

## A STUDY ON THE MUSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF ZHUANG-STYLE PIANO MUSIC IN CHINA

YU ZHAO<sup>1</sup>, Dr. CHUTIMA MANEEWATTANA<sup>2</sup> and Dr. REN XIULEI<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Performing Arts of Doctor of Philosophy program, Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Thailand.

Email: s62584947006@ssru.ac.th

<sup>2</sup> Asst.Prof. Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University,

Email: chutima.ma@ssru.ac.th

<sup>3</sup> Prof Faculty of Music, Yunnan Arts University China.

Email: 845298386@qq.com

Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Thailand

### Abstract

This research will concentrate on the evolution of Zhuang-style piano music in China, beginning with a work created by Jin Xiang in 1962 and continuing up to the current day. This year, according to the Chinese calendar, is the year 2022. Over the course of the past 60 years, music that was influenced by Chinese folk instruments has progressed through a variety of stages. There are just a handful of studies of music for Chinese-style piano that concentrate on a single piece or a series of pieces for comparison at this point in time. A literature review is used to describe the musical characteristics of Chinese Zhuang style piano works in this article. Among other approaches, ethnomusicology and music aesthetics are two of the methods that are utilized to do so.

**Keywords** Chinese style, musical characteristics, Zhuang piano pieces

### 1 Introduction

The vast history of Chinese culture and its profound cultural foundations constitute the basis for China's rapid economic development in modern times. China's socioeconomic position as well as its total national might are both on the rise as the twenty-first century gets underway. As people's material conditions improve, there is a growing need for cultural practices that are more spiritual in nature. As a result, the construction of cultural confidence at the national level in China has been elevated to the highest level of the national development strategy. Beginning in ancient times and continuing up to the present day, the development of Chinese culture has been influenced by a diverse variety of foreign civilizations, particularly those of ethnic minorities.

The use of Western instruments into piano compositions allows the spirit and musical language of China to be conveyed to the listener. Not only do these works meet the criteria for the growth of piano works, but they also fulfil the aesthetic requirements of the Chinese people. The Zhuang nationality, which is China's second-largest ethnic group, has developed its own extremely distinctive culture throughout the course of history. This culture cannot be compared to that of any other ethnic group. Utilizing Zhuang-style piano music, which is a subgenre of Chinese-style piano music, is one way that the traditional Zhuang music of

Guangxi may be kept alive and passed down to future generations. This is the situation with regard to a piece of music for Chinese piano.

This research, which spans a time period of 60 years, focuses on 15 Zhuang-style piano works that were written in China between 1962 and the current day. The time range of this research is 60 years. 1. the origin of the creative impulse; 2. an analysis of the musical characteristics that are shared by these fifteen works; and 3. a synopsis of the musical qualities that are shared. These three aspects are demonstrated right here in their entirety. The research method is research in the existing literature. These Zhuang piano works are examined from an ethnomusicological standpoint. Zhuang style piano compositions are analysed, categorised, and summarised from the perspective of music aesthetics. Zhuang-style piano music in China is performed on the piano, showcasing the music's unique charm and fascinating history (Qin Yezhuo, 2011). This is done to make it easier to share and disseminate pieces for Chinese piano.

## 1.1 Purpose

To learn more about Chinese Zhuang-style piano music's distinctive melodic features

## 1.2 Research Findings

1. Zhuang-style piano music in China is inspired by the country's culture and traditions.

This study focuses on fifteen Zhuang piano compositions that were released in China between 1962 and 2020. Zhuang-style piano works are included in a table below with information on the composers, titles, dates, and inspirations.

Author / Title Title	Publication Time	Source of Writing Motivation
“Jin Xiang <i>Liu Sanjie Suite</i> ”	1962	“Folklore”. “The story about “Liu Sanjie” in Zhuang legend”.
“Hai Peng <i>Fisherman’s Song on a Zhuang Mountain</i> ”	1970s	“Working life”. “Fishing, the most important event in Zhuang people’s working life”.
Lu Huabo <i>Donglan Bronze Drum Dance</i>	1977	“Celebrating festival”. “The author’s observation during the collection of folk songs in Donglan and Bama, Guangxi”.
Ni Hongjin <i>Zhuang Township Suite</i>	1978	“Ballad ditty”. “The four titled pieces originated from Zhuang ballads in Wuming, Debao, Long’an and

		Yongning, Guangxi”.
Lu Huabo <i>Song of Jianhe River</i>	1979	“Natural landscape”. “The headstream of Jianhe River in Bameng, Jingxi County, Guangxi”.
Wang Xiaoning <i>Illustrated Page of Western Mountain</i>	1980	“Historic site”. “The composition was inspired by the observation in Western Mountain, Guiping, Guangxi and the mourning in the ancient battlefield of Jintian”.
“Zhang Yunxuan <i>The Creativity of Two Parts of ‘Zhuang Style’</i> ”	1980	“Ballad ditty”. “This piece was composed for the purpose of teaching, by using the materials of Zhuang folk songs”.
Ding Ling <i>Dream of Bronze Drum</i>	1996	“Percussion instrument”. “The author visited the bronze drum exhibition hall of Guangxi Museum and looked up materials about bronze drums”.
Lu Jianye <i>Moluoza’s Aria</i>	2002	“Myth”. “Conceived by extracting some excerpts from the story about Moluoza in Zhuang myths and legends”.
Cai Shixian <i>Fantasia on the Theme of Liu Sanjie</i>	2002	““Folklore”. Liu Sanjie, an archetypal character in Zhuang legends”.
“Qiu Panyangyang Lu Jianye <i>Fantastic Tea Mountain</i> ”	2008	“Ballad ditty”. “Zhuang folk song element in Lingyun County, Guangxi, which described a fairyland-like ancient tea mountain in northwestern Guangxi”.
“Li Jia <i>Shuiyuan Cave</i> ”	2009	“Ballad ditty”, “a Zhuang folk song in Lingyun County, Guangxi, which portrayed the natural scenery of “Shuiyuan Cave”.
Qiu Yulan <i>Sunrise in the Valley</i>	2014	“Ballad ditty”, “the basic tone of Zhuang folk song “The Moon is Accompanied by Stars in the Sky”, Napo, Guangxi”.
“Dai Lixia <i>Merry Songs in Mountain Village</i> ”	2017	“Percussion instrument”. “The happy songs and laughter of Zhuang villages were described through a combination of bronze drum element and Zhuang musical style”.
Zhou Jianfeng <i>Capriccio on Zhuang Opera</i>	2020	“Opera dance”. “The stage step music of Guangxi Zhuang Opera based on the observation during the collection of folk songs”.

### 1.3 Summary

Compositions for piano in the Zhuang style have drawn inspiration from a wide range of cultural artefacts, including natural landscapes, historical places and celebrations of festivals, mythology, and everyday life. As the old Chinese proverb says: “The methods are universal; inspiration and resources must be gathered from ethnic groups.” The rich resources and emotional expression found in Zhuang music are a vital part of the region's musical heritage and provide endless inspiration for the region's composers (Li Wen, Lai Zhengbing, 2018).

## 2. Chinese Zhuang-style piano pieces have been studied for their musical characteristics.

### 2.1 The Liu Sanjie Suite's Musical Characteristics

To begin, Jin Xiang made his debut as a pianist with the Liu Sanjie Suite, which is a composition for the piano that combines elements of Zhuang-style folk tunes with a Western musical instrument like the piano. There are seven designated sections inside the song: the "Overture," "Dance Music," "Madrigal," "Matchmaker," "Antiphon," and "Anti-imprison" portions, and the "Ode" section. The piano art of the Zhuang folklore "Liu Sanjie," which illustrates the story and the most crucial episodes, including folk tones that incorporate Guangxi minority music into one cohesive whole.

### 2.2 Song of Fisherman on Zhuang Mountain Musical Characteristics

An attempt was made by the author to utilise the piano to sketch the visual contour and creative sense of items in Fisherman's Song on a Zhuang Mountain. This was referred to as a "art sketch." It's a 12-snatched song about young fishing crews travelling to the reservoir to throw their nets, singing in an antiphonal way while they're there, and coming back with a plentiful harvest when they get back.

### 2.3 Musical Characteristics of *Donglan Bronze Drum Dance*

Donglan Bronze Drum Dance features a wide variety of bronze drum beats and rhythms, and each drumbeat demonstrates a different Zhuang dance. The sonata is a type of musical composition. It showcases Zhuang-area indigenous music while fusing Chinese and western influences. For those who pay attention, the drumbeats may be felt more clearly (Xue Ke, 2015).

### 2.4 Zhuang Township Suite's Musical Characteristics

The singles in the Zhuang Township Suite detail the entire story of the Zhuang Township festival celebration, whilst the suite offers a more in-depth account of the events. Arpeggios are utilised in the song "The Ships Come from Afar" to provide a musical representation of the gurgling and drifting motion of the sea. The climax and polyrhythm are two of Gexu's

most impressive qualities. The serenity and stillness of Lullaby contributes to the joyous spirit of the event. Zhuang Township Suite is able to reach its climax in an exuberant and lingering environment because to the inclusion of an octave approach in the last piece, which is called Drinking Song. This octave approach kicks off the melodic splendour of the whole work (Mo Ruo, 2015).

### 2.5 Song of the Jianhe River: A Musical Analysis of Its Characteristics

The Song of Jianhe River is influenced by western music's sophisticated ternary structure, yet the harmony and tone are done in an ethnic way. The roaring Jianhe River is evoked by the opening accompanying motif of pentatonic arpeggios (Wei Liuchun, 2012). Even if the melody is the same for the repeated sections of the prelude, we may perceive a developing Jianhe River by changing them into an intensification set of octave and left-hand arpeggio via right-hand melody in order to observe the river growing. The piece's middle section is an expositional section with music that is a little quicker and more emotional. People on both banks of the Jianhe River appear to be dancing joyfully. Reproduction of change is what the recapitulation is all about. With this music topic, there are more grace notes and chords added to the overall music image than in the exposition.

### 2.6 Musical Characteristics of *Illustrated Page of Western Mountain*

It is a work for the piano that mixes music and art as a whole and is based on the traditions of Guangxi. In his work as a French impressionist, he is known for fusing aspects of ethnic flavouring with his works, which ultimately results in a musical style that is appealingly basic. It's (Chen Ying, 2016)

### 2.7 The Musical Characteristics of the 'Zhuang Style' Creativity of Two Parts

The artist creates two unique musical themes by beginning with a Yu-tone Zhuang folk song as the basis for his work. The first theme is characterized by a joyful exuberance, while the second theme is characterized by a calm and collected calm. Two diverse ideas that are connected in some way meld together as if they were questions or answers that might be interchanged. The spectator will get a totally fresh visual experience as a result of this (Wei Jijia, 2015).

### 2.8 Dream of the Bronze Drum possesses the following musical characteristics:

The musical material from the Lusheng dance is utilized; however, the composer does not adhere to the original style and feature of folk music. Instead, he forcefully inserts new tones in order to make the song seem both traditional and modern.

### 2.9 Musical Characteristics of *Moluoza's Aria*

As part of his attempts to unify the Zhuang people under his leadership, Moluoza, the creator of the Zhuang country and the progenitor of the Zhuang ethnic group, created a gigantic mother monument. This was done as part of his efforts to unite the Zhuang people. The paintings exhibit a picture of profound and substantial parental sentiments while maintaining a primitive and dignified aesthetic. The undulating melody, together with the

agitated and deep texture, thwarts and reveals Moluoza's paternal tendencies, despite the fact that he is the mythological character who gives his life to bring the cosmos into being.

#### 2.10 Musical Characteristics of *Fantasia on the Theme of Liu Sanjie*

By taking the genre of fantasia, the piano solo *Fantasia on the* Traditional folk tunes served as the inspiration for the development of the theme song for Liu Sanjie, which was based on the character. Liu Sanjie's "Singing Mountain Songs" is utilised to make six piano pieces that reflect the melody of the folk songs in an incisive and beautiful way. These compositions also disturb the conventional style of conveying emotions through the use of the human voice (Chen Haiyan, 2014).

#### 2.11 Musical Characteristics of *Fantastic Tea Mountain*

In *Fantastic Tea Mountain*, Zhuang traditional melodies from Lingyun County, Guangxi Province, are mixed with romantic and impressionist composition genres. The musical imagery of the work shifts between being abstract and being tangible throughout the course of this piece. Despite the fact that the nature of the composition shifts between being static and dynamic, it exhibits the work's dramatic fluctuations in discordant sound. Antiphonal styles of Guangxi folk songs have been modelled from Guangxi folk songs and utilised to inspire their creation. Several methods have been implemented in order to accomplish this objective, including the application of the major second interval, the utilisation of characteristic rhythmic patterns, and the creation of a fairytale setting on an old tea mountain inhabited by the minority. (Yu Li, 2014).

#### 2.12 Musical Characteristics of *Shuiyuan Cave*

Traditional Zhuang melodies are combined with romantic and impressionist composition styles from Lingyun County, Guangxi Province, to create *Fantastic Tea Mountain*. The musical imagery in this work oscillates between being abstract and tangible throughout its whole, and the composition's alternation between being static and dynamic helps to depict the abrupt shifts in discordant sound. Antiphonal form of Guangxi traditional songs in major second interval is mimicked by using unique rhythmic patterns to emulate the bronze drum's hammering mode. Another approach is to create a fantasy world on an ancient tea mountain populated by ethnic minorities. In the major second interval, Guangxi folk songs (Yu Li, 2014).

#### 2.13 Musical Characteristics of *Sunrise in the Valley*

In the scene titled "Sunrise in the Valley," the Zhuang valley is enveloped in a dense fog that is accompanied by a misty breath. At midnight, the mist on the river is dispelled, and at three in the morning, the land awakens from its slumber. At this phase, the contours of mountains and valleys start to become more discernible. The sounds of mountain music can be heard in the distance, along with the chirping of flying birds and the rustling of old trees that tower above the bubbling streams. The scene of a Zhuang village in the wee hours of the morning is really breathtaking. The creator of this collection of folk songs creates a sonic extravaganza that is a feast for the ears and transports readers into a captivating spiritual realm with his

work.

#### 2.14 Musical Characteristics of *Merry Songs in Mountain Village*

*Merry Songs in Mountain Village*, performed by a piano soloist, is an experimental attempt to include aspects of ethnic music into its composition. Musicians in Guangxi have long relied on the bronze drum to provide new musical materials and writing techniques for ethnic composition. This work explores new ways to use these elements, as well as new ways to think about how ethnic minorities in Guangxi can pass on their musical traditions while also advancing their own. The music of Guangxi's ethnic minorities is infused with "regionality," "artistry," "ethnicity," and "audibility" thanks to a creative usage of bronze drum's music elements (Dai Lixia, 2016).

#### 2.15 Musical Characteristics of *Capriccio on Zhuang Opera*

The song's inspiration comes from Guangxi Zhuang Opera's stage step music, which is distorted, compared, and expanded in the growth of music in order to find new ways of working together. In addition to using classic compositional methods, such as pentatonic tonal expansion and polytonality, the piece also has a contemporary aesthetic sensibility (Wei Huiling, 2016).

#### 2.16 Summary

Despite the fact that they are all pieces of piano music in the Zhuang style, each one has its own individual musical characteristics. This is demonstrated through the independent assessment of each of the fifteen pieces of Zhuang-style piano music. Every work has Zhuang-style piano music, which may easily be identified. Dr. Hao Huang and Dr. Tatiana Thibodeaux of Scripps College in the United States were inspired to investigate the ways in which different regional cultures affected the creative expressions of Chinese musicians when they were teaching piano in China (Hao Huang and Tatiana Thibodeaux, 2018).

### **3. Summary of Musical Characteristics of Zhuang-Style Piano Music in China**

Zhuang-style piano compositions are summarized in the following eight pieces following an individual study of the fifteen Zhuang-style piano works.

#### 3.1 Characteristics of Melody

Composing methods for melodies may be divided into two distinct categories: composition with melody and composition without it. The two most common approaches to composing that use melody are known as polyphony and homophony. Both Ni Hongjin's *Zhuang Township Suite's* second title tune, *Gexu*, and Zhang Yunxuan's *The Creativity of Two Parts of 'Zhuang Style'*, demonstrate Zhuang style polyphonic composing methods. Music in this manner was used for both of the compositions in this collection.

#### 3.2 Characteristics of Structure

In the context of this discussion, "structure" refers to both the grammatical structure and the

melodic structure of the piece. The rules of musical form mandate that beats give rise to bars that bars make up a musical vocabulary that vocabulary gives rise to phrases, that phrases give rise to periods, and that the interactions between the many types of periods give rise to the many different kinds of musical form. Zhuang music has a non-square structure between phrases, which means that the  $n$ th power of 2 is rarely used. While labouring in the fields, Zhuang people sing about the natural world around them. They use phrases with an irregular number of bars connected together to illustrate the independence of the Zhuang musical style and to express Zhuang people's careless and indolent attitude toward landowners and bureaucrats.

### 3.3 Characteristics of Mode

The Western major and minor scales, as well as the mediaeval modes, employ diatonic intervals, but the ethnic Chinese scales use pentatonic, hexatonic, and heptatonic intervals. By adding either one or two partial notes to the pentatonic mode 12356, it is possible to create the hexatonic and heptatonic modes (4, 7). The Zhuang nationality uses the scales 123, 5612, and 2356 rather frequently. The pentatonic scale 12356 is also a well-known one. The mode Zheng is used the most, followed by Gong and Yu, and Shang and Jiao are used much less frequently.

### 3.4 Characteristics of Harmony

The Zhuang nationality's emphasis on harmony is a distinctive component of Guangxi's musical tradition. In instrumental compositions, Zhuang music's distinctive harmony is used to portray its distinctive qualities and styles. A three-dimensional musical image is created by the horizontal melody, which has significant ethnic expressiveness, and the longitudinal harmony. Zhuang Township Suite by Ni Hongjin, for example, has a lasting appeal to the Zhuang-style because of the acoustic effect of characteristic harmonies (dual chord and unessential note, for example). The Zhuang nationality's multi-voiced folk songs may be clearly heard in all of these pieces.

### 3.5 Characteristics of Interval

Folk songs sometimes use a major second interval with Zhuang features. The Zhuang people, via the singing of folk singers, have created, selected, processed, and modified this interval notion over time. The major second is a discordant and unstable interval in western composition techniques that must be addressed in order to become a stable interval. The major second is regarded in Zhuang folk songs as a consonant and stable interval that does not require solving. In Guangxi instrumental compositions, in addition to the above-mentioned composition approaches, intervals like perfect fourth, perfect fifth, major third, and minor third are frequently employed to portray the Zhuang nationality's qualities.

### 3.6 Characteristics of Texture

Two types of textures are available: standard texture and tone clusters. Arpeggios, semi-decomposed chords, and block chords are among the most common textures (wavy, spiral, shaking, chasing and ornamental, etc.). Scales, arpeggios, and chunks are the most common

types of imitation tone clusters, and they are utilized in the introduction, connection, and conclusion of a piece.

### 3.7 Characteristics of Beat

Single, complex, mixed, dispersed, changeable, and upbeat are all types of beats. Many of the compositions in the Zhuang-style piano series incorporate varying rhythms to portray the dynamic and ever-changing customs of Zhuang hamlet.

### 3.8 Characteristics of Rhythmic Pattern

The three basic forms of rhythmic patterns are average, dot, and segmented patterns. The natural environment of Zhuang village is primarily shown in semiquavers, which have an average rhythmic pattern. Primitive melodies frequently have dot patterns, and when these patterns are incorporated into piano compositions, the original melody is generally preserved. Singing and dancing sequences, as well as scenes of labor, benefit from segmented patterns since they are more dynamic.

### 3.9 Summary

Composers who are influenced by the characteristics of Zhuang music are responsible for the development and promotion of Zhuang-style piano music. According to the findings of the research indicated earlier, the fifteen Zhuang-style piano compositions contain a variety of musical components, such as melody, structure, mode, harmony, interval, texture, beat, and rhythmic pattern, among other things. These melodic features, which symbolize maturity and accomplishment for the musical style, give Chinese-style piano music its ethnic group traits, making it recognizable as music from China. Traditional Chinese folk music and culture are being disseminated across China and the rest of the globe by means of the Zhuang-style piano, which is the most widely played musical instrument in the whole world (Qiao Jing, 2015).

## 4 Conclusion

Folk music from the Zhuang people has a rich history and a distinctive sound. Material culture, customs, folkways, and spiritual beliefs make up these heritages. As a result, the Zhuang people have a strong spiritual foundation on which to build their culture, which has given rise to a plethora of Zhuang musical compositions.

Symbolic of a country's soft power is its culture, which includes music. Ethnic music from the Zhuang people is steeped in their culture and has a strong sense of identity. Music has always been an important part of the Zhuang people's culture, and it has infiltrated every element of their daily lives. There are many different forms of Zhuang music, each with its own distinct qualities. It has been fertile ground for modern music's growth for thousands of years (Qiao Jing, 2015).

Zhuang-style piano compositions have been published freely over the past 60 years, but there are likely other works that haven't been made public. For the author's sake, he hopes that

those who have read this article will go on to compose and compose for future generations, incorporating more and more minority elements into their music in order to create a distinctive style, enrich China's Zhuang music culture, and pass it on to future generations.

#### References

- Chen Haiyan. (2014). Tasting the Ethnic Appeal of Fantasia on the Theme of Liu Sanjie, *Essays on Visual Film and Television Literature*, 93-95.
- Chen Ying. (2016). A Study on the Poeticization of Piano Sounds in Zhuang Folk Songs of Guangxi, *Popular Literature. Music Theory*, 160-161.
- Dai Lixia. (2016). The Innovative Use of Musical Elements of Bronze Drum: A Case Study of the Piano Solo Merry Songs in Mountain Village. *Music Creation*.
- Hao Huang and Tatiana Thibodeaux, Scripps College. (Spring 2018). Making Transcultural Connections through Teaching Piano in China. *Piano Journal*, 113.
- Li Wen, Lai Zhengbing. (2018). Research on Minority Materials of Piano Works. *Guizhou Ethnic Studies*.
- Mo Ruo. (2015). Research on the Music of Zhuang Township Suite, Master's thesis. *Musicology. Yunnan Art Institute*.
- Qiao Jing. (2015). Research on Zhuang-style Piano Works in Guangxi. Master's thesis. *Musicology. Qufu Normal University*.
- Qin Yezhuo (2011). A Study on the Characteristics of Guangxi Zhuang Nationality in Piano Works. Master's thesis. *Musicology. China Conservatory of Music*
- Wei Huiling. (2016). An Analysis of Hidden Musical Characteristics in Zhuang Folk Songs. *The Sound of the Yellow River*.
- Wei Jijia. (2015). On the Aesthetic Characteristics of Native Piano Works in Guangxi. *Art Space*.
- Wei Liuchun. (2012). "The Jianhe River is Brimming with Spring and Spoonrift Flies. The Ethnic Affection Lasts Forever: An Analysis of Lu Huabo's Piano Work "Song of Jianhe River". *Journal of Wuhan Conservatory of Music*.
- Xue Ke (2015). Analysis of Guangxi Piano Work "Donglan Bronze Drum Dance", *Journal of Jilin College of the Arts, Global Academia*.
- Yu Li. (2014). On the Rendering Method of Fantastic Tea Mountain, a Minority Piano Work in Guangxi, *Northern Music*.
- Zhang Jiefu. (2016). Exploration into the Application of Ethnic Elements in Guangxi Instrumental works. *Music Creation*.
- Zhao Yiming. (2010). Traditional Music of Guangxi Minorities in Piano Art. *Research on Folk Music of Ethnic Group*.