong formulated the following cultural concept: "Let everyone appreciate their own beauty and the beauty of others; let beauty coexist, and the world will become harmonious" [43], which emphasizes the diversity and openness of Chinese

([43]) Fei Xiaotong (1910–2005), an eminent Chinese sociologist and anthropologist, formulated the concept "各美其美，美人之美，美美与共，天下大同" ["Let everyone

culture. The heritage and development of Chinese music are currently undergoing a phase of change and innovation. Although society shares a certain consensus regarding cultural identity, aesthetic preferences are becoming increasingly diverse—traditional music must find new paths for development in the contemporary context. In the future, the development of Chinese musical culture requires not only strengthening traditions and promotion at the national level, but also seeking more open and innovative forms of communication on the international stage to realize the idea of "beauty in coexistence" in a true, global dimension.

"One values one's own beauty, values the beauty of others, shares beauty with one another, and the world strives for harmony." This idea emphasizes the need for mutual respect, recognition of differences, and the pursuit of harmonious coexistence among cultures, which is of significant importance for contemporary research on integration and intercultural dialogue.

Chapter 2. Analysis of Three Outstanding Works of Latin American and Spanish Guitar Literature: An Interpretive Perspective and Its Contribution to the Development of Guitar Music in China

2.1. Agustín Barrios Mangoré *Un Sueño en la Floresta* [*A Dream in the Forest*]



Figure 8. Agustín Barrios draws on the figure of Mangoré—a character modeled after a 16th-century Guarani Indian chief who died while resisting Spanish invaders in Paraguay

Agustín Barrios gained fame thanks to his incredible guitar-playing skills [44] . By adopting the identity of Mangoré, Barrios expressed pride in his cultural and ethnic roots while simultaneously voicing opposition to traditional colonial rule. This cultural aspect sparked widespread interest in his music throughout Latin America, earning him widespread recognition within the classical guitar community [45] . *Un Sueño en la Floresta* is undoubtedly one of the most difficult

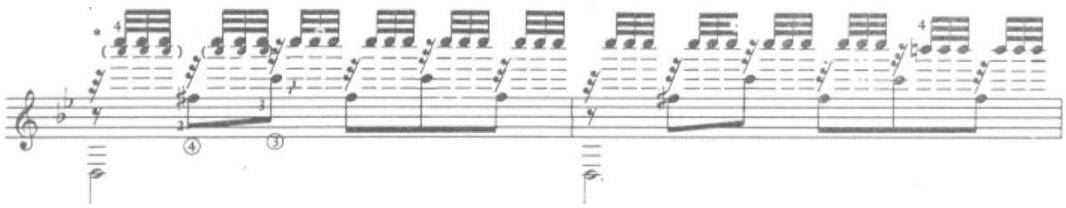
[44] R.D. Stover, *Agustin Barrios Mangoré, His Life and Music, Part III: Cacique Nitsuga Mangoré*, "Guitar Review" 1995, no. 100, Winter, pp. 17–21.

[45] S. Krüger Bridge, *Music and Identity in Paraguay: Expressing National, Racial, and Class Identity in Guitar Music Culture*, "Journal of the Royal Musical Association" 2022, no. 1(147), pp. 1–49.

of pieces featuring the *tremolo* technique in the entire guitar repertoire (Barrios developed it in 1918)[46] .

In this piece, Barrios fully demonstrated his profound understanding of guitar technique, introducing innovations not only in terms of performance but also by expanding the artistic possibilities of tremolo. Although Giulio Regondi and Francisco Tárrega are considered the pioneers of this technique, Barrios, drawing on their experience, further refined and developed it[47] . By combining the melodic line with the harmonic layer, he increased the fluidity of the sound, significantly expanding the expressiveness of tremolo on the guitar. This approach not only enriched the palette of expressive means in the guitar solo but also cemented Barrios's position as one of the most important figures in the history of guitar music[48] .

In the piece *Un Sueño en la Floresta,* Barrios's musical imagination transcends the technical limitations of the guitar at the time[49] . This composition requires extending the instrument's range from 19 to 20 frets, raising the highest note from B to C. From that point on, the classical guitar began to have 20 frets[50] .



Musical example 1. Agustín Barrios Mangoré, *Un Sueño en la Floresta*, 106–107

[46] L. Száran, *Barrios, Agustin Pio [Nitsuga Mangoré]*, [in:] E. Casares Rodicio (ed.), *Diccionario de la Música Española e Hispanoamericana*, Sociedad de Autores y Editores, Madrid 1999, p. 266.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid.

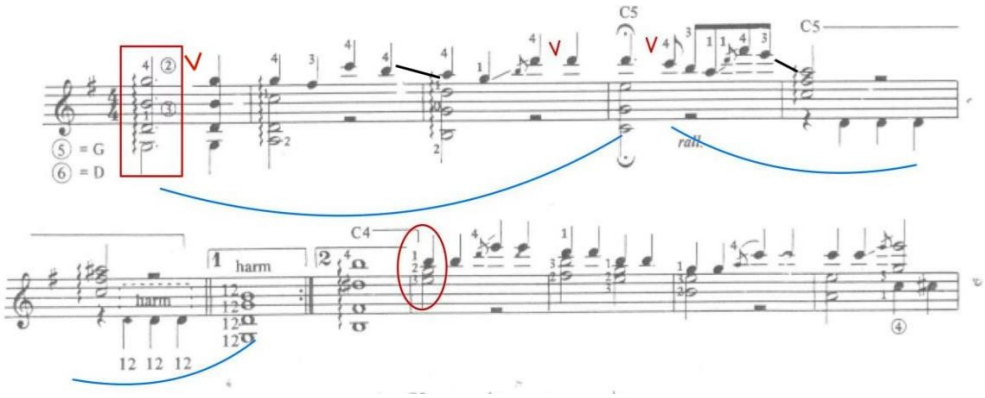
[50] A. McKenna Ward, *Agustin Barrios Mangoré: A Study in the Articulation of Cultural Identity*, The University of Adelaide, Elder Conservatorium of Music, master's thesis, Adelaide [AUS] 2010, https://digital.library.adelaide.edu.au/server/api/core/bitstreams/bb29886f-64e0-4d9f-a977-4a3cddebdec6/content [accessed: 05/03/2022], p. 144.

Furthermore, this piece is based on the character of Mangoré, who became a source of unique visual and emotional expression for Barrios and his work [51] . Through music, Barrios introduces the listener to a world full of fantasy and emotion, revealing his deep sensitivity and creative imagination as an artist.
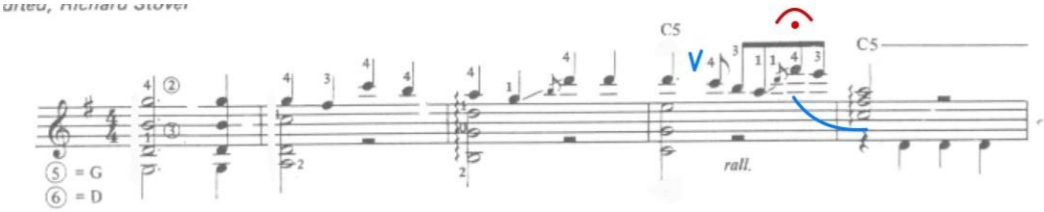
When performing this piece, in addition to strictly adhering to its formal structure and harmonic arrangement, special attention should be paid to shaping the tone color, controlling dynamics, and the nuances of the tremolo. The first section of the piece (the introduction) begins with a G major chord, which sets the emotional tone for the entire work and draws the listener into a peaceful, contemplative world of nature. This is followed by contrasting material in E minor, providing a striking counterpoint to the opening passage (bar 9).

Of particular note is the repetition of the introduction, where the composer opted for several unique interpretive choices: the first two chords were played as full chords rather than arpeggios, resulting in a more powerful and focused sound. Additionally, the tempo was slightly accelerated to heighten the drama and expressiveness of the narrative. An additional modification concerns the fourth measure—the fermata has been moved to the penultimate note (F), which allowed for a more balanced climax and a more coherent phrasing. Barrios introduces the main theme already in the introduction, embellishing it with glissando, which lends the music greater fluidity. In achieving this effect, the author paid attention to the subtlety of the transitions and appropriate rhythmic variation to strengthen both formal coherence and musical expression.

[51] Ibid., p. 151.



first



second

Musical Example 2. Agustín Barrios Mangoré, *Un Sueño en la Floresta*, 1–12

Upon entering the *tremolo* section, a uniform and multi-layered sound emerges, making the main melody clear and fluid against the accompaniment. The use of tremolo is not solely about striving for evenness; precise control of tone color and dynamics is key here, so that the melodic line gains a singing quality and natural flow.

After a brief modulation to E minor (bars 46–59), the piece returns to the key of G major. The melody takes on a distinctly lyrical character, typical of Romantic music. During the performance of this section, the composer employed the *rubato* technique while simultaneously using *a crescendo* to further emphasize the melody's fluidity; through precise fingerwork of the left hand—especially in the execution of ornamentation—she sought subtlety, which brought out the music's elegance and emotional richness. From measure 88, the piece shifts to the key of G minor and introduces an *arpeggio* introduction through a rapidly descending scale, laying the groundwork for the reappearance of the tremolo technique. The musical material of this section is based on ascending and descending melodic movements, and when the tonic seventh chord reaches its climax,

The composer makes the melody more tense and dramatic by adjusting the strength of the right hand and precisely controlling the pressure of the left hand on the strings, which further intensifies the emotional climax of the entire piece. The piece then gradually returns to the key of G major (bar 115). Finally, the composer deliberately slows down the tempo of the ascending tonic arpeggio to achieve a final release of musical tension. The contrast between the two G major chords in the highest and lowest registers of the guitar creates a strong sense of space and musical tension, which ultimately achieves a balance between emotional fluctuations and the return of the musical structure.

In classical guitar technique, *tremolo* is one of the most expressive skills; it requires the performer not only to have precise control of the right hand but also to carefully blend tone, dynamics, strength, and musicality. The essence of tremolo lies in creating a fluid melodic line from a series of rapidly repeated notes, with the musical effect depending on the tight connection and internal cohesion between them. When the tempo is sufficiently fast, individual notes lose their distinctiveness, giving way to a smooth, singing flow of melody. The notes are no longer perceived as individual units, but thanks to a coherent tremolo technique, they form a natural, almost vocal melodic line.

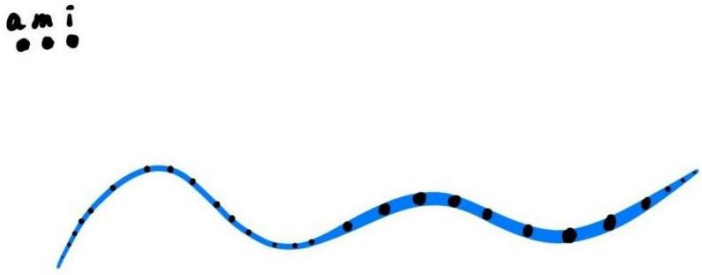


Illustration 9. Diagram of the tremolo technique

In the illustration above, the blue line represents the melody to be played, and the black dots indicate notes played alternately with three fingers of the right hand (a,

m, i)[52] in the *tremolo* technique. One can observe that the line rises and falls, becoming thicker or thinner, symbolizing faster, slower, stronger, or weaker passages. The dots forming this line vary in density and size. Therefore, mastering tremolo is not merely a matter of achieving perfect evenness; the performer must find the optimal balance in terms of volume, strength, and subtle changes in fingering so that the melody sounds natural and fluid, with appropriate changes in dynamics and tempo. This phenomenon is similar to the bowing technique used when playing long notes on stringed instruments. Changes in bow speed, pressure, and tone indicate dynamic changes in the bowing technique. Therefore, performing a tremolo is not merely a matter of mechanically repeating movements, but must be combined with natural changes in the melody, and the vitality and dynamics of the melody can be emphasized by flexibly handling changes in the dynamics and speed of each note. An excessive pursuit of absolute uniformity in the tremolo can not only weaken the musical spontaneity but even lead to stiffness and artificiality in the melody's sound.

In summary, Barrios's work combines elements of classical music and Paraguayan folklore, giving it a unique character. His compositions are often distinguished by their poetic expression and deep emotion. Through his music, Barrios conveys his deepest feelings and reflections, making his works full of romantic, personal expression.

2.2. Joaquín Rodrigo *Invocación y Danza* [*Prayer and Dance*]

As one of the most important Spanish composers of the 20th century, Joaquín Rodrigo wrote as many as 24 solo pieces for classical guitar, among which *Invocación y Danza*

[52] a, m, and i – abbreviations used in guitar notation to denote the fingers of the right hand: *a* (Spanish: *anular*) – ring finger, *m* (Spanish: *medio*) – middle finger, *i* (Spanish: *índice*) – index finger. These abbreviations originate from Spanish and are a widely accepted standard in classical guitar literature and pedagogy.

is undoubtedly one of the most widely performed [53] . This work is distinguished by a mysterious and almost magical musical atmosphere, which sets it apart from Rodrigo's earlier subtle and lyrical compositions, rich in orchestral colors. In his early works, the composer draws on the harmonic style of Maurice Ravel, which was clearly linked to the influence of his teacher Paul Dukas [54] . In **Invocación y Danza**, Rodrigo retained his characteristic refined harmony, while enriching it with elements of Andalusian music and flamenco, thanks to which the work not only presents a national style but is also characterized by strong drama and musical vividness.

Rodrigo drew strong inspiration from Manuel de Falla in his work, and **Invocación y Danza** is a prime example of this. The piece's subtitle—**Homenaje a Manuel de Falla** [*Tribute to Manuel de Falla*]—clearly indicates the intention to honor this composer. The piece was composed in 1961 and dedicated to the Venezuelan guitar virtuoso Alirio Díaz. It was officially published by the French Chamber of Deputies in 1962, and the Spanish guitarist Graciano Tarragó added fingering to it[55] . That same year, Alirio Díaz performed the piece for the first time at the Bordeaux Music Festival in France, and in 1973 he published an abridged version of it. Subsequently, Spanish guitar virtuoso Pepe Romero published his own version in 1977, and in 1993 he revised it to correct certain errors and refine the piece for performance purposes[56] .

Rodrigo sought to use the guitar to depict the scene of a Gypsy woman's final dance with the spirit of her deceased husband in a forest setting—this motif comes from Manuel de Falla's ballet *El*

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[53] R. Calcraft, *Complete Biography*, https://www.joaquin-rodrigo.com/index.php/en/complete-biography [accessed: 12/11/2023].

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid.

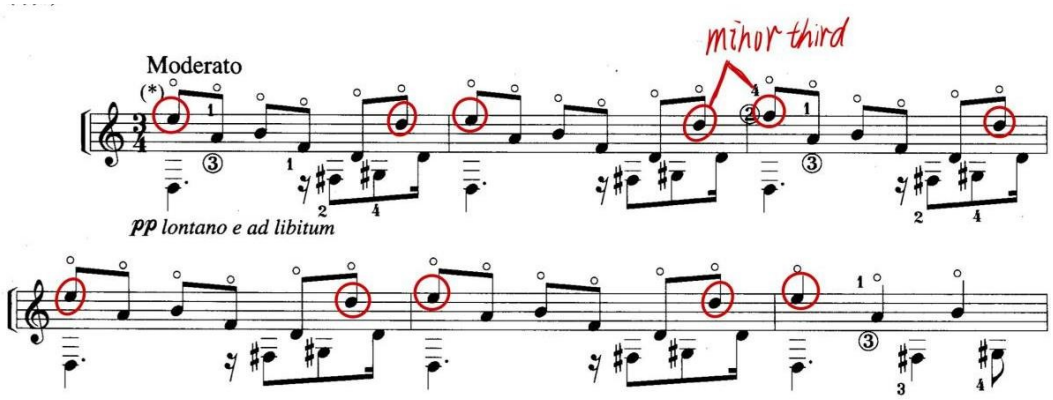
[56] M.C.M. Colinet, *"La Música Pianística de Joaquín Rodrigo*," *Revista de Musicología*, 2005, no. 2(28), pp. 8–10.

amor brujo [*Enchanted Love*]. In terms of structure, the piece can be divided into two main parts: “Invocation” (*Invocación*) and “Dance” (*Danza*).

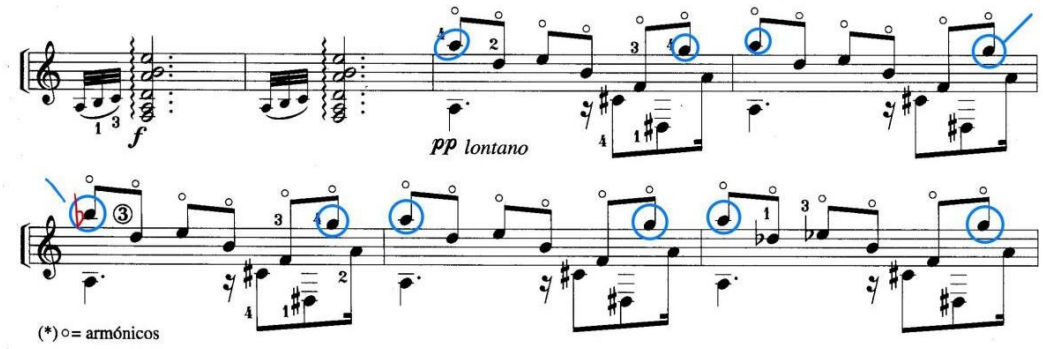
The “Invocation” section is based mainly on harmonics and *arpeggio* techniques, and the opening—thanks to a rhythmic introduction—introduces a theme by Manuel de Falla, highlighted by harmonics, which reinforces the aura of mystery and magic. In the “Dance,” Andalusian *palo* rhythms and elements of *flamenco* technique appear, leading the piece to an intense tremolo section. The music then returns to the sparse, ethereal sound of harmonics, and the piece concludes with *an arpeggio* that once again evokes the mystical atmosphere of the invocation, giving the composition a cohesive and well-thought-out form.

Since its creation, the piece **Invocación y Danza** has been arranged in many different ways, a fact attributable to the fact that it was not originally written for the guitar. Consequently, performers often make changes to adapt it to the specific characteristics and technical demands of the instrument. In the presented interpretation, elements from all the most important versions have been combined and subtly modified to achieve an even better balance between technical aspects and musical expression. The remainder of this text refers primarily to the sheet music version prepared by Pepe Romero in 1977, though certain passages have been further optimized and adapted to the author’s individual needs. The first part of the piece begins with a variation on a motif from the first act *of El amor brujo* (musical example 3), which in the original is characterized by a distinct Spanish national style. In the presented performance version, during the repetition of the melody (musical example 4), a subtle change has been introduced: the first note of the third measure has been changed from B to B-flat. The theoretical basis for this correction is the fact that the melody in question is actually a reference to the theme from the first act *of El amor brujo*, where a minor third interval appears in the corresponding passage of the original. At the same time, Rodrigo also uses the D–F structure—that is, a minor third—at the very beginning of his piece (musical example 3). Therefore, when reintroducing

the motif, the same interval logic must be maintained, and the minor third relationship must also be applied—by changing B-flat to B—to ensure the internal coherence of the melody and harmonic continuity.

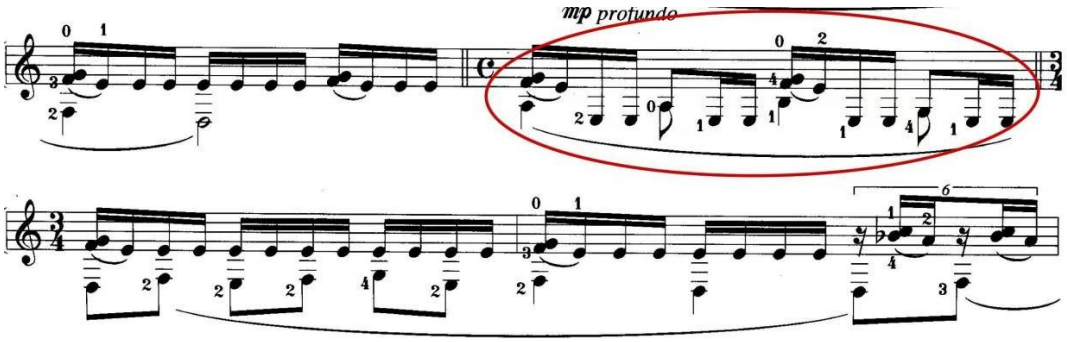


Musical example 3. Pepe Romero 1977. Bars 1–6
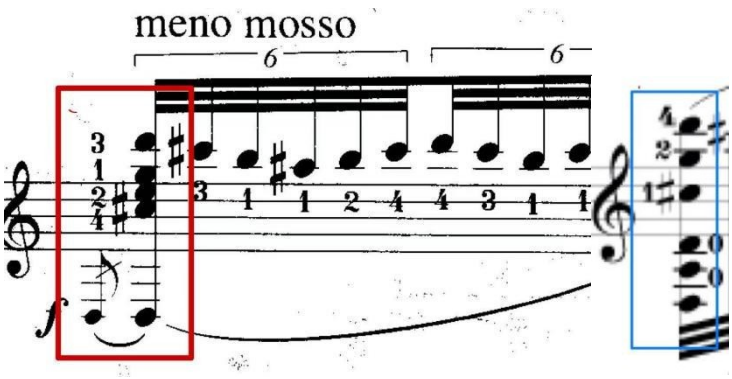


Musical Example 4. Pepe Romero, 1977. Bars 12–18

This passage refers to the ending of Scene IX *of El amor brujo*, where in the original this part is performed by violin and flute, which emphasize its delicate and light character. However, in the presented version, the appearance of measure 34 seems somewhat abrupt and does not quite harmonize with the overall flow of the music. This measure disrupts the originally subtle mood and makes the music too heavy, clearly contrasting with the fluidity and finesse of the adjacent phrases. To restore the piece's coherence and harmony, the author decided to remove this measure, thereby avoiding an overly abrupt sonic effect that could have affected the overall interpretation. It is worth noting that this measure was also omitted in Diaz's version (musical example 5).
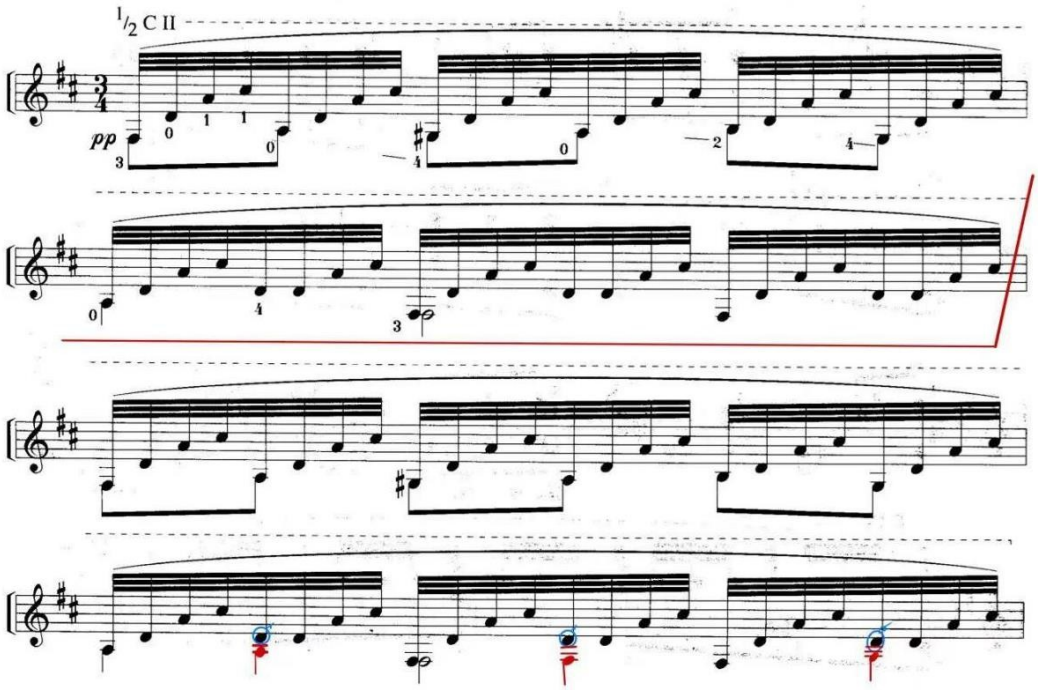


Musical example 5. Pepe Romero 1977. Measure 35

In this performance version, compared to Pepe Romero's 1977 version, the E note in the first chord of measure 64 has been omitted, while the low D and A notes have been emphasized. This modification not only emphasizes the root of the chord but also allows for the use of the *rasgueado* technique, giving the chord a clearer layering and better resonance, which lends the performance greater expressiveness (musical example 6).



Musical example 6. Pepe Romero 1977. Measure 64

This passage consists of four measures, divided into two two-measure musical phrases, leading to the next section featuring the tremolo technique (musical example 7). In Pepe Romero's 1977 version, both musical phrases are identical. In the presented performance, however, the author has made changes to the second part of the second phrase (i.e., the last line of this passage). She has added more bass notes (in the musical illustration, the new notes are marked in red, and the removed sections in blue).



Musical example 7. Pepe Romero 1977. Bars 133–136

This modification not only increased the contrast within this passage and enriched the musical texture, but also improved the transition to the next section of the piece. Furthermore, from a technical standpoint, this change makes fingering smoother when transitioning to the tremolo technique.

In this work, Rodrigo masterfully interprets Falla's ballet **El amor brujo** [*The Love of the Sorcerer*] using only the guitar. Through elements borrowed from *flamenco*, the guitar's expressive potential is fully realized, successfully capturing the mysterious atmosphere of the Gypsy legend. The combination of the guitar's tone with appropriate performance techniques reinforces the piece's Spanish character, endowing it with vivid drama and emotional tension, while at the same time capturing the unique charm of Gypsy culture. Elements of Spanish music and culture can be discerned in Rodrigo's work. Furthermore, his compositional technique is distinguished by an original approach to melody and harmony. The melodies in his works are typically fluid, lyrical, and exceptionally expressive, while classical harmony infused with elements of Spanish folk music creates a unique sonic effect. Thanks to this synthesis, his work is not only characterized by extraordinary

expressiveness, but also makes him one of the most influential Spanish composers of the 20th century.

2.3. Leo Brouwer *Elogio de la Danza* [*In Praise of Dance*]

Leo Brouwer is a Cuban composer and guitarist who has had a tremendous influence on the development of contemporary guitar music [57] . *Elogio de la Danza* represents the pinnacle of the first phase of his career as a guitar composer. This piece can also be considered one of Brouwer's most famous and highly regarded guitar works [58] . Although the piece was composed primarily in a traditional tonal and harmonic style, the development of atonal technique is clearly discernible in it. This is what distinguishes *Elogio de la Danza* from Brouwer's other works of that period—here, the composer consciously attempts to transcend the boundaries of traditional tonal stability.

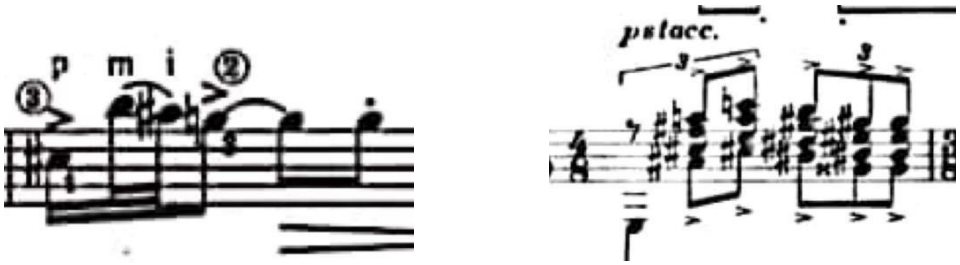
"Elogio de la Danza" is a guitar piece that blends traditional elements with modernity, showcasing the composer's mastery of Latin American rhythms, avant-garde harmony, and innovative structure. Rhythmically, the piece employs rhythmic patterns typical of the Afro-Cuban tradition, such as *tresillo* and *cinquillo*, as well as syncopated rhythms, which give the music a unique dance-like character (musical examples 8 and 9). During the performance, the performer paid particular attention to the clarity of the rhythmic layers, combining techniques such as staccato and rubato to achieve a balance between rhythmic freedom and the precise structure of the piece. In the harmonic layer, Brouwer employed many dissonant intervals, such as seconds, thirds, fourths, and sevenths, and through the parallel progression of chords, he deliberately blurred the boundaries of traditional tonality. While playing, the performer paid particular attention to the shaping of chords, adjusting the placement and strength of the fingers' contact with the strings to achieve varied timbres and better emphasize the innovative character and
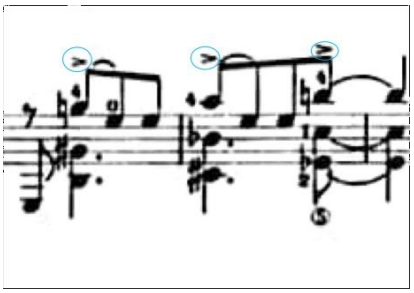
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[57] C.W. Kronenberg, *"Guitar Composer Leo Brouwer: The Concept of a 'Universal Language*,'" Tempo 2008, no. 62, pp. 30–46.

[58] R. Pincirolli, *"Leo Brouwer's Works for Guitar*," trans. P. Possiedi, *Guitar Review*, 1989, no. 77, Spring, pp. 4–10.

the piece's tonal contrasts. Control of dynamics and timbre is a key element of the interpretation of this piece. Brouwer marked changes in volume, variations in timbre, and special techniques (such as *rasgueado* or *golpe*) in great detail in the score. Following these instructions, the performer adjusted the angle and manner of striking the strings with the fingers of her right hand to achieve the appropriate sound effect in specific passages. For example, a darker tone was used at the beginning of the piece to emphasize mystery, while at the climax, a bright sound played closer to the bridge was used to heighten the tension.



Musical Example 8. Cinquillo, I-Lento, m7. Measure 7 (left); Tresillo, II-Obstinato. Measure 6 (right)



Musical example 9. A variation of the tresillo rhythm, manifested in the accentuation. II-Obstinato. Bars 23–24

This piece affords the performer considerable interpretive freedom—not only does it showcase the characteristics of Cuban music, but it also contains symbolic references to dance rituals. In her interpretation, the artist sought a balance between logical structure and freedom of expression, shaping the drama through subtle changes in tempo (rubato) and dynamics (crescendo/decrescendo), which emphasized the piece's expressiveness.

In summary, *Elogio de la Danza* combines a unique form, innovative harmony, and national rhythms, serving as an example of Brouwer's exploration of the musical language of the guitar. During the performance, the artist brought her own interpretive approach,

achieving a balance between modernity and emotional expressiveness, which perfectly illustrates the subtle coexistence of national, modernist, and individual elements in Brouwer's music.

2.4. Conclusions and Summary

All of the aforementioned outstanding composers, despite certain common traits in their creative approach, represent their own recognizable styles. Each was deeply inspired by their native culture and music, which they expressed by weaving these elements into their guitar works. As a result, their music not only reflects individual emotions and reflections but also stands out for its high technical and artistic level, fully showcasing the wealth of expressive possibilities of the classical guitar.

History shows that, despite the profound influence of Spanish guitar culture, guitar music in Latin America has developed its own distinct musical language, illustrating a process of indigenization—that is, the transformation of a foreign tradition into a locally rooted artistic form. This process led to the creation of a unique guitar repertoire that has become one of the most important pillars of the world's guitar literature.

Agustín Barrios Mangoré integrated elements of folk music with poetic expression; Joaquín Rodrigo highlighted the charm of Spanish culture through a masterful use of melody and harmony; while Leo Brouwer explored the boundaries of musical language in the spirit of the avant-garde and experimentation, weaving in reflections on society and culture. The diversity of these creative approaches illustrates a process that demonstrates how the lasting and sustainable development of classical guitar music can be supported by deep roots in native cultural traditions and the consistent shaping of one's own cultural identity, which simultaneously enriches the instrument's artistic potential and its place within the broader context of world music.

Chapter 3. Chinese Guitar Music

The works of Chinese composers attest to the growing maturity and individuality of Chinese guitar music, as well as its potential to shape a distinctly recognizable national musical tradition.

3.1. Tan Dun

Tan Dun, an Oscar and Grammy Award winner, born in 1957 in Changde, Hunan Province, is one of the most influential contemporary Chinese composers and conductors of international renown. Tan Dun's work is renowned for its distinctive fusion of traditional Chinese musical elements with Western techniques of contemporary music[59] . Thanks to this unique musical style, his works convey a strong exotic atmosphere to Western audiences, while at the same time standing out to Asian listeners for their modernity and Western character. This cultural tension has led to Tan Dun's work garnering immense interest worldwide[60] .

"*Seven Desires*" is Tan Dun's only solo piece for classical guitar to date. The origins of this work date back to 1996, when the composer collaborated with Professor Sharon Isbin of *the Juilliard School of Music* to create the guitar concerto *Yi2* [61] . In 2002, the piece was rearranged into a solo version titled *Seven Desires*. The inspiration here was the ancient Chinese philosophical text *Yijing* (*Book of Changes*)[62] , written in the 5th century BCE, which discusses such concepts as the unity of opposites, change, and permanence.

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[59] J.C. Lee, *"Tan Dun." Grove Music Online*, Oxford University Press, Oxford [UK] 2003.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Chicago Philharmonic, *Sharon Isbin and Tan Dun Create Yi2*, video, YouTube, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XtywZ72XpAw [accessed: 02/14/2024].

[62] ***The Book of Changes*** (*Yìjīng*, 易经) is one of the oldest classical Chinese texts, originally which served as a divination manual as early as the Western Zhou Dynasty (c. 1000–750 BCE). During the Warring States period and the early years of the Empire (c. 500–200 BCE), this text was

3.1.1. Seven *Desires*

Seven Desires is a single-movement work with a complex structure, based on seven autonomous yet interrelated sections, each presenting distinct emotional and musical characteristics. It is significant that Tan Dun did not specify the nature of the seven desires, which gives the work an open character [63] . It is precisely this free, open structure that provides the work with a much broader space for subjective interpretation, allowing audiences and performers the freedom to understand and experience the work (based on their own emotional experiences). This characteristic reflects a fundamental feature of the Chinese musical tradition, which emphasizes the performer's spontaneous expression in line with their current spiritual state, thereby highlighting the dynamic interaction between individual experience and artistic creation. The composition makes extensive use of the senza misura technique (without

(fixed rhythm, free rhythm), which shows an analogy with the characteristics of *the sanban* (散

板)[64] in traditional Chinese music, while also reflecting features of Western

contemporary music, such as atonality and rhythmic variability. The piece is a synthesis of flamenco techniques, elements of traditional Chinese opera, and Chinese methods of playing traditional instruments, creating a unique musical expression through modulations

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transformed into a complex cosmological work, enriched with philosophical commentaries, known as the *Ten Wings*. Over the following millennia, *the Yìjīng* served as the foundation of Chinese philosophical and cosmological thought, functioning simultaneously as a moral guide, a political handbook for rulers, and a divination tool used to predict the fortunes of individuals and states. This text played a significant role in the development of numerous fields of knowledge, such as literature, art criticism, cartography, and medicine. It gave rise to numerous interpretations in the spirit of Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and even Christianity and other competing philosophical currents.

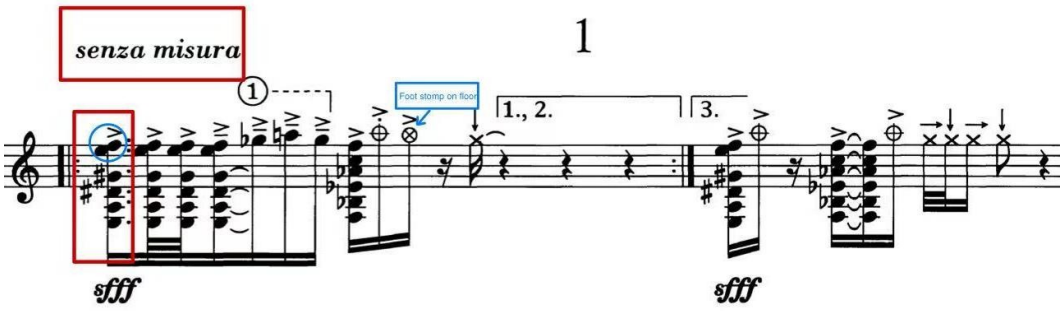
[63] Tan Dun, *Seven Desires for Guitar* (2002), introduction to the piece in the score, G. Schirmer/AMP, New York 2002.

[64] ***Sanban*** (散板) is a traditional rhythmic technique in Chinese music, characterized by the absence of a fixed meter and a free, fluid articulation of tempo. This technique allows the performer to shape the musical phrase flexibly, adjusting the tempo and accents to the current emotional expression and interpretation, which reflects an important aspect of Chinese musical aesthetics, in which spontaneity and individual expression are of key importance.

modal and modern performance techniques. This complex fusion of musical styles and traditions demonstrates an innovative compositional approach and the intercultural artistic perspective characteristic of contemporary musical creation.

Part 1

This passage employs the senza misura technique, creating a dramatic musical atmosphere through the intense rhythm of the rasgueado (flamenco), percussive *tapping* on the guitar's soundbox, and sound effects generated by foot stomping. Additionally, the use of the Phrygian scale (Phrygian mode)[65] has reinforced the characteristic Spanish musical timbres (musical example 10).



Musical example 10. Tan Dun, *Seven Desires*. Bars 1–2

Notes on performance technique:

[65] **The Phrygian mode** is one of the seven church (modal) modes, characterized by a specific sequence of intervals: semitone–whole tone–whole tone–whole tone–semitone–whole tone–whole tone. In the modern context, the Phrygian mode begins on the note E and consists of the notes: E–F–G–A–B–C–D–E. This mode originates from ancient Greek music and was widely used in medieval liturgical music. In the Spanish tradition, the Phrygian mode has become one of the defining features of flamenco and classical Spanish music. The specific semitone interval between the first and second degrees gives it a sound characteristic of Iberian music, which emphasizes the Spanish style and is widely used in Spanish guitar literature. See W. Piston, *Harmony*, W.W. Norton, New York 1987, pp. 35–42; H. Quine, *Flamenco Guitar: History, Style and Context*, Scarecrow Press, Lanham 2005, pp. 67–74.



Striking the strings with the palm near the soundhole or the fingerboard, producing a dry, percussive sound.



Stomping your foot on the floor.



Striking the guitar's side soundboard with your left hand.



Tapping the soundboard with the knuckles of the right hand.

The following *dolce molto* passage reveals the composer's extraordinary subtlety—a gentle, lyrical melody emerges, forming a stark contrast to the passionate flamenco section that precedes it. At a calm tempo

♩=50, the melodic line becomes fluid and cohesive, and the use of triplets gives the music a free, light character. In terms of sound, the performer should strictly adhere to the marking *dolce molto* (very sweet), as well as implement specific dynamics and tremolo technique to bring out the lyricism of the melody and its dynamic contrasts (musical example 11).

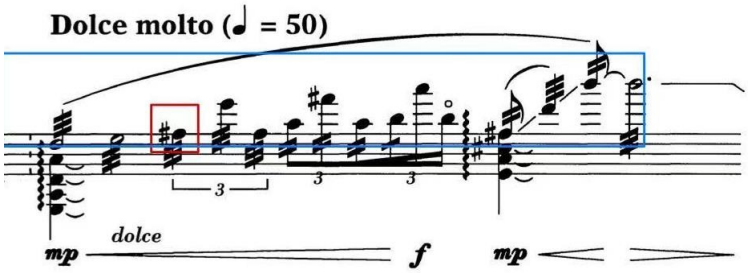
The harmony in this passage is based on a pentatonic scale (D–E–F#–A–B), which echoes the typical "horizontal" melodic lines found in Chinese music. As the melody gradually rises, the dynamics briefly increase to *forte*, creating a small climax, after which they quickly return to *mezzo piano*, as if the whole were oscillating between restraint and the need for expression. This structure perfectly reflects the fusion of Eastern lyricism with Western modernity—the music gains depth and, thanks to numerous contrasts, becomes multi-layered.

In this section, the phrasing resembles Erhuang[66] from Chinese opera, which helps maintain the tension of flamenco while enriching the whole with an oriental flavor.

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[66] ***Erhuang*** is one of the two basic types of musical recitative (shengqiang) in Peking opera, alongside ***xipi***. It derives from the local musical traditions of central China and is characterized by

At the end, the opening flamenco chord returns with four harmonics, which conclude the first section of the piece.



Musical Example 11. Tan Dun *Seven Desires*. Measure 4

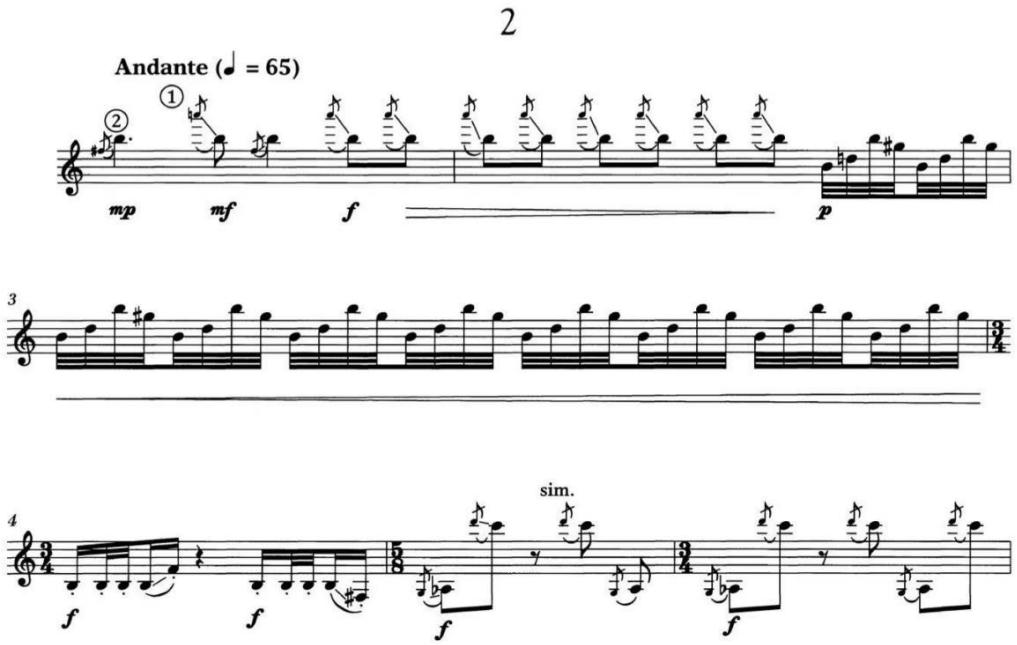
Part 2

This section of the piece is played at an Andante tempo (♩=65), which emphasizes its calm mood. In terms of pitch and rhythmic structure, the first measure consists primarily on repeated single notes with a glissando, which is one of the characteristic elements of Chinese opera and traditional instrumental music (musical example 12).

In the second half of the second measure, the melody transitions into rapid arpeggios, centering mainly around the note B. This creates an effect similar to an ostinato, or a repeating motif. This evenly distributed arpeggio structure, performed smoothly, gives the piece great cohesion and fluidity of sound.

The musical material from the fourth measure is further developed and enriched with larger interval leaps, such as octave leaps in the lower registers. In the fifth measure, the composer added the marking "sim." (*simile*): the performer should maintain the earlier rhythmic structure in the following section. The introduction of an eighth-note rest adds space to the melody's flow while simultaneously enhancing its rhythmic clarity.

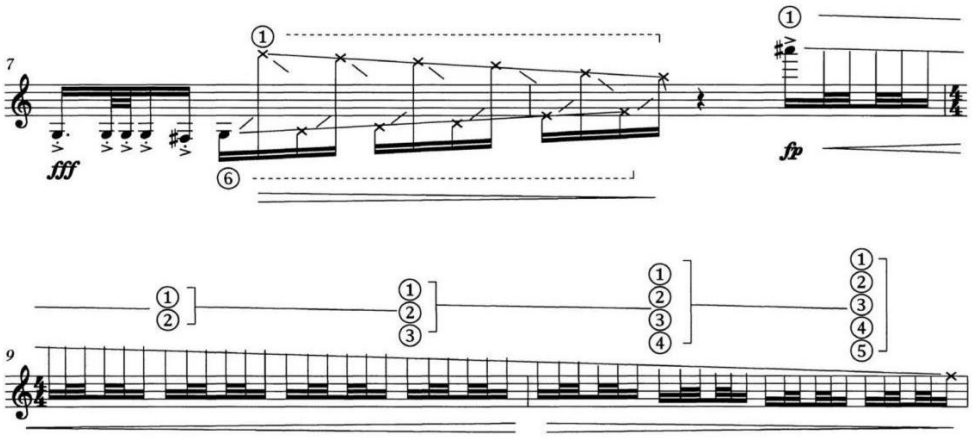
It is characterized by a serious, deep tone and a calm tempo. It is most often used in dramatic scenes depicting tragedy, the characters' inner conflicts, or their moral resolve. This style contrasts with *the* lively, energetic *xipi*, which is used to convey more dynamic and cheerful emotions.



Musical Example 12. Tan Dun, *Seven Desires*. Bars 1–6

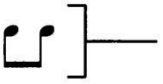
The indicated section of the score employs two "textural" techniques characteristic of contemporary classical guitar playing, which blend together in terms of timbre, dynamics, and execution, creating a multi-layered and rich sonic texture. First, *the* two-part *glissando* in opposite directions requires the performer to simultaneously play two independent melodic lines: the lower voice moves upward from the G note in the bass to any higher note, while the higher voice glides downward from a high note toward the lower register. During this process, the performer must precisely control the pressure of the left hand to ensure *the glissando* is smooth, while simultaneously gradually changing the dynamics with the right hand so that the timbre naturally fades (*diminuendo*) and smoothly transitions into *a* crescendo in the next section of the piece. Next, beginning with the note A#, the melodic line unfolds toward the lower registers. As indicated in the score, the performer should gradually expand the range of string contact—from a single string to a larger area of the instrument's resonance. While performing these two techniques, the left hand moves quickly across the fingerboard, producing staccato sounds reminiscent of clicking on the frets. This timbre gives the music a certain mechanical and random quality (aleatoric elements, musical example 13).

This unstable sonic effect reinforces a defiance of traditional aesthetics, breaking away from the norm of the classical guitar's pure tone. It makes the music more physical, primal, and experimental, reflecting the avant-garde and spectral music movements of the second half of the 20th century in their exploration of inharmonic timbres.
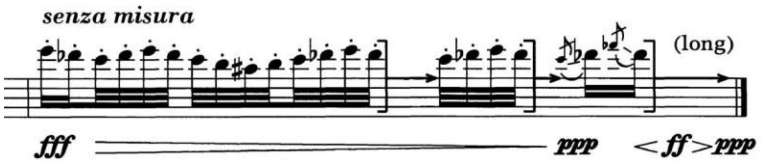


Musical example 13. Tan Dun, *Seven Desires*. Bars 9–10

Notes on performance technique:

The motif before the bracket is repeated, with the length of the line  indicating the duration of the repetition. All grace notes should played on the strong beat of the measure (on the beat).

At the end of the piece, the rhythm returns once again to *senza misura*, and the composer employs a non-traditional method of expressing rhythmic structures, using the length of the beams to indicate the number of repetitions of the notes, thereby creating a dynamic structure based on changes in the density of the timbre. This compositional approach transcends the traditional division into measures and fixed rhythmic frameworks, giving the performer great freedom in shaping the tempo while ensuring a gradual and fluid sound. Second, in terms of dynamics, striking contrasts are employed—from fff (*fortissimo possibile*) through ppp (*pianissimo possibile*), then a return to ff (*forte fortissimo*), until the music calms down again and concludes at ppp (*pianissimo possibile*). This

use of dynamics reflects the characteristic features of modern music from the second half of the 20th century (postmodern music, musical example 14).

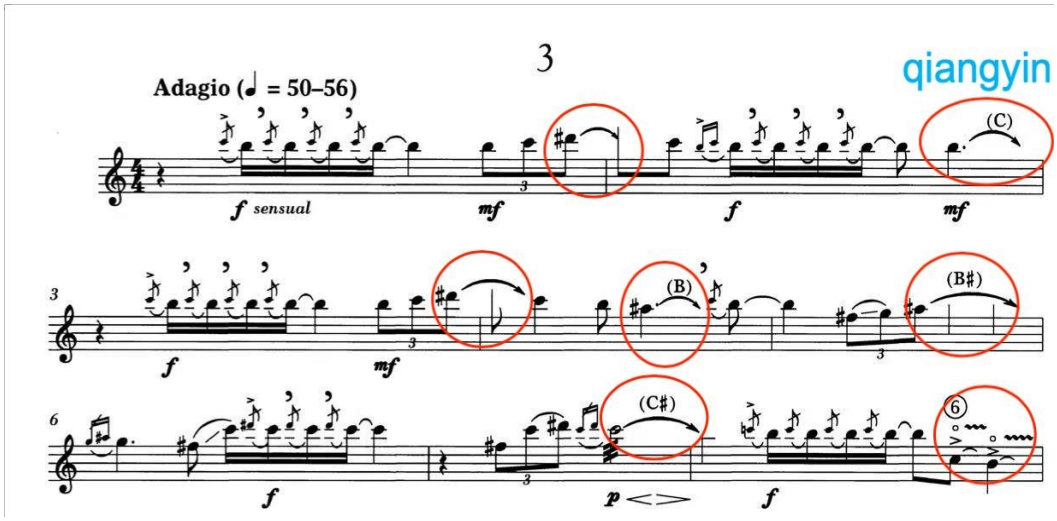


Music example 14. Tan Dun, *Seven Desires*. Measure 11

Part 3

The beginning of the third movement is in Adagio tempo. This passage illustrates the characteristics of the concept of "qiangyin" (腔音) in Chinese music, a detailed analysis and description of which are presented in section 4.2.2. In the passage in question, the composer

He employed a range of guitar techniques, such as appoggiaturas, tremolo, and bending, to capture the melodic phrasing characteristic of traditional Chinese instruments (e.g., pipa, guzheng). These techniques enhance the role *of the qiangyin* in shaping the timbre and emotional expression (musical example 15).



Musical Example 15. Tan Dun, *Seven Desires*. Bars 1–8

Notes on performance technique:



Legato glissando, produced exclusively with the left-hand finger.



Pulling the sound by sliding the string parallel to the fret with the left-hand finger.

The music then transitions into an entire sequence based on harmonics, and the rhythm becomes freer, shifting into *senza misura*. This technique once again highlights the characteristic rhythmic features of Chinese music.

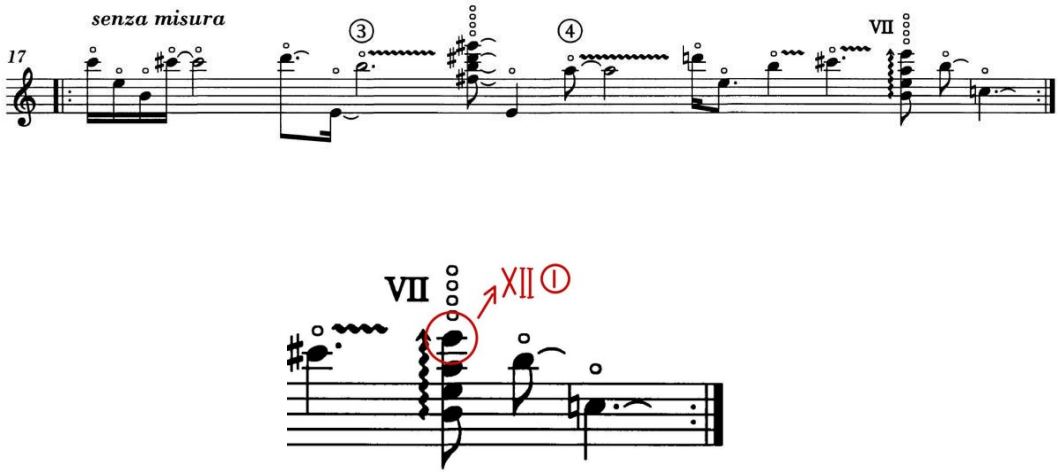
From the perspective of performance analysis, it should be noted that this passage employs numerous harmonics atypical of the standard guitar repertoire, which significantly increases the difficulty of interpretation. An analysis of available recordings of this composition reveals that most guitarists make intonation errors at various points in this passage, confirming its high technical complexity.

Particular attention should be paid to the imprecision of the notation in measure 17, where the indication of the seventh fret could lead to a misinterpretation (musical example 16). The chord consists of the notes B–E–A–E (from lowest to highest), with the second E being an octave higher than the first. The natural harmonic of this note is actually on the twelfth fret of the first string, while the score indicates only the seventh fret. This inaccuracy in the notation leads to the final note frequently being played as a B harmonic on the seventh fret of the first string, which constitutes a textual error.

The way this passage is arranged shows strong inspiration from guqin playing techniques [67] , particularly in the use of harmonics. The creative adaptation and development of these techniques within the guitar idiom, through the juxtaposition of natural and artificial harmonics, allowed for the achievement of a distinctive sound

[67] **The guqin** (古琴) is one of the oldest Chinese string instruments, used for over three thousand years. **It** typically **has** seven strings and **no frets**, which allows for smooth glissandos and subtle intonational nuances unattainable on most Western instruments. Characteristic of the guqin are **harmonics**—clear, resonant tones produced by gently touching the string at specific nodal points. These harmonics constitute an essential element of the instrument's aesthetic, lending its sound an ethereal and spiritual quality.
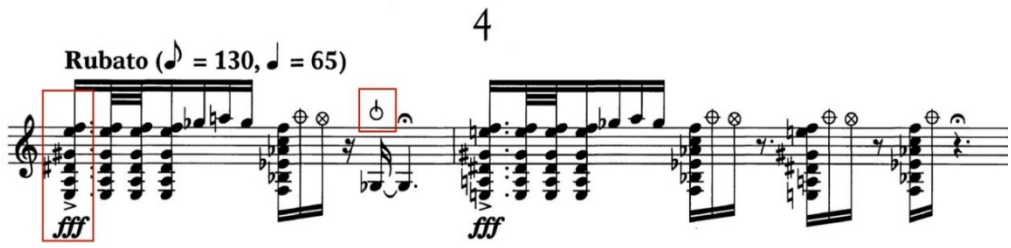
similar to the ethereal and crystalline sound of the guqin, thereby creating a transcultural musical language (musical example 16).



Musical example 16. Tan Dun, *Seven Desires*. Measure 17

Part 4

At the beginning of this section, we return to the flamenco chord structure from the first section (musical example 17).

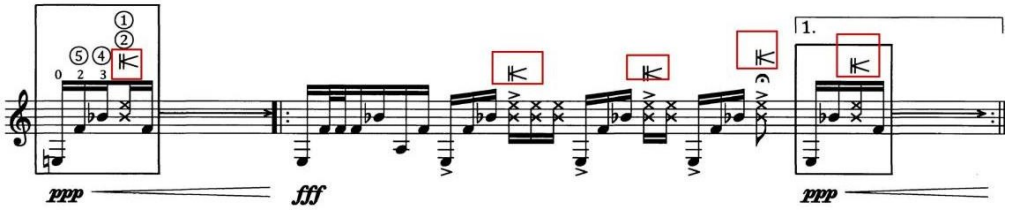


Musical example 17. Tan Dun *Seven Desires*. Bars 1–2

A special guitar technique is used here—the middle finger of the left hand simultaneously frets the first and second strings, producing a pluck that generates a sound effect similar to percussion instruments, reminiscent of gongs and drums [68] in Chinese opera. This technique enhances the sense of rhythm, giving

[68] **Gongs and drums** (锣鼓乐) are a traditional Chinese percussion ensemble used primarily in Chinese opera, consisting of various instruments such as gongs (*luo*), drums (*gu*), cymbals (*bo*), and others
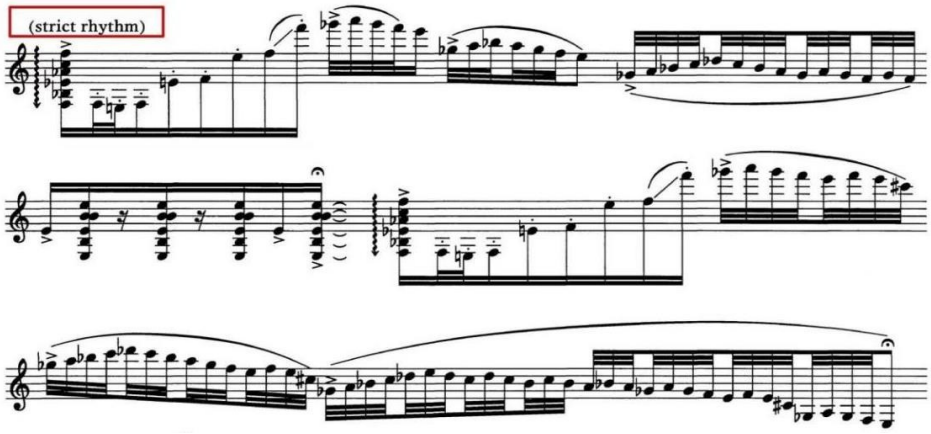
gives the sound greater expressive power. At the same time, the piece employs striking dynamic contrasts—from ppp *(pianississimo)*, through a sudden crescendo to fff (*fortississimo*), and then back to ppp—creating a dramatic effect full of tension (musical example 18).



Musical example 18. Tan Dun, *Seven Desires*. Bars 3–4

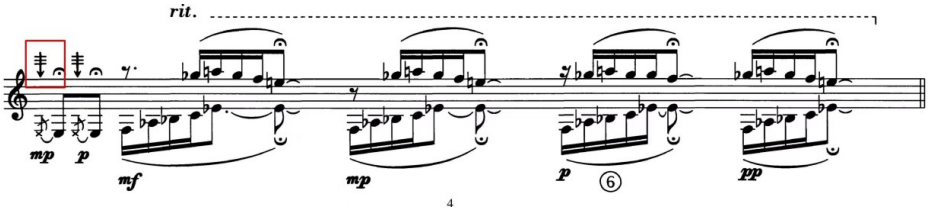
In the cadence, the composer employs a strict rhythm. The absence of bar lines enhances the sense of fluidity and movement in the music, while also serving as a bridge between the preceding and subsequent themes. The fast scale passages are characterized by strong drama and a high degree of technical sophistication, presenting fluid runs of ascending and descending scales, with a clear emphasis on virtuosity. Tonal-wise, this section employs numerous chromatic passages and passing notes, which lend the melody tension and a rich tonal palette. The direction of the scales gradually intensifies, creating an effect of rising dynamics (musical example 19).

percussion instruments. It plays a significant role in emphasizing rhythm and emotion, as well as illustrating stage actions and shifts in atmosphere. The characteristic sound effects of the luogu are often used to build tension, signal a character's entrance, or a scene change.



Musical example 19. Tan Dun *Seven Desires*. Bars 4–6

At the end, a modern guitar technique is employed, involving sliding the fingernails of the right hand along the strings, which introduces a gradually fading conclusion to the piece (musical example 20).



Musical Example 20. Tan Dun, *Seven Desires*. Measure 7

Notes on performance technique:



Bartók's pizzicato – a technique involving a sharp pluck of the string so that it strikes the fingerboard, producing a distinctive percussive sound
sound.



Crossing two strings with the left hand.



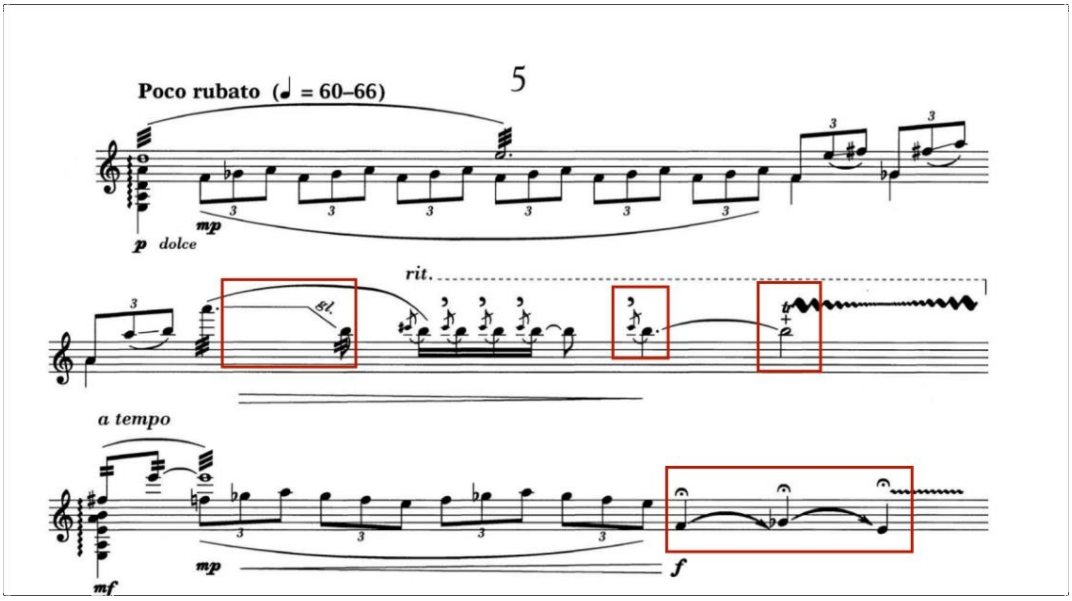
Vertical sliding of the right-hand fingernail along the string.

Part 5

The beginning of this passage employs the poco rubato technique, indicating a free tempo of performance. The entire section is not divided into measures, which emphasizes rhythmic flexibility in the interpretation. Vertical harmonies have also been added to the horizontal melodic line, serving as harmonic accompaniment. This approach

not only enhanced the multi-layered nature of the melody but also provided a richer sonic palette for expressing the emotions contained in the music. The composer masterfully employed the arpeggio technique (alternating finger strokes), combining it with accompanying triplet passages, which gave the music fluidity and rhythmic finesse. The sound of the chords, combined with the triplet rhythm, gives the piece a sense of fluidity in the rhythmic layer. Furthermore, the combination of the glissando technique from high A to B with the vibrato technique further emphasizes the way interval changes are expressed and the gradual shaping of pitch in Chinese music (musical example 21).

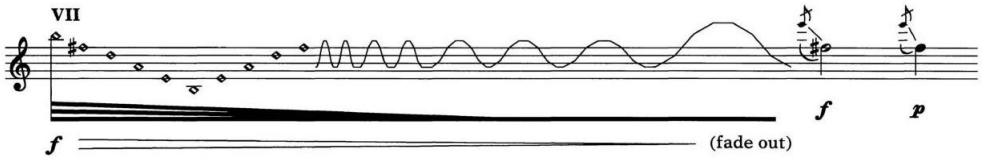
The way the grace notes are notated also exhibits characteristic features of Chinese music. The apostrophe (’) before the ornament emphasizes its lightness and fluidity, accentuating the relatively stronger sound of the C#, which makes the effect of the ornaments even more pronounced (musical example 21). This method of notating music not only provides technical guidance for the performer but also precisely captures the subtle emotions of Chinese music, revealing its delicate nuances in timbre, rhythm, and performance techniques.



Musical Example 21. Tan Dun, **Seven Desires**. Lines 1–3

Overall, the formal structure of the fifth excerpt, through the combination of diverse techniques, demonstrates the organic integration of contemporary compositional techniques with elements of traditional Chinese music. It not only reflects Tan Dun's artistic innovation in blending tradition and modernity but also reveals his deep understanding of the cultural essence of Chinese music. Through the use of *poco rubato*, tremolo, a combination *of glissando* and *vibrato*, and specific ornamentation markings, the piece presents an emotionally rich and technically sophisticated musical language, expressing a multidimensional exploration of the composer's desires, feelings, and artistic craftsmanship.

Next, by combining natural harmonics with a right-hand string-scraping technique—whose tempo and rhythm are clearly marked by a wavy line—the sound gradually fades and slows down, showcasing unique contemporary guitar performance techniques (musical example 22). Tremolo techniques on single notes and rapid glissandos capture the characteristic style of pipa playing, while skillfully interwoven chords create a rich polyphonic effect, showcasing the guitar's sonic and interpretive richness. Tan Dun skillfully applied Western musical techniques to express the timbres of Eastern music, demonstrating his deep understanding of the musical languages of both cultures.

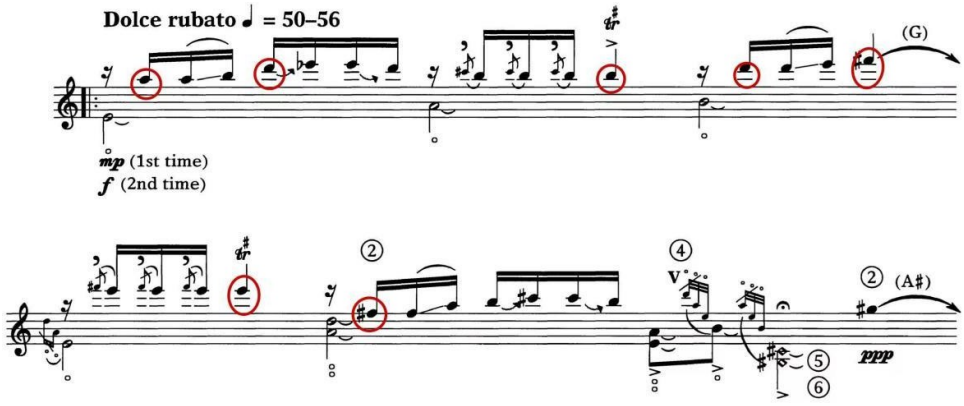


Musical Example 22. Tan Dun *Seven Desires*. Line 6

Part 6

Although the following excerpt is short, consisting of only three verses, it is the most typical of Peking opera within the entire piece. It should be noted that it contains no division into measures, which further emphasizes the rhythmic and structural freedom and flexibility of Chinese music. It is written in the Chinese D gong scale (D–E–F#–A–

B), which gives the music a tone more akin to traditional Chinese opera (musical example 23).

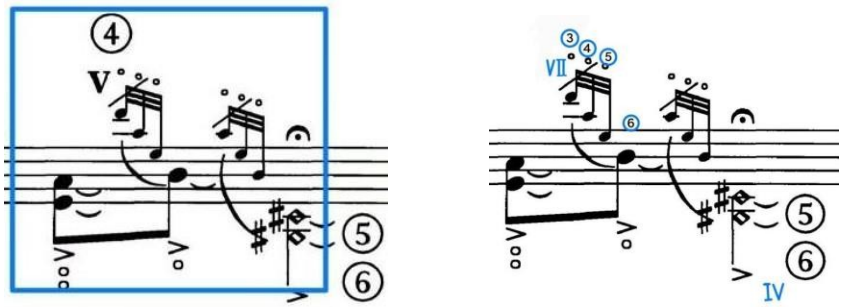


Musical example 23. Tan Dun, *Seven Desires*. Lines 1–2

Technically, Tan Dun skillfully borrowed the performance style of the traditional string instrument known as *the guqin* (marked with a blue frame), making extensive use of ornamentation, *glissandos*, and the technique of plucking the strings, which not only capture the expressiveness of traditional Chinese music but also give the music an intensely Chinese character (guqin techniques and typical features of Chinese music—see Chapter Four).

In performance practice, the original notational markings in this passage are not easy to execute. Compared to the original musical notation, a better solution is to perform this passage using natural harmonics on the 3rd, 4th,

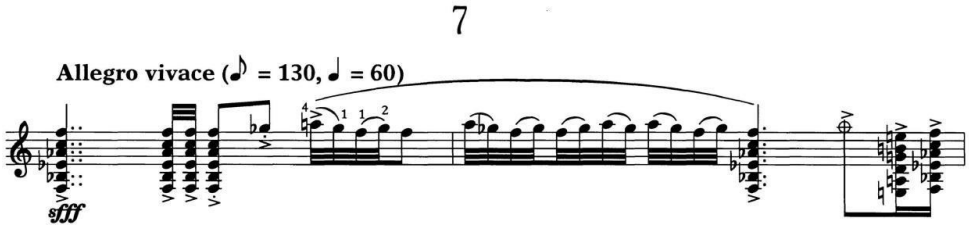
5th, and 6th strings at the seventh fret, which ensures smoother fingering, a better connection with the following natural B harmonics, as well as a clearer and better sound (musical example 24).



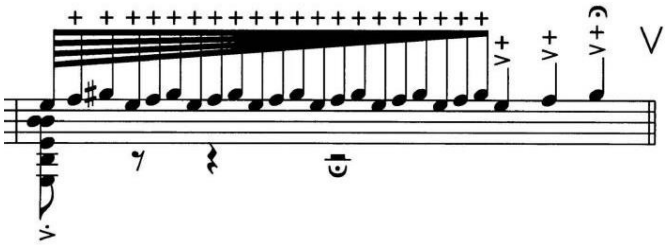
Music Example 24. Tan Dun, *"Seven Desires."* The second line at the end of the music example

Part 7

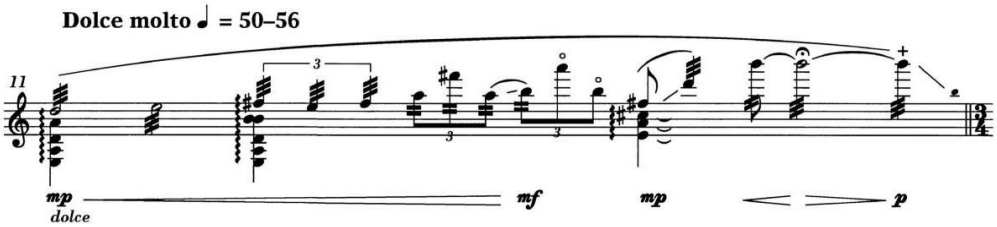
The opening rhythm of this section (measures 1–9) is a rhythmic variation of the opening section of the first flamenco-style passage (musical example 25), marked allegro vivace. In the ninth measure, a tension-filled flamenco technique is used in combination with left-hand plucking, reinforcing the sense of pulsation and concluding this theme (musical example 26). This dynamic and technically daring passage creates a stark contrast with the subsequent return to dolce molto. This passage creates a melodic character typical of Chinese opera singing, emphasizing a flowing sound, which gives the music a more lyrical expression. At the same time, subtle changes in the dynamic markings—mezzo piano, mezzo forte, and piano—further enrich the musical texture, making the emotional expression more subtle and refined (musical example 27).



Music example 25. Tan Dun *Seven Desires*. Bars 1–2



Music Example 26. Tan Dun, *Seven Desires*. Measure 10



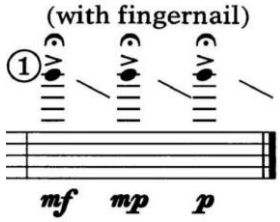
Music example 27. Tan Dun, *Seven Desires*. Measure 11

Performance notes: Glissando with the left

 hand.

 Left-hand playing.

As the music develops, the rhythm gradually becomes more and more free, leading to an open ending that ultimately fades away in three gradually fading glissandos of the note B, giving the entire piece a dramatic sense of closure (musical example 28). This type of ending not only corresponds to the overall musical structure but also enhances the piece's expressiveness, achieving a balance between tension and lyricism.



Musical example 28. Tan Dun, *Seven Desires*. Measure 21

An analysis of Tan Dun's composition *Seven Desires* reveals that the piece is characterized by a structure based on the principle of free formal development, presenting a complex musical layering through seven distinct musical fragments. From a modal perspective, the composition represents a system of free modality, in which only tendencies toward specific scales can be observed — the sporadic use of Phrygian modality lending a Spanish flavor and tendencies toward the Chinese pentatonic scale, which, however, do not determine the overall tonal structure of the piece but serve as coloristic elements enriching the musical drama.

Rhythmic analysis reveals an innovative combination of flamenco elements with the Chinese *sanban* rhythm, creating a striking contrast and structural dynamism. The richness of the performance techniques employed goes beyond conventional

guitar idioms, encompassing not only traditional harmonics, string strumming, tapping, and tremolo, but also avant-garde extended techniques, such as rubbing the strings with the right-hand fingernail or glissando techniques without a specific pitch, which contribute to a multi-layered and varied sonic texture.

In summary, the composition combines a high degree of experimentation with a clearly defined national identity, making it a significant work in contemporary guitar literature that transcends traditional stylistic and cultural boundaries.

Table 1. Musical Form of Tan Dun's *Seven Desires*

Form	Part	Section	Measures	Time signature	Tempo marking	Scale / System	Musical character
Form free / multipart	1	A	1–3	senza measure	– (tempo free)	Phrygian mode (Phrygian mode)	Contrasts, passionate, dramatic, full tension
		B	4–5		dolce molto ♩ = 50	Chinese pentatonic scale (D–E–F#–A–B)	Mellow, melodious, contemplative Oriental lines melodic
		A'	6–7			return to the scale Phrygian	Return to unity, closing
	2	C	1–11	senza misura + variable meter	andante ♩ = 65	calm, multi-layered mechanical, random, aleatoric	Exploration of non-harmonic timbres – the influence of the avant-garde and spectral music
			12	4/4	– (tempo free)	dynamic, free, gradual	Rhythmic organization based on density timbre. Characteristic dynamic contrasts of postmodern
	3	B'	1–16		adagio ♩ = 50–56	Chinese scale pentatonic with a tone fundamental B	Expressive, emotional, melodic. Strengthening the role qiangyin in shaping the timbre and expression
		D	17–21	senza measure + 4/4	– (post-tonal free)	post-tonal	Creative adaptation Guqin technique. Transcultural sound. Characteristic rhythmic features of Chinese music
	4	A'	1–2	senza measure	rubato ♪ = 130, ♩ = 65	Phrygian scale (Phrygian mode)	Contrasts, passionate, dramatic, full tension

		E	3–5			Post-tonal	A pluck produces a percussive effect, similar to the gongs and drums in Chinese opera
		F	6		strict rhythm		Strict rhythm, no division into measures; enhances fluidity and serves as a link between themes
	5	G	1		poco rubato ♩ = 60–66		Not divided into sections; Characteristic dynamic contrasts of postmodern music
	6	B"	2		dolce rubato ♩ = 60–66	based on the B pentatonic scale	Erhuang style (Chinese opera)
	7	A"'	1–10		allegro vivace ♪ = 130, ♩ = 60	Phrygian mode	The material from the first section is revisited, constituting a formal recapitulation and remaining consistent with the musical character of the opening section
		B"'	11–21		dolce molto ♩ = 50–56	Chinese pentatonic scale (D–E–F#–A–B)	

3.2. Xia Weinan

Xia Weinan (b. 1981) began his musical education in childhood under his father's guidance, learning to play various instruments. As a teenager, influenced by his fascination with rock music, he took up the guitar. He systematically developed his guitar skills, studying classical guitar with Pu Nan, and then continuing his education under the guidance of Professor Chen Zhi at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing. His further artistic development also included studying electric guitar with Liu Yijun, the guitarist of the renowned rock band "Tang Dynasty." In 2016, Xia Weinan began composing, focusing on works for classical guitar[69] .

[69] J. Wang, *Xia Weinan's Original Classical Guitar* Compositions, WeChat, user Classical Guitar Consultation and Appreciation [Consultations and lessons on playing on the classical guitar], https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/TDzWm5-IUro5z7rN0OmPkQ [accessed: 12/13/2024].

3.2.1. 水云间 [*Between Water and Clouds*]

Xia Weinan's composition *Between Water and Clouds* requires an unusual guitar tuning—both the first and sixth strings must be lowered to the note D. The piece is structured in a three-part A–B–B'–A, in which the entire structure unfolds around a single main motif, combining classical guitar techniques with elements of traditional Chinese music. As a result, the composition creates an evocative, delicate soundscape that evokes the atmosphere of a Far Eastern landscape.

The formal structure is based on a cyclic form with elements of a framed reprise [70], consistently maintained in the pentatonic scale of D gong [71] without tonal modulations. The composition is characterized by a clear division into main sections of varied musical character, all of which develop the central thematic motif in various variations and textural treatments.

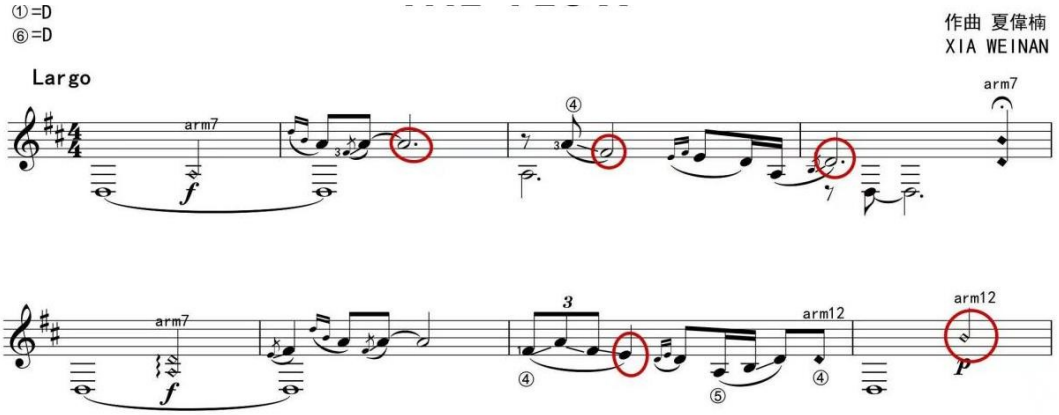
Section A – introduction (bars 1–12), in the tempo *of Largo*, presents the basic motivic material by imitating the sound of the traditional Chinese guqin instrument. It employs the D gong pentatonic scale (D–E–F#–A–B), creating a slow and rhythmically breathing atmosphere of tranquility. The dominant means of expression are natural harmonics, appoggiaturas, and glissandos, which reinforce the sense of space and the piece's Eastern atmosphere (musical example 29).

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[70] In music (particularly in sonata form), **a framed recapitulation** is a specific type of repetition of thematic material in which the first and second themes are confined within the same main key (tonic). It is characterized by harmonic coherence, in which the second theme—unlike in the exposition—is not transposed to another key, but remains in the main key.

[71] **D gong pentatonic scale** (D 宫五声调式) – a traditional Chinese pentatonic system based on five degrees: gong 宫 (D), shang 商 (E), jue 角 (F#), zhi 徵 (A), yu 羽 (B). Each degree represents a specific harmonic function in Chinese music theory, where gong 宫 serves as the

.



Musical example 29. Weinan Xia *Between Water and Clouds*. Bars 1–8

Section B—the main section (bars 13–33), in *Adagio* tempo—develops the main theme in a new texture. Through the continuous use of arpeggios, it creates the impression of a "dialogue"—the melodic line alternates between different voices, making the musical texture more varied and

rich. The musical-rhythmic pattern of this passage draws on Chinese five-character poetry (五言诗)[72] through the use of guitar arpeggio and chord techniques.

Section B'—a modified reprise (bars 34–60)—presents a variational treatment of the material from Section B. As a variation on Part B, it introduces the tremolo technique, which lends the melody greater fluidity while simultaneously enriching the piece's emotional expression. The accompaniment part ingeniously enriches the texture with glissandos and appoggiaturas, which, frequently used in Oriental music, give the piece a unique Chinese flavor.

The return to Section A—the recapitulation—reintroduces the *Largo* tempo. The piece returns to the mood of Part A, and through structural allusion and repetition, the entire musical form becomes fuller and more harmonious. This section serves a dual function: it presents a re-stating of the basic motif from the beginning of the piece

[72] ***Wuyanshi*** (五言诗) – Chinese five-character poetry, a traditional poetic form in which each line consists of five characters. It is characterized by a regular rhythmic and melodic structure, particularly popular during the Tang Dynasty (618–907).

and serves as a bridge to the conclusion of the piece, emphasizing the cyclical nature of the composition and the thematic unity of the whole.

Analysis shows that the composition represents a cyclical form based on a single main motif, which undergoes various transformations and textural elaborations in the individual sections. The consistent use of the D gong pentatonic scale throughout the piece, combined with the variation in performance techniques and the musical character of individual sections, demonstrates a skillful blending of traditional Chinese musical elements with modern guitar technique. The piece *Between Water and Clouds* ingeniously utilizes the rich sonic qualities of the classical guitar, demonstrating the possibilities of intercultural musical creativity, where a single leitmotif serves as the framework for a richly developed formal structure.

Table 2. Musical Form *of* Xia Weinan's *"Between Water and Clouds"*
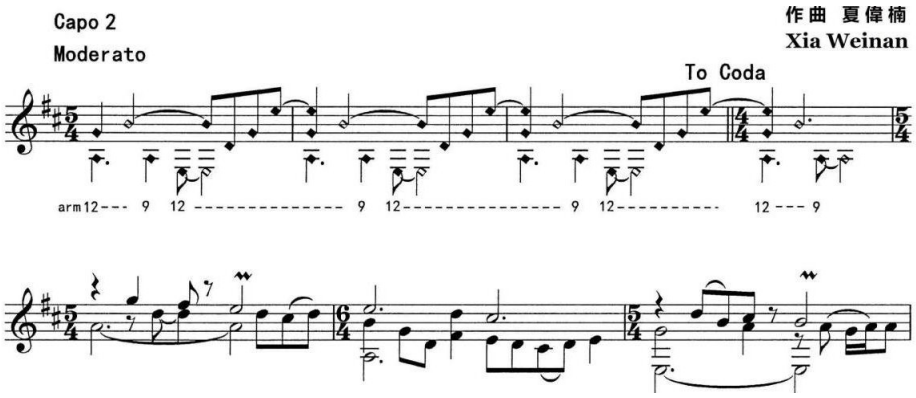
Form	Section	Measures	Key	Thematic material
Tripartite form	A	1–12	largo /D gong	D gong pentatonic scale (D–E–F#–A–B)
	B	13–33	adagio/D gong	Development of the main theme
	B'	34–60		Variations on theme B
	A to the coda	61–final	largo/D gong	Return to the main theme

3.2.2. 逍遥游 [*Carefree Wanderings*]

Carefree Wanderings by Xia Weinan is a one-movement form centered around the main theme A, which can be divided into sections A–B–C–A, with each section presenting different variations and transformations of the theme. The piece requires the use of a capo on the second fret, which transposes the original key of D major to E major in actual sound.

Section A – introduction (bars 1–4) serves as the exposition of the main theme. It is characterized by a smooth, calm melodic line based on pentatonic structures, presented using the technique of natural harmonics, which lends the sound transparency and clarity. The intertwining of two voices

create a syncopated rhythmic structure that reinforces the impression of lightness and spaciousness, intended to illustrate the idea of a carefree journey (musical example 30).



Musical example 30. Weinan Xia *Carefree Journey*. Bars 1–7

Section B (bars 5–15) constitutes the first development of the basic motif through the introduction of a complex rhythmic structure and contrapuntal elements. The composer reworks the material from Section A, expanding it with polyphony, which creates a richer musical texture. The interweaving of melodic lines across different registers enriches the piece's sonic texture while maintaining motivic continuity.

The transition (bars 17–19) provides harmonic preparation for the next section by using chords that lead smoothly into it while maintaining the same key.

Section C (bars 20–34) presents the main theme in a new textural arrangement, where the musical color becomes more introspective, and the emotional tone gains greater tension through a change in rhythmic and harmonic character while maintaining the basic key. The introduction of syncopation gives the rhythm a pulsating character, and the use of the *tambora* technique (strumming the strings) and trills not only enriches the sound texture but also mimics the sound effect of Chinese percussion instruments. The textural contrast in this section reinforces the emotional diversity of the entire composition.

The return to Section A (reprise) leads to *the coda*: natural harmonics create here the effect of a gradual fading of sound, reflecting the philosophical dimension of a carefree

journey. The gradual fading leaves a lingering echo, diminishing the impression of a definitive conclusion.

The title of the piece, *Carefree Journey*, comes from the *Zhuangzi* [73] , and the music freely weaves between movement and stillness, reflecting the Taoist idea of harmony between yin and yang. The gradual fading out (*coda)* symbolizes a state of forgetting oneself and the world, the attainment of carefree harmony. Throughout the piece, the language of Western classical guitar is successfully combined with the philosophical depth and aesthetics of the East. The piece conveys the composer's feelings as he, having endured many hardships and sufferings, finally glimpses the dawn of fulfillment; looking back on the path he has traveled, he feels joy mixed with bitterness and realizes that all of this was merely a stage on the way to carefree peace.

Table 3. Musical Form: Xia Weinan's *Carefree Journey*
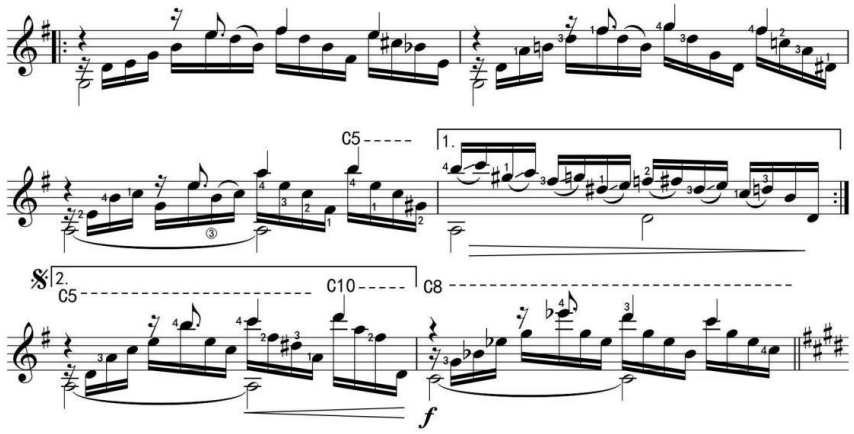
Form	Section	Measures	Key	Thematic material
Single-movement form	a	1–4	moderato / capo on the 2nd fret in D major	Two-part syncopation
	b	5–19		Complex, multi-layered texture
	c	20–34		Rhythmic pulsation with percussion imitation
	a	35–38		Sonoric fading

3.2.3. 风之语 [*Whisper of the Wind*]

The piece titled *Whisper of the Wind* combines technical and lyrical elements. Its form is in three parts, skillfully blending technical elements with musical expression. The entire piece unfolds through the alternating use of arpeggios in the right hand and the barré technique in the left hand, along with rapid position changes, creating a fluid, wind-like sound effect and evoking an ethereal, multi-layered atmosphere.

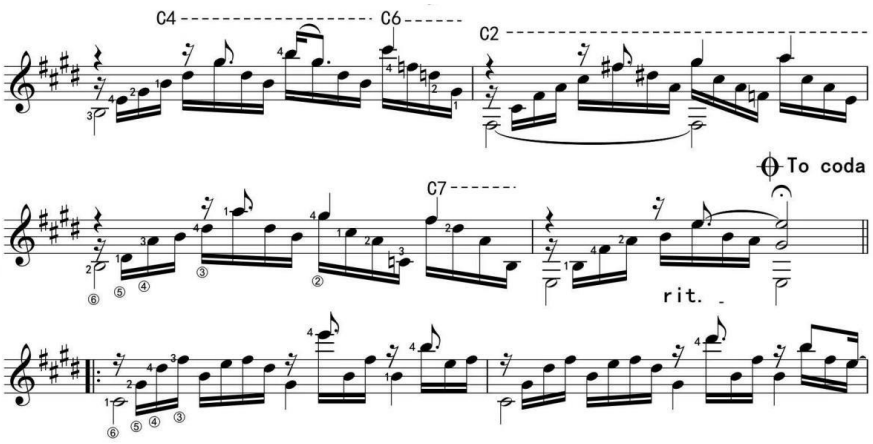
[73] ***Zhuangzi*** (庄子) is a classic work of Chinese Taoist philosophy, attributed to the philosopher Zhuang Zhou, who lived in the 4th century BCE. The text consists of numerous stories, allegories, and dialogues that explore themes such as the nature of reality, epistemological relativism, spiritual freedom, and the harmonious coexistence of humanity with nature. Its literary style is characterized by metaphor and irony, making *Zhuangzi* one of the most important and influential texts in the canon of Chinese philosophical thought.

Part A (bars 1–14) begins with delicate arpeggios in the key of G major, in which the right hand, using a subtle technique of freely played broken chords, mimics the flow of the wind. Simple melodic lines emerge within the fluid harmonic progression, creating the impression that the listener is immersed in a natural landscape gently caressed by the wind. In this section, the smooth transitions between the *barré* technique and the portamento performed by the left hand enhance the cohesion of the sound and lend it a gentle softness. The technique of rapid finger position changes lends dynamism to the melody while simultaneously enhancing the technical quality of the performance (musical example 31).



Musical example 31. Weinan Xia, *Whisper of the Wind*. Bars 5–10

Part B (bars 15–24) begins with a brief shift to the key of C-sharp minor, followed by a transition to the key of E major, which introduces a distinct tonal contrast between the minor and major modes. This juxtaposition creates a narrative effect in which the sonic image of the wind gradually gains intensity and violence. Rapid arpeggio passages intertwined with chords build an aura of whispers floating in space, corresponding to the "voice of the wind" motif (musical example 32).



Musical example 32. Weinan Xia, *Whisper of the Wind*. Bars 11–16

Reprise A (bars 25–31) allows the theme to return, but through subtle changes in rhythm and dynamics, it gives it a different emotional tone. The piece gradually sounds calmer, the rhythm slows down, as if the whisper of the wind were fading and eventually dissolving into silence.

In a single verse, the composer vividly captures the mood and ideological depth of this piece. Through its picturesque descriptions of the wind, nature, and emotions, the verse conveys an inner longing and a state of deep immersion in musical ecstasy. Below is an explanation of the individual phrases:

Longing like the wind, gently leaning against the twilight

Longing is like the wind—gently leaning against the twilight /

Longing is like the wind—invisible yet omnipresent, gently nestled in the evening twilight.

The sky is azure, the clouds are light; the scent of grass, trees, and flowers

The blue sky and light clouds, the scent of grass, trees, and flowers /

The sky is clear, the clouds are sparse, and a floral fragrance wafts through the grass and trees.

Furrowed brow, serene face; murmuring like a dream

Furrowed brows, a calm face /

Eyebrows gently furrowed, expression composed, quiet murmuring under his breath, as if lost in a dream.

Eyes closed, lost in rapture, a song flows

Eyes closed, lost in rapture /

With closed eyelids, he surrenders to this feeling, allowing the melody to flow gently like a stream.

In this piece, one can discern the influence of Heitor Villa-Lobos's guitar études. This composition perfectly combines educational value with musical expression, allowing the performer to both refine their technique and fully convey the emotional content of the work. While playing, one gets the impression that scenes from Hayao Miyazaki's films come to life in this piece, where humans engage in a harmonious dialogue with nature, and the wind becomes more than just a symbol of nature.

Table 4. Musical Form: Xia Weinan's *Carefree Journey*

Form	Section	Measures	Key	Thematic material
Ternary form	A	1–14	1–10 G, 11–14 E	The opening in the key of G major gives the piece a modal character and establishes its connection to nature. *Longing, like the wind, gently rests against the twilight.* *The blue of the sky and light clouds, the scent of grass, trees, and flowers.*
	B	15–24	15–16 #c, 17–24 E	The music transitions from warm tones to the whispers of the wind, revealing the development of the thematic material. *Furrowed brow, calm face,* *Eyes closed, lost in rapture.*
	A	25–31 + 9–14	25–31 + 9–10 G, 11–14 E	Ending with a return to the gentle breeze.
	Coda	32–33	E 7	

3.2.4. I'll tell you what I want to say on a night *full* of tulips [*I'll tell you what I want to say on a night full of tulips*]

, the scent intoxicatingly drifts past the window

The night glow of the city of flowers, and the intoxicating scent wafts through the window /

Depicts a nighttime city full of splendor and charm, with the scent of flowers wafting through the air, filling one with delight.

, 酒红花黄

The glow of flames and the shadows of lamps, the red of wine and the yellow of flowers /

Neon lights intertwine with candlelight, and vivid colors shimmer in the glasses; red wine and yellow flowers symbolize passion and opulence.

Ladies and Gentlemen　　爱慕相望

Ladies and gentlemen, gazing at each other with mutual admiration /

A man and a woman in a nighttime setting exude charm; gazing deeply into each other's eyes, they convey love and anticipation.

Starry Sky and Countryside　　A Gentle Breeze

A starry sky above the fields, and a gentle breeze blows softly /

The scene suddenly shifts: from the hustle and bustle of the city, we are transported to the tranquility of a rural landscape, where the vast starry sky and a light breeze create an atmosphere of natural, quiet beauty.

Moonlight Spilling　A Sea of Tulips

Moonlight spills over a sea of tulips /

The bright glow of the moon cascades over vast fields of tulips, creating a romantic and fairy-tale atmosphere.

Love Flows　Confessions from the Heart
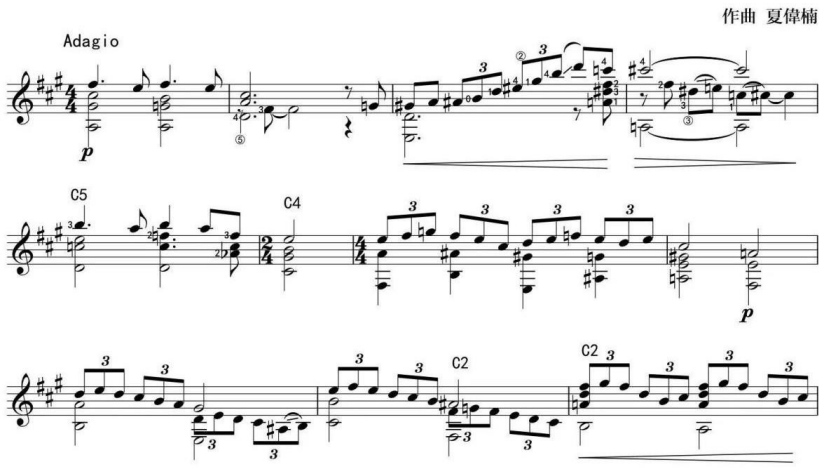
Love flows gently, and confessions come straight from the heart /

On this peaceful night, love flows like a stream, and lovers, amidst a sea of flowers, confess their feelings from the depths of their hearts.

This piece is in a single-movement, two-part form with an introduction and *a coda*, in which music and poetic imagery intertwine to create a picture of tender emotions unfolding at night against an urban backdrop. The composer has incorporated an original Romantic poem into the piece, which serves as a poetic expression of the composition's emotional content.
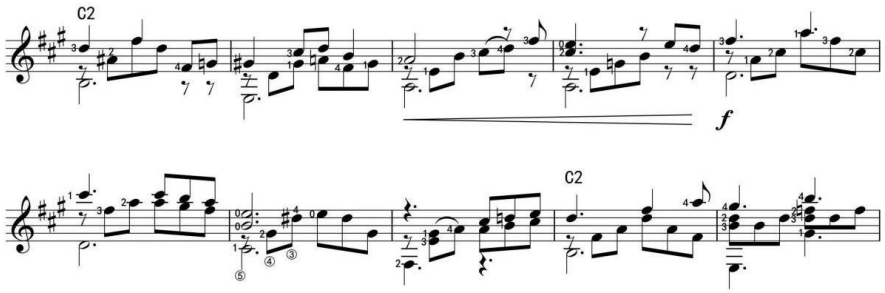
The introduction (*Adagio*, measures 1–13) begins with a slow, lyrical melody, like a reflection of the poetic image of "a nighttime cityscape of flowers, where the scent is intoxicating and pours in through the window." Gentle arpeggios accompany the wistful melody, creating the tranquil atmosphere of a nighttime city, like reflections in the glow of lights, illuminating the romantic hues of "red wine and yellow flowers." In this section

of the piece, thanks to the use of open strings and sustained notes, the melody becomes ethereal and fleeting, as if floating through the quiet streets of the night city. The wide *barre* technique and glissando performed by the left hand give the melodic lines greater cohesion, expressing the depth and delicacy of feelings, which reflects the poetic "gazing at a loved one" (musical example 33).



Musical example 33. Weinan Xia *I will tell you what I want to tell you on a night full of tulips*. Bars 1–10

Part A (*Andante*, measures 13–60) grows increasingly expressive as the tempo accelerates, drawing the listener into a poetic image of "a starry sky over the fields and a gentle breeze." Alternating arpeggios and rapid runs resemble a breeze over a flower-filled field—delicate, yet full of subtle rises and falls. In this section, the harmony becomes richer, and the frequent chord changes and rapid shifts of the left hand intensify the impression of fluidity and inner emotion. The poetic "moonlight spills over a sea of tulips" is also rendered musically: a wide spectrum of sounds and a flowing melodic line make the listener feel as if immersed in a sea of flowers, experiencing both the romance and the delicate solitude of the night (musical example 34).



Musical example 34. Weinan Xia *I'll tell you what I want to tell you on a night full of tulips*. Bars 42–51

Next, both the melody and the harmony become richer and more varied, lending the music greater emotional subtlety. At this stage, the piece seems to enter the poetic world of the phrase "love flows gently, and confessions flow straight from the heart." The melodic line becomes even more fluid and delicate, and the use of techniques such as glissando and sustained notes enhances the piece's emotional expression. The slowing of the tempo (*ritenuto*) builds the emotions toward a climax, only to gently subside into a delicate conclusion, like a nighttime whisper that gradually fades into silence.

This piece is strongly inspired by Western Romantic music, particularly in terms of harmonic structure and melodic fluidity, while at the same time emphasizing the lyricism and poeticism characteristic of Eastern music. Through its rich emotional layers and subtle musical language, the piece deeply weaves together poetic images of the night, a sea of flowers, the moon's glow, and human emotions.

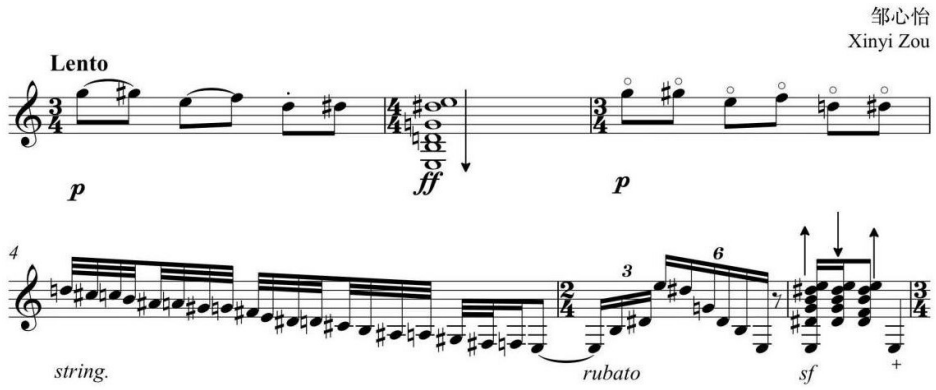
Table 5. Musical Form *of* Xia Weinan's *"I Will Tell You What I Want to Tell You on a Night Full of Tulips"*

Form	Section	Measures	Key	Thematic material
Single-movement form with a developed theme and coda	Introduct ion	1–13	adagio, 4/4, A	*The night glow of the city of flowers, and the intoxicating scent wafts through the window* *The glow of flames and the shadows of lamps, the red of wine and the yellow of flowers*
	A	14–29	andante, 6/8, A	*The moonlight spills over the sea of tulips*
	A'	30–61		*Love flows gently, and confessions come straight from the heart*
	A	14–27		
	koda	62–71		

3.3. *Z*ou Xinyi 随心 [*Follow Your Heart*]

Follow Your Heart is Xinyi Zou's first guitar piece. It was composed by the author when she was 18 years old. The entire process—from the initial sketch, through the development of the final version, to the preparation of the score—was carried out independently by the author. The composition is an attempt to express emotions—uncertainty in the face of the unknown and complex inner experiences. The piece combines elements of simplicity and complexity, marking the first step toward developing the composer's compositional skills.
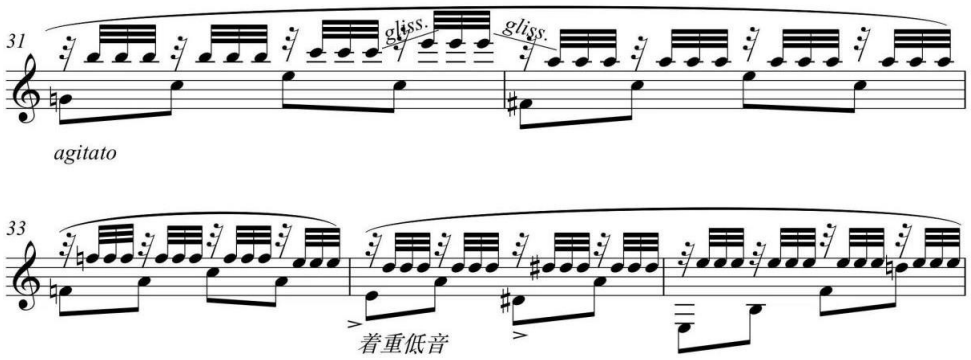
Part A (bars 1–59): inner hesitation and conflict. The piece begins with a simple semitone motif. This motif is repeated many times, and through its transposition to different registers and subtle rhythmic changes, it creates the impression of an internal dialogue full of hesitation. The dynamic markings—from *piano* to *fortissimo*—introduce a striking contrast in dynamics (musical example 35).



Music Example 35. Xinyi Zou *Following the Heart*. Bars 1–5
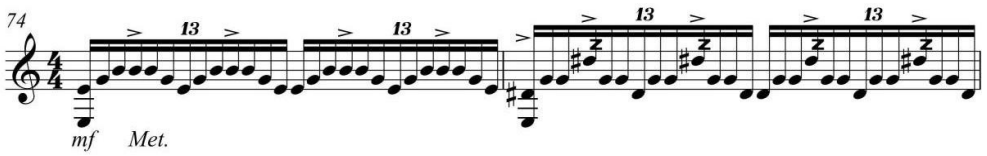
The "rubato" marking encourages the performer to treat the tempo freely in order to emphasize the fluctuation of emotions. The main melody part primarily employs the arpeggio technique, and a glissando appears at the beginning of the phrase, which, in dialogue with the accented low notes in the second part of the phrase, builds tension. This tension grows with the repetition of the motif, yet the

the internal conflict—the music here conveys a state of limbo and emotional turmoil (musical example 36).



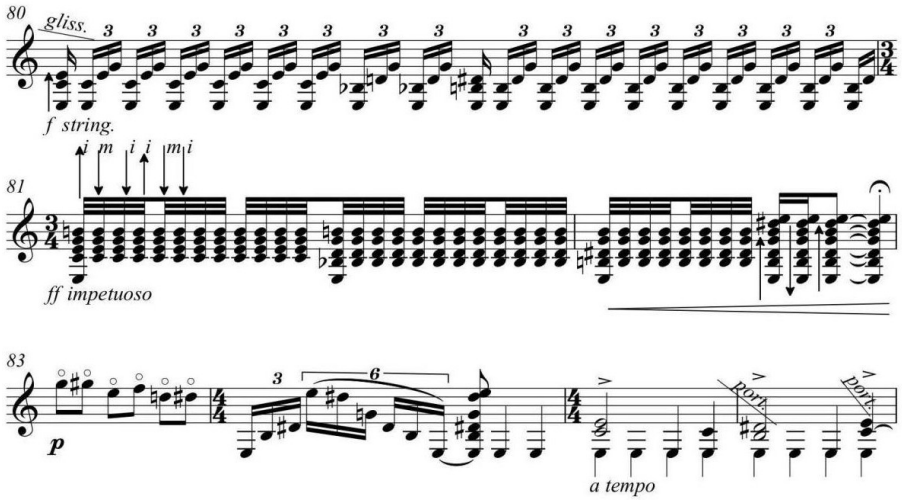
Musical example 36. Xinyi Zou *Following the Heart*. Bars 31–35

Part B (bars 60–100): an explosion of emotion and the moment of decision. In this section, the tempo of the music accelerates noticeably, and the dense succession of sixteenth notes (thirteen-note motifs) builds toward the piece's climax. Although the thematic material is still based on motifs from Part A, the continuous stream of sounds and more pronounced dynamic contrasts give the whole piece the character of an emotional climax. This part depicts the inner struggle leading to a decision and conflict, symbolizing the fear of the unknown and the courage to make a choice (musical example 37).



Musical Example 37. Xinyi Zou, *Following the Heart*. Bars 74–75

When the music reaches its climax in measure 82, the sudden stop creates a strong dramatic effect, foreshadowing a calming of emotions in the remainder of the piece (musical example 38).



Musical example 38. Xinyi Zou, *Following the Heart*. Bars 80–85

A repetition of Section A (bars 21–52), whose mood can be described as "peace and detachment"—this section returns in bar 55, but this time, in contrast to the initial uncertainty, the music gains greater rhythmic and dynamic stability, and the mood becomes more subdued and reflective. The piece concludes with *a rallentando* and very delicate dynamics (*piano pianissimo*), ending with bright harmonics. They symbolize a ray of sunlight breaking through the clouds—the music finds an answer, bringing a sense of peace and reconciliation with oneself. This musical transformation reflects the Taoist philosophy of achieving harmony through inner balance and acceptance of the natural course of things.

The inspiration for *Following the Heart* came from the composer's emotional experiences related to beginning her studies at one of the best music conservatories in China. Although the piece is based on a simple semitone motif, it is saturated with complex emotions that lead to internal conflicts. The hesitant nature of Part A, the struggles and climax in Part B, and the calm in the conclusion (A') illustrate a process of emotional maturation: from confusion to inner awakening, which corresponds to the Confucian idea of self-improvement through education and reflection on one's own character.

This process of musical development can also be interpreted in the context of the Chinese concept of *xiu yang* (修养)—the cultivation of the spirit through self-discipline

and inner work. This piece is not only the result of the composer's personal quest, but also an authentic expression of her feelings, imbued with traditional Chinese wisdom about the path from chaos to order, from uncertainty to clarity of mind. The conclusion, marked by harmonics, symbolizes not only self-awareness and transcendence, but

also the attainment of the state *of ming* (明)—enlightenment and complete spiritual clarity—elevating

the work's message to a higher emotional level in accordance with the Chinese philosophy of harmony between humanity and the cosmos[74] .

Table 6. Musical Form: *Following the Heart by* Xinyi Zou

Form	Section	Measures	Key	Thematic material
Ternary form	Introduct ion	1–20	-	Part A depicts inner turmoil and uncertainty; Part B, through tonal and rhythmic contrast, expresses an explosion of emotion, reflecting the composer's self-discovery and Chinese philosophy
	A	21–52	a	
	transitional section	53–59		
	B	60–102	-	
	A	21–52	a	
	koda	103–108		

3.4. General Characteristics of Contemporary Chinese Music for Classical Guitar

As Chinese guitarists have become increasingly prominent on the international music scene, it was foreign composers who first recognized the lack of a Chinese guitar repertoire and began composing pieces in the Chinese style specifically

[74] ***Tian ren he yi*** (天人合一) is a key concept in traditional Chinese philosophy, expressing the idea of harmonious unity between humanity (*ren*, 人) and the cosmos (*tian*, 天). This concept, developed since the time of Confucian, Taoist, and later schools, posits that man is not a being separate from the natural order, but constitutes an integral part of the universe, in which moral laws and the laws of nature are interdependent. In a metaphysical sense, "tian ren he yi" implies that the moral perfection of the individual lies

on achieving inner harmony with the Dao (道)—the universal order of things. In the ethical dimension
This idea underscores the need to harmonize human actions with the rhythms of nature and the principles of cosmic balance. This concept has had a lasting influence on Chinese culture, art, politics, and music theory, becoming one of the cornerstones of thinking about the relationship between humanity and the world.

for Chinese guitarists, e.g., *The Bridge of the Birds* (鹊桥)[75] by Italian guitarist and composer Carlo Domeniconi, *Toccata on the Theme of Sun Wukong* (孙悟空的托卡塔) [76] by Cuban guitarist and composer Sérgio Assado, or *Chinese Gardens by* British guitarist and composer Stephen Goss. To some extent, this phenomenon reflects the appeal of Chinese elements within the international classical guitar community, while also encouraging domestic composers to pay attention to their native musical resources.

Currently, original works for classical guitar in China are entering a phase of dynamic development. The rich resources of Chinese traditional music constitute an inexhaustible source of inspiration for classical guitar compositions. From early arrangements of classical Chinese instrumental pieces, such as *Liang Zhu* (梁祝) or *Song of Twilight on a Fishing Boat* (渔舟唱晚), all the way to recent years, which original compositions such as *Between Water and Clouds* and *Seven Desires* have emerged, Chinese music for classical guitar demonstrates impressive progress and increasing maturity in terms of subject matter, performance technique, and style.

In the future, the development of Chinese guitar music will be even more focused on cultural synthesis. On the one hand, composers will continue to draw on Western compositional techniques to maintain a high, international artistic standard. On the other hand, they will delve ever deeper into the unique qualities of traditional Chinese music, combining national elements with a contemporary musical language, which will expand the expressive possibilities of the classical guitar. Such an approach not only

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[75] ***Qīqiáo*** (鹊桥, lit. "Magpie Bridge") is a symbolic motif in traditional Chinese culture, derived from the legend of the Cowherd and the Weaver Girl (Niú Láng Zhī Nǚ). According to this tale, the two lovers—the Cowherd and the Weaver Girl—
were separated by the Queen of Heaven and can meet only once a year, on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month. On that day, magpies build a bridge for them in the sky, allowing them to meet.

[76] **Sun Wukong** (孙悟空), also known as the Monkey King, is one of the most important characters in classical the 16th-century Chinese novel **Journey to the West** (西游记) by Wu Cheng'en. This character symbolizes cunning, strength, independence, and spiritual transformation. Sun Wukong possesses supernatural powers, such as the ability to change shape, extraordinary strength, and the ability to fly on a cloud, making him an extremely popular hero in both Chinese folk culture and art.

This contributes to the development of a unique Chinese guitar system, but also brings new energy to the international guitar music scene.

Chapter 4. The Application of Chinese Elements in Guitar Music

4.1. An Outline of the History of Chinese Music

China's five-thousand-year history has given rise to a rich and diverse cultural tradition in which music plays a vital role as a vehicle for social and aesthetic values. Its development not only reflected socio-political and historical transformations but also revealed the aesthetic preferences and philosophical concepts of the Chinese people, constituting an integral part of Chinese civilization.

To provide a detailed discussion of the evolution of Chinese music, this chapter divides its history into three key periods of development: the formative period of music, the new era in music, and the period of musical systematization. Each of these stages was characterized by specific stylistic and institutional features, as well as the socio-cultural functions of music within the context of broader civilizational transformations.

This analysis aims not only to present the chronological development of the Chinese musical tradition, but also to identify the key cultural mechanisms that have enabled its continuity and adaptation in changing historical conditions. Understanding these processes provides the necessary theoretical background for further considerations regarding the contemporary possibilities for the development of Chinese music in a global context, with particular emphasis on its potential for adaptation and integration with international musical traditions.

I. The Formative Period of Music (from Prehistoric Times to 1840)

The formative period of Chinese music spans from prehistoric times to the outbreak of the Opium War[77], encompassing successive stages such as: the Xia Dynasty (夏朝, ca.

[77] **The** First **Opium War** (鸦片战争, 1840–1842) – the first Opium War between the Qing Dynasty and the British Empire, triggered by a conflict over the British opium trade in China. It ended with the signing of the Treaty of Nanking (1842), which forced China to open its ports to trade

2070–1600 BCE), Shang (商朝, ca. 1600–1046 BCE), Western Zhou (西周, ca. 1046–771 BCE), as well as the Spring and Autumn (春秋时代, 770–476 BCE), Warring States (战国时代, 475–221 BCE), Qin (秦朝, 221–206 BCE), and Han (汉朝, 206 BCE – 220 CE). During the Shang Dynasty, the first

the foundations of Chinese music theory—the "five-tone" system was established[78] , which during the Zhou period was expanded into a system of seven tones and subsequently crystallized into the “seven-step scale” and the “twelve lü” (twelve fundamental tones), forming the theoretical foundation of Chinese music [79] . During the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, despite numerous wars and political chaos, China experienced a period of extraordinary cultural flourishing known as the “Hundred Schools of Thought” [80] . During this time, there was a dynamic development of musical instruments: among others, solo instruments such as the guqin appeared. Research shows that as early as the

pre-Qin period (先秦时期, from prehistoric times to 221 BCE),

use[81] . At the same time, musical institutions and the profession of the professional musician began to emerge more distinctly, which contributed to the further development of both performance and musical composition.

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foreign aid and the payment of war reparations. In Chinese historiography, this war marks the beginning the “Century of Humiliation” and the end of the traditional, isolationist period of Chinese cultural development. It serves as a conventional chronological dividing line separating the classical period of the formation of Chinese music theory from the era of Western influences.

[78] **The Five Tones** (五声, *wusheng*) – the basic Chinese pentatonic system consisting of five degrees: *gong* (宫), *shang* (商), *jiao* (角), *zhi* (徵), *yu* (羽), which forms the basis of traditional .

[79] Editorial Board, 中国音乐史 [*History of Chinese Music*], [Higher Education Press], Beijing 2022.

[80] ***Bai jia zheng ming*** (百家争鸣, lit. “a hundred schools vie for dominance”) – refers to a period in the history of Chinese philosophy (6th–3rd centuries BCE) when various schools of thought competed with one another in the realm of political, social, and philosophical ideas. This period, also known as the “golden age of Chinese philosophy,” was characterized by extraordinary intellectual diversity and freedom of academic debate. In the contemporary context, this term is used metaphorically to describe a situation in which various intellectual, artistic, or methodological currents coexist and compete with one another, leading to the enrichment and development of a given field through ideological pluralism and creative competition among concepts.

[81] Editorial Board, 中国音乐史 [*History of Music…*, op. cit.].

II. A New Era in Music (4th–10th Centuries CE)

The period from the 4th to the 10th century, encompassing the Wei (魏朝, 220–266), Jin (晋朝, 266–420), Southern and Northern Dynasties (南北朝, 420–589), through to the Sui (隋朝, 581–618) and Tang (唐朝, 618–907), constituted a significant turning point in the history of Chinese music[82].

During the Wei and Jin periods and the Southern and Northern Dynasties, social upheavals led to the deep integration of various ethnic groups[83]. Against this historical backdrop, there were intense contacts and exchanges between the North and the South, between the Han Chinese[84] and ethnic minorities[85] — not only in the realm of music, but also in culture and everyday customs. This process contributed to the further diversification of musical styles in China[86].

During this period, many prominent music theorists and performers emerged—for example, He Chengtian developed the theory of the "new lü" [87], thereby enriching the Chinese tuning theory system [88]. *Qin Cao* [(89)], authored by Cai Yong, became an important

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[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid.

[84] **The Han** (汉族, *Hanzu*)—the largest ethnic group in China, constituting approximately 92% of the country's population. The name derives from the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) and refers to the Chinese ethnic majority, characterized by a shared culture, language (Chinese), and writing system. Historically, the Han people inhabited mainly the central and eastern regions of China.

[85] **Ethnic minorities** (少数民族, *shaoshu minzu*) – 55 officially recognized ethnic groups in In China, accounting for approximately 8% of the country's population. During the Wei, Jin, and Southern and Northern Dynasties, nomadic groups from the north (such as the Xianbei and Xiongnu) and peoples from the southern and western regions played a pivotal role. These ethnic groups made a significant contribution to the development of Chinese music by introducing new instruments, musical scales, and performance styles, which enriched the Chinese musical tradition.

[86] Ibid.

[87] **The "New Lü"** (新律 *xinlü*) **theory** is a system of temperament developed by the Chinese theorist He Chengtian (370–447), which constitutes a solution very similar to equal-tempered tuning . This system represents a significant advance in Chinese music theory, characterized by a precise division of the octave into twelve intervals of nearly equal proportions, which ensured a harmonious sound in all keys and resolved the acoustic problems of earlier tempering systems.

[88] Editorial Board, 中国音乐史 [*History of Music*..., op. cit.].

[89] ***Qin Cao*** (琴操) by Cai Yong—a classical treatise from the Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220) devoted to the theory and practice of playing the guqin. In it, Cai Yong (132–192) compiled traditional melodies along with

a historical account of the art of playing the guqin[90] . *The Treatise on the Absence of Sorrow and Joy in Sounds* by Ji Kang[91] contains philosophical reflections on the expression of emotions in music, laying the foundations for Chinese musical aesthetics[92] .

The Tang Dynasty period (618–907) is widely regarded as the golden age of ancient Chinese music[93]. China's power and openness under the Tang Dynasty created favorable social conditions for the flourishing of musical art, and the capital, Chang'an, became a global hub of cultural exchange. Thanks to the Silk Road[94] , instruments from the West, such as the harp and the lute, began to flow into China, which significantly enriched the native set of instruments and were eventually incorporated into the Chinese musical system. Furthermore, during the Tang Dynasty, a breakthrough occurred in musical notation—notation systems such as jianzipu, wenzipu (illustration 10), gupu (Figure 11), and gongchipu (Figure 12), as well as the famous Dunhuang pipapu (Figure 13)[95] . These documents constitute a valuable source for research on ancient music and its performance.

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poetic descriptions and symbolic meanings, presenting the philosophical foundations of guqin musical culture and its connection to Confucian morality. The work remains an important source for researchers of Chinese music history.

[90] **Guqin** (古琴) – a traditional Chinese plucked string instrument with seven strings and a history of over 3,000 years of history. Considered the instrument of Chinese scholars and philosophers, it belongs to the "Four Arts" of classical Confucian education.

[91] ***Treatise on the Absence of Sorrow and Joy in Sounds*** (声无哀乐论, *Sheng wu aile lun*) by Ji Kang (223–262), a distinguished scholar and musician of the Three Kingdoms period, is one of the seminal works in the history of Chinese musical aesthetics. In it, Ji Kang emphasizes that sounds in and of themselves do not contain emotions such as sadness or joy; rather, these feelings arise through human perception and interpretation. This thesis, which builds upon earlier philosophical traditions (including Confucian and Daoist thought), had a significant influence on later reflections on the relationship between music, emotions, and ethics in Chinese culture.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Editorial Board, 中国音乐史 [*History of Music…*, op. cit.].

[94] **The Silk Road** (丝绸之路, sīchóu zhī lù) – a network of trade routes connecting China with Central Asia and Europe (2nd century BCE–15th century CE). See V. Hansen, *The Silk Road: A New History*, Oxford University Press, Oxford [UK] 2012, pp. 7–23.

[95] Ibid.



Figure 10. Jieshi diao Youlan 碣石调·幽兰 – jianzipu notation (left) and verbal notation (right)



Figure 11. Gupu 鼓谱 – the oldest known Chinese musical notation
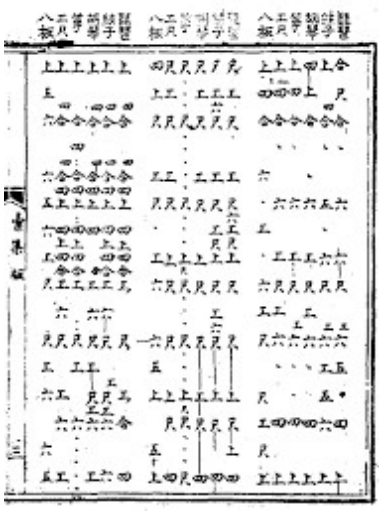


Figure 12. Gongchi pu 宫尺谱 (Gongchi notation system)

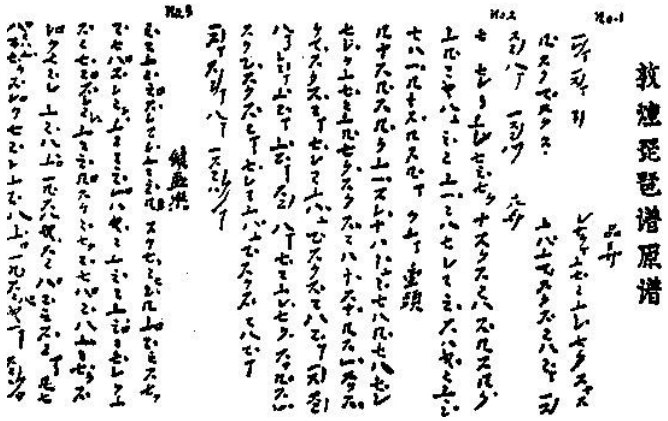


Figure 13. Dunhuang notation – pipa score 敦煌琵琶谱 from the Tang Dynasty

III. The Period of Musical Systematization (10th–19th Centuries)

From the Song (宋朝, 960–1279), Liao (辽朝, 916–1125), Jin (金朝, 1115–1234), Yuan (元朝, 1271–1368), and Ming (明朝, 1368–1644) dynasties through the Ming and Qing (清朝, 1644–1912) dynasties, Chinese music entered a phase of systematization and diverse integration.

During this period, court and folk music coexisted and flourished, and various forms of music—such as opera, instrumental music, and literary music—intermingled. The development of the social economy and civic culture led to the gradual secularization of musical art[96] .

During the Ming and Qing periods (明清，1368–1912), Chinese music underwent further popularization, particularly evident in the flourishing of opera, which became one of the most characteristic features of this era. During the Ming Dynasty, "small folk songs"[97] enjoyed immense popularity, rich in subject matter and ubiquitous in daily life[98] . The four main vocal styles—Haiyan, Yuyao, Yiyang

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[96] Editorial Board, 中国音乐史 [*History of Music*…, op. cit.].

[97] **Small folk songs** (小调, *xiaodiao*)—a category of Chinese folk music characterized by simple, melodic pieces of modest formal scope. In contrast to monumental ceremonial or operatic forms, *xiaodiao* embody the intimate character of folk music, often performed in a domestic setting or during local festivals. These pieces are distinguished by accessible melodies, a regular metrical structure, and poetic lyrics referring to everyday life, romantic feelings, or descriptions of nature.

[98] Editorial Board, 中国音乐史 [*History of Music*…, op. cit.].

and Kunshan[99] – became widely popular during this period, with Kunshan qiang (Kunqu)[100] was refined by, among others, Wei Liangfu of Taicang (魏良甫, c. 1489–1566, from Taicang 太仓 – a city in Jiangsu Province)[101]. Thanks to its subtle, flowing melodies and careful diction, Kunqu gained great popularity. The heyday of Kunqu represents not only the pinnacle of opera art but also an important stage in the maturation of traditional Chinese music.

At the same time, increasingly intense musical exchange between China and Western countries led to the enrichment of both the instrumental repertoire and performance techniques. An example is the pipa, which arrived in China during the Tang Dynasty and, after a long period of development, developed its own unique Chinese playing style, becoming one of the most important solo instruments during the Ming and Qing dynasties[102].

The history of Chinese music is a grand narrative embodying the nation's profound cultural heritage and wisdom. Over the course of five thousand years, it has evolved from primitive beginnings to sophisticated, organized systems, shaping its own unique musical aesthetics and a wealth of artistic forms. Although in modern and contemporary times Chinese music has been strongly influenced by Western traditions, its deeply rooted national characteristics and rich traditions continue to serve as an inexhaustible source of inspiration for creators and researchers.

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[99] **The four main vocal styles of traditional Chinese opera**—Haiyan (海盐腔), Yuyao (余姚腔), Yiyang (弋阳腔), and Kunshan (昆山腔)—are regional singing schools dating back to the Ming Dynasty. Haiyan was characterized by melodic simplicity, Yuyao by rhythmic vitality, Yiyang by dramatic expressiveness with accompanying choruses, and Kunshan qiang evolved into the refined kunqu, becoming the model for later forms of Chinese opera.

[100] **Kunqu** (昆曲)—one of the oldest and most refined forms of traditional Chinese opera, It originated in the 16th century in the Kunshan region (Jiangsu Province). It is characterized by an exceptionally subtle vocal technique based on the melodic lines *of kunqiang* (昆腔), elegant stage movements and a refined poetic style. Kunqu had a fundamental influence on the development of other forms of Chinese opera, including Peking opera.

[101] Editorial Board, 中国音乐史 [*History of Music*…, op. cit.].

[102] Ibid.

In the immediate research horizon, the key methodological challenge will be to identify and document existing elements of Chinese culture, followed by the exploration of innovative ways to synthesize them with modern musical language within the context of classical guitar literature. This process requires not only a thorough knowledge of traditional musical forms, but also a creative approach to adapting authentic cultural values in an artistically compelling manner. It has the potential to set a fundamental direction for the development of Chinese guitar music.

4.2. Key Characteristics of Chinese Music

Over the course of several thousand years of development, Chinese music has developed its own unique artistic system, whose characteristics differ fundamentally from the Western musical tradition. Key distinguishing features include: a diversity of modes and scales that goes beyond the stereotype of exclusively pentatonic scales; the presence in the melody

the *Liubai* (留白) aesthetic [103] , which reflects Eastern philosophy; a deep
exploration of timbres and performance techniques; as well as freedom and flexibility in the use of rhythm. These features not only define the unique artistic style of Chinese music but also reflect its profound cultural ideas and aesthetic aspirations.

4.2.1. The pentatonic scale

Chinese music cannot be reduced to a simple identification with the pentatonic scale, as its modal and tuning systems exhibit significant historical and regional diversity. The pentatonic scale, though widespread in China's musical traditions—including Mongolian music, certain southern Han regions, and the repertoires of many ethnic minorities—is neither the only

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[103] ***Liubai*** (留白) – a fundamental aesthetic concept in Chinese art and philosophy, literally meaning "leaving empty space" or "preserving white space." In a
music, it refers to the deliberate use of silence, pauses, and the space between sounds as integral elements of composition. This concept derives from the Daoist philosophy *of wu wei* (無為) and the aesthetics of Chinese painting, where empty areas on the canvas are just as important as the painted
elements.

forms of sound organization in Chinese culture, nor is it a specifically Chinese phenomenon. The pentatonic scale also appears in the music of other cultural regions, such as Scottish, Irish, and Japanese traditions, as well as in the music of certain peoples of Africa and the Americas.

In fact, throughout Chinese history, six-note and seven-note scales coexisted with the pentatonic scale, creating a much richer modal system. An example is the bone flute from the Jiahu excavation site, dating back approximately eight thousand years, which allowed for the performance of a full seven-note scale[104]. This archaeological discovery demonstrates not only the early maturity of the Chinese tonal system but also the pioneering role of the Zhongyuan region[105] in the development of music theory. Beginning with the Tang and Song dynasties (618–1279), Chinese music theory developed dynamically[106] . As early as the Tang period, the concept of "seven by twelve" emerged, yielding as many as eighty-four possible modes. During the Song dynasty, the composer Jiang Kui used a twelve-tone notation system, thereby anticipating many solutions used in other parts of the world. In the 16th century, the music theorist Zhu Zaiyu developed and refined the theory of the "twelve-tone equal temperament system" [107] , doing so nearly a century before its widespread acceptance

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[104] Editorial Board, 中国音乐史 [*History of Music*..., op. cit.].

[105] **Zhongyuan** (中原) – a term referring to the central part of China, comprising mainly the lowlands in the Yellow River (Huang He) basin. Since ancient times, this region has been regarded as the cradle of Chinese civilization, both in a political and cultural sense. It was in Zhongyuan that the fundamental state institutions, classical philosophical traditions, and canonical musical forms took shape, exerting a lasting influence on the development of Chinese culture as a whole.

[106] Editorial Board, 中国音乐史 [*History of Music*..., op. cit.].

[107] **The twelve-tone equal temperament system** (十二平均律, shí'èr píngjūnlǜ) – a tuning system in which an octave is divided into twelve equal semitones, with the frequency ratio of each semitone being $\sqrt[12]{2} \approx 1.059$. In this system, all semitones have the same interval size (100 cents), which allows for free transposition and modulation in all keys. This system was systematically formulated in theory by the Chinese scholar Zhu

Zaiyu (朱载堉) between 1580 and 1584, but it did not gain widespread practical use.
In Europe, the earliest theoretical treatises on this concept appeared in the late 17th century (around 1691). Today, it forms the basis for the tuning of most keyboard and string instruments, including the classical guitar.

in Europe [108] . However, due to China's specific aesthetic tastes and cultural context, this theory did not gain widespread application in China at that time [109] .

The richness of modal systems in Chinese music is evident not only on a theoretical level but is also widely reflected in performance practice. Opera music, folk songs from various regions, and court music exhibit modal characteristics distinct from the typical pentatonic scale [110] . For example, opera music from the Ming and Qing periods, such as Peking Opera and Cantonese opera, frequently employs seven-note scales and melodies based on semitone intervals. Furthermore, certain musical traditions of ethnic minorities exhibit unique modal variations. For example, the five-tone scale system of the Bulang people of Yunnan[111] , although

formally classified as pentatonic, differs in terms of specific scale components and melodic patterns from the traditional 宫 商 角 徵 羽 [112] (CDEGA) model, reflecting significant regional diversity.

A comparative analysis of the developmental paths of Chinese and Western European music reveals fundamental paradigmatic differences. While Western music developed through the progressive expansion of harmonic and contrapuntal structures,

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[108] Editorial Board, **History of* Chinese Music*, op. cit.

[109] Y. Du, D. Qin, 中国乐理 [*Chinese Music Theory*], [Shanghai Conservatory of Music Press], Shanghai 2007, pp. 24–37.

[110] Ibid.

[111] ***Bulang*** (布 朗 族) – one of the 56 officially recognized ethnic minorities of the People's Republic of China, inhabiting mainly the southern regions of Yunnan Province (云 南) in southern western China. The Bulang people speak a language belonging to the Austroasiatic group (Mon–Khmer language family). The traditional culture of the Bulang includes a rich musical repertoire, rituals associated with Theravada Buddhism, and distinctive agricultural practices, primarily tea cultivation, which constitutes one of the central elements of their cultural identity.

[112] **The five-tone system** (宫商角徵羽, *gōng-shāng-jiǎo-zhǐ-yǔ*) – the traditional Chinese five-tone notes of the musical scale, forming the basis of classical Chinese music theory. This system includes: 宫 (gōng) – the fundamental tone, equivalent to the Western C; 商 (shāng) – the major second, equivalent to D; 角 (jiǎo) – major third, equivalent to E; 徵 (zhǐ) – perfect fifth, equivalent to G; 羽 (yǔ) – major sixth, equivalent to A. These five tones form an anhemitonic pentatonic scale (without semitones).

Chinese music consistently prioritized linear melodic aspects and the intensification of expressive potential, which determined the distinctiveness of its modal systems. Beginning with the Tang and Song dynasties (618–1279)[113] , the Chinese theoretical system crystallized not only seven- and eight-tone structures, but also

diverse tuning systems: the twelve-tone equal temperament, *xinlü* (新律), and twenty-tone and eighteen-tone systems. This theoretical diversity implied a significant enrichment of the modal apparatus of the Chinese musical tradition. Consequently, Chinese music cannot be reduced to a uniform pentatonic system, but rather constitutes a multi-layered, hierarchical modal structure characterized by a high degree of systemic adaptability. A key characteristic of this system is its ability to assimilate numerous chromatic elements within the modal structure without introducing the processes of modulation or alteration associated with the tonal system of Western music. This phenomenon defines the boundaries of the classical repertoire, manifesting itself just as clearly in folk traditions, where performers lacking formal musical education intuitively operate complex nine-tone systems, generating a specific, culturally conditioned musical expressiveness[114] . This observation confirms the deep-rooted nature of the described modal mechanisms in Chinese musical consciousness.

Below is a summary of scales ranging from six-note (Figure 14) to nine-tone scales (Figure 17), constructed on the basis of the five fundamental tones 宫徵商羽角 (C, G, D, A, E) by adding successive tones

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[113] **The Tang and Song Dynasties** (唐宋时期) – two consecutive periods in Chinese history that together These periods include the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE) and the Song Dynasty (960–1279 CE). These periods are considered the pinnacle of Chinese civilization's development in the fields of culture, science, art, and philosophy. The Tang Dynasty was characterized by a cosmopolitan nature, openness to foreign influences, and a flourishing of court poetry and music. The Song Dynasty, in turn, was distinguished by advances in the sciences, technology, and the development of Neo-Confucianism. In the musical context, these periods brought significant innovations in music theory, the systematization of modal scales, and the development of sophisticated instrumental and vocal forms.

[114] Z. Wang, *"Only Nine Songs, Eight Winds, Seven Sounds, and Six Laws Serve the Five Tones: Continued Exploration*," *Journal of the Central Conservatory of Music*, 1996, no. 4, pp. 45–56.

sharpened and flattened. Different frame colors—red, blue, green, and black—denote the individual components and names of these scales, allowing for a clear illustration of the structural features of each modal system.



Figure 14. Six-tone scale

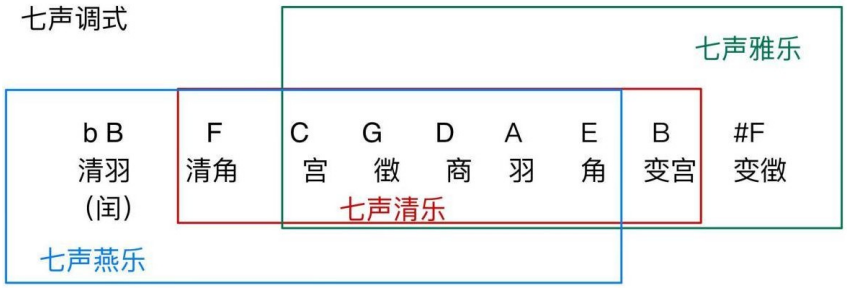


Figure 15. Seven-tone scale

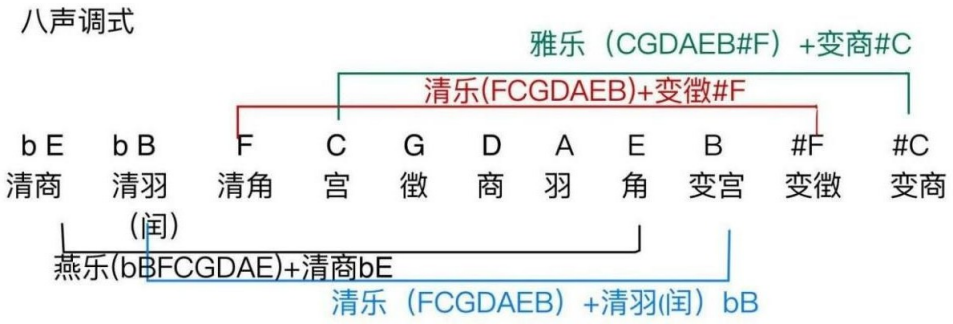


Figure 16. Eight-tone scale



Figure 17. Nine-tone scale

4.2.2. Fundamental differences between traditional Chinese music and Western classical music

In 1980, Shen Qia noted in his work **A Phonemic Theory** that the most significant difference between traditional Chinese music and Western classical music does not concern aspects such as scales, tonal systems, modes, structure, or texture. The foundation of this difference lies primarily in the way individual sounds are shaped [115] . In Western classical music, a simple, stable tone predominates.

Meanwhile, in traditional Chinese music—alongside individual stable sounds—there exists a vast number of so-called *Qiang Yin* (腔音), whose pitch, intensity, and timbre can be deliberately and widely modified. Shen Qia termed this phenomenon *Yin Qiang* (音腔).

When the articulation of sound (Qiang Yin) was transferred to

such as the guqin or other Chinese folk instruments, characteristic performance techniques developed:

- *chuo* (绰) is an upward glissando, sliding from a lower to a higher note;
- the reverse, i.e., a downward glissando, is referred to as *zhu* (注), sliding from a higher to a lower pitch;
- *yin* (吟) is a technique involving the rapid alternation of sound from a higher to a lower pitch;

[115] Q. Shen, 音腔论 [*Theory of Tone*], [Shanghai Music Publishing House], Shanghai 2019, p. 140.

- the opposite *of yin* is *nao* (猱), which is the repeated shifting of the sound from lower to higher.

The four types *of Qiang Yin* mentioned above are further subdivided into many different varieties. For example, in guqin playing, various types *of yin* are distinguished, such as: *luo zhi yin, xi yin, chang yin, ding yin, you yin, fei yin, fen kai yin, and wang lai yin*[116] . *Nao* is divided into such varieties as: *huan nao, dang nao, ji nao, zhuang nao*[117] and others. Qiang Yin can be performed on all Chinese wind, string, and plucked instruments, such as the guzheng, guqin, erhu, yueqin, liuqin, pipa, ruan, and sanxian.

In English, the concept *of Qiang Yin* is sometimes translated in various ways, including as *"Unfixed tone*," *"Tone with intonation*," *"Moving tone*," or *"Bending tone*." As can be seen, all these terms focus primarily on changes in pitch, while failing to fully capture the changes in timbre and dynamics that are the essence of this phenomenon in Chinese music.

Among the various cultural fields related to music, language remains in a particularly close relationship with this art form[118] . Musical melody can be significantly shaped by the intonation of language, and the rhythm of a piece often shows similarities to the rhythm of speech. Furthermore, dynamics in music are to some extent shaped by linguistic habits established within a given culture[119] .

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[116] **Traditional guqin ornamentation techniques**—*luozhi yin* (落指吟), *xi yin* (细吟), *chang yin* (长吟), *ding yin* (定吟), *you yin* (游吟), *fei yin* (飞吟), *fenkai yin* (分开吟), *wanglai yin* (往来吟)—represent various forms of vibration and sound modulation characteristic of this instrument. They range from delicate, subtle vibrations (*xi yin*) through sustained vibrato (*chang yin*) to rapid, "flying" modulations (*fei yin*). These sophisticated techniques, known as *yin fa* (吟法), form the foundation of musical expression in the guqin tradition.

[117] **The traditional nao** (猱) **techniques on the guqin**—*huan nao* (缓猱), *dang nao* (荡猱), *ji nao* (急猱), *zhuang nao* (撞猱)—constitute a group of performance techniques involving horizontal finger movements on the strings. *Huan nao* refers to slow, gradual sliding; *dang nao* is characterized by a free, swaying motion; *ji nao* is a fast, energetic sliding of the finger; *zhuang nao* consists of a sudden "striking" glissando.

[118] L. Jäncke, *"The Relationship between Music and Language*," *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2012, no. 3, article 123.

[119] Ibid.

The tonal nature of Sino-Tibetan languages has a profound influence on the musical sensibilities of the Chinese people [120] . This constitutes the most important cultural foundation for the emergence of and preference for *Qiang Yin*, as well as the basis for the existence of both *Qiang Yin* and *Zhi Yin*[121] . In the music of Chinese minorities who speak Sino-Tibetan languages, various forms *of Qiang Yin* are commonly used to achieve the effect *of Zizheng Qiangyuan* [122] — a precise, full-bodied sound corresponding to Chinese pronunciation.

In the languages of this group, two main types of tonal variation are distinguished: intonation (phrase intonation) and tones (pitch levels assigned to syllables). Intonation is extremely rich in all Chinese languages of the various ethnic groups; it is precisely this that gives the Chinese language—depending on the situation—its characteristic "ups and downs," that is, variations in pitch, intensity, and speech rate. The core of intonation is sentence tone[123] ; different sentence intonations can completely change the meaning of an utterance. Below is a diagram (Figure 18) illustrating the relationships between *qiangyin*, *zhiyin*, and guqin playing techniques, which provides a simple way to visualize these relationships and facilitates understanding of the topic.

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[120] Q. Shen, 音腔论 [*Theory of Tone*…, op. cit.], p. 140.

[121] ***Zhí yīn*** (直音) – in the Chinese phonetic system, this refers to a simple, uniform sound, devoid of tonal modulation or glissando transitions between pitches. The term refers to: 1) a stable a pitch that maintains a constant frequency without fluctuations; 2) the absence of tonal inflection, in contrast to modulated sounds (曲 音 , *qū yīn*); 3) a uniform articulatory character without changes in dynamics or timbre during production. In a musical context, 直音 refers to a plain tone, a sound that is pure without ornamentation, vibrato , or other modifications to the sound, characteristic of traditional Chinese vocal and instrumental practice, where purity and simplicity of sound constitute an aesthetic ideal. English equivalent: plain tone, unornamented sound.

[122] ***Zì zhèng qiāng yuán*** (字正腔圓) – a traditional Chinese concept regarding correct pronunciation Chinese. Literally: "correct words, round tone." This principle refers to an ideal of articulation that combines precise pronunciation of words (字正) with a full, round tone (腔圓). It constitutes a fundamental requirement for correct Chinese pronunciation, ensuring the clarity of each syllable while maintaining a natural, resonant quality of sound.

[123] **Sentence intonation** refers to the overall rise and fall of pitch and pauses in speech, influencing tone and emotional expression.

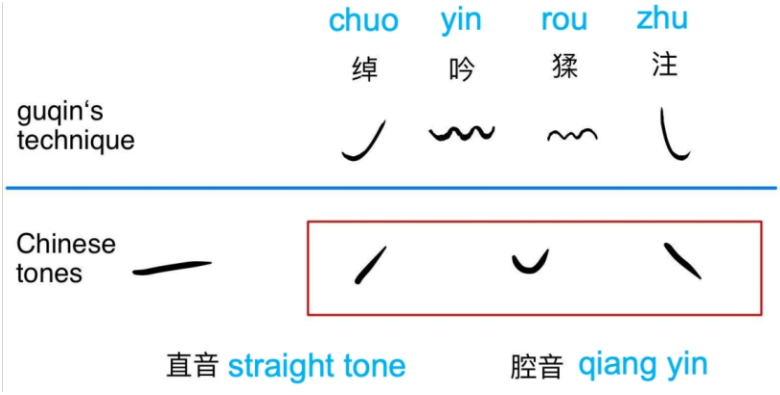


Illustration 18. Diagram of the relationship between qiangyin (articulated sound), plain sound, Mandarin tones, and guqin playing techniques

4.2.3. Freedom and flexibility of rhythm

The principles of accentuation in music are closely linked to the linguistic structures of a given culture [124]. The same musical material, when subjected to different accentuation patterns, can produce different perceptual and expressive effects, which demonstrates the fundamental role of rhythmic organization in shaping musical character. Accent preferences in various musical traditions show a clear correlation with the prosodic features of their corresponding linguistic systems, which constitutes a significant factor in the process of cultural adaptation of musical forms [125] .

In Indo-European languages, there is a word stress that is divided into stress of strength (dynamic stress) and melodic stress. Stress of strength involves emphasizing a syllable by increasing the intensity of the sound, whereas melodic stress is realized mainly through a change in pitch[126] . In Indo-European languages, dynamic accents occur according to specific rules, which is the primary means of creating rhythm in poetry[127] . These linguistic accentual habits and

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[124] D. Gibbon, *"The Rhythms of Rhythm*," *Journal of the International Phonetic Association*, 2023, vol. 1(53), pp. 233–265.

[125] Ibid.

[126] A. Carter-Enyì, *Prosody in Music: Representing Speech Intonation, Rhythm, and Stress*, Society for Composers, Beverly Hills [CA] 2013.

[127] T. Proto, F. Dell, *The Structure of Metrical Patterns in Tunes and Literary Verse. Evidence from Discrepancies between Musical and Linguistic Rhythm in Italian Songs*, "Probus" 2013, no. 1(25), pp. 105–138.

aesthetic awareness gradually integrated into the European musical system, creating the rhythmic system observed today, based on the regularity of strong and weak beats. In Indo-European languages of the Germanic group, such as English or German, as well as in Slavic languages like Russian, one can observe a regularity in the occurrence of stressed and unstressed syllables. It is precisely because of this regular distribution of stressed and unstressed syllables in Indo-European languages that we observe a duple musical rhythm in the form of a strong–weak/strong–weak cycle and a triple rhythm in the form of strong–weak–weak cycles. Furthermore, this highly regular phenomenon of the alternation of strong and weak beats has a specialized term in musicology—even pulse—which forms the basis of the European metrical system and bar accents.[128]

It is precisely this regular alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables in Indo-European languages that gave rise to a typical musical pattern: duple meter is based on the strong–weak/strong–weak pattern, and triple meter on the strong–weak–weak pattern, and so on. This phenomenon is referred to in music as isometric meter and forms the basis of the European rhythmic and accentation system[129] .

In Chinese, word stress is not traditionally distinguished [130] . Unlike languages such as English, where each word is assigned

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[128] **Isochronous pulse** (Latin: *pulsus isochronus*)—in music theory, this refers to a regular, mathematically divisible rhythm in which successive metrical beats occur at equal time intervals. This term, derived from the German musicological tradition (*gleichmäßige Bewegung*), forms the basis of the European metrical system and refers to the phenomenon in which the musical pulse can be divided into equal units of time, thereby enabling the regular occurrence of strong and weak accents. In the context of the relationship between language and music, an even pulse corresponds to the regular distribution of stressed and unstressed syllables characteristic of Indo-European languages. See H. Riemann, *System der musikalischen Rhythmik und Metrik*, Breitkopf & Härtel, Leipzig 1903, pp. 145–167.

[129] P. Mairano, *Rhythm Typology: Acoustic and Perceptive Studies,* doctoral dissertation, Università degli Studi di Torino, 2010, pp. 10–11, https://theses.hal.science/file/index/docid/654261/filename/MairanoPaolo_These.pdf [accessed: 12/13/2024].

[130] *Word stress* (German: *Wortakzent*) – in linguistics, this refers to a phonetic phenomenon in which a specific syllable in a multisyllabic word is emphasized by

a specific stress; in Chinese, only sentence (logical) stress exists [131] . This stress appears in speech to emphasize specific emotions or meaning, and its placement depends on the context, content, and mental state of the speaker—there is no fixed pattern here. Shifting the stress also changes the meaning of the entire sentence, e.g., in the sentence "I am learning to play classical guitar":

- 我学古典吉他 – when the stress falls on "我", we emphasize that it is I, and not someone else;
- 我学古典吉他 – the emphasis on "学" suggests that what is important is "I am learning," not, for example,

  "I have learned";
- 我学古典吉他 – the stress on "古典吉他" indicates that it is a classical guitar, not another type.

Since logical stress in Chinese does not follow a rigid pattern and depends on context and the speaker's mindset, in Chinese music, stress is left to the performer's free interpretation. This explains why traditional Chinese musical notations, such as guqin tablature or gongchi pu, do not indicate accents or dynamics—any changes in intensity are left to improvisation, depending on the circumstances, mood, and intent of the performer. A similar phenomenon is also found in folk music, opera, and recitative.

Second, this characteristic is also reflected in the organization of rhythm—in the Chinese musical tradition, musical notation differs from European notation because it typically does not unambiguously specify the rhythmic pattern. This gives performers

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an increase in intensity, pitch, or duration. In Indo-European languages, word stress serves an organizational function within the rhythmic structure of speech and may have a phonological role, distinguishing lexical meanings (e.g., English *"record"*—noun vs. *"re'cord"*—verb). Based on the placement of stress, a distinction is made between languages with fixed stress (e.g., Polish—paroxytone stress, i.e., on the penultimate syllable) and those with mobile stress (e.g., Russian, English). In tonal languages, such as Chinese, the function of organizing the rhythmic structure of speech is primarily taken over by the tone system, which means that the traditional concept of word stress requires redefinition. See R. Grzegorczykowa, R. Laskowski, H. Wróbel, *Grammar of Modern Polish. Phonetics and Phonology*, vol. 3, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor [MI] 2008, pp. 140–156; D. Crystal, *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford [UK] 2008, pp. 45–47.

[131] Ibid.

greater interpretive freedom and scope for expression, allowing them to flexibly adapt the rhythm to their own understanding, emotions, and the atmosphere during the performance. Such an open structure of musical notation not only creates more space for the imagination of performers and listeners, but also makes traditional Chinese music a form of art co-created by the composer and the performer. In this process, the performer is not merely a reproducer of the composer's work, but also becomes a co-creator of the music.

4.2.4. The Aesthetics of the "Expressive Pause" in Melody

Some time ago, composer John Cage created the piece *4'33*, in which he sought to convey that silence is also music. In the Chinese musical tradition, the idea

"expressive pause" (留白)[132]is even more deeply rooted. This manifests itself in irregularities and interruptions in the melody—pauses, vibrato, and harmonics are an integral part of the music. Such melodic lines are difficult to memorize, but they leave the listener with vast room for imagination, exuding the subtlety and understatement characteristic of Chinese culture.

In Chinese music, particular emphasis is placed on "horizontal" development, that is, melodic expression. This manifests itself both in the overall style

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[132] **Expressive pause** (留白, *liúbái*)—a term borrowed from Chinese painting aesthetics, where it denotes deliberately left empty spaces in a painting, transferred to musical terminology as the concept of the artistic use of silence. In a musical context, it refers to the strategic use of pauses and sonic space as an equal compositional element

to the sound material. This concept assumes a dialectical relationship between sound (实, *shí* (fullness) and silence (虚, *xū* – emptiness), where moments of silence take on an expressive, contemplative, and structural functions. In traditional Chinese musical practice, the expressive pause serves to emphasize the significance of the adjacent sound elements, build dramatic tension, and allow the listener to reflect on the material heard. It embodies the Taoist philosophy, in which emptiness is just as essential as fullness in the process of artistic creation.

artistic, as well as in the detailed treatment of the "flavor" (*yunwei*)[133] of the melody—the aim here is for "the form to be dispersed, but the spirit to remain intact"[134] .

Above all, the expression of Chinese music lies in emphasizing the horizontal progression, and thus conveying emotions and images precisely through a developed melodic line[135] . Traditional Chinese compositions very often rely on a single, sustained melodic line, which gives each note an independent, profound expression, and the entire melody becomes exceptionally evocative and moving. In contrast to Western music, which places greater emphasis on harmony and vertical development, Chinese music focuses primarily on linear melodic narration, expressing shifts in emotion through the continuity and development of the melody[136] .

Second, in terms of artistic style, Chinese music emphasizes the refined shaping of the melody's expressiveness and flavor[137] . This means that the performer pays special attention to the fluidity of transitions and connections between notes, ensuring the melody's coherence and naturalness. Such manipulation of the "flavor" of the melody requires masterful skills from the performer—it is precisely through various ornamentations and

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[133] **Yunwei** (韵味, lit. "the flavor of rhyme") – in Chinese musical and literary aesthetics, this term refers to a subtle, ineffable artistic quality that transcends the literal meaning of a work. The concept derives from classical poetic theory, where it originally referred to the harmony between sound and meaning in versification (*yun* 韵 – rhyme, sound; *wei* 味 – taste, aroma). In a musical context, yunwei denotes a depth of expression that arises from the combination of technique performance, emotional engagement, and cultural context, creating the work's unique atmosphere. This is an aesthetic category characteristic of Chinese philosophy of art, emphasizing the importance of what remains unsaid and is left to the viewer's imagination. In Western musicology, it is often translated as "musical charm" or "aesthetic depth," though neither of these terms fully captures the original meaning. See L. Zehou, *The Path of Beauty: A Study of Chinese Aesthetics*, trans. G. Lizeng, Oxford University Press, Oxford [UK] 1994, pp. 78–92; Z. Qian, *The Concept of Yunwei in Traditional Chinese Music Theory*, "Asian Music Studies" 2008, no. 2(15), pp. 23–41.

[134] W. Yumeng, *A Study on the Characteristics of Chinese Music and Communication in European Sinology in the 16th–18th Centuries*, doctoral dissertation, Xiamen University, 2015, pp. 6–7.

[135] Ibid.

[136] Ibid.

[137] Ibid.

Through performance techniques, it can enrich the melodic line, giving it multidimensionality and depth.

Furthermore, in traditional Chinese music, the following principle is of paramount importance: "The form may be loose, but the spirit must remain intact" (形散神不散)[138]. This means that when performing a piece, the musician should pay attention not only to the clarity

form and logical structure, as well as the preservation of the spirit and expressiveness of the music. This pursuit of harmony between form and content ensures that Chinese music is not merely a simple sequence of sounds, but becomes a means of conveying profound thoughts and emotions, rich in meaning and full of poetic atmosphere.

4.2.5. Tone and Performance Techniques

For centuries, the Chinese musical tradition has attached great importance to the role of timbre (color) in musical expression. As early as in one of the oldest Chinese chronicles—*the Zuo Zhuan*—we read: "If you add water to water, who would want to taste it? If the playing of the qin and se is too monotonous, who would want to listen to it?"[139] Drawing an analogy from cooking, the text emphasized the necessity of enriching music through tonal variation. In contrast, Western musical tradition largely

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[138] ***Xing san shen bu san*** (形散神不散, lit. "form scattered, spirit unbroken") – an aesthetic principle in Chinese literature and art, according to which a work may have a seemingly chaotic external structure (*xing* 形 – form), while maintaining internal spiritual coherence (*shen* 神 – spirit, essence). This concept prioritizes the organic fluidity of composition over a rigid formal structure, where the unity of the work is based on an intuitive rather than a logical order. See H. Zou, 中国美学 [*Chinese Aesthetics*], [Social Sciences Press], Beijing 2004, pp. 412–429.

[139] The quote comes from the Zuo Zhuan (左传, *Zuo's Annals*), one of the oldest Chinese historical chronicles from the Spring and Autumn period (722–481 BCE), attributed to Zuo Qiuming. The passage reads: "水加于水，谁尝之？琴瑟齐鸣，谁听之？" (lit. "When water is added to water, who will taste it? When the qin and

se play in unison, who will listen?") is a classic aesthetic and philosophical metaphor emphasizing the importance of contrast and diversity in art. This statement illustrates the Chinese concept of

harmony (*he* 和), which does not rely on uniformity, but on the balanced interaction
opposing elements. In a musical context, this quote has become a fundamental principle

Chinese aesthetics, according to which true harmony arises from the diversity of tones, rhythms, and sounds, rather than from monotonous unison. See Y. Bojun, 春秋左传注 [*Zuo Zhuan from the Spring and Autumn Period*], Beijing 1990, vol. 4, pp. 1456–1458.

focused on the unity of timbre and harmonic coherence, which stemmed from different cultural, aesthetic, and historical conditions.

As early as the Wei and Jin periods, the work **Shi Shuo Xin Yu** [140]recorded: *"Si bu ru zhu, zhu bu ru* rou" (lit.: "strings are not as good as bamboo, bamboo is not as good as flesh"). This is a comparison of different materials in terms of sound quality and texture. The term *Si* refers to stringed instruments with silk strings, such as the guqin; zhu refers to instruments made of bamboo, such as flutes; and *rou* refers to the human voice. This metaphor expresses the belief that the human voice is the most beautiful and moving sound, and that the ideal sound of instruments is to imitate the human voice. In other words, the ancient Chinese believed that the ideal

One of the instrument's most beautiful qualities is its sound, which resembles the human voice [141]. For example,

instruments such as the erhu (二胡), pipa (琵琶), sanxian (三弦), and bamboo flutes (dizi 笛子, xiao 箫) occupy a particularly important place in the traditional Chinese instrumental repertoire

due to their distinctive tonal characteristics. Their high and middle registers exhibit a significant tonal similarity to the human voice, making them the most suitable for realizing the aesthetic principle in question. Furthermore, some of these instruments, particularly the erhu and pipa, possess the ability to articulate in a manner resembling speech, enabling them to mimic the inflections and modulations characteristic of the tonal Chinese language. This functional analogy between

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[140] ***Shi Shuo Xin Yu*** (世说新语, lit. "New Tales of the World")—a collection of anecdotes and short stories from the Wei, Jin, and Southern and Northern Dynasties (220–589 CE), compiled by Liu Yiqing (403–444) of the Liu Song Dynasty. The work consists of 36 thematic categories

containing a total of approximately 1,200 short stories about aristocrats, intellectuals, and officials of that period. Shishuo xinyu is a unique source of information on the culture, customs, and mentality of the Chinese

intellectual elite, particularly valued for its portrayal of the ideal of *wei jin feng du* (魏晋风度, "Wei-Jin style") Jin"), characterized by nonchalance, elegance, and eccentricity. In Chinese literature, this work had a profound influence on the development of artistic prose and became a model for later collections

anecdotal collections. See L. Yiqing, 世說新語 [*New Tales of the World*], Yang Yong, Shanghai 1999; R. Mather, *Shih-shuo Hsin-yü: A New Account of Tales of the World*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor [MI] 1976.

[141] R. Mather, *Shih-shuo Hsin-yü…*, op. cit.

The relationship between musical instruments and the vocal apparatus constitutes a key element of traditional Chinese musical philosophy, in which the pursuit of imitating natural sound patterns determines the hierarchy of aesthetic values.

This preference for instruments with quasi-vocal qualities is, however, subject to significant regional variations that reflect the specific geographical and cultural characteristics of different areas of China. In the northern regions, characterized by vast open spaces and a tradition of performing folk music outdoors, a sonic aesthetic has developed that favors tones

bright, piercing, and resonant timbres. Hence, this part of the country is dominated by instruments with a sharp, high-pitched sound, such as the suona (唢呐), guanzi (管子), or bangdi (梆笛), which provide adequate acoustic projection in conditions of natural acoustics

. In contrast, the southern regions, characterized by a more intimate architectural space and a tradition of indoor performance, have developed a different sonic aesthetic. Here, a preference for softer, more subtle tones with a greater sweetness of sound predominates, which is

reflected in the popularity of instruments such as the erhu, pipa, and qudi (曲笛).

The majority of Chinese instruments are high-pitched, followed by mid-range instruments, while low-pitched instruments are very rare; this stems from a general preference for bright, clear, and piercing tones[142] . In many traditional instruments—such as the guqin, guzheng, pipa, erhu, and dizi—the technique of harmonics (sounds similar to a pure tone) is also frequently used. Furthermore, in traditional Chinese polyphonic compositions, intervals such as unison, octave, perfect fourth, and perfect fifth are most commonly used, as they emphasize the clarity and brilliance of the sound[143] .

Western music, influenced by the Industrial Revolution and the standardization of instrument production, sought to unify timbre in order to enhance the effects

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[142] Ibid.

[143] Y. Du, D. Qin, 中國樂理 [*Chinese Music Theory*…, op. cit.], pp. 24–37.

[144] . For example, although brass, woodwind, and string instruments differ in timbre, through appropriate orchestration, a harmonious blend has been achieved in the symphony orchestra. This direction of development particularly emphasized the value of tonal harmony and the beauty of harmony.

Meanwhile, the Chinese musical tradition is based on the principle of "sound is like taste" ("声亦如味") [145], which means that greater emphasis is placed on the individuality and uniqueness of the sound of each instrument [146]. In ensembles of
, playing in unison is more common than harmonic arrangements. Chinese folk instruments are characterized by a unique timbre and distinctive sound, which makes it inappropriate to copy the orchestration methods used in Western symphonic music.

Ancient China possessed the potential for the development of symphonic music—for example, the bianzhong set of bells from the Zhou Dynasty allowed for the performance of pentatonic and heptatonic scales, and even the use of a twelve-tone scale, covering a range of five octaves and enabling polyphonic playing. However, the musical development of that time focused more on the individual character of instruments and the diversity of timbre than on the pursuit of homogeneous harmony[147] . The emphasis on individual timbre aligns with a trend in contemporary music that involves the exploration of new sounds.

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[144] D.J. Grout, C. Paliscal, *A History of Western Music*, trans. Y. Zhigang, People's Music Publishing House, Beijing 2010, p. 57.

[145] ***Shēng yì rú wèi*** (声亦如味, lit. "sound is also like taste") – a classical Chinese aesthetic concept that links auditory perception with the gustatory experience. The formula illustrates the synesthetic nature of perception in the Chinese tradition, where different sensory modalities interpenetrate one another. See C. Li, *Aesthetics and Synesthesia in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, Beijing University Press, Beijing 2019, pp. 78–95.

[146] Y. Du, D. Qin, 中國樂理 [*Chinese Theory of Music…*, op. cit.], p. 40.

[147] Ibid.

4.3. An Examination of Elements of the Chinese Instrumental Tradition as a Source of Inspiration for Guitar Literature

Chinese traditional instruments are characterized by enormous diversity and an exceptionally long history. Archaeological excavations alone prove that a multitude of instruments existed long before our era. For example: bone whistles were discovered at the Hemudu Neolithic site in Zhejiang Province; in Jiahu (Wuyang County, Henan) – bone flutes (also known as *gu*), estimated to be around 8,000 years old; at Banpo near Xi'an (Yangshao culture) – ceramic ocarinas (埙, *xun*); at the site Yin Xu in Anyang, Henan – stone lithophones (石磬, *shiqing*) and drums covered with snake skin[148]. In the tomb of Marquis Zeng Hou Yi (from 433 BCE) in Suixian, Hubei, a set of bells (illustration 19), lithophones (编磬, *bianqing*), and suspended and standing drums (悬鼓, *xuangu*, 建鼓, *jiangu*, 枹鼓, *bangu*), as well as instruments such as the paixiao and sheng[149] (Figure 20).



Figure 19. A set of bianzhong from the tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng

[148] Editorial Board, 中国音乐史 [*History of Music*..., op. cit.].

[149] Ibid.



Figure 20. Diagram of the most common Chinese musical instruments along with their names

Consequently, the integration of elements of the Chinese instrumental tradition into compositions for classical guitar constitutes a complex issue requiring a systematic analysis of the adaptability of specific instrument categories. This chapter attempts a comprehensive overview of traditional Chinese instruments in the context of the possibility of transposing their characteristic idioms into the realm of guitar literature.

The analysis will be conducted based on an organological classification comprising four basic categories: plucked, percussion, string, and wind instruments. Within each category, specific performance techniques, characteristic melodic patterns, and idiomatic

tonal solutions that demonstrate potential for adaptation to the specific characteristics of the guitar.

The aim of this exploration is to present elements of the Chinese instrumental tradition that are amenable to adaptation for the guitar. This analysis is intended to provide a theoretical foundation for the process of musical creation that combines the idioms of the classical guitar with the aesthetics of traditional Chinese music, thereby contributing to the expansion of the expressive possibilities of contemporary guitar literature.

1. Plucked instruments

Chinese plucked instruments bear a strong resemblance to the guitar in terms of playing techniques; therefore, compared to other types of traditional instruments, their elements are much easier to adapt and incorporate into guitar music. For example: although the direction of finger movement when playing the pipa is opposite to that of the guitar (in the former, movements are made from the inside out, while on the guitar they are mainly from the outside in), the principles are similar—both techniques create a flowing melody through rapid plucking of the strings. Additionally, playing the pipa usually requires the use of artificial nails to increase the clarity and power of the sound. A similar effect can be achieved by changing the angle at which the nails touch the strings, making the sound brighter and more piercing.

Techniques used on other plucked instruments, such as the guzheng—including rubbing, plucking, strumming, rolling, and shaking—are similar to the *slide*, *bend,* and *vibrato* techniques used on the guitar, making it easier to transfer them to the guitar in a more natural way. For example, the “finger tremolo” used when playing the guzheng can be adapted into *a* continuous *vibrato* performed with a single finger on the guitar. On the guitar, for example, one can use a movement with the back of the fingernail from the 6th to the 1st string to replicate the gun technique known from playing the guqin. This is similar to the *rasgueado* effect in classical guitar. Generally speaking, the playing techniques of Chinese plucked instruments are very similar to those of the guitar, both in terms of

sound production and fingering logic, which makes these inspirations particularly easy to adapt in guitar compositions.

2. Percussion instruments

Traditional Chinese percussion instruments are characterized by tremendous diversity and a wealth of playing techniques. Their distinctive qualities are primarily evident in the rich variations in timbre and the great freedom in the use of rhythmic patterns. For example, the bangu and bangzi are often used as accompanying instruments in traditional Chinese opera, and their short, powerful syncopated rhythms can be incorporated into the rhythmic patterns of a guitar part to enhance the rhythm of the playing. Continuous drum strikes, such as those on the paigu or "elephant leg" drums, can be translated into fast arpeggios or the golpe technique on the guitar, which creates a distinct sense of rhythmic drive. The metallic striking effects characteristic of Chinese bells or cymbals can be achieved on the guitar using harmonics or the rasgueado technique, which enriches the song's sonic texture. It is worth noting that the rhythms of Chinese percussion instruments are not limited solely to an accompaniment function—many of them serve as independent solo instruments, capable of creating full, self-contained musical forms, such as the drum sequences in Peking Opera or the solo parts of the tanggu drum. The rhythmic complexity and dialogic structure of these forms can serve as inspiration for guitarists—particularly in solo pieces—allowing for the introduction of expressive, contrasting rhythmic patterns that enhance the narrative and dramatic quality of the composition[150] .

It is worth noting that Chinese percussion instruments not only serve a rhythmic function, but some of them also possess melodic and harmonic qualities—a typical example being the bianzhong (sets of bells). Bianzhong date back to the Western Zhou Dynasty (c. 1046–771 BCE), and the peak of their development occurred

[150] L. Dongsheng, **Illustrated Guide to Chinese Musical* Instruments*, Shandong Education Press, Shandong 1995, pp. 27–34.

to the Warring States period (475–221 BCE)[151] . Bianzhong held an important place in both court music and ritual ceremonies, and their unique
"double tone" makes them one of the world's earliest instruments capable of performing polyphonic music[152] .

The characteristic sound of the bianzhong stems mainly from the variety of striking points on the bell's surface. On a single instrument, depending on the point of impact, two stable but differently pitched sounds can be produced. Among these, the "central point," located in the center of the bell, produces a bright and clear sound, while the "side point," situated roughly two-thirds of the way from the center, generates a softer and rounder sound. Between these two tones, there is usually a major or minor third interval [153], which indicates that as early as the period from the 8th century BCE to the 3rd century BCE, Chinese music was capable of performing contrapuntal music.

The Zeng Hou Yi bianzhongs from the Warring States period (433 BCE) represent the pinnacle of bianzhong performance art, and their range spans as many as five octaves (from C2 to D7)[154] .

In guitar composition, the bianzhong's characteristic "one bell—two sounds" feature can serve as inspiration when constructing harmonies and modern contrapuntal techniques. Furthermore, as a polyphonic instrument with a rich palette of timbres, the guitar has the ability to emulate the polyphonic qualities of the bianzhong.

3. String Instruments

Chinese string instruments, represented mainly by the huqin family, although they have a relatively short history, occupy an important place in traditional Chinese music thanks to their unique sound and playing technique. Their main features include a two-stringed

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[151] Ibid.

[152] Ibid.

[153] Ibid.

[154] Ibid.

or four-stringed construction, and a soundbox covered with skin (snake, python, or goatskin) or a wooden board (as in the case of the yuehu or banhu), which gives the instruments a diverse tonal character—ranging from the gentle and melodious sound of the erhu, through the bright and clear banhu, to the powerful and joyful sound of the zhuihu[155] . These instruments are characterized by a high degree of expressiveness and a singing quality of phrasing. The playing technique, which involves bowing the strings, makes the melodies fluid and continuous, while the richness of ornamentation lends the music a special emotional expression.

The characteristics and techniques of Chinese string instruments mentioned above can serve as a valuable source of inspiration for guitar composition. Above all, by using *glissando, legato*, and *vibrato*, one can imitate the singing quality of instruments from the huqin family on the guitar and lend the sound greater flexibility. Furthermore, the use of open strings and harmonics allows one to achieve a bright resonance similar to that of the banhu or a deep, full sound akin to the morin khuur, while simultaneously emphasizing the piece's Eastern aura. When constructing melodies, it is also worth drawing on the interval relationships typical of the erhu (fifth or fourth), combining them with the pentatonic scale to give the phrases an authentic, national character. In terms of rhythm and dynamics, one can use techniques such as rapid strokes, *tremolo, arpeggios*, or *staccato* to imitate the subtle expression and strong sense of pulsation characteristic of the huqin, making the musical structure even richer.

4. Wind Instruments

Chinese wind instruments, such as the dizi, xiao, suona, bawu, and hulusi, are distinguished by a distinctive national character in terms of melody, ornamentation, and timbre[156] (Figure 20). These features can be imitated and utilized on the guitar through various techniques to enhance the national, "Chinese" character of guitar music. Above all, the melodic lines of Chinese wind instruments are often characterized by long glissandos and numerous ornaments, such as grace notes,

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[155] Ibid., pp. 87–90.

[156] Ibid., p. 47.

tremolo, percussive strokes, and pitch modulations. For example, the tuyin effect (articulated breath) on the dizi flute can be reproduced on the guitar using staccato or rapid single plucks, while glissandos and pitch modulations can be achieved through slide, bend, and vibrato techniques, allowing the player to approximate the idiom of traditional Chinese music. Furthermore, instruments such as the xiao, bawu, and hulusi often use breath control to create subtle changes in timbre and smooth transitions—on the guitar, this can be imitated using legato and harmonics, resulting in a soft, varied, and nuanced sound.

Second, the suona is famous for its piercing, resonant sound, as well as its expressive, oscillating melodic movement and characteristic changes in tone color—these effects can be reproduced on the guitar through *artificial* harmonics, bending in high positions, and fast glissandos, which lend the music a dynamism and rhythmic energy similar to the suona's expression. Furthermore, the polyphonic qualities of Chinese wind instruments can be translated to the guitar; for example, "double tonguing" on the flute corresponds to fast *staccato* on the guitar, and overlapping two notes or harmonics allows for a partial reproduction of the complex timbres of wind instruments. By utilizing these techniques, the guitar can successfully imitate the expressive means of Chinese wind instruments, enriching compositions with national color and a unique sound.

It can therefore be concluded that the characteristics of Chinese instruments in terms of melodic line, timbre creation, and rhythmic control can be translated and applied to guitar playing. A review of most traditional Chinese instruments has simultaneously revealed a vast field of research regarding elements useful in guitar music, which still awaits exploration and development. Among the instruments already used in compositions for classical guitar, plucked instruments—the pipa and guqin—exhibit the greatest potential. Their similarity to the guitar in terms of performance techniques and the ability to produce specific timbres makes them the most

promising sources of compositional inspiration. Consequently, these instruments will be the focus of a detailed analysis: subsection 4.3.1 will present the characteristics of the pipa from the perspective of its relationship to the classical guitar and highlight the structural and technical similarities between these instruments, while subsection 4.3.2 will characterize the guqin, with particular emphasis on distinguishing it from the guzheng, with which it is often mistakenly conflated, thereby enabling a precise definition of its specific characteristics in the context of guitar music.

4.3.1. "A Close Relative of the Guitar" – the pipa

The pipa is one of the richest Chinese traditional instruments in terms of expressive range—its history dates back over two thousand years. It is characterized by an extremely complex playing technique and immense expressiveness, making it a true treasure among Chinese instruments[157] .

The relationship between the classical guitar and the Chinese pipa requires analysis in the context of historical instrument migration. A stringed instrument called the ud reached China during the Han Dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE) via the Silk Road trade routes, where it underwent significant morphological and functional transformations, evolving into the modern pipa as an autonomous traditional Chinese instrument.

A comparative analysis of structural features confirms common genealogical roots: the ud, the European lute, and the pipa from the Tang Dynasty (618–907) exhibit convergent morphological characteristics, including a pear-shaped soundbox, a convex, rounded back, and a retroflexively curved head. These structural analogies provide empirical confirmation of a common organological prototype. However, geographical isolation

[157] D. Summers, R. O'Rouke-Jones (eds.), *Music: the Definitive Visual History*, Dorling Kindersley, London [UK] 2015, pp. 66–67.

and the cultural autonomy of the Chinese civilizational sphere determined a distinct developmental trajectory for the pipa, independent of the evolution of the European lute tradition. Consequently, despite their shared historical roots, the pipa and the classical guitar currently represent distinct technical and aesthetic paradigms within the family of plucked string instruments. The author illustrates these relationships in the diagram below (Figure 21), which shows the genealogical connections between the guitar and the pipa.

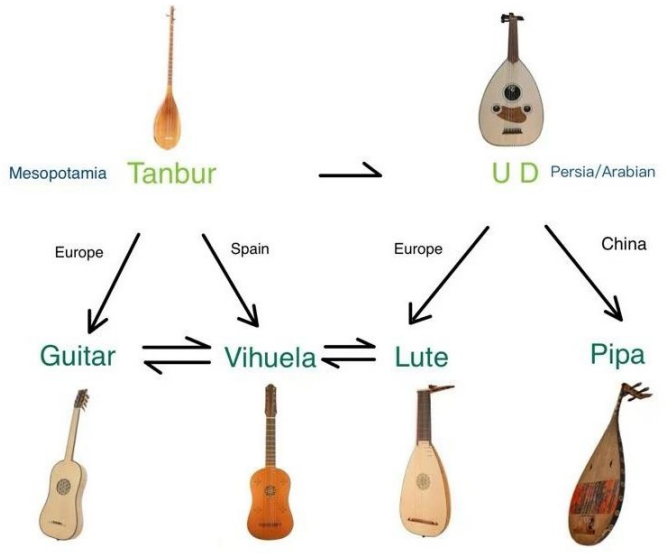


Figure 21. The guitar and its related instruments

In the diagram of the close connections between the guitar and the pipa developed by the author, we can clearly observe the historical origins and morphological features of both instruments. In his 2022 book **The Classical Guitar**, Maurice J. Summerfield rejected the traditional view that the guitar derives from the ud and argued that it is more likely to have originated from the tanbur. At the same time, the lute developed from the Persian ud. Since both of these instruments developed in parallel in Europe and belong to the plucked string instrument family, they influenced each other in terms of construction, playing techniques, and musical styles.

During the Northern Wei Dynasty (386–534) and the Sui and Tang Dynasties (581–907), the pipa had a pear-shaped soundbox, four strings, and

frets[158] . Five-string versions also existed. The instrument was held horizontally on the knees and played with a plectrum. Since the entire weight of the instrument rested on the left hand when playing the horizontally held pipa, the hand had to constantly support it—as a result, it was unable to move freely along the fingerboard, which significantly limited the scale and the instrument's ability to expand its range[159] (illustration 22).



Illustration 22. *Anyue Tu* (按乐图) (detail), Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period (907), by Zhou Wenju, collection of the National Palace Museum in Taipei

In the late Tang Dynasty, the pipa underwent significant development in terms of both playing technique and construction[160] . The way the instrument was held changed—players began to hold the pipa vertically instead of horizontally. Playing with a plectrum was replaced by the technique of plucking the strings directly with the fingers. In the construction of the instrument

[158] S. Han, Z. Zhang, 中国琵琶史稿 [*A Sketch of the History of the Chinese Pipa*], [Shanghai Conservatory of Music Press], Shanghai 2010, p. 58.

[159] Ibid.

[160] Ibid., p. 87.

the most significant change was the increase in the number of frets from four to sixteen. At the same time, the neck is widened and the lower part of the soundbox is narrowed, making it easier for the left hand to press the strings when playing lower notes[161] .

In recent years, some European guitarists have begun using a vertical holding method, similar to that used with modern Chinese pipa instruments, abandoning traditional stands and tripods (Figure 23).



Figure 23. Guitarist Franz Halász holding a guitar (left) and pipa player Fang Jinlong (right)

This phenomenon accurately reflects the close relationship between the guitar and the pipa. However, precisely for this reason, composers often overuse playing techniques and sound effects characteristic of the pipa when writing pieces for the guitar, leading to a neglect of the guitar's unique characteristics. As a result, these compositions sound very similar to music performed on the pipa and are difficult to distinguish. Such pieces, due to their distinctive sound, attract a certain audience. However, over time, the novelty wears off, and listeners' interest wanes.

[161] Ibid.

As shown by the survey conducted in the second chapter of this work, Chinese listeners expressed some skepticism toward adaptations of guitar pieces incorporating elements of traditional music, especially when the guitar's sound became nearly identical to that of the pipa. Respondents pointed out that in such cases, the unique character of the classical guitar may be diminished, and the music loses its individual dimension. This raises an important theoretical and practical question: if the guitar's performance fully imitates the pipa, then the question arises as to the purpose of such an adaptation—shouldn't the listener instead engage directly with traditional music performed on the pipa?

It is worth noting that in China, the guitar has a much wider audience than the pipa. Therefore, a key issue in further research on this topic is finding a balance—how to draw inspiration from traditional techniques while preserving the guitar's unique sound and creating an original musical language.

4.3.2. Guqin and guzheng

The guzheng and guqin often pose a challenge to those unfamiliar with Chinese music, as they are very similar and difficult to distinguish (Figure 24). Although both instruments are traditional Chinese national instruments, they emerged in different historical periods. According to historical records, the guzheng has been with us since the Warring States period [162] . The guqin appeared even earlier. Its origins likely date back 3,000 years[163] . In the phrase "qin, chess, calligraphy, and painting," often mentioned by the ancients, the word "qin" appears, which specifically refers to the guqin, considered the most important musical instrument in the history of Han culture[164] .

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[162] **The Warring States Period** (Chinese: 战国时代, pinyin: Zhànguó Shídài) – an era in the history of ancient China lasting from around 475 (or 403) BCE to 221 BCE, when King Ying Zheng
unified China, establishing the Qin dynasty. It was characterized by intense military and political rivalry among the seven major states: Qin, Chu, Qi, Yan, Han, Wei, and Zhao.

[163] Editorial Board, *A History of Chinese Music* [*History of* Music…, op. cit.].

[164] Ibid.



Illustration 24. Guqin (above) and Guzheng (below)

There are significant differences between the two instruments in terms of timbre, playing technique, string construction, and playing style. The guqin is usually equipped with silk or steel-nylon strings, always has seven strings, and is most often tuned to a pentatonic scale (e.g., F–C–D–G–A–C–D) [165] . Its sound is deep, noble, and full of nuances, and particularly characteristic are the ethereal, almost otherworldly overtone effects that create a unique atmosphere. By comparison, the guzheng traditionally also used silk strings, though nylon-wrapped steel now predominates; this instrument usually has 21 strings, and the tuning is free (unfixed), though most often also pentatonic (e.g., D–G–A–D–G) [166] . The sound of the guzheng is bright, resonant, and penetrating, cutting through even the densest musical textures, making this instrument well-suited for performing works in a variety of styles.

As for playing technique, the guqin requires precise, subtle playing with the fingertips—its techniques include, among others, harmonics, fretted and open notes, and attention to tonal nuances plays a key role in playing this instrument. Of particular importance are the harmonics, which are produced by gently touching the string—the result is a spacious, mystical sound, relatively easy to

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[165] L. Dongsheng, **Illustrated Guide to* Chinese Musical *Instruments** [op. cit.], pp. 187–190.

[166] Ibid.

reproductions on the classical guitar. The guzheng, on the other hand, emphasizes greater finger flexibility—typical techniques include *tremolo, glissando*, plucking, and sliding the fingers along the strings, which gives its sound fluidity and expressive dynamics.

In terms of repertoire, guqin pieces are often inspired by classical poetry, historical legends, and philosophy, e.g., *Gao Shan Liu Shui* [*High Mountains and Flowing Water*] or *Ping Sha Luo Yan* [*Wild Goose on a Calm Beach*], which underscores the depth and contemplative nature of this instrument. In contrast, the guzheng's repertoire encompasses both classical poetry and folk melodies or opera music—one can find here both lyrical pieces and dynamic, expressive compositions[167] . Importantly, the timbre of the guqin—and especially the use of harmonics—is much closer to that of the classical guitar than the sound of the guzheng, which is why the characteristic effects of the guqin are easier to achieve on the guitar.

4.4. The Expansion of Sources of Inspiration in Chinese Guitar Music

In addition to emulating the sounds and techniques of traditional Chinese instruments in guitar compositions, one can draw inspiration from even broader areas of art. Music, like literature, painting, or calligraphy, is an important form of artistic expression—each possesses its own unique language for expressing emotions and thoughts. Therefore, qìyùn shēngdòng[168] ,as one of the most important Chinese aesthetic concepts, finds application in various fields of art, including music.

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[167] Ibid.

[168] The concept ***of qìyùn shēngdòng*** (气韵生动) – "vibrant resonance of the spirit" – constitutes a fundamental aesthetic category of Chinese painting theory, originating from the treatise *Gǔhuà pǐnlù* (古画品录) by the painter Xie He (5th–6th centuries). It is the first of the "six principles" (liù fǎ 六法) of Chinese painting. The term consists of *qì* (气) – inner life force, *yùn* (韵) – spiritual grace, and *shēngdòng* (生动) – vitality.
The principle posits that a work of art should be characterized by a living spirit and vital energy. In the context of transcultural music, it signifies the pursuit of an artistic ideal that combines technical mastery with spiritual expression.

Xie He, a painter from the Southern Dynasties period (420–589), established the concept

"the living resonance of the spirit" (*qìyùn shēngdòng*) as the guiding aesthetic principle and the highest artistic standard[169] . According to his theory, painting capable of expressing this spiritual resonance (*qìyùn*) evokes in the viewer a sense of harmony comparable to the effect of music.

A practical application of this concept is illustrated by the example of the Six Dynasties-period landscape painter[170] Zong Bing, who, while contemplating paintings of mountain landscapes, accompanied himself on the guqin, seeking to evoke the musical rhythm inherent in landscape painting[171] . This syncretic approach to the reception of a work of art testifies to a deep conviction regarding the complementarity of rhythmic structures present in both landscape painting and music, which points to the fundamental aesthetic unity of these two artistic forms within the Chinese cultural tradition.

The painting *Singing Poetry on the Back of a Donkey* by the Ming Dynasty painter Xu Wei gives the impression that the viewer can almost hear the rhythm of the donkey's hooves (illustration 25). This is the result of the artist's subtle conveyance of a musical sensation—what is referred to as the "rhythmic spirit" (*yùn*) hidden within the painting.

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[169] **Xie He** (谢赫, c. 479–502), **Guhua pinlu* (古画品录, "Catalogue of Ancient Paintings"). The concept *of *qiyun shengdong** constitutes the first of the six principles of painting (**liufa**, 六法) formulated by this theorist. See S. Bush, *Hsio-yen Shih, Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge [MA] 1985, pp. 15–24.

[170] **The Six Dynasties** (六朝, Liuchao, 222–589) – a period of political fragmentation encompassing the Wu, Eastern Jin, and the four Southern Dynasties.

[171] ***Zong Bing*** (宗炳), *Hua shanshui xu* (画山水序, *Preface to Landscape Painting*), ca. 440. See S. Bush, *Hsio-yen Shih…*, op. cit., pp. 35–38.



Illustration 25. Painting *Qilü Yinshi Tu* (骑驴吟诗图) [*Reciting Poetry on the Back of a Donkey*], Ming Dynasty period, by Xu Wei

During the Wei and Jin eras, people attached great importance to *qìyùn* (the energy and spirit of a work), and also valued the beauty of painting and calligraphy. Wang Xizhi's calligraphy was described as "light as flowing clouds, fierce as a startled dragon"[172] —and the term *qìyùn* used here refers precisely to this particular expression and spiritual emanation of the work (illustration 26).

[172] The above quote is an excerpt from a classic description of the calligraphy **of Wang Xizhi** (王羲之, 303–361), who is regarded as the "saint of calligraphy" (*shūshèng* 书圣) in the Chinese artistic tradition. **Chinese calligraphy** (*shūfǎ* 书法) is a unique form of the art of writing, having no equivalent in Western cultures. Unlike Western calligraphy, which focuses on the decorative aspect of writing, Chinese calligraphy constitutes an independent artistic discipline in which Chinese characters (hànzì 汉字) become a medium of aesthetic, spiritual, and philosophical expression. It is considered one of the traditional "Four Arts" (*sì yì* 四艺) alongside painting, poetry, and playing the qín. The description of Wang Xizhi as "floating like a cloud, soaring like a startled dragon" (*piāo ruò fúyún, jiǎo ruò jīnglóng*) comes from the *Jin Shu* (晋书, **Chronicles of the Jin Dynasty**). The metaphor of "floating clouds" (fúyún 浮云) refers to the lightness and natural flow of the brushstrokes, while the "startled dragon" (*jīnglóng* 惊龙) symbolizes the dynamic force and expressive power of the writing. This dualistic characteristic represents the harmony of opposing forces (*yīn-yáng* 阴阳) in the art of calligraphy. See F. Xuanling, 晋书 [*Chronicles of the Jin Dynasty*], [Zhonghua Book Company], Beijing 1974, p. 80.

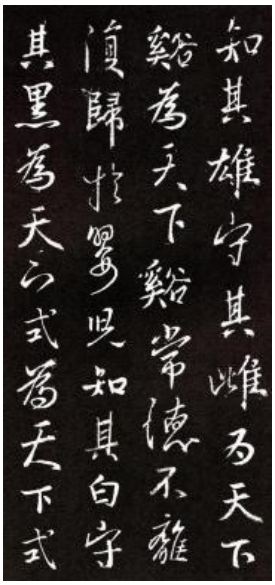


Illustration 26. Calligraphy by Wang Xizhi

During the late Tang Dynasty and the Five Dynasties period, the renowned landscape painter Li Jie provided a detailed explanation of the concept *of qìyùn* in her work **Notes on Brush Technique**. She pointed out that *qì* is the emanation of the artist's inspiration, which, through brushstrokes, captures the true essence of the depicted object without appearing artificial. *Yun*, on the other hand, means that while creating a painting, the artist should conceal their brushstrokes and bring out the essential characteristics of the depicted object without exposing their own technique. Thanks to this, the artist merges with the work, and attention focuses on the representational quality of the depicted motif. This
type of perfect expression stimulates the imagination of the viewers, allowing them to fully immerse themselves in the mysterious world of the painting. "气韵生动" (*qì yùn shēng dòng*, meaning "vitality and spiritual resonance") is an ideal in painting, thanks to which
The depicted objects come to life, rendered with great expressiveness and aesthetic appeal. This allows the viewer to sense the dynamic vitality and inner energy within the work.

"气" (*qì*) here refers to the spiritual essence that conveys emotions and inspiration, while "韵" (*yùn*) encompasses feelings, moods, and an aura of mystery. When "气韵" is fully realized, the viewer experiences a vibrant, pulsating energy on the canvas, as if life itself were dancing within the painting.

In summary: painting, calligraphy, and other art forms can also serve as a source of inspiration for musical composition on the guitar. Such inspirations foster collaboration between different arts and can bring new energy to the world of guitar music.

4.4.1. The "three primary colors" principle

In the visual arts, the three primary colors (red, yellow, blue) form the foundation of the color system—their various combinations allow for a wealth of shades and the creation of complex means of visual expression. In this work, the author applies this principle to guitar composition with Chinese elements, creating an original methodology: the principle of the three primary colors is translated into three key areas—techniques and timbres, scales/modality, and cultural imagery and symbols. These three fundamental elements, much like primary colors, can be freely combined by the composer as needed, allowing for the creation of guitar pieces with a distinctively Chinese flavor.

Chapter 5. Practical Applications

In this chapter, the author will present in detail her own experiences with the use of Chinese motifs in her compositions for classical guitar, covering inspirations, concepts, working methods, and the results achieved.

5.1. Inspiration and Creative Ideas

While searching for chamber music pieces featuring the classical guitar, the composer noticed that in most of them the guitar serves merely as an accompaniment, and in some pieces its sound is barely audible. To overcome this limitation, the composer decided to create a piece in which the guitar and other instruments would complement one another, so that the guitar would cease to be merely a simple accompanying tool and instead become the primary vehicle for emotion and musical theme. She chose the piano as the accompanying instrument because both the piano and the guitar are harmonic instruments, allowing them to create a more harmonious and balanced interaction in terms of harmony, timbre, and emotional expression. The piano's wide range and rich sound provide strong support for the guitar without overwhelming its melodic role, allowing the two instruments to remain complementary. As a result, the piece showcases both the melodic and rhythmic qualities of the guitar and the harmonic and tonal capabilities of the piano.

The piece was inspired by a Chinese landscape from the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912)—*Gāo Jiǎn Jiāngxiāng Chūxià Tú* (高简江乡初夏图) [*View of a Rural River in Early Summer*], by Gao Jian. The painting depicts a lake surrounded by three
mountains, the reflections of pine trees in rippling water, and drifting mist. Various shades of green blend in layers, and the subtle transitions between tones create a cohesive, harmonious whole, requiring no additional embellishments to perfectly capture the majesty and delicacy of nature. This deep, serene, and yet vibrant beauty of nature became a source of inspiration for the author of this dissertation—she sought to translate the mood and emotions of this

landscape into the language of music. Therefore, as the central theme, the author chose the traditional Chinese color “A Thousand Green Mountains” (“千山翠”). This is the name of a traditional Chinese color that is often used in poetic literature to describe the lush green of the mountains after

the rain, when the hills appear fresh, full of life, and shrouded in mist. This shade signifies a green that is deep yet unobtrusive, saturated yet not garish, evoking forested, multi-layered mountain ranges shrouded in mist (illustration 27).



Illustration 27. *Gāo Jiǎn Jiāngxiāng Chūxià Tú* (高简江乡初夏图) [*View of a Rural River in Early Summer*] by Gao Jian – a classic Chinese landscape painting from the Qing Dynasty
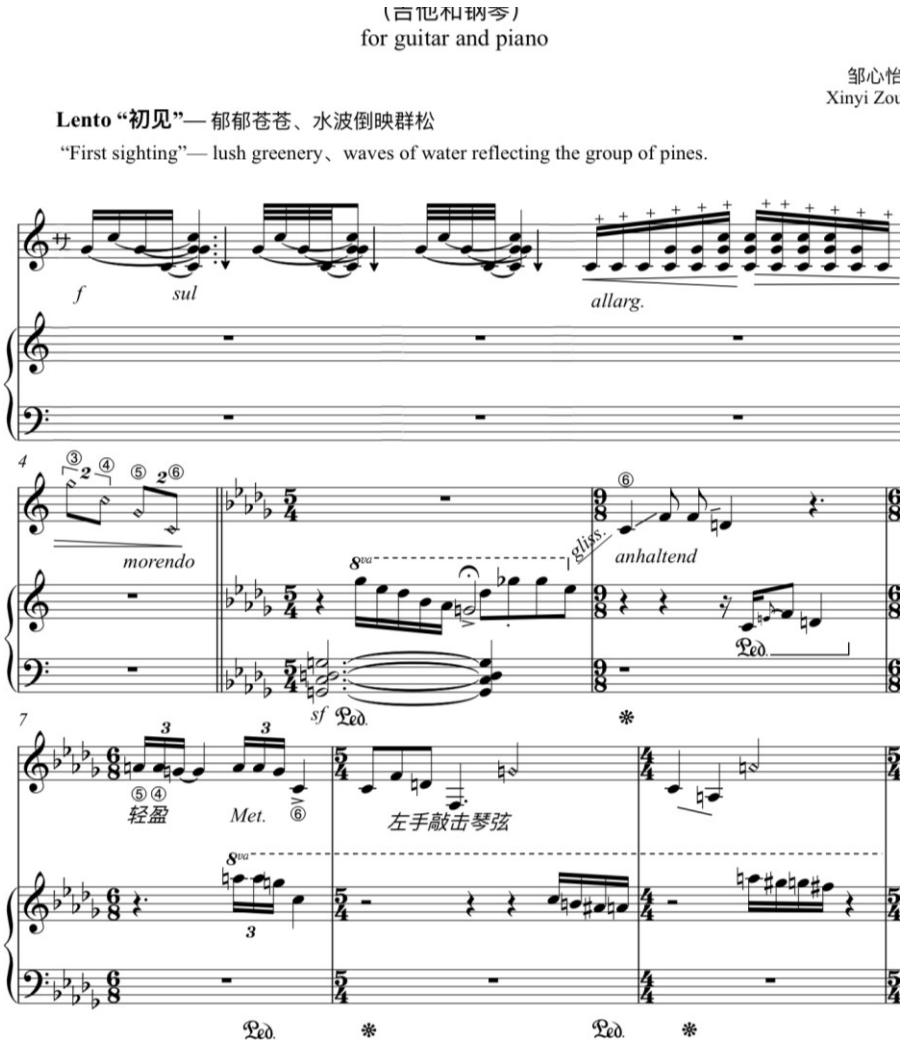
In composing this piece, the composer sought to reflect traditional Chinese culture, highlight the expressiveness of the guitar, and at the same time convey the beauty of the Chinese concept *of yi jing* (意境)—that is, the spiritual landscape and poetic atmosphere rooted in the aesthetics of Chinese culture.

5.2. Method and creative achievements

In composing this piece, the composer employed a three-part structure: Part A – *First Encounter*, Part B – *Listening Closely,* and Part C – *Viewing from Afar*. Each of these parts musically reflects the distinctive characteristics of Chinese landscape painting, depicting a transition from the distant to the near foreground and from the monumental to subtle details.
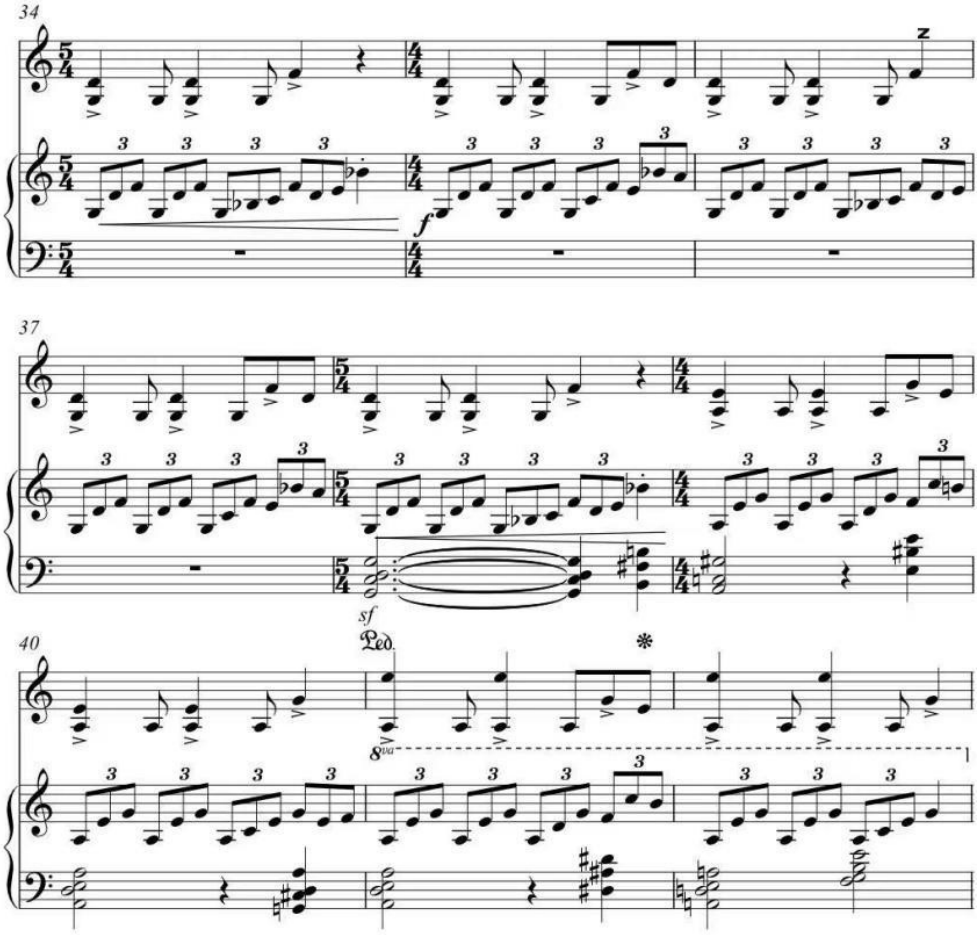
This piece was composed for classical guitar and piano, and its structure is divided into three parts: A, B, and C. During the creative process, the composer introduced elements drawn from traditional Chinese instruments such as the guqin and pipa, with the entire composition based on the *zhonglü* scale (仲吕调), characteristic of guqin music. Additionally, the piece employs the traditional Chinese rhythmic system *sanban* (散板)—a free rhythm denoted by the symbol 𝄴, which is characterized by the absence of a fixed meter and allows for expressive, natural phrasing of the melody in accordance with the aesthetics of Chinese music. This rhythmic element reinforces the contemplative nature of the piece and allows performers to flexibly shape the musical expression in the spirit of traditional Chinese interpretive practice.

Section A *First Encounter* – vast expanses of greenery across a thousand mountains stretch out before the eyes like a vast, natural landscape. As the gaze focuses on the details, one sees clouds of mist floating between the peaks, flowing lightly and airily among the hills. A breeze stirs the branches and leaves, carrying with it the refreshing scent of nature. The mountain ranges are immersed in dense greenery, pulsing with hues, and the water's surface glistens, reflecting the proud silhouettes of pine trees. The entire scene exudes tranquility and depth, giving the impression of entering a quiet paradise cut off from the world (musical example 39).



Musical Example 39. Xinyi Zou *Qian Shan Cui* (千山翠) [*Emerald of a Thousand Mountains*]. Bars 1–6

Section B *Listening attentively* – the gentle sounds of nature flow like a murmuring stream, in which blue waves full of life-giving energy shimmer. The subtle murmur of water intertwines with the melodious song of birds, creating a vivid soundscape: birds sing joyfully on the branches, the wind moves through the treetops, introducing a barely perceptible movement. Every drop of water, every breath of wind gives the listener the impression of being embraced by nature, experiencing the pulse of life and harmony (musical example 40).



Musical example 40. Xinyi Zou *Qian Shan Cui* (千山翠) [*Emerald of a Thousand Mountains*]. Bars 34–43

Part C: *View from Afar* – As the mist and clouds gradually disperse on the horizon, vast mountain ranges begin to emerge. An impressive, majestic landscape slowly unfolds before your eyes, and the mountains, like natural barriers, appear mighty and stately. At that moment, a light breeze sweeps by like a white arrow, and the clouds and mist once again shroud the mountains, instantly obscuring their majestic view. The magnificent scene abruptly ends, leaving behind an aura of mystery and deep contemplation, as if time had stopped for a moment.

In her creative approach, the composer placed particular emphasis on the use of Chinese thought and aesthetics, as well as on balancing the sound of the piano and the expression of the guitar in the instrumental texture. The composer ensured that, right from the opening of the piece, through references to the timbre of the guqin, she captured the atmosphere of mountain silence and tranquility, which lend the whole work a calm, contemplative character. The piano—thanks to its wide

range—introduces a sense of space and depth, reinforcing the impression of lightness and distance. In turn, the timbral references to the pipa serve as subtle embellishments in the piece: they add liveliness and freshness to the composition, evoking associations with the presence of animals in the natural world and their spontaneous energy.

In the elaborate conclusion of the piece, the composer drew inspiration from traditional Chinese percussion instruments—primarily the harmonics characteristic of the bianzhong (Chinese bells). As a result, the percussive effects achieved on the guitar are not limited solely to a rhythmic function: the use of the unique "one bell, two sounds" effect allows for the creation of specific harmonies and a rich sonic texture. Thus, the percussion enriches the entire composition with additional layers of depth, emphasizing the majesty of the stretching mountain ranges and intensifying the impression of their monumentality.

In the harmonic layer, the composer drew upon the concept of spatial composition found in Chinese landscape painting, building in the music a sense
"depth and emptiness" through appropriate changes in pitch and passages with a free tempo. This structure not only allows for contrast and development in the dimensions of time and space but also enhances the piece's internal tension and its subtle emotional expression. Thanks to the combination of diverse timbres and performance techniques, the composition as a whole retains its traditional Chinese character, while simultaneously serving as a preliminary exploration of the possibilities for integrating elements of Chinese culture into the development of contemporary guitar music.

Table 7. Musical form *of Qian Shan Cui* (千山翠) [*Emerald of a Thousand Mountains*] by Xinyi Zou

Form	Part / Title	Section	Measures	Meter / Characteristics	Elements of Chinese Culture	Cultural images and aesthetic content
Single-part title form	A *First* Meeting	Introduction	1–4	Based on the *zhonglü* scale (仲吕调), it uses 散板 in the Chinese rhythmic form (symbol 艹) interwoven with a regular rhythm	The aesthetics of the guqin: The effects of muted and harmonic sounds The pursuit of the "淡远" (delicate and distant) tone The guqin scale: *zhonglü* (仲吕调) The concept of landscape in mountain-and-water (*shanshui*) painting: The impression of "distant mountains like ink" (远山如黛) A visual sense of graduated depth and layering	The color aesthetic of "Thousand Mountains in Emerald" The lush green of the mountains after rain Layered mountain ranges in a light mist, barely visible Visual concepts of space "Mountains in silence, the sun shines long, steep walls reach the sky" A reflection of the classical Chinese philosophy "great beauty needs no words"
		A	5–14			
		B	15–26			
	B *Listening attentively* Listen carefully	C	27–51		Pipa playing technique with elements of guzheng Tremolo and combination with the guzheng "roll" (滚轮) The "pearls falling onto a jade platter" effect (珠落玉盘) The use of decorative techniques Simulation of nature sounds The sound of flowing water Birdsong and the scent of flowers	The aesthetics of "attentive listening" Transition from macro- to micro-perspective in the aesthetic experience The rhythm of life "The movement of grass in the wind," "the shimmering of water" Reflects the vitality and vitality of nature
		D	52–59			
		A'	15–26			
	C *Viewing from a distance* 远观	E	60–77		An exploration of the percussive effects of traditional Chinese music on the guitar; the conclusion, like a fleeting image of mountains, breaks off suddenly, reflecting the Chinese aesthetic of transience and the philosophy of "the interpenetration of emptiness and fullness"	"Distant View" depicts the majesty of mountains emerging and disappearing amidst the mist, reflecting the Chinese aesthetic of transience and the principle "the mutual interpenetration "interpenetration of emptiness and fullness" (虚实相生)

Chapter 6. Conclusions and Results of the Study

6.1. Key Findings

This study, focusing on the process of indigenization of the classical guitar in China, employed a multifaceted methodology encompassing literature review, musical analysis, interviews, surveys, and creative practice, leading to the following key conclusions:

Indigenization as a key path to development. The study demonstrated that the key to the continuous development of foreign instruments in a new cultural environment is the process of indigenization—that is, the adaptation of local characteristics to ultimately shape a musical style with distinct national traits. This theoretical framework provides essential theoretical foundations and practical guidance for the development of Chinese classical guitar music.

Structural imbalance among creative actors. The study reveals that the fundamental problem in the development of Chinese classical guitar music is a shortage of original compositions, the main cause of which is a structural imbalance among creative actors. Composers who are not guitarists often lack a full understanding of the instrument, due to its unique characteristics, resulting in works of uneven quality. In the course of in-depth research, the author discovered that many important documents on composition contain inaccuracies and erroneous descriptions regarding the execution of guitar playing techniques. This phenomenon explains why, in the past, prominent composers rarely wrote pieces for the guitar, while simultaneously highlighting the importance of guitarists' active involvement in original composition. Despite the growing number of guitarists with outstanding performance skills, the lack of a proportional number of performing guitarists with solid compositional training—resulting from shortcomings in creative education—limits the development of a high-quality repertoire. Therefore, encouraging guitarists to engage in independent composition and deepen their knowledge of the instrument currently represents the most direct and

effective way to enrich Chinese guitar music and support its sustainable development.

6.2. Theoretical Contribution

The study indicates that the key characteristics of Chinese music are not limited to the pentatonic scale, but that its modal system exhibits considerable diversity. The fundamental difference between traditional Chinese music and Western classical music manifests itself primarily in the shaping of individual notes, rather than at the level of scales, modes, or structures. This discovery opens up a new theoretical perspective for the indigenization of guitar music in China.

The study presents types of Chinese instruments and their potential for use in guitar music, particularly highlighting the “kinship” between the guitar and the Chinese pipa.

The “three primary colors” principle proposed in this study provides musicians outside of China with a simple framework for understanding the specificity of Chinese music, contributing to the incorporation of elements of traditional Chinese music into guitar composition and promoting the mutual coexistence of Chinese and Western music.

6.3. Practical Significance

The study demonstrates that the classical guitar holds immense potential for development, including in China. Its unique sound, rich expressiveness, and excellent compatibility with other instruments endow it with qualities that can be utilized in intercultural creativity. Chinese music’s emphasis on the individualization of instruments and the diversity of sounds fits perfectly with the contemporary trend of seeking innovative effects in music. Through creative practice, the author has verified the feasibility of the theoretical framework, confirming the real possibility of multifaceted development in guitar music and providing practical examples for future research and creative work.

6.4. Summary

This dissertation provides a comprehensive analysis of the perspectives and directions of development in contemporary Chinese guitar music, while also offering methodological guidelines derived from an analysis of the success model of classical Latin American guitar music. The research has shown that the classical guitar in China possesses significant artistic and cultural potential, and its development can be supported by the systematic implementation of the idea of indigenization, that is, the adaptation of guitar music to the context of Chinese musical culture.

This work demonstrates that through the deliberate use of characteristic elements of Chinese aesthetics, musical modes, and instrumental techniques, it is possible to create guitar music that both preserves its classical roots and explores local cultural values. Furthermore, the research indicates that an interdisciplinary and intercultural approach, incorporating the experiences and strategies of Latin American composers, can serve as a model of inspiration and a practical reference for Chinese guitarists and composers.

This analysis also reveals significant gaps in the structure of guitar education in China, highlighting the need for systematic support of compositional skills among performing guitarists. At the same time, it has been demonstrated that the practical application of the concept of indigenization in the works of contemporary Chinese composers is not only possible but also yields tangible artistic results, expanding the repertoire and bringing a new quality to guitar music.

As a result, this study provides both a theoretical foundation and practical guidance for the further development of contemporary Chinese guitar music, pointing to possible directions for the adaptation of local aesthetics and musical expression. Through systematic creative exploration and intercultural exchange, classical guitar music in China can not only develop its own national cultural identity but also bring new energy to the global guitar repertoire.

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