


The Application and Aesthetic Inheritance of Chinese National Instruments in Modern Popular Music Arrangements: A Case Study of “All Night of Drizzling Rain”

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Abstract: *Background:* Chinese national instruments have carried millennia of cultural heritage from Chinese civilization, yet they confront severe preservation challenges amid Western cultural penetration and the homogenization trend in modern popular music composition, as the dominance of Western instruments has disrupted their inheritance. *Purpose:* To explore effective pathways for the organic integration of Chinese national instruments with modern popular music, and to deconstruct the underlying logic of instrument arrangement and the mechanisms of aesthetic inheritance in fusion works. *Methods:* Taking Jay Chou’s “All Night of Drizzling Rain” as the core case, this research adopts literature review, case analysis, musical analysis, and in-depth exchanges with professionals, supplemented by the deconstruction of musical scores and arrangement files. *Results:* The integration has evolved through four stages—Enlightenment, Pioneering, Expansion, and Diversification—while facing issues like homogenized creation and commercial distortion. The case song achieves a seamless fusion of tradition and modernity via precise arrangement, adaptive tonal adjustments, and adherence to cultural core values. *Conclusion:* The creative philosophy of “preserving essence while seeking innovation” is central to successful fusion. Establishing precise arrangement logic and culture-oriented concepts provides a feasible model, offering valuable reference for the living transmission of Chinese national instruments.

Keywords: Chinese national instruments; Modern popular music; Fusion in arrangements; Aesthetic inheritance; “All Night of Drizzling Rain”

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Chinese national instruments embody the cultural DNA of millennia of Chinese civilization. Evolving through the artistic landscapes of successive dynasties, they have formed an artistic system uniquely imbued with Eastern aesthetic qualities. From the ritual music of bells and drums in the pre-Qin period to the refined melodies of string and wind instruments in the Ming and Qing dynasties, these instruments have consistently served as vital carriers of the Chinese cultural spirit. Many categories have endured uninterrupted transmission for millennia, accumulating profound artistic depth and national sentiment. However, since the late Qing Dynasty, influenced by Western cultural impact and societal transformation, the influence of Chinese culture gradually waned. Many traditional instruments faced the predicament of lost craftsmanship and interrupted transmission (Luo, 2012; Yang, 2016; Yue & Hu, 2018). After the founding of China, the government actively promoted the preservation and development of ethnic

culture, laying the groundwork for the revival of traditional instruments. However, amid the global wave of cultural integration and technological transformation, Western music has long dominated international cultural dissemination, leveraging the dissemination advantages of industrial civilization (Tang, 2016).

With accelerated globalization and widespread digital technology, modern popular music has become a central part of contemporary cultural life. Instrumental arrangements have long centered on electric and Western instruments, forming mature creative paradigms and aesthetic systems. Against this backdrop, how Chinese national instruments can transcend their conventional boundaries to achieve organic integration with modern popular music has become a pivotal issue concerning the inheritance and development of national musical culture. This fusion represents not only an innovative exploration of artistic forms but also a vital pathway for traditional culture to seek vitality in the contemporary context. (Lin, 2024; Fang, 2024)

In the practical exploration of integrating traditional instruments with popular music, Jay Chou, a leading figure in 21st-century Chinese popular music, has established himself as an industry benchmark through his continuous innovative practice. Following his debut in 2000 with the album *Jay*, he rapidly gained attention for his distinctive musical style. He graced the cover of the Asian edition of *Time* magazine in 2003 and has been named the World Music Awards' Best-Selling Asian Artist four times, demonstrating the global reach of his musical influence. As early as his debut album's track "Nanny," Jay began exploring the fusion of Eastern and Western elements. By incorporating ancient Chinese cultural motifs into his lyrics, he laid the groundwork for the integration of cross-cultural musical influences. His second album, *Fantasy*, featured the track "Nunchucks," which pioneered the fusion of rock-infused electric instrumentation with traditional Chinese instruments, such as the *erhu* and piano. This breakthrough shattered barriers between conventional folk instruments and popular music, marking his formal entry into the realm of integrating traditional instruments with modern pop. This innovation provided crucial inspiration for subsequent creators.

1.2 Research Purpose and Content

In the creative practice of integrating traditional instruments with popular music, the quality of works varies significantly. Some pieces merely superficially layer traditional elements without achieving a deep alignment between the instrument's characteristics and the musical style. Conversely, a select few outstanding works achieve seamless fusion through meticulous arrangement, showcasing unique artistic appeal. To explore effective pathways for integrating traditional instruments with popular music, this study examines the classic track "All Night of Drizzling Rain" from Jay Chou's 2010 album *Cross Era*. Featuring lyrics by Vincent Fang, composition by Jay Chou, and arrangement by Chung Hsing-min, the piece incorporates regionally distinctive instruments, including the *qudi* (Su flute, a traditional Chinese bamboo flute specialized for Kunqu opera accompaniment, with a lyrical and mellow tone) (Ruan, 2000), *xiao* (A vertical Chinese bamboo flute, renowned for its ethereal, deep, and resonant timbre, and ideal for playing lyrical and melodious melodies) (Wang & Yu, 2013), *guzheng* (Chinese zither, known for its layered sound expression, it boasts a wide range and beautiful timbre), *castanets* (Spanish clappers, a Western percussion instrument consisting of two wooden shells and producing a sharp rhythmic sound, should not be confused with similarly named traditional Chinese percussion instruments known as "xiangban", which differ significantly in structure and function) (Fang et al., 1974), *erhu* (a Chinese two-stringed fiddle, is one of the principal bowed string instruments in traditional Chinese music.), *small gongs* (a percussion instrument with a slightly convex center, delivering a bright and crisp tone) (Liu et al., 1975), *shu drums* (A traditional Han Chinese membranophone, primarily used for accompanying narrative drum music), and *Chinese bass drums* (A large traditional Chinese percussion instrument, characterized by its deep, powerful, and far-carrying resonance). These instruments, rich in regional

character, blend organically with Western instruments such as the nylon-string guitar, electric bass, drum set, and string section, as well as electronic instruments. This fusion constructs a musical expression that harmoniously combines traditional charm with modern vitality, making it a model work of East-West musical integration.

Taking "All Night of Drizzling Rain" as its subject, this paper adopts a micro-level perspective on musical composition to systematically analyze the arrangement logic, technical application, and tonal adjustment strategies for traditional instruments within the work. It also examines the fusion approach between traditional instruments and Western/electronic counterparts. Through a deconstructive analysis of musical score materials, combined with professional interpretations of instrumental techniques and tonal aesthetics, the study explores the work's innovative artistic expression and aesthetic value. This research aims to fill the gap in academia regarding in-depth deconstruction and analysis of outstanding fusion works. It provides a concrete, referenceable research sample for the fusion of traditional instruments with modern popular music, while offering theoretical references and practical guidance for the living inheritance and innovative development of Chinese national instruments. This contributes to the contemporary transmission and flourishing of traditional music culture.

1.3 Research Methods

To ensure depth and accuracy, this study employs multiple research methods: First, a literature review systematically synthesizes domestic and international research on defining popular music, preserving traditional instruments, and fusion composition to establish theoretical foundations. Second, case analysis: Taking "All Night of Drizzling Rain" as the core case study, meticulously dissecting the song's sheet music, audio materials, and arrangement project files to deeply analyze the orchestration structure, technique application, and timbre processing of national instruments; Third, in-depth exchanges with professionals in music composition, instrument performance, and music production to gather practical experience and expert insights on integrating traditional instruments with popular music; Fourth, musical analysis employing expertise in music aesthetics and composition theory to objectively evaluate the work's artistic expression and fusion effects across dimensions such as melody, harmony, rhythm, and timbre, revealing artistic principles in blending tradition and modernity.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Popular Music and Chinese National Instruments

Popular music occupies a musical category between folk music and art music. Though lacking clear boundaries, it exhibits distinct contemporaneity and communicability. On one hand, it draws on the accessibility of folk music; on the other, it incorporates the aesthetic qualities of art music, forming a mature paradigm of creation and dissemination within the contemporary cultural context. (Tao, 1998)

Amidst the "guofeng (Chinese-style music) craze," Chinese-style and ancient-style popular music have become research hotspots in the Chinese music scene. Related studies have explored diverse dimensions, including core aspects of fusion creation, case characteristics, and cultural value. Regarding creative essence, existing research has identified the core components of fusion music: melodically, they fuse pentatonic scales, opera vocal techniques, and regional folk song elements to construct distinctive Eastern rhythms; instrumentation innovatively combines traditional instruments like guqin, guzheng, and erhu with Western instruments and electronic effects, transcending conventional boundaries between traditional and modern instrumentation (Han, 2025; Hu, 2025). In case studies, scholars predominantly analyze representative musicians, such as Xu Song, dissecting multi-perspective creative features, including historical reflection and role immersion, within their works. They also examine practical

approaches integrating Chinese and Western music theory with unified stage performance, highlighting the exploratory value of individual creators in fusion domains (Zhang, 2023). Value interpretations generally affirm the multifaceted significance of such fusion music, serving as a vital vehicle for modernizing traditional cultural heritage. It expands the creative scope of popular music while reinforcing national cultural identity, offering a practical pathway for the international dissemination of Chinese music (Han, 2025; Hu, 2025).

While existing research covers creative processes, case studies, and value interpretations, it lacks in-depth analysis of core micro-practices in fusion composition—such as the arrangement logic of traditional instruments, technique adaptation, and timbre adjustment. Furthermore, comparative analyses of different fusion models (e.g., instrument combinations, stylistic adaptations) remain insufficient, hindering the development of a fusion theory that strikes a balance between universality and specificity.

2.2 Inheritance and Development of Chinese National Instruments

Although numerous scholars cannot agree on specific plans for the inheritance and development of Chinese national instruments, they all strive to concretize this abstract concept. Currently, various approaches to inheritance and development exist, based on different perspectives and objectives. These include: developing talent through higher education to achieve inheritance and development (Li, 2024; Zhuoga, 2014; Tu, 2021; Chen, 2023); integrating instruments into folk culture and tourism product development; promoting preservation through related product economies (Du, 2021; Wang, 2017; Bin, 2015); and incorporating national elements into contemporary music for revitalization (Wang, 2024; Meng & Pang, 2024; Zheng, 2024; Zhou, 2025). In summary, the inheritance and development of Chinese national instruments is not merely about preserving technical skills. It represents a dynamic process that achieves skill transmission, cultural dissemination, and contemporary revitalization through diverse pathways while upholding the instruments' cultural essence and artistic heritage. Its core lies in balancing tradition with modernity, ensuring national instruments maintain vitality within contemporary cultural contexts.

Academic circles have explored the pathways for preserving and developing Chinese traditional musical instruments from multiple perspectives, forming three representative research directions. First, the higher education transmission pathway emphasizes the necessity and feasibility of cultivating talent in performance, composition, and research through specialized university programs. This approach establishes a systematic transmission framework to provide long-term support for human resources in national instruments. Related findings primarily focus on designing and optimizing educational models (Li, 2024; Zhuo, 2014; Tu, 2021; Chen, 2023). Second, the integration of folk culture and tourism. Researchers propose incorporating traditional instruments into folk activities and tourism product development from a commercial empowerment perspective. This approach aims to utilize economic returns to support preservation and promote the dissemination of these instruments in consumer contexts. However, such studies often prioritize industrial development logic while paying insufficient attention to the instruments' artistic characteristics and cultural significance (Du, 2021; Wang, 2017; Bin, 2015). Finally, the integration approach through popular music has emerged as a recent research focus. This strand advocates combining national elements with popular music composition, leveraging the dissemination advantages of popular music to revitalize national instruments in contemporary contexts. Related findings predominantly concentrate on theoretical value arguments and trend analyses (Wang, 2024; Meng & Pang, 2024; Zheng, 2024; Zhou, 2025).

Existing research has established a multidimensional theoretical framework for the inheritance and development of traditional instruments. However, most studies remain at the macro level of theoretical exposition, emphasizing the necessity and value of

fusion while offering only superficial attention to specific creative practices. They fail to conduct in-depth analyses of key aspects in representative fusion works—such as instrumentation, technique application, and tonal adaptation—leading to a disconnect between theory and practice. Simultaneously, insufficient research exists on the aesthetic inheritance mechanisms of traditional instruments during fusion, overlooking the intrinsic connections between technique selection, timbre adjustment, and the transmission of cultural connotations.

3. Current Status of Chinese National Instruments in Modern Popular Music

3.1 Development History and Evolutionary Stages

The integration of Chinese national instruments with modern popular music is deeply intertwined with China's socio-cultural transformations and the localization of popular music, progressing through four distinct phases: Enlightenment, Pioneering, Expansion, and Diversification.

In the 1980s, China's economic system transitioned from a planned economy to a market economy (Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 1978). Modern popular music, already mature in the West, entered China during this period, profoundly impacting the public's traditional musical tastes. Prior to this, revolutionary songs and theatrical music dominated public musical consumption. However, artists like Teresa Teng and Peter Lo introduced entirely new musical forms that shattered the public's established perceptions of "songs," allowing popular music to rapidly take root and flourish in China. While this transformation enriched the public's musical choices, it also disrupted the transmission of Chinese traditional instruments: Western orchestras and electric bands gradually dominated performance venues. The younger generation perceived traditional instruments as "outdated" and "unfashionable," showing little interest in learning them and rejecting their use in popular music compositions. Traditional instruments thus faced a crisis of inheritance.

The theme song "Swift Sound of the Cloud Palace" from the 1986 television series *Journey to the West* (1986 version) became a groundbreaking fusion of traditional instruments and popular music. Composer Xu Jingqing innovatively combined traditional instruments, such as the guzheng, with electronic instruments and sound effects. He used electronic effects to simulate the fantastical sensation of "soaring through clouds and mist," while pairing Chinese drums with drum kits and timpani to form a percussion ensemble that amplified dramatic tension. Female vocal harmonies created an ethereal atmosphere. This composition achieved a cross-genre fusion of tradition and modernity while maintaining a foundation in traditional cultural narrative. This timeless piece remains resonant today. The 2024 hit Triple-A(AAA) game *Black Myth: Wukong* reimagined its theme song based on this classic, adding pipa (Chinese lute, a four-stringed plucked instrument with a pear-shaped body, known for its agile and vivid expressiveness) parts and upgrading it with multi-track layering, montage effects, and surround sound technology—further validating the contemporary relevance of this fusion paradigm (as shown in Figure 1).

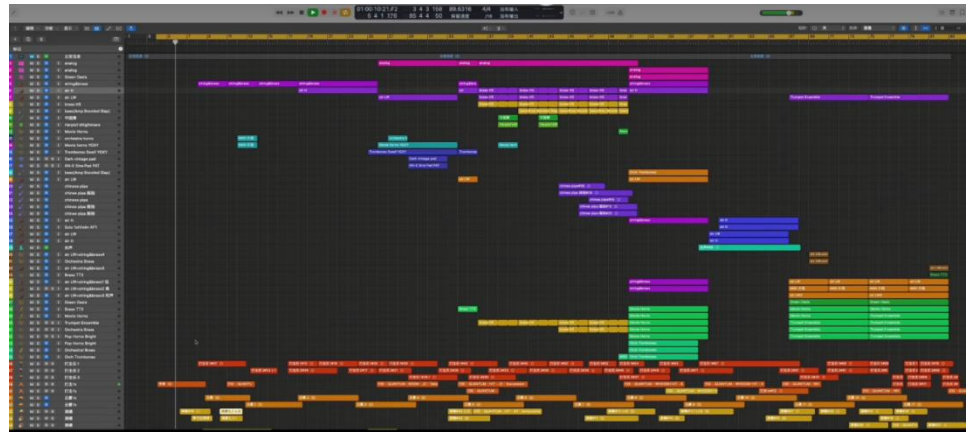


Figure 1: Screenshot of the production file for the adapted theme song "Swift Sound of the Cloud Palace" from "Black Myth: Wukong"

Source: Bilibili Network, Uploader: Jian Pan Shou Ting Ting

https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV14n14YVEo2/?spm_id_from=333.337.search-card.all.click&vd_source=c507c024ee014bab0d71e28915b5fafc

After entering the 21st century, fusion practices initially entered their pioneering phase (2000-2009), followed by an expansion into a growth phase (post-2010) with the rise of the "Chinese-style music craze." Musicians like Jay Chou became core pioneers during this early period: In 2000, his album *Jay* featured "Niangzi," which first incorporated ancient Chinese cultural elements into lyrics, setting the tone for cross-cultural fusion; In 2001, "Nunchucks" from *Fantasy* blended rock-infused electronic sounds with the erhu and piano, breaking down barriers between traditional instruments and popular music while offering crucial inspiration for subsequent creators. With the "national style craze," fusion entered its expansion phase, as more musicians experimented with integrating traditional instruments into their work, sparking a significant surge in creativity.

In recent years, fusion development has formally entered a phase of diversification. However, while exhibiting innovative characteristics, it also harbors numerous prominent issues, constituting the complex ecosystem of current fusion practices.

3.2 Characteristics and Concerns of Contemporary Fusion Development

1) Coexistence of Diverse Cross-Genre Exploration and Homogeneous Creation

The proliferation of online platforms has spurred diverse stylistic crossovers, giving rise to a surge of electronic dance music and "disco-style" ancient-themed songs. These works break free from traditional Chinese-style creative frameworks, centering on electronic music to pursue "high-energy" sounds. Lyrics increasingly adopt vernacular language, directly narrating historical facts or fictional ancient tales, moving away from excessive reliance on classical poetry imagery. However, homogenization in creation has become increasingly evident: lacking deep integration with the characteristics of traditional instruments and musical styles, most works merely employ superficial cross-genre arrangements. Melodies become formulaic, orchestration patterns repetitive, and unique artistic expression remains elusive. Some pieces, in their pursuit of "high-energy" effects, blindly pile on electronic sound effects and traditional instrumental elements, neglecting musical coherence and emotional logic, resulting in works that lack artistic impact.

2) Commercialization Accelerates While Artistic Value Imbalance Emerges

The commercialization of ancient-style music accelerates, with "breaking into the mainstream" becoming the core objective of creation and dissemination. Through diverse channels, such as commercial performances, anime conventions, and album

releases, ancient-style music has transitioned from subcultural circles into the public eye, forming a comprehensive commercial chain that objectively expands the reach of traditional instruments. However, this commercial wave has also distorted creative logic: capital intervention has reduced some works to mere “money-making tools.” Creators excessively pander to market traffic preferences, treating traditional instruments as mere “decorative elements” while neglecting their cultural significance and artistic qualities. The arrangement of traditional instruments no longer centers on musical aesthetics and cultural transmission. Instead, it prioritizes simple adaptation for sensational effect, leading to a decline in artistic value and undermining the fundamental goal of preserving these instruments.

3) *The intertwining of generalized creators, distorted labels, and marginalized instruments*

The surge in “cross-genre fusion” has attracted a flood of creators, resulting in the overuse of labels such as “ancient style” and “national style.” However, this has also led to a significant disparity in the professional competence of the creative community. Some practitioners lack a deep understanding of traditional culture, merely piling on keywords like “martial arts world” and “fair maidens” or pasting pseudo-opera elements to slap “ancient style” labels on works, resulting in superficial, poorly crafted creations. For instance, logically incoherent lyrics in certain songs—such as “My hair has turned white, my hair has turned white” or “Drinking wine by the eastern fence, emulating Tao Yuanming”—expose creators’ lack of theoretical grounding and their pure pursuit of traffic (Wang, 2020). In this process, the core value of Chinese national instruments has been severely marginalized: their functional and cultural significance in music is ignored, and they no longer serve as the core vehicle for musical expression, but merely become a traffic-driven symbol attached to the “guofeng” label. This obscures the essence of traditional instrument development and inheritance, and they are no longer a key consideration for audiences when selecting works.

4. Case Study and Theoretical Discussion

The core of achieving living inheritance for Chinese national instruments within the modern popular music context lies in preserving their traditional aesthetic essence through scientific arrangement techniques while forming organic resonance with contemporary musical logic. As a model of East-West fusion, “All Night of Drizzling Rain” maintains the artistic roots of traditional instruments while innovatively reinterpreting their aesthetics for contemporary expression. This chapter systematically analyzes the arrangement’s wisdom from two dimensions—overall compositional logic and individual instrument practices—revealing how traditional instrumental aesthetics are sustained and innovated within modern popular music.

4.1 Synergistic Realization of Overall Arrangement Logic and Aesthetic Inheritance

“All Night of Drizzling Rain” establishes its foundational framework in B-flat major and 4/4 time (as shown in Figure 2). employing a dual-switching structure of “modern pop—traditional folk.” Through layered instrumental interventions, dynamic tonal adaptation, and deep narrative-rhythm integration, it constructs a “spatiotemporal dialogue” aesthetic system. Its aesthetic inheritance transcends mere replication of tradition, achieving the modern transformation of three core beauties: traditional artistic conception, instrumental harmony, and emotional storytelling.

Figure 2: Guitar tablature and standard notation for the prelude of “All Night of Drizzling Rain”
Source: Created by the author(s)

1) Aesthetic Inheritance in Arrangement Structure

In terms of arrangement structure, the first 1 minute and 42 seconds center on the lyrical arpeggios of a nylon-string guitar, paired with R&B(Rhythm and Blues)-infused vocals, establishing a soft foundation for contemporary popular music. Instrumental arrangements deliberately minimize intricate ornamentation during this phase, reserving emotional space for the subsequent introduction of traditional elements. This creates a narrative rhythm of “modern context preparation—traditional element prominence.” The introduction of the shugu drum sample at 1:43 marks a pivotal aesthetic transition: As an accompaniment instrument in traditional narrative music, the sheng drum’s steady rim strikes inherently carry a “narrative-guiding” aesthetic. This breaks the monotony of popular music’s rhythmic patterns while subtly awakening listeners’ aesthetic memories of traditional instruments, signaling the shift in musical intent from “modern lyricism” to “classical storytelling.”

At 1:47, the synchronized introduction of the erhu and guzheng completes the core implementation of aesthetic inheritance: the erhu’s delicate melodies and the guzheng’s warm timbre directly replicate the “refined elegance and spirited grace” of traditional Chinese string and wind ensemble aesthetics. At the same time, the rhythmic accompaniment of the drum set and Chinese bass drum does not disrupt this conventional atmosphere. Instead, through the pulsating energy of modern percussion, it complements the “serene beauty” of string and wind music with the “dynamic beauty” of popular music, achieving the “modern revitalization of traditional artistic conception.” At 2:10, the ensemble of the qudi, xiao, and polyphonic erhu elevates the aesthetic inheritance to its climax: The flute’s lyrical rhythm draws from the refined aesthetics of southern Kunqu opera, while the xiao’s deep, ethereal tones preserve the traditional flute’s essence of “interplay between substance and void.” Arranged in octave counterpoint, they create an auditory experience akin to classical gardens’ “shifting vistas,” allowing listeners to perceive the core beauty of traditional instruments’ “scenic narrative” within a popular music framework.

2) Aesthetic Inheritance Through Multi-Instrument Fusion

The song transcends the superficial fusion model, which views “national instruments as mere embellishments.” Through an arrangement logic of “functional layering and tonal complementarity,” it inherits the aesthetic pursuit of “harmony without uniformity” characteristic of traditional Chinese instrumental music. The nylon-string guitar, as a Western instrument, consistently provides a “foundational backdrop” through its arpeggios and broken chords. Its gentle, unobtrusive tone offers a modern vehicle for the traditional beauty of national instruments. The electric bass and drum kit, through low-frequency support and rhythmic reinforcement, compensates for the narrow soundstage limitations of traditional Chinese instruments. This creates a harmonious symbiosis between the delicate beauty of string and wind ensembles and the multidimensional richness of modern popular music.

The dual-channel chorus arrangement in the bridge section (2:58) represents an innovative expression of aesthetic continuity: Jay Chou juxtaposes R&B pop vocal techniques with Peking Opera vocal projection. The former embodies the emotional logic of contemporary music, while the latter preserves the traditional vocal artistry of Peking Opera—characterized by precise diction and resonant resonance. Their dual-channel fusion achieves a “dialogue between ancient and modern sound aesthetics.” Simultaneously, the synchronized arpeggios of the guzheng and classical guitar uphold the traditional instrumental principle of “harmonic resonance.” The guzheng’s classical plucking rhythms complement the guitar’s modern harmonic logic, preserving the instrument’s “clear and melodious” traditional character while extending its aesthetic through cross-instrumental dialogue.

3) *Elevating Traditional Aesthetics Through Emotional Narrative Rhythm*

The song’s aesthetic evolution consistently serves its “intertwined time and space” narrative theme, achieving synchronized progression of emotion and beauty through rhythmic shifts in instrumental arrangement. The guitar arpeggios in the intro establish an initial “modern lyricism” aesthetic with a soothing tempo; The chorus builds tension with the introduction of electric bass and guitar arpeggios, gradually intensifying the rhythm to prepare for the entry of traditional instruments. During the interlude, the sequential progression of the erhu, qudi, and xiao, accented by national percussion, shifts the rhythm from serene to majestic, gradually revealing the “ceremonial beauty” inherent in traditional instruments. The climax features dual-hand strumming and polyphonic ensemble, pushing the rhythm to its peak. The expressive tension of traditional instruments perfectly aligns with the climactic logic of popular music, achieving a modern elevation of traditional aesthetics.

The song’s arrangement logic demonstrates that preserving the beauty of traditional instruments does not mean rigidly adhering to original forms. Instead, through “structural adaptation, tonal complementarity, and rhythmic synergy,” core aesthetic elements—traditional artistic conception, harmonic aesthetics, and emotional narrative—find new expressive vehicles within the context of modern popular music. This approach retains the cultural DNA of national instruments while infusing them with contemporary vitality.

4.2 Analysis of Arrangement Applications and Aesthetic Inheritance Across Chinese National Instruments

The traditional aesthetic cores of different national instruments vary. Through targeted arrangement techniques, “All Night of Drizzling Rain” maximizes the preservation of each instrument’s inherent aesthetic qualities while achieving their organic integration with modern popular music, enabling the inheritance of traditional beauty through precise adaptation.

1) *Erhu Section*

As a traditional Chinese bowed string instrument, the erhu possesses a delicate and distinctive timbre, excelling at mimicking the human voice. It is primarily a monophonic instrument; while specific, specialized double-string techniques can produce double notes, it typically functions as a monophonic melody instrument in folk music. The core of the erhu’s traditional beauty lies in its “delicate lyricism and human-like vocal quality,” as well as its role as the “emotional backbone” in folk ensembles. This aesthetic stems from the Chinese tradition of music’s pursuit of “emotion as the core” (as exemplified by erhu solos in Jiangnan silk and bamboo music, which excel in lyricism). The arrangement of “All Night of Drizzling Rain” achieves the inheritance and innovation of this aesthetic through three techniques.

First, precise scene positioning. The erhu appears only during interludes, avoiding vocal sections. This prevents auditory conflict between the solo instrument and vocals while making the erhu’s lyrical beauty the core link for “transitioning between scenes.”—The first half of the interlude features a monophonic erhu solo (see Figure 3), upholding the traditional aesthetic logic of “solo expression.” Its simple melody evokes an ancient, unadorned atmosphere, reawakening listeners’ recognition of the erhu’s classical beauty. The latter half employs multi-track layering to form a polyphonic ensemble (see Figure 4). Rather than disrupting its lyrical core, this thickening of vocal parts elevates the traditional “delicate beauty” to a “grand beauty,” aligning with popular music’s demand for emotional progression and achieving an expansion of aesthetic dimensions.

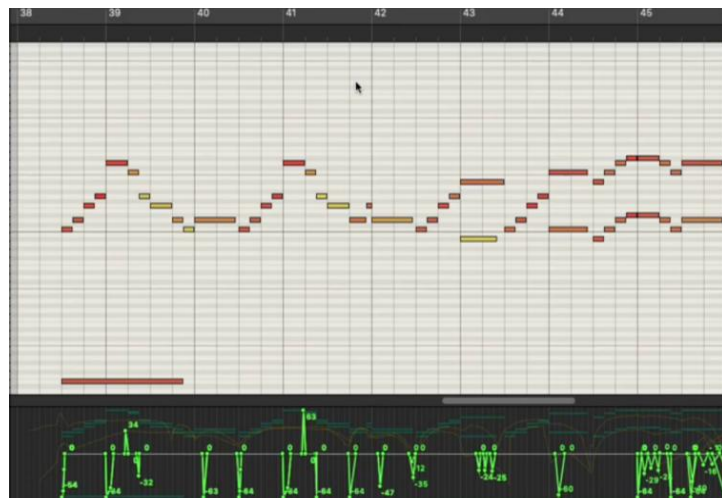


Figure 3: Screenshot of the first half of the erhu track in the interlude of “All Night of Drizzling Rain”



Figure 4: Screenshot of the project file for the second half of the erhu track in the interlude of “All Night of Drizzling Rain”

Source: Bilibili Network, Uploader: MiDi Jiang Zuo MiDi

https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1uK4y177zi/?spm_id_from=333.1391.0.0&p=4&vd_source=c507c024ee014ba b0d71e28915b5fafc

Second, tonal softening adjustments. While the traditional erhu features clear high notes and rich low notes, the erhu in this piece has been processed to sound more subdued with reduced dynamics. This adjustment does not diminish traditional aesthetics but stems from an “instrumental fusion” approach: The softened timbre complements the flute and xiao, preventing auditory fragmentation in the upper register while preserving the erhu’s “warm and restrained” lyrical essence—this very restraint being the core aesthetic that distinguishes the erhu from other bowed string instruments.

Through tonal adjustments in the arrangement, “traditional beauty adapts to modern fusion,” ensuring the erhu’s lyrical core remains unmasked within the ensemble. Instead, it becomes the pivotal anchor of the fusion’s aesthetic.

Third, the technique is simplified. The erhu in this piece avoids complex virtuosic displays, relying solely on a concise melody to convey emotion. This choice returns to the traditional aesthetic principle of the erhu: “conveying emotion through simplicity” (as exemplified by the traditional piece “Moon over Two Springs,” which uses a simple melody to express profound sentiment). The uncluttered melodic lines not only ease coordination with other instruments but also accentuate the erhu’s core beauty of “conveying emotion through sound,” ensuring the traditional instrument’s expressive logic endures within modern arrangements.

In summary, the erhu arrangement centers on “preserving its lyrical core while adapting to fusion contexts.” It inherits the instrument’s delicate, lyrical traditional beauty while effectively conveying this aesthetic within modern popular music through adjustments to context, timbre, and technique.

2) Guzheng Section

The guzheng, a traditional Chinese plucked string instrument with over 2,500 years of history, has evolved through millennia of refinement. While preserving its traditional charm, innovations in technique and materials have endowed it with a dynamic, expansive sound that can adapt to a wide range of musical styles. The traditional aesthetic of the guzheng is characterized by three dimensions: “primitive yet spirited plucking rhythms,” “layered multi-register expression,” and “the creation of evocative, immersive atmospheres.” Its techniques consistently revolve around conveying such atmospheres (e.g., the traditional piece “Fishermen’s Evening Song” uses tremolo to mimic rippling water, while finger fluttering embellishes the lively movement of fishing boats). Through precise alignment of technique and structure, “All Night of Drizzling Rain” ensures these three aesthetic dimensions are fully preserved in its modern arrangement.

From the perspective of technique inheritance, the application of tremolo, ornamental fingerwork, and continuous double-hand strumming all uphold the traditional aesthetic logic of the guzheng. The flower finger technique employs elastic wrist power to control note density (as shown in Figure 5), forming a “decorative-melody” combination structure. This perpetuates the traditional zither’s aesthetic quality of “revealing agility through flower fingers.” In the main verse, flower fingers connect phrases, creating a resonance between the zither’s agile beauty and the fluidity of pop vocal delivery, achieving harmony between traditional rhythm and modern melody. The tremolo technique employs steady wrist oscillation (as shown in Figure 6) to impart a string-like vibrato to single notes, aligning with the guzheng’s traditional use of tremolo to “unfold artistic conception.” The low-volume tremolo in the interlude lays a rustic foundation for the main melody while preserving the instrument’s inherent beauty of “restraint and subtlety.” The layered, ascending continuous strumming with both hands (as shown in Figure 7) showcases the guzheng’s traditional strength of “spanning multiple registers.” Through the gradual crescendo of timbre, it inherits the traditional instrumental aesthetic of “emotionally escalating layers,” becoming the key driver of the song’s climax. This allows the guzheng’s power and beauty to be unleashed within a modern context.



Figure 5: Screenshot of the finger-picking section in the guzheng track during the interlude of “All Night of Drizzling Rain”



Figure 6: Screenshot of the vibrato section in the guzheng track for the interlude of “All Night of Drizzling Rain”

Source: Bilibili Network, Uploader: MiDi Jiang Zuo MiDi

https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1uK4y177zi/?spm_id_from=333.1391.0.0&p=4&vd_source=c507c024ee014bab0d71e28915b5fafc

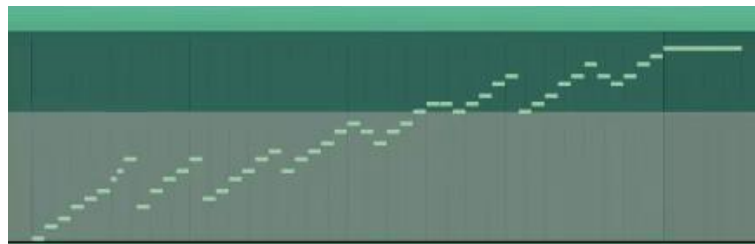


Figure 7: Screenshot of the project file showing the continuous double-hand strumming section of the interlude guzheng track in “All Night of Drizzling Rain”

Source: Bilibili Danmu Network, Uploader: Huaxue Jiang Azumi

[Azumihttps://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1rk4y1c7nz/?spm_id_from=333.1387.search.video_card.click&vd_source=c507c024ee014bab0d71e28915b5fafc](https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1rk4y1c7nz/?spm_id_from=333.1387.search.video_card.click&vd_source=c507c024ee014bab0d71e28915b5fafc)

In terms of tonal adaptation, the guzheng’s timbre dynamically adjusts with each section. The interlude features a muted, grainy timbre that aligns with the traditional rustic beauty of the guzheng while avoiding conflict with the erhu’s main melody. The verse sections employ a brighter, fuller single-note timbre that preserves the instrument’s traditional “clear and resonant” character. Through the penetrating power of grace notes following finger flutters, the guzheng’s presence stands out within the multi-instrument ensemble. The climax employs a glissando technique that transitions from soft to bright tones, upholding the traditional aesthetic principle of “adapting sound to emotion.” This approach enables tonal shifts to serve emotional expression, resulting in a modern transformation of conventional tonal aesthetics.

In summary, the zither arrangement demonstrates that preserving the beauty of traditional instruments does not require rigid adherence to a single timbre or technique. Instead, by “aligning techniques with tradition and adapting timbres to context,” the instrument’s inherent aesthetic qualities achieve layered expression in contemporary arrangements. This approach retains the guzheng’s rhythmic beauty and poetic charm while establishing it as a vital pillar in multi-instrument fusion.

3) Qudi and Xiao Sections

The xiao, also known as the dongxiao, is a single-reed, mouth-blown aerophone among Chinese national instruments. The qudi, also called “bandi,” “shidi,” or “zaixian di,” is an instrument used to accompany southern opera forms, such as Kunqu. As it flourished in Suzhou, it is also known as the “Sudi.” The qu di belongs to a category of bamboo flutes characterized by a lyrical tone. Another type, the bang di, is common in northern regions, featuring a sharp timbre and compact form. As traditional Chinese wind instruments, the qudi and xiao embody contrasting aesthetic cores: “lyrical elegance” and “ethereal depth.” Their combination perpetuates the traditional silk-and-bamboo music aesthetic logic of “complementary parts and synergistic ambiance” (as exemplified by flute-and-xiao duets in Jiangnan silk-and-bamboo music, often used to evoke refined scenes). The arrangement of “All Night of Drizzling Rain” achieves symbiotic coexistence of their traditional aesthetics in modern fusion through “precise instrument selection, structural synergy, and technique inheritance.”

First, the aesthetic integrity of instrument selection. The arranger chose the qu flute over the brighter-toned bang flute primarily to preserve the qu flute’s traditional “lyrical elegance”. As an accompaniment instrument for southern Kunqu opera, its warm timbre and flowing melodies inherently embody an “elegant and refined” aesthetic, perfectly aligning with the song’s “ancient-style narrative” theme. The xiao’s deep, ethereal timbre creates a “high-low resonance” with the qudi, upholding the traditional silk-and-bamboo ensemble principle of “high flute, low xiao, harmonious parts.” This pairing fundamentally preserves the purity of conventional wind-and-string instrument aesthetics.

Second, scene-building through structural intervention. The qudi and xiao only enter simultaneously after the drumbeat in the latter half of the interlude. This structural design replicates the traditional instrumental aesthetic of “gradual progression and unfolding scenes.” The erhu’s monophonic lead sets the rustic foundation. At the same time, the addition of flute and xiao instantly intensifies the sense of the scene—as if transporting listeners from modern times to a traditional theatrical stage. This effect of “scene transformation through instrumental intervention” inherits the traditional musical philosophy of “creating atmosphere through sound.” The qudi’s main melody outlines the scene’s core, while the xiao’s low frequencies fill sonic gaps. Together, they construct a traditional aesthetic that is “elegant without loneliness, rich without clutter,” allowing listeners to recreate the scenic beauty of traditional art through auditory experience.

Third, the continuity of traditional techniques. The flute’s techniques of overlapping notes, vibrato, and glissando (see Figures 8 and 9) are all core expressive methods of traditional flute music. The overlapping notes, with their “suppression before release,” preserve the aesthetic of “restrained expression” in flute music, avoiding bluntness or abruptness in the melody; The upward second glissando’s “warmth and fluidity” perpetuates the qudi’s “linear lyricism,” aligning with the rhythmic beauty of Kunqu opera singing. Vibrato embellishes sustained notes, endowing the qudi’s melodies with the traditional aesthetic of “stillness within motion,” preventing monotony and enhancing rhythmic vitality. The xiao’s stacked notes and vibrato techniques synchronize with the qudi, preserving the xiao’s “deep and restrained” beauty while achieving an aesthetic symbiosis where “forms differ, but spirits unite” through technical collaboration. This perpetuates the “harmonious beauty” of traditional wind ensemble playing.

accompaniment for various forms of drum storytelling, including the northern Chinese narrative art of “dagu shu.” The small gong, a variant of the gong, is named for its smaller surface. Its center is slightly convex, it lacks a suspension rope, and it produces a bright, crisp tone. In Peking Opera, it is also called the Jing small gong. Alongside the large gong, it is struck in rhythm with the performers’ movements during Peking Opera performances, serving to enhance the musical texture and emotional atmosphere. The traditional aesthetic of Chinese national percussion centers on “ceremonial solemnity, narrative function, and ornamental beauty.” Each instrument serves a distinct role: the Chinese bass drum amplifies grandeur in ceremonial settings, the story drum propels narrative progression, and the small gong adds emotional nuance. This aesthetic logic originates from the accompaniment principles of traditional opera’s “gong and drum script”—percussion does not exist independently but serves the overall artistic conception and emotional expression. The arrangement of “All Night of Drizzling Rain” preserves this traditional beauty within a modern rhythmic framework through “functional replication, tonal optimization, and technique simplification.”

Functionally, the arrangement of the shu drum, Chinese bass drum, and small gong fully preserves the traditional division of labor: the shu drum, struck along its rim with gradually increasing intensity, guides emotion and transitions scenes. Its first intervention at 1:43 signals a stylistic shift (as shown in Figure 10), and its subsequent appearances propel emotional progression, inheriting its role in traditional drum storytelling as a narrative connector. The Chinese bass drum follows the “strong-weak-medium-strong-weak” dynamic pattern in 4/4 time (as shown in Figure 11), its deep timbre complementing the low frequencies of the drum kit. This approach not only preserves its traditional ceremonial grandeur, as seen in its use during festive celebrations and opera battle scenes, but also transforms this solemnity into the sonic depth of contemporary popular music through integration with modern percussion—achieving a functional evolution of its aesthetic role. The small gong’s embellishing strikes at phrase endings (as shown in Figure 12) perpetuate the traditional opera aesthetic principle of “small gong as the finishing touch.” Though its high frequencies are reduced, its crisp timbre retains the embellishing beauty of “adding the finishing touch,” lending the overall rhythm greater layering and avoiding the monotony of modern percussion.



Figure 10: Screenshot of the shu drum track engineering file for “All Night of Drizzling Rain”

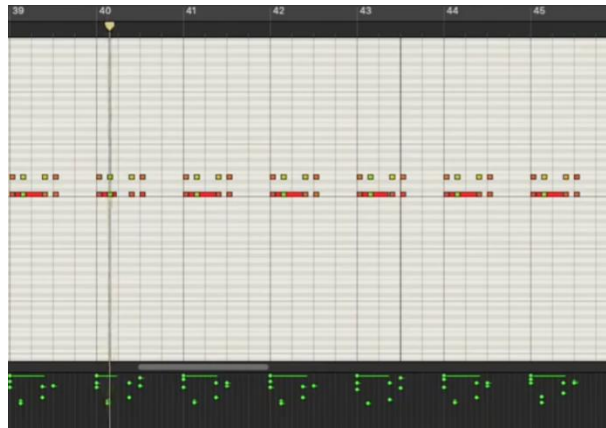


Figure 11: Screenshot of the Chinese bass drum track project file for “All Night of Drizzling Rain”
Source: Bilibili Network, Uploader: MiDi Jiang Zuo MiDi



Figure 12: Screenshot of the small gong track project file for “All Night of Drizzling Rain”
https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1uK4y177zi/?spm_id_from=333.1391.0.0&p=4&vd_source=c507c024ee014bab0d71e28915b5fafc

Regarding tonal optimization, the deepening of the Chinese bass drum, the reduction of high frequencies in the small gong, and the refinement of noise are not intended to diminish traditional aesthetics. Instead, these adjustments are based on the principle of “multi-instrument integration”: Traditional national percussion instruments possess highly distinctive timbres that, when unprocessed, can clash with Western percussion. The optimized timbres achieve greater clarity and coherence, preserving each instrument’s core sonic characteristics (the bass drum’s weightiness, the small gong’s crispness) while enabling harmonious coexistence with drum kits and electronic instruments. This allows the aesthetic appeal of traditional percussion to be conveyed distinctly within modern mixing contexts.

Technically, all national percussion employs simplified techniques (rim shots, head strikes, accent hits), upholding the traditional principle of “simplicity mastering complexity.” The essence of traditional “gong and drum manuals” lies in precise adaptation rather than virtuosic display. The straightforward techniques employed in this piece ensure percussion consistently serves the overall mood and artistic conception. This approach avoids overshadowing the main elements while highlighting its traditional aesthetic of “enhancing ritual significance and advancing narrative,” achieving a modern adaptation of traditional percussion aesthetics.

In summary, the arrangement of national percussion demonstrates that preserving the aesthetic essence of traditional percussion hinges on “functional integrity and tonal adaptation.” By replicating its traditional functional roles and optimizing timbres for contemporary fusion contexts, core aesthetics—rituality, narrative quality, and ornamental beauty—persist within the rhythmic framework of modern popular music.

To clearly present the core characteristics of various national instruments in “All Night of Drizzling Rain” regarding technique application, arrangement logic, and aesthetic inheritance, the key points discussed earlier for the erhu, guzheng, qudi, xiao, and national percussion are consolidated into Table 1 below.

Table 1: Core Information on Chinese National Instrument Arrangement Applications and Aesthetic Inheritance in “All Night of Drizzling Rain”

Instrument Type	Core Techniques	Arrangement Application	Aesthetic Heritage Manifestation
Erhu	Multi-track layering (converting monophonic to polyphonic); Tone softening adjustment (diminished dynamics, reduced transparency).	Appears only during the interlude; the first half features the solo melody instrument, while the latter half incorporates ensemble playing with the Chinese flute and xiao; it avoids vocal sections.	Core stylistic transition: multi-track layering builds momentum, softened timbre fosters harmony, preserving the delicate lyricism of bowed instruments.
Guzheng	Flower finger technique; scraping; continuous scraping with both hands (layered from mid-low to mid-range to mid-high to high); vibrato.	1) Interlude: Vibrato fingerpicking lays the foundation for the main melody; 2) Verse: Flower finger technique connects phrases; 3) Climax: Double-hand strumming propels emotional intensity.	Tone color adapts dynamically to each section; techniques align with emotion, highlighting the rhythmic beauty of traditional plucked instruments.
Qudi	Vibrato; Tremolo; Glissando (upward second).	Appears only in the latter half of the interlude; serves as the main melody instrument, responding in octaves with the xiao; accompanies polyphonic erhu and percussion ensemble.	Lyrical timbre echoes the charm of Kunqu opera; a strong rhythmic pulse enhances the narrative imagery of ancient tales.
Xiao	Repeated notes; vibrato.	Appears only in the latter half of the interlude; supplements the low-frequency melody of the qudi, entering simultaneously and playing in unison with it.	Complements the bass section, recreating the layered texture of silk-and-bamboo ensembles to evoke an ethereal, ancient ambiance.
Chinese National Percussion (Chinese bass drum, shu drum, small gong)	1) Shu drum: Strike the rim (gradually increasing in intensity); 2) Chinese bass drum: Struck on the drumhead (following the strong-weak pattern of 4/4 time); 3) Small Gong: Accent strikes at phrase endings; 4) Overall tonal optimization (reduce high frequencies, process noise).	1) Shu Drum: Introduced at 1:43 to drive emotional transition; 2) Chinese Bass Drum: Complements the drum kit bass during the interlude; 3) Small Gong: Adds embellishment at phrase endings in the latter half of the interlude.	Clean, appropriate timbre aligns with traditional opera percussion logic, reinforcing a ceremonial atmosphere and achieving a fusion of ancient and modern rhythms.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

5.1 Research Conclusion

This study examines the integration of Chinese national instruments into modern popular music arrangements and the preservation of aesthetic heritage. By analyzing the current application of traditional instruments in popular music and conducting an

in-depth deconstruction of the core case study “All Night of Drizzling Rain,” the following key conclusions are drawn:

First, the integration of Chinese national instruments with modern popular music has progressed through stages of enlightenment, initial development, and expansion, now entering a period of diversified growth. However, it simultaneously faces significant developmental challenges. Following the introduction of popular music to China in the 1980s, while greatly enriching public musical choices, it also disrupted the transmission of traditional instruments, leading to a decline in young audiences’ acceptance of them. Although pioneering works like “Swift Sound of the Cloud Palace” established the fusion genre and continue to exert profound influence, the current market still grapples with issues such as homogenized creativity, commercial distortion, and shallow cultural substance. Some works merely pile on national elements and archaic vocabulary while neglecting the essential characteristics and cultural core of traditional instruments, reducing “national style” to a fleeting trend and marginalizing the heritage value of national instruments.

Second, “All Night of Drizzling Rain” establishes a paradigm for integrating traditional instruments with modern popular music through its ingenious arrangement and aesthetic expression. The track employs a seamless “pop-style to national-style” transition structure, grounded in B-flat major and 4/4 time. Through layered collaboration between Western instruments, such as the nylon-string guitar, and national instruments like the qudi flute, xiao flute, guzheng zither, and erhu fiddle, it achieves a trans-temporal musical narrative. In instrumentation, each traditional instrument undergoes adaptive adjustments based on its inherent characteristics: The erhu employs multi-track layering and softened timbre to avoid clashing with vocals, serving as the core bridge for stylistic transitions. The guzheng employs techniques such as finger fluttering, tremolo, and double-hand strumming to provide groundwork, transitions, and emotional propulsion across different sections. The qudi and xiao flutes infuse Eastern charm through octave-echoing melodies, while national percussion refines the soundscape and emotional layers with simplified techniques and optimized timbres. These approaches preserve the historical resonance of national instruments while achieving harmonious resonance with Western and electronic instruments, validating the fusion logic that “precision adaptation, not complex techniques, is paramount.”

Thirdly, the successful fusion of traditional instruments with popular music fundamentally stems from the creative philosophy of “honoring tradition while pursuing innovation.” The practice of “All Night of Drizzling Rain” demonstrates that fusion is not a simple collage of elements, but rather innovation grounded in preserving the cultural essence and artistic principles of traditional instruments while integrating modern musical logic: In technique selection, it abandons high-difficulty virtuosity, focusing instead on aligning the core expressive power of instruments with the song’s emotional core; In timbre processing, moderate adjustments are made according to the overall style to achieve organic integration of different instrumental parts; in structural design, the incorporation of traditional instruments is deeply tied to the narrative rhythm of the music, allowing traditional elements to blend into the modern pop framework naturally. This creative model, “preserving the soul of tradition while creating the form of the era,” retains the artistic essence of tradition while endowing the work with new vitality for the times, providing an effective path for the living inheritance of traditional instruments.

5.2 Implications for Inheritance Strategies

Based on research findings and current trends in fusion development, the following strategic insights are proposed for the inheritance and innovation of Chinese national instruments:

First, establish a precision-matched arrangement logic to strengthen the intrinsic compatibility between national instruments and musical styles. Creators should have a deep understanding of the tonal characteristics, technical limitations, and cultural connotations of national instruments, avoiding the indiscriminate combination of elements. Drawing inspiration from the layered arrangement approach in “All Night of Drizzling Rain,” national instruments should be assigned clear functional roles based on the song's emotional expression and narrative requirements—whether as the carrier of the main melody, providing groundwork and transitions, or reinforcing rhythmic layers. Through techniques such as simplifying playing methods, adjusting timbres, and multi-track layering, national instruments can achieve complementary timbres and rhythmic coordination with Western instruments and electronic instruments. This allows traditional charm and modern vitality to blend naturally.

Second, uphold the creative principle of preserving the cultural core, resisting commercial distortion and superficial expression. Faced with market trends, creators must deeply cultivate traditional culture, uncovering the historical depth and spiritual essence behind national instruments, and weaving cultural understanding into every arrangement detail. For instance, the lyrical quality of the qudi flute linked to southern opera traditions, or the historical imagery and sonic tension of the Chinese drum, can serve as cultural anchors for composition. Simultaneously, avoid forced associations with “ancient-style” labels and reject illogical collages of elements. Through solid cultural awareness and artistic expression, traditional instruments can become vessels for conveying cultural values, reshaping audiences’ perceptions of them.

Third, expand multi-dimensional dissemination pathways to enhance the contemporary influence of traditional instruments. On one hand, leverage digital technology to broaden the reach of outstanding fusion works—such as launching “Traditional Instrument Fusion” playlists on mainstream platforms like Spotify and NetEase Cloud Music, releasing instrument arrangement analysis videos on short-form platforms like TikTok and Bilibili, and collaborating on game soundtracks like *Black Myth: Wukong*. On the other hand, promote cross-sector collaborations between fusion creation and fields like education and cultural tourism. Integrate outstanding fusion works into music education curricula, and enhance public appreciation for traditional instruments through live performances and hands-on instrument experiences, thereby cultivating potential inheritors and audiences.

Fourth, establish a practice-oriented research system to provide theoretical support for the creation of fusion. Current academic research on integrating national elements into popular music often focuses on theoretical analysis while lacking in-depth deconstruction of specific works. Future efforts should focus on strengthening case studies, examining the logic of arrangement, technique application, and timbre processing in outstanding fusion pieces to distill replicable and scalable fusion principles. Simultaneously, cross-disciplinary collaboration between creators and researchers should be encouraged to translate practical experience into theoretical outcomes, providing clear guidance for subsequent creations and bridging the research gap between theory and practice.

5.3 Limitations and Prospects

While this study has yielded specific results, it still has the following limitations: First, the case selection is relatively limited, focusing solely on “All Night of Drizzling Rain” as the core subject of analysis. It fails to encompass fusion works of different styles, regions, and eras, leaving the universality of its conclusions to be further validated. Second, the research perspective focused on instrumental arrangement and technical analysis, neglecting dimensions such as audience aesthetic feedback and market dissemination effects, resulting in an incomplete exploration of the social impact and transmission effectiveness of fusion works. Third, the analysis of technical details regarding the adjustment of national instrument timbres was relatively macro-level,

lacking in-depth investigation into post-production processes such as recording and mixing.

To address these limitations, future research may advance in the following directions: First, expand the case scope by selecting representative works across diverse styles (e.g., folk, rock, electronic), regions (e.g., national instrument fusion), and creative eras for comparative analysis, thereby identifying varied fusion patterns and principles. Second, broaden research dimensions by incorporating audience surveys and market data analysis to examine the practical impact of fusion works on traditional instrument preservation and assess acceptance differences across demographics. Third, deepen technical research by dissecting recording techniques, tonal processing parameters, and multitrack mixing logic through music production engineering files, offering creators actionable references. Fourth, focus on new opportunities in the digital era by exploring the application of emerging technologies, such as AI-assisted composition and virtual performances, in integrating traditional instruments with popular music. This will uncover novel pathways for preserving traditional instruments and foster the sustained prosperity and development of national music culture in the contemporary era.

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