

# THE EVOLUTION OF CHINESE ETHNIC ELEMENT IN PIANO MUSIC FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY



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## Abstract

As a Western musical instrument, the piano came to China a hundred years ago. Its evolution, development, and integration in China have left deep imprints of Chinese ethnic elements. The purpose of this research was to study the evolution of ethnic elements in Chinese piano.

The study used document research as a type of research in descriptive research by reviewing literature from a cultural anthropology perspective, identity expressions, cross-cultural communication, and social functions. Based on descriptive analysis, this study reviewed the history of the development of ethnic elements in Chinese piano music, discussed the integration of ethnic elements and cosmopolitanism, and proposed the protection and inheritance of ethnic elements.

The results of the research found that the ethnic elements in Chinese piano music have evolved through different stages of development, and have become more and more closely integrated and innovative with the cosmopolitan world, cultural exchanges have become more and more extensive, and the traditional ethnic elements have been protected and inherited in Chinese music. Analyzing Chinese ethnic elements in piano music from an anthropological perspective helps to promote cross-cultural understanding and cultural preservation, and also enriches the understanding of musical diversity.

**Keywords:** Ethnic elements; Chinese piano; Cultural anthropology

## Introduction

Music is rooted in the soil of human culture, and the differences in human thinking patterns, habits of life, and so on, all contribute to the differences in the nature of musical culture. Anthropocentrism can help us understand more deeply the role, meaning, and evolution of music in different cultures. By comparing musical forms, musical styles, performance techniques, and the role of music in social and ritual

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activities in different cultures, Anthropologists can reveal the different ways in which different cultures view and use music. This helps us to understand how music shapes and reflects cultural identities, values, and social structures in different cultures. Anthropologists are often involved in studying and recording ethnomusicology. They may record musical performances, songs, dances, and traditional musical ceremonies in order to preserve and pass on cultural heritage and help communities maintain their unique musical traditions. Anthropocentrism studies how music is associated with social identities, including gender, class, ethnicity, religion, and age. Music can be used in society to express identity, power relations, and social status, and anthropologists can study these aspects to understand social structures and cultural dynamics. Music plays an important role in rituals and celebrations, whether they are religious ceremonies, weddings, funerals, or social celebrations. Human culturists can study the musical elements of these rituals to reveal their symbolic meanings and social functions. Globalization has allowed different musical styles and cultural elements to spread across national boundaries. Anthropologists can study the impact of global musical flows to understand how music adapts to different cultural contexts and generates new hybrid styles. Anthropologists can engage in cultural preservation efforts to help protect endangered musical traditions and to advocate for the rights of musicians to ensure that they can continue to transmit and perform their traditional music.

Piano as a classic Western instrument piano came to China, it landed in China, and development, derivation, and fusion became a brilliant pearl in the development of Chinese music. The ethnic elements in piano music can be regarded as a cultural symbol reflecting Chinese culture and history. These elements may include the melodies, modes, rhythms, and chord structures of traditional Chinese music, as well as the tonal characteristics of traditional Chinese instruments. These symbols convey the uniqueness of Chinese culture through music. Chinese piano composers and performers often express their cultural identity and recognition through music. They may draw on elements of traditional Chinese music in order to present the charm of Chinese culture in their piano works. Such expressions help to preserve and promote Chinese cultural traditions. In the era of globalization, the national elements in Chinese piano music also reflect the trend of cross-cultural exchange and integration. Chinese piano composers may fuse elements of Western and Chinese traditional music to create unique works that contain elements of Chinese culture and appeal to international audiences.

National elements in Chinese piano music may play an important role in social and cultural terms. For example, certain pieces may be played on national days or important celebrations to emphasize China's national identity and unity. Such music is symbolic of social rituals and celebrations. Anthropological research can help promote the preservation and transmission of traditional Chinese musical elements in piano music. Studying and documenting these elements, it can ensure that they will not be forgotten, and it can also encourage a new generation of musicians to incorporate them into modern piano music compositions.

## **Objectives**

To study the evolution of ethnic elements in Chinese piano.

## Material and Method

### Literature review

Xue Ke (2010) believes that music is rooted in the soil of human culture, and the differences in human thinking patterns and living habits have caused the essential differences in music culture, so there is a great deal of difference for Chinese students to learn Western piano music works. He draws on the viewpoint of cultural anthropology to think about the solution to this difference, and in piano teaching, students should be guided and trained appropriately to minimize the contradiction in piano performance brought about by cultural differences.

Referring to the disciplinary approach of anthropology, Hao Wei (2013) explored and contemplated the Chinese style of piano music by analyzing and comparing the cultural backgrounds of Chinese and Western music from the perspective of cultural anthropology of music.

Li Jing (2010) thought and researched the issue of style grasping in piano teaching from the perspective of cultural anthropology, adopting the research methodology and ideology of cultural anthropology to guide the practice of piano teaching.

Hsieh, J. C. (2019) examined how the sound of one place informs and produces the sound of another by focusing on Western art music as it is multiply negotiated by urban residents in Taipei, Taiwan. She looked at how various instantiations of piano playing in apartment buildings, on municipal garbage trucks and on the Taipei Mass Rail Transit System produce expectations for sonic space in a relational, rather than isolated, context. The results showed how cultural expectations for the sounding of one place are spatially and ontologically produced in relation to adjacent auditory environments throughout the city. Contributing to discussions for sound anthropology, she addressed how residents navigate diverse auditory environments and called for ethnographic attention to the movement between, not only within, sounded spaces.

Lu, Y. (2022) primarily based on theoretical studies of multicultural pedagogy, anthropology of music, and postmodern music education concepts, techniques combining qualitative and quantitative research are used. Eight types of design guidelines are then proposed according to different intelligence characteristics, according to intelligence characteristics, and the context of conversational design. Finally, based on the perspective of multicultural learning environments, this work will explore and provide insights into new concepts of piano teaching in multicultural learning environments in three areas: new piano teaching, new instruction, and new piano learning materials. The experimental results show that piano teaching activities based on multiple intelligence theory can stimulate students' interest in learning music, fully mobilize students' initiative in learning music, and improve the quality of music teaching.

Kovačević, I., & Ristivojević, M. (2016) studied Serbian ethnology and anthropology music was long viewed as part of Serbian traditional culture, so the interests of researchers focused on "traditional music". In the 1980's first papers analyzing music that went outside the traditional frameworks appeared (new folk music – turbo folk), and this tendency has increased in the last ten years.

Stajić, M. (2018) stated that the relationship between music and culture in the broadest sense is the central field of study of anthropology of music, a discipline with

a growing number of researchers, study programs, and published works in the world, within which the interpretation of music in itself, meaning the process of its creation, structure, sound analysis or aesthetic values, is not represented, rather emphasis is placed on studying the meaning that music creates and communicates in everyday life and its perception within a particular culture or globally. During the last thirty years, popular music has become an increasingly important subject of anthropological interest, and this tendency is, to some extent, also present in local scientific production. In the 1980s, the first studies of newly-formed folk music began in Yugoslavia, and a growing range of topics in contemporary Serbian anthropology of music, especially in the last decade of the twentieth century, includes both theoretical considerations, such as problematizing the classification of popular music by genres or the conceptualization of the term world music in the local context, as well as concrete studies of music festivals and performances and anthropological case studies within musical genres, such as rock and roll, new wave, hip-hop and Sevdalinka. With the idea of popularizing the study of popular music in the local anthropological community and opening this field to researchers who have not dealt with this topic thus far, as well as to exchange ideas and opinions among researchers from various related socio-humanistic disciplines who have long been studying music.

## Research Methodology

This study used analyze document research is a type of research in descriptive research by reviewing literature from a cultural anthropology perspective

### 1. Cultural anthropology

Cultural anthropology is a subfield of anthropology that focuses on the study of cultural phenomena, habits, beliefs, values, and social structures of different cultures and social groups. It aims to understand the diversity of human societies and cultures and to delve into the differences and commonalities between cultures through methods such as cultural comparison, cultural change, symbolic analysis, and cultural interpretation.

#### Cultural comparison

Cultural anthropology emphasizes the relativity of culture, which means that values and practices in different cultural contexts can be understood in relation to each other, but not necessarily compared or judged. This perspective helps to avoid the pitfalls of cultural superiority and emphasizes respect for and understanding of the uniqueness of different cultures.

#### Cultural change

Cultural anthropology is also concerned with how cultures evolve and change. Cultures can change over time and are influenced by both internal and external factors. Studying cultural change helps to understand the process of social change and cultural adaptation.

#### Symbolic analysis

Cultural anthropology emphasizes the importance of signs and symbols, including language, religious rituals, art, and symbolic behavior. These symbols help to convey the values and meanings of a culture.

#### Cultural interpretation

With globalization, cultural anthropology also focuses on the interaction between cultures and the transmission of culture. Globalization has led to

cross-cultural flows of cultural elements, which have generated new challenges and opportunities in terms of cultural change and cultural identity.

## **2. Research scope**

The scope of this study is the evolution history, protection, and inheritance of ethnic elements in Chinese piano music.

## **3. Research Tools**

The research tool used in this study is the literature review method.

## **Results**

The evolution of ethnic elements in Chinese piano music is a process rich in historical and cultural backgrounds and has gone through different stages:

### **Early Stage - Introduction of Western Classical Music**

In the early years of Chinese piano music, it was mainly influenced by Western classical music. At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, Chinese musicians began to study and perform European classical works, such as piano pieces by Beethoven, Mozart, and Chopin. At that time, Chinese musicians were mainly dedicated to the study and performance of Western music.

### **Early 20th Century - Awakening of National Consciousness**

With the changes in Chinese society and the awakening of national consciousness, musicians began to focus on Chinese traditional and folk music. Some composers began to incorporate Chinese national elements into their works, but the process was relatively slow. The Yellow River Piano Concerto (黄河钢琴协奏曲), written by Chinese composer Nie Er, is based on the Chinese folk song "Yellow River Cantata" and demonstrates the use of traditional Chinese musical elements in a piano concerto. Its music contains traditional Chinese melodic, chordal, and rhythmic elements, as well as strong patriotic feelings. The traditional Chinese song Jasmine Flower has been arranged for piano solo by many pianists. This piece is characterized by a Chinese national melody and demonstrates the beauty and romance of Chinese tea culture. The famous Mongolian song "Malan Flower Blossom" has been adapted by many Chinese composers into piano solo or piano concerto versions. It fully demonstrates the characteristics of Mongolian music, including open melodies and connection with nature. These pieces begin to incorporate the melodies, chords, and rhythms of traditional Chinese music in order to express the uniqueness of Chinese culture in piano music. These pieces not only enriched the diversity of piano music but also conveyed the beauty and emotion of Chinese culture.

### **Mid to Late 20th Century - Cultural Renaissance**

During the 1960s and 1970s Chinese music and art hit a low point and many traditional cultural elements were suppressed. However, after the reform and opening up, Chinese musicians and composers actively participated in the revival of Chinese music. They began to research and compose piano works based on traditional Chinese music, as well as using traditional melodies, rhythms, and harmonies in their compositions. The melody and lyrics of the Chinese revolutionary song "The Red Army Is Not Afraid of a Long March" have been adapted for the piano to express the emotions and recollections of China's revolutionary history. Sailing on the Sea

Depends on the Helmsman" has also been adapted for piano by a pianist. Tea Mountain Love Song is a traditional Chinese song that expresses the culture of tea and has been adapted for piano. It conveys the beauty and emotion of Chinese tea culture. The Shanxi folk song "Treading Mountain and River" has also been adapted for piano. It has a bright melody and is characterized by the music of northern China. These piano pieces are based on Chinese folk songs and fully demonstrate the diversity and deep cultural heritage of Chinese traditional music. They combine elements of traditional music with the timbre and technique of the piano to create delightful musical compositions that reflect the richness and colorfulness of Chinese culture.

### **21st Century - Globalization and Innovation**

As China opened up and globalized, Chinese piano music further enriched its national elements. Composers and pianists have begun to blend traditional Chinese music with Western musical elements to create a unique style of music that incorporates a wide range of styles, including pop, electronic, and jazz music with traditional Chinese melodies. Represented by Jay Chou, the pop king of the Chinese music industry, his music fuses and innovates some traditional and cultural elements. The influence of traditional Chinese music elements can be clearly shown in the melodies and arrangements of the songs. Many of Jay Chou's songs have musical elements of piano. Although the songs are usually dominated by modern pop music, sometimes some Chinese-style musical elements are added to the arrangements to create a unique musical effect. His song "Blue and White Porcelain" (青花瓷) is based on the theme of blue and white porcelain in traditional Chinese culture, with lyrics that incorporate elements of classical culture, such as poetic words and ancient stories. Its music and lyrics show Jay's unique creative style. Seven Miles Fragrance, the title track of Jay Chou's album of the same name, is inspired by classical Chinese culture, with lyrics filled with classical imagery. Its musical arrangement also combines traditional and modern elements. Rice Fragrance is a heartwarming song with lyrics about simple and precious moments in life. The song is led by piano accompaniment and is full of emotion, reflecting Jay's musical depth and emotional expression. Sunny Day is one of Jay's classic songs, with lyrics that explore the dreams of young people.

### **The Fusion of Ethnic Elements and Cosmopolitanism in Chinese Piano**

The national elements of Chinese piano music and its worldwide fusion reflect the evolution and development of Chinese music in the era of globalization. Chinese piano music has begun to fuse musical elements from all over the world. Some Chinese composers and pianists have fused elements of traditional Chinese music with Western musical styles, jazz, pop, and electronic music to create novel musical experiences and stunning musical effects. This fusion is not only reflected in the music but also the visual and stage performances, creating an audio-visual feast.

The fusion of Chinese piano music also reflects the Chinese people's thinking and expression of their cultural identity. Musicians try to find a balance in fusion, preserving the characteristics of traditional Chinese music while giving the musical works modern and international elements to show their cultural pride. A number of Chinese pianists and composers have risen to prominence on the international stage, winning the hearts of audiences around the globe with their musical works that incorporate elements of Chinese culture. These musicians have promoted the dissemination and recognition of Chinese music around the world and facilitated

cultural exchanges. Expression of Cultural Identity: The ethnic elements of Chinese piano music and the cosmopolitan fusion show that music is a powerful tool for cultural exchange. Through fusion, Chinese music is not only able to spread its own culture but also to participate in global musical innovation and dialog. This fusion provides music creators, performers, and listeners with a wider range of opportunities for creation and appreciation, and enriches the diversity of world music.

## Discussions

It is important to preserve and pass on the national elements of Chinese piano and to continue to develop them in modern music. Many musicians and scholars have devoted themselves to researching, recording, and passing on traditional Chinese music, including musical elements of traditional instruments such as the huqin, erhu, and pipa, which sometimes appear in piano music as well. Gangling San (广陵散) is an ancient Chinese zither piece that is often adapted by pianists for the piano. It has the characteristics of traditional Chinese music, including the imitation of running water, the simulation of huqin tones, and the melody of Chinese folk music. Horse Racing: A piano piece adapted from a Chinese Peking Opera, it is characterized by drama and passion. Its melody mimics the fast-paced dance of Peking Opera and is an interesting fusion of Chinese classical music and piano. Liang Zhu, a famous love story in Chinese classical music, has been adapted for piano by several composers. These piano versions are often romantic and lyrical, conveying the love story of Liang Shambu and Zhu Yingtai. Reflection of the Moon on Equant Spring is a piano adaptation of an erhu solo piece, known for its unique melody and emotion. The piano version retains some of the musical elements of the erhu to create a profound musical effect. Yangquan Sanjie is a piece of classical Chinese music that has been adapted for piano. It has a bright melody and strong Chinese cultural characteristics. These piano versions of Chinese classical music pieces combine traditional musical elements and piano musical techniques to present unique and enjoyable musical works. They provide piano players with opportunities to express Chinese cultural heritage and at the same time enrich the diversity of classical music.

There are many ways to protect and pass on the ethnic elements in Chinese music. Education and training in traditional Chinese music is emphasized in music education to foster young musicians' interest in and understanding of ethnic elements. Students can learn traditional Chinese musical instruments, such as the huqin, erhu, and pipa, as well as learn the basic theory and techniques of Chinese music. Conservatories may offer special courses and programs to promote the study and transmission of Chinese music. Music festivals and then encourage musicians to compose and perform piano works that incorporate ethnic elements. Such events can provide opportunities to present and publish these works and stimulate creative passion. Digital recordings of performances and performances of traditional Chinese music are made to ensure that these precious performances are not lost. Digitized music resources can be shared and distributed globally to promote Chinese music culture. Encourage collaboration between musicians, composers and ensembles to promote the fusion of traditional Chinese musical elements with other musical styles. Such cross-border cooperation can create new and creative musical works.

The government and cultural institutions provide funding and resources to support piano composers and performers in creating and performing musical works

that incorporate traditional Chinese elements. Cultural policies and regulations are in place to protect and support the heritage and development of traditional Chinese music. This includes incentives for musicians, financial support for music organizations, and copyright protection. International exchanges can facilitate the exchange and cooperation of Chinese traditional music on the international stage, which can help Chinese musical traditions to spread more widely, and at the same time allow Chinese musicians to draw inspiration from outside musical cultures.

Through these methods, the national elements of Chinese piano can be protected and inherited, while also being able to be integrated into modern music creation to meet the needs of different audiences and maintain its vitality and diversity. This will help preserve and pass on the uniqueness and richness of Chinese musical culture.

## Conclusion

Anthropology helps to better understand the social, cultural, and emotional significance of the ethnic elements of Chinese music in different cultural contexts, and how music is closely linked to human life, society, and identity. This paper explores the preservation and inheritance of traditional ethnic elements in Chinese piano music by examining the process of development and evolution of ethnic elements in different stages of Chinese piano music, and the integration and innovation of Chinese ethnic elements with cosmopolitanism. Analyzing Chinese ethnic elements in piano music from an anthropocentric perspective helps to promote cross-cultural understanding and cultural preservation, and also enriches the understanding of musical diversity.

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