

Reimagining Debussy's Arabesque No. 1: A Cross-Cultural Exploration with the Guzheng

Wang Yuchen
Ningbo Childhood Education College
P20212003002@siswa.upsi.edu.my

Zaharul Lailiddin bin Saidon*
University Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Perak Darul Ridzuan, 35900 Tanjung Malim,
Malaysia
zaharul@fmsp.upsi.edu.my

Herry Rizal Djahwasi
University Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Perak Darul Ridzuan, 35900 Tanjung Malim,
Malaysia
erry@fmsp.upsi.edu.my

Abstract: One area that has not been extensively investigated in academia regards the Chinese stringed musical instrument called Guzheng as a vehicle for Western classical performances. This study addresses that gap by integrating multiple theoretical perspectives and organological insights on the Guzheng. The present study introduces new concepts for merging the Guzheng's traditional structures with Western compositional frameworks, focusing on a Guzheng ensemble adaptation of Debussy's Arabesque No. 1. The methodological approach of this study conducted based on score analysis which refer to the iterative adaptation process. The score analysis serves as the foundation for comprehending Debussy's compositional intentions, harmonic language, and structural elements in Arabesque No. 1. The findings reveal that using a Guzheng ensemble to adapt Debussy's work challenges traditional Western-centric representations of exotic instruments, promoting a cross-cultural reinterpretation that respects both Western and Chinese musical traditions. This study contributes to both Western classical repertoire and Chinese musical practice by illustrating how cross-cultural adaptations can enrich artistic narratives and inspire future innovations. Despite its contributions, this study acknowledges limitation. The focus on a single composition (Debussy's Arabesque No. 1) necessarily constrains the generalizability of findings to other Western classical works with different structural, harmonic, or textural characteristics.

Keywords: Guzheng, Cross-Cultural Performance, Chinese Traditional Music instrument, Debussy, Arabesque No. 1

1. INTRODUCTION

Recently, traditional instruments have increasingly been included and adapted into Western classical music. This transcription necessitates several

steps, including the transcription of musical notation, adaptation of instruments, and, critically, interpretation by the performers (Everett & Lau, 2004). This situation raises important questions. Does not a traditional Chinese musical instrument, in the case the *Guzheng*, possess inherent aesthetic value? Will it compromise its intrinsic aesthetic worth when it must adapt to Western classical music? When compelled to adapt and "transform" to accommodate the structural and stylistic conventions of Western classical compositions, there is a legitimate risk that the *Guzheng*'s intrinsic artistic identity and expressive capacities will become compromised or diluted. The *guzheng*'s unique timbres, playing techniques, and underlying emotive sensibilities may become overshadowed or marginalized as it is forced to conform to the harmonic frameworks, rhythmic patterns, and performance practices of the Western classical canon. This phenomenon arguably represents a form of cultural appropriation, wherein the distinctive aesthetic properties of the *Guzheng* are subjugated to serve the needs of a foreign musical tradition. The very essence and artistic *raison d'être* of the instrument – its capacity to convey the philosophical ideals and cultural ethos of the Chinese musical heritage – may become irrevocably diminished in the process. A number of scholars defined this phenomenon as Post-colonial transformation (Ashcroft et al., 2013) or Post-colonial culture (Patke, 2006). Proponents of this cross-cultural musical integration must grapple with the fundamental question of whether the potential benefits of artistic synthesis can truly outweigh the risk of compromising the *guzheng*'s inherent aesthetic value and cultural significance. Preserving the integrity and honoring the traditional modes of expression of the instrument must be given careful thought lest the *Guzheng* become only a decorative accent inside an foreign musical environment. Having been formed over two millennia ago, the *Guzheng* is one of the earliest plucked-string instruments in Chinese music (Chen & Li, 2023; Zheng & Knobloch, 1983). The *Guzheng* have their own distinct musical aesthetics, philosophies, and cultural histories that are intricately woven into its construction and performance traditions. *guzheng* evolved over centuries to embody very specific sonic, emotional, and spiritual qualities within the Chinese musical canon. The *Guzheng* is highly regarded for its expressive range, as well as its unique techniques and playing styles. Players can produce sounds that resemble cascading waterfalls, thunder, or even the serene ambiance of a mountain landscape (Zinkiv & Ren, 2024). The instrument's versatility makes it suitable for solo performances as well as ensembles and is used in various genres of music, from traditional Chinese court music to contemporary

compositions (Mingyue, 1985; Qu, 2017; Wu, 2018). However, the selection of composers and their compositions of Western classical music for Guzheng performance necessitates impartial evaluation. The organology of the Guzheng instrument is structured to produce pentatonic tones on open strings. Diatonic tones can be produced using both open and closed strings; however, this results in a distinct polarization in timbre between the two methods. The Guzheng is not intended for performing intricate textures. Nonetheless, the Guzheng can be performed in an ensemble. Referring the above consideration, one compositional work taken into consideration in this study is Debussy's Arabesque No. 1. According to Xia Debussy's musical language, especially his employment of timbre as a fundamental creative component (Xia, 2017), exhibits striking similarities with traditional Chinese musical aesthetics. Numerous historians have documented Debussy's fascination with non-Western classical instruments. (Babyak, 2014; Tamagawa, 2019; Wen-Chung, 1971). According to Locke, Debussy's exposure to Asian music at the 1889 Paris Exposition significantly influenced his compositional approach (Locke, 2009). As noted by Said, this period marked significant Western engagement with Eastern cultural forms (Said, 1978). An interesting insight into the oriental aspect of Debussy's music is his interest in the exoticism of non-Western scale types (Schmitz, 1995). According to Day-O'Connell Debussy is one of important figure that excited to *Pentatonicism* in nineteenth-century music (Day-O'Connell, 2007). In this respect, *Pentatonicism* from the Eighteenth Century to Debussy provides a thorough examination of a prominent facet of music history: the growing incorporation of pentatonic ("black-key scale") techniques in nineteenth-century Western art music. Marisi state that Debussy's works consider as cultural mediators between East and West (Marisi, 2023). Debussy's Arabesque No. 1 presents a scholarly perspective in interaction to non-western musical Instrument. In the term of aesthetic compatibility, there is alignment between Debussy's impressionistic style and Chinese musical aesthetics is documented by Tien who notes the shared emphasis on timbral exploration and non-linear melodic development (Tien, 2015). In the perspective of technical feasibility Chen and Li discusses how the moderate tempo and clear textural layering of Arabesque No. 1 allows for effective adaptation to traditional Chinese instruments (Chen & Li, 2023). The piece's "architectural clarity" (Howat, 1983) provides natural points for technical adaptation. Further question. What artistic features does the Guzheng offer in Debussy's Arabesque No. 1? What artistic attributes does Debussy's Arabesque No. 1 provide for the Guzheng? Transcription is not

merely a matter of note-for-note transfer; rather, it involves a re-contextualization of musical material that must account for each instrument's technical, aesthetic, and expressive characteristics. As Djahwasi et.al. explain, the process raises questions of authenticity because the sonic identity of the new instrument can alter both the composer's intent and the listener's perception of the original work (Djahwasi et al., 2024). Yet, as Howard-Jones (Howard-Jones, 1935) and Davies emphasize, the act of transcription can also reveal nuances or highlight compositional strengths that may remain underexplored in the original version (Davies, 1988). By considering factors such as timbre, dynamic range, articulation possibilities, and historical or stylistic context, the transcriber does more than mechanically convert notation (Djahwasi et al., 2023). They engage in an interpretive process that can showcase the new instrument's expressive potential while respecting the ethos of the piece. This interplay of technical feasibility, artistic interpretation, and cultural context is precisely what makes transcription such a rich and, at times, challenging domain in music. This study seeks to attain a nuanced balance between maintaining Debussy's original musical objectives in Arabesque No. 1 and doing justice to the natural artistic potential of the guzheng. Its dual approach sees both the artistic integrity of Western classical music and the cultural significance of the Chinese music instruments. The research questions of this study are as follows:

1. How may an arrangement of Debussy's Arabesque No. 1 for the Guzheng reconcile faithfulness to the original composition format and successfully highlight the instrument's specific technical and expressionist strengths?

2. In what specific passages of Arabesque No. 1 do traditional *Guzheng* techniques either enhance the musical expression or present challenges when adapting Western classical structures, and what solutions can be developed to navigate these intersections?

This study is grounded in the exploration of cross-cultural musical adaptation, specifically investigating how traditional Chinese *Guzheng* techniques interact with Western classical structures in Debussy's Arabesque No. 1. The rationale for conducting this study is fourfold. First, through examination of particular passages where guzheng practice either enhances or faces restrictions in Debussy's composition, this study addresses a crucial void in performance practice scholarship where Eastern and Western traditions intersect. The outcome of this study is significant to musicians and composers engaged in working across cultural borders.

Second, the method of approaching idiomaticity and compositional

integrity is a model of appropriate adaptation practice. Subordination of one tradition to the other does not happen in this study, however; it shows how reflective engagement between different music systems can give rise to aesthetically gratifying results. Third, this study allows the guzheng repertoire to increase in directions that respect both the traditional role of the instrument and its potential in modern expression. Through changing Debussy's piece, which was based on Western music resources, the study establishes a fruitful discourse between music idioms. Last, the research is aware of the larger cultural value of these arrangements in mediating East and Western creative traditions in terms of theoretical and working resources for treating cross-cultural music interaction in professional yet understandable terms.

2. LITERATURE REVIEWS

2.1 The Construction of The *Guzheng*

Tracing the origins of the guzheng is challenging since early Chinese records combine several silk-stringed zithers under a general category. Wang and Lollini further note that words like *zhen*, *se*, and *qin* are frequently used synonymously (Wang & Lollini, 2024). Therefore, a description of the origins of *Guzheng* terminology requires a thorough philological research. However, by the late Warring States and early Han periods, writers gradually reserved the word *qin* for the seven-string *guqin*; that semantic shift helped separate the guzheng from its relatives and marked the first clear step in its independent history (Han, 2001). As the instrument's identity solidified, its construction also evolved. Early *zhen* were reportedly built from *catalpa*, a dense hardwood that yields a bright but relatively short sustain. Luthiers soon discovered that a lighter resonator improved projection, and *paulownia* (*wutong*)—famed for its low density and straight grain—became the preferred soundboard timber. Recent acoustic studies by Zheng & Knobloch verified that low-frequency vibrations are enhanced by the high stiffness-to-weight ratio of paulownia (Zheng & Knobloch, 1983), hence providing the warm resonance of the guzheng. Constructively, it changed with the employment of ornamented frames, first made of whatever hardwood was available, later moving to red sandalwood and rosewood for their strength and the richness of overtones produced by sympathetic vibrations (Peirong et al., 2023). These new materials matched a more general reclassification of Chinese zithers. Treaties from the Tang period clearly identified the moveable bridges,

enlarged soundbox and range of over two octaves from the flat-board se, and fretless *guqin*. This increasing technical and terminological accuracy helps to clarify historical accounts (Zinkiv & Ren, 2024). From an anonymous silk-string zither to a revered solo instrument, the evolution of the guzheng is a twining of techniques alteration, handicraft experimentation, and sonic perception. Understanding that interplay clarifies the creative sharpness of the craftspeople who defined the instrument as well as its own voice. The structural design of the Guzheng has changed significantly over time, progressing from simpler models to more intricate arrangements with a wider range of musical tones. As seen in figure 1, the instrument's functionality significantly advanced with the addition of movable bridges and the transition from sixteen to twenty-one strings.

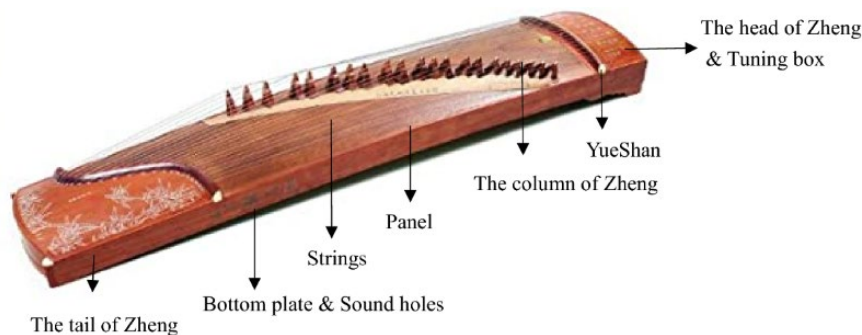


Figure 1: The Construction of *Guzheng*

The range of strings on contemporary *Guzhengs* is eighteen to twenty-seven (and occasionally more). The eighteen-stringed *Guzheng*, sometimes referred to as the *Steel-Stringed Zheng*, contains steel strings as opposed to the silk strings of the old *Guzheng*. Sharp, metallic, and twangy is how one may describe its tone (Han, 2013). Mostly, this kind of *Guzheng* is used to perform traditional folk music, particularly material from Southern Chinese folk styles like Kejia (Hakka), Guangdong (Canton), and Chaozhou. Other contemporary *Guzhengs*, save the *Steel-Stringed Zheng*, have nylon and plastic wrapped around steel inside the strings. The *Steel-Stringed Zheng* sounds more mellow and warmer than these. Nowadays, the *Guzheng* with 21 strings is the most often used kind. Four pentatonic octaves are by default its tuning. For instance, the notes in the common *D major pentatonic* scale tuning are *D, E, F#, A, and B*, in that order from low to high. There's an extra *D* note in the highest octave and the scale repeats four times. Mostly, *D major/B minor, G major/E minor, and C major/A minor* are the keys used to write modern *Guzheng* music. Rarely are songs composed in the keys *F major/D minor* and *A major/F# minor*; even when they are, performers sometimes decide to play the work in the closest key, *G major/E minor*. The

intricacy of the tuning adjustments needed from the common keys makes the other keys of the Western *12-Keys system* only utilized rarely.

2.2 The Range of *Guzheng*

There is no universally adopted standard notation in China that is analogous to the staff notation employed in Western music. Function-dependent variations of notation include numerical systems, intonation systems, descriptive systems, hand and finger systems, *gongchepu*, and rhythmic systems. According Kaufmann to Early indications of Chinese notated music date back to the Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220) (Kaufmann, 1967). Particularly the *Guzheng* and *guqin*, Mingyue (1985) observations on the notation system and performance techniques connected with ancient Chinese string instruments highlight the sophistication and depth of musical expression accessible with these instruments. Mingyue's study investigates the subtleties of the ten-pitch tuning system, modal variations, and the subtle right-hand techniques defining the performance quality of these ancient instruments. Based on the ancient heptatonic scale, the ten-pitch tuning system marks a sophisticated knowledge of musical theory and its application in instrument tuning. This system made composition and performance flexible enough to let for a great spectrum of musical expression. The reference to four modal modulations inside this framework highlights even more a sophisticated approach to musical structure, allowing performers to change mood and tonal color inside a work. The *Guzheng* typically follows a pentatonic scale, with strings tuned to *DO, RE, MI, SO, LA* or '1', '2', '3', '5', '6'. The guzheng is a 21-string zither with adjustable bridges. Pentatonic tuning is used in most cases; there are five pitches in each octave. The strings are tuned using a tuning key to modify the pins hidden in a chamber at the RH end of the instrument. The bridges can be shifted for fine adjustment. The guzheng uses the grand staff (the same as the piano). This is a common guzheng "D major" and "d minor" tuning as shown at figure 2.3, 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6.

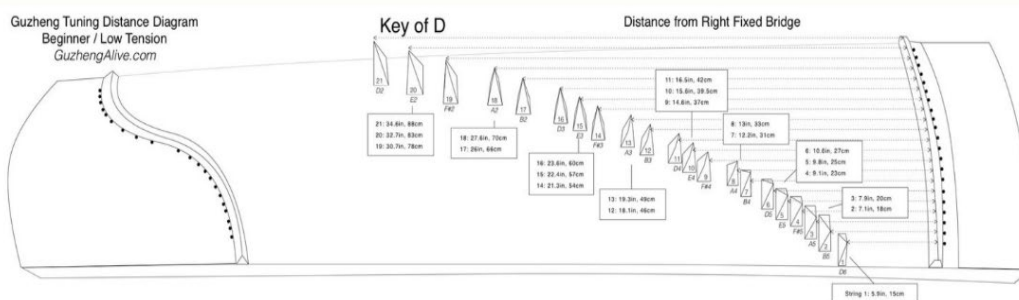


Figure 2: D major Tuning on *Guzheng*

Guzheng Key Tuning Chart

Key of D					
	Notation		Tuning	Distance from Right Fixed Bridge	
21	2 Dots Below	1	D2	34.6in	88cm
20	2 Dots Below	2	E2	32.7in	83cm
19	2 Dots Below	3	F#2	30.7in	78cm
18	2 Dots Below	5	A2	27.6in	70cm
17	2 Dots Below	6	B2	26in	66cm
16	1 Dot Below	1	D3	23.6in	60cm
15	1 Dot Below	2	E3	22.4in	57cm
14	1 Dot Below	3	F#3	21.3in	54cm
13	1 Dot Below	5	A3	19.3in	49cm
12	1 Dot Below	6	B3	18.1in	46cm
11		1	D4	16.5in	42cm
10		2	E4	15.6in	39.5cm
9		3	F#4	14.6in	37cm
8		5	A4	13in	33cm
7		6	B4	12.2in	31cm
6	1 Dot Above	1	D5	10.6in	27cm
5	1 Dot Above	2	E5	9.8in	25cm
4	1 Dot Above	3	F#5	9.1in	23cm
3	1 Dot Above	5	A5	7.9in	20cm
2	1 Dot Above	6	B5	7.1in	18cm
1	2 Dot Above	1	D6	5.9in	15cm

Figure 3: *Guzheng* Pitch Range in D Tuning

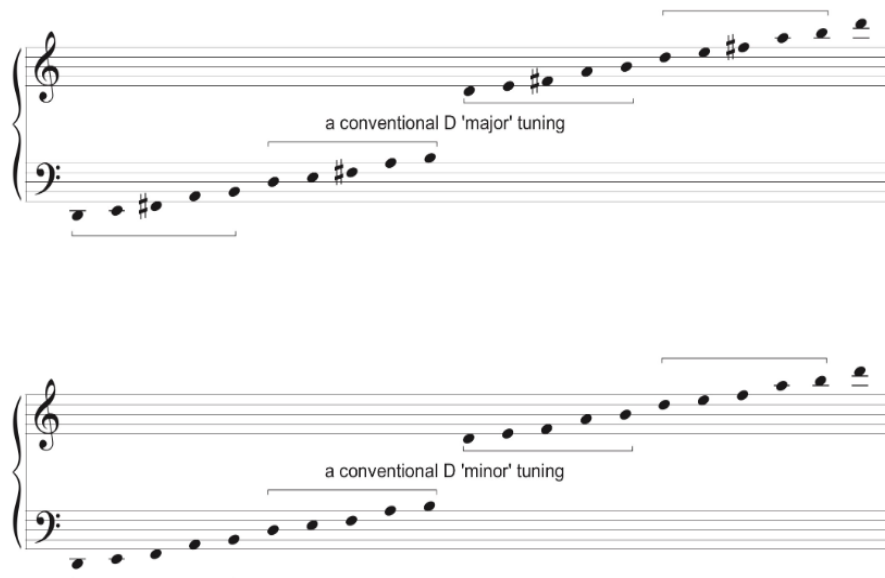


Figure 4: *Guzheng* Pitch Range Score in D Tuning

One of the first features of the guzheng that can be changed or experimented with is the tuning; there is no necessity for octave homogeneity. For every new piece, a composer basically creates their own tuning. Meanwhile in G major Tuning s shown at figure 2.6 and 2.7

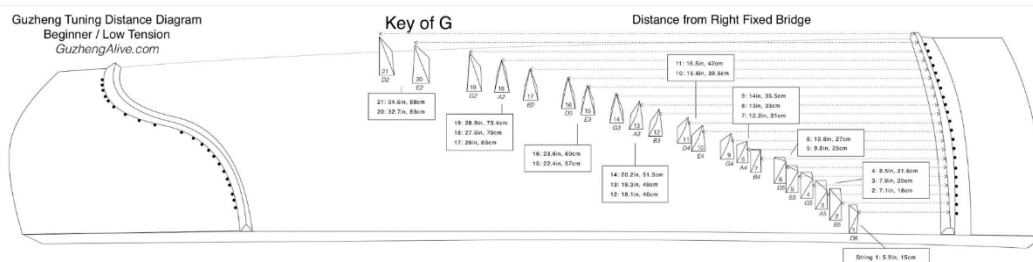


Figure 5: G major Tuning on *Guzheng*
Guzheng Key Tuning Chart

Key of G					
	Notation		Tuning	Distance from Right Fixed Bridge	
21	3 Dots Below	5	D2	34.6in	88cm
20	3 Dots Below	6	E2	32.7in	83cm
19	2 Dots Below	1	G2	28.9in	73.4cm
18	2 Dots Below	2	A2	27.6in	70cm
17	2 Dots Below	3	B2	26in	66cm
16	2 Dots Below	5	D3	23.6in	60cm
15	2 Dots Below	6	E3	22.4in	57cm
14	1 Dot Below	1	G3	20.2in	51.3cm
13	1 Dot Below	2	A3	19.3in	49cm
12	1 Dot Below	3	B3	18.1in	46cm
11	1 Dot Below	5	D4	16.5in	42cm
10	1 Dot Below	6	E4	15.6in	39.5cm
9		1	G4	14in	35.5cm
8		2	A4	13in	33cm
7		3	B4	12.2in	31cm
6		5	D5	10.6in	27cm
5		6	E5	9.8in	25cm
4	1 Dot Above	1	G5	8.5in	21.6cm
3	1 Dot Above	2	A5	7.9in	20cm
2	1 Dot Above	3	B5	7.1in	18cm
1	1 Dot Above	5	D6	5.9in	15cm

Figure 6: *Guzheng* Pitch Range in G Tuning

3. METHODOLOGY

The relationship between the *Guzheng*'s inherent aesthetic values and Debussy's Arabesque No. 1 presents a complex artistic dialogue that warrants careful examination. While we must acknowledge the *Guzheng*'s distinct artistic properties, analysing its implementation in Debussy's work requires us to consider both what is gained and what might be compromised in this cross-cultural adaptation. The *Guzheng* does possess inherent aesthetic value that is deeply connected to its traditional context. Adapting it to Western classical music can potentially compromise this value if not approached thoughtfully. However, whether this is a sacrifice or an evolution depends on one's perspective. Preservationists might

advocate for keeping the guzheng within its traditional framework to maintain cultural integrity. Innovators might see adaptation as a natural progression that enriches both the instrument and the musical cultures it touches. The journey to adapt Debussy's Arabesque No. 1 for the *Guzheng* was one paved with both exciting possibilities and delicate challenges. There is a need of on balancing mechanism in order to be treading a fine line between preserving the composer's original intentions and honouring the *Guzheng's* own distinct artistic identity. The concept of transcription that applies in classical music is known as the literal, paraphrase and orchestral or piano reduction models (Hinson, 2000; Thom, 2007). In this case, the balancing mechanism does not contradict the transcription theory in Western classical music.

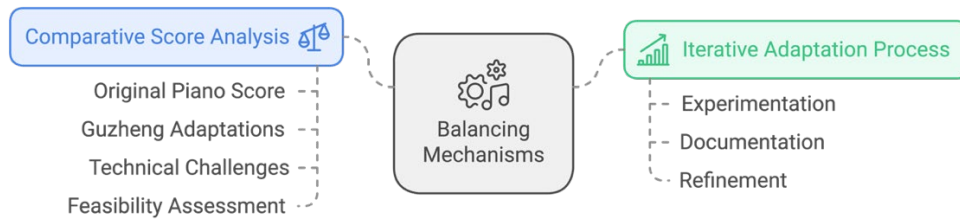


Figure 7: Balancing Mechanism Debussy's Arabesque No. 1 in the *Guzheng*

4. FINDING AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Comparative Analysis and Technical Challenges

The compositional structure of Arabesque No.1 is composed in the *ternary* form as provide at table 1

Table 1(A): Formal Textures of Debussy's Arabesque No. 1

Bar Numbers	Key Signatures
1-38	E major

A Section

Arabesque No. 1 in E Major

from



Deux Arabesques

L. 66 No. 1

Claude Achille Debussy
(1862–1918)

Andantino con moto

Table 1(B): Formal Textures of Debussy's Arabesque No. 1

Bar Numbers	Key Signatures
B Section	
39-70	A major
<i>tempo rubato (un peu moins vite)</i>	
	
A Section	
71-107	E major
<i>tempo primo</i>	
	

There is no issue in playing music with the key signature of E major on the Guzheng, as the instrument's flexible tuning allows it to accommodate the sharps required for Arabesque No. 1.

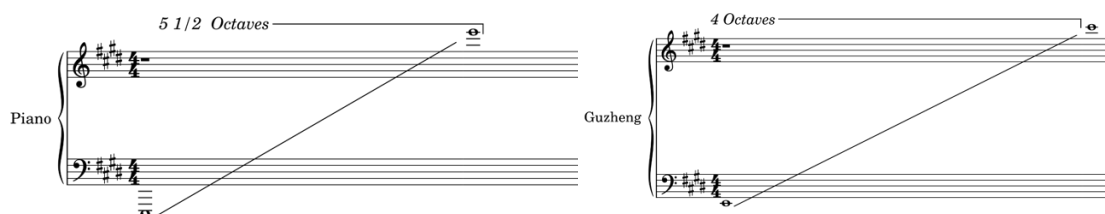


Figure 8: The Range Comparison between Debussy's Arabesque No. 1 and the *Guzheng*

The figure 8 appears that Arabesque No. 1 for piano has a range spanning 5 1/2 octaves, while the Guzheng has a range of 4 octaves. This indicates a limitation for the Guzheng in playing the complete piano part of Arabesque No. 1, as its range is insufficient to cover the higher or lower notes present in the piano score. The Guzheng's 4-octave range is notably shorter compared to the piano part, which extends to 5 1/2 octaves. As a result, there are sections, particularly in the upper and lower ranges of the piano score, that cannot be fully played on the Guzheng. This discrepancy in range presents challenges in fully reproducing the melodic lines and

dynamic expressions found in the piano part of Arabesque No. 1. Identification of texture complexity technical challenges on Arabesque No. 1 is showed at figure 9, 10, 11 and 12

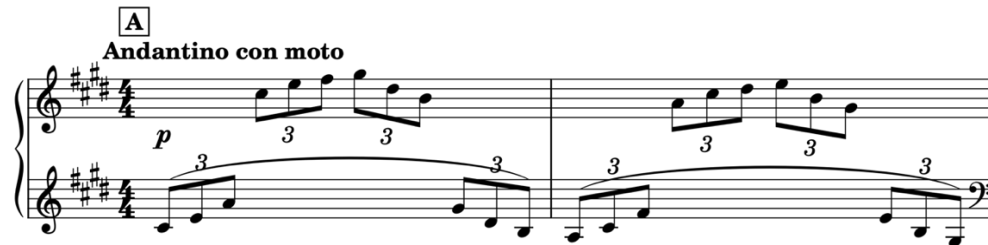


Figure 9: Ascending Arpeggio Movements

This passage at figure 9 features a single-line melody with minimal harmonic support. This type of texture is more suitable for the *Guzheng*, as it aligns with the instrument's strength in producing expressive melodic lines. The single-line nature avoids the challenges associated with polyphony and complex harmonic interplay, making it more adaptable to the *Guzheng*'s monophonic capabilities. The *Guzheng* can effectively replicate the single melodic line found in this figure, as it does not involve simultaneous harmonic layers or contrapuntal voices that would otherwise present significant challenges. Thus, Figure 10 fits well within the scope of what the *Guzheng* can perform effectively.



Figure 10: Contrary Arpeggio Movements which Combined with Single Melody Line

Figure 10 features counter-arpeggio movements intertwined with a distinct melodic line. The arpeggios create a flowing harmonic backdrop that contrasts dynamically with the melody, which moves in a lyrical and expressive manner. The simultaneous articulation of arpeggios and melody lines highlights the polyphonic capacity of the piano, allowing for a multi-layered texture that integrates harmonic motion with melodic phrasing. The *Guzheng* faces limitations with Figure 10 because it is primarily a

monophonic instrument. While the Guzheng can effectively perform arpeggios, it cannot play simultaneous counter-arpeggios and melody lines independently at the same time. The multi-voice requirement of this passage, involving distinct movements in both the arpeggios and the melody, is beyond the capabilities of the Guzheng, which lacks the structural versatility for true polyphonic performance.

Figure 11: Melody Accompanied by Chord Movements

Figure 12: Combination Melody and Chords Movement

Figure 11 demonstrate the texture in this figure features a melody accompanied by chord movements, with harmonization structured in the form of bass figures and voice leading. The harmony often involves broken triads and drop voicings, creating a rich, multi-layered sound that serves as a harmonic and rhythmic foundation while supporting the melody. The bass voice provides a grounding effect and maintains continuity, while the melodic line sits atop the harmonic movement, creating an interplay that is both expressive and texturally complex. Figure 12 involves more structured harmonic progressions where melodic lines are intertwined with chords formed through triad movements and drop voicing techniques. Long notes and *ligatura* (*tie*) treatment give the music a flowing, interconnected feel that creates a sense of constant tension and release. Maintaining the piece's harmonic texture and melodic continuity requires the ability to sustain notes for a long time, which is necessary for this rhythmic complexity. The Guzheng struggles with this figure because it lacks the capacity for effective voice leading among bass, chordal harmony, and melody. The layered interplay between the bass and the upper harmonies requires a level of

polyphony that the Guzheng, being a monophonic instrument, cannot reproduce effectively. The Guzheng is unable to fully replicate this texture, as it does not have the capability to maintain multiple harmonic voices while also articulating a melodic line. The separation of voices—including the drop voicing and triad structures—requires an instrument capable of handling polyphonic textures, such as the piano, to faithfully recreate the layered harmonic interactions. The multi-voice dynamics, including the interplay of the bass, harmonic progression, and melody, exceed the Guzheng's monophonic limitations, making it unsuitable for such complex, layered arrangements. Identification of Rhythmic complexity of Arabesque No. 1 is showed at figure 12 and 13.



Figure 13: Long Notes

Figure 14: Tie

Arabesque No. 1's complicated rhythm, comprised of lengthy, held-out notes and ties that occur over several beats or measures, is represented best in Figure 12. Treatment of lengthy notes and ligatura (tie) impart a smooth, running quality to the music that builds a feeling of perpetual tension and release. Held-out note-holding is needed for this rhythmic complexity in order to maintain the piece's harmonic texture and melodic continuity. The sustained notes, ties, and various rhythmic groupings in Figure 13 also exist to examine rhythmic complexity further. The layered rhythmic texture that results deepens and imparts a sense of motion to the piece as a result of the overlapping of the sustained notes with the increasingly active rhythm sections. Phrasing and timing need to be precise due to the intricate

interaction resulting from the combination of active and sustain rhythmic materials. Because it cannot sustain pitches as a piano or string instrument can, the Guzheng is restricted in playing these longer notes and ties. Note decaying, which naturally occurs in the instrument after plucking, also constrains the instrument's capacity to mimic the extended, chained phrasing required by the rhythmic figures in Figure 12. The *Guzheng* is challenged in keeping these sustained rhythmic components due to the fact that it cannot sustain a note over a long passage of time without extreme decay. This leads to the failure to obtain legato phrasing and smooth transition that is supposed to be attained by the use of the long ties and sustains in Figure 13. Since there is no sustain in the Guzheng, it is challenging to properly balance the active and sustain rhythmic lines that are essential in attaining the desired music effect of Arabesque No. 1.

4.2 Iterative Adaptation Process

Adapting Arabesque No. 1 for the Guzheng requires a creative and thoughtful Iterative Adaptation Process that respects the unique challenges of range, texture, and rhythmic complexity. Through systematic experimentation and adaptation, it is possible to capture the essence of Debussy's work while showcasing the unique character of the Guzheng. The process necessitates balancing compromise and creativity, ensuring that musicality remains intact while leveraging the strengths of the Guzheng to reinterpret this iconic piece.

Table 2: Iterative Adaptation Process

Aspect	Piano	Guzheng Version Adaptation
Range	- 5 1/2 octaves	Iteratively transpose sections beyond Guzheng's range, adjusting for playability and musical fidelity while preserving the melodic and harmonic intent
Textures	- Polyphonic textures including harmonies, counterpoints, and multiple simultaneous voices.	Guzheng Ensemble as a Solution Adapting Rhythmic Flow as show on figure 14 and 15 demonstrate division of voice in the form of different parts voicing to individual players (melody, harmony, basslines) to achieve polyphonic texture and create Harmonic enrichment (multiple players articulate harmonies through arpeggiations and layered lines).
Rhythmic Complexities	- Sustained notes and ties provide fluidity and connected phrasing; the piano can sustain notes effectively.	Adapting Rhythmic Flow as show on figure 14 and 15 demonstrate sharing sustained notes in the form of distribution sustained notes among ensemble members to approximate the effect of a sustained chord or tie and Use tremolo to simulate sustained notes, with other players

providing rhythmic and melodic support.

This table 2 offers a structured overview of the key challenges in adapting Arabesque No. 1 and how they can be addressed by using a Guzheng ensemble through an iterative adaptation process. To retain musical intent and produce a coherent performance that stays true to Debussy's expressive character, the process entails thinking through constraints, adjusting, and testing adaptations.

Figure 15: Guzheng Ensemble

Figure 16: Guzheng Ensemble

4.3 Discussions

Figures 14 and 15 provide valuable suggestions for resolving the textural and rhythmic challenge introduced by Debussy's original piano piece in adapting Arabesque No. 1 to the ensemble of the Guzheng. A number of findings pointed out the following:

4.3.1 Division of Voices and Harmonic Enrichment

- An analysis of Figures 14 and 15 uncovers a creative strategy of voice assignment in the guzheng ensemble arrangement of Debussy's Arabesque No. 1. The arrangement successfully mimics the polyphonic texture of the original piano piece by assigning various aspects of music—melody, harmony, and basslines—to Guzheng ensemble. Such a voice arrangement demonstrates how the flexibility of the guzheng can be applied in group settings to achieve subtle harmonic interactions that may be beyond a single instrument. The finding of this study demonstrates the flexibility of the guzheng in performance contexts (Mingyue, 1985; Qu, 2017; Wu, 2018).

- From Chinese court music to Western music, the instrument possesses extraordinary flexibility that assists in making it very suitable for both solo playing and ensemble settings across various types of music. Such inherent flexibility of the guzheng is particularly useful in transcribing Western music pieces consisting of complex voicing and harmonic movement.

- Harmonic enrichment is attained through many players articulating harmonies via arpeggiations and layered lines; this intrinsic flexibility of the guzheng proves especially beneficial when adapting Western classical pieces including complex voicing and harmonic progressions. This variation and depth added by the way several musicians distribute their voices helps the Guzheng ensemble to give a deeper, more dynamic interpretation. The ensemble's layered textures provide the harmonic landscape complexity and closely reflect the polyphonic character of the original piano version.

4.3.2 Adapting Rhythmic Flow

- These adaptation strategies showcased in Figures 14 and 15 depict innovative solutions toward providing one of the piano-to-guzheng translation's deepest problems: how to sustain notes. One or more members of the ensemble employing tremolo technique stands out as an especially efficient means of duplicating the type of sustained tones that in the piano would be produced by releasing the damper pedal. This technical

accommodation, accompanied by well-timed supporting rhythm and melody by ensemble members, productively creates the extended sound needed in order to maintain the smooth nature of Debussy's composition.

- These technical adjustments are also complemented by the inborn aesthetic compatibility between Chinese traditional music and Debussy's impressionist style. As note by Tien (Tien, 2015), both music traditions inherently value timbral discovery and non-linear melodic composition. Through this natural affinity, there can be sensitive adaptation of both traditions without compromising the compositional aesthetic and natural qualities of the Guzheng instrument. It follows that the study outcomes indicate that this compatibility goes beyond level of appearance to structures and philosophy on a higher level.

- From a technical feasibility perspective, Chen and Li's (Chen & Li, 2023) argument is supported by the outcome of this study. Arabesque No. 1's moderate pace and clear textural stratification definitely supply beneficial conditions for adaptation to the traditional Chinese instrument *Guzheng*.

- Modern ensemble arrangements for the guzheng are designed with what Howat's terms "architectural clarity" (Howat, 1983): the overall intention is to add colour without compromising the composition's load-bearing structure. Practically, transcribers allocate melodies and secondary lines between a range of zithers—or between the guzheng and supportive Chinese instruments—yet maintain phrase spans, cadential points and tonal paths exactly where they occurred in the original composition. Such regard for the underlying structure of the piece, a precept that might be summarized in Chinese as *bù xīn qí běn* ("do not tamper with the root"), ensures that even the most elaborate orchestrations respect the composition's essential form.

- Successful adaptation of these methods indicates that well-considered guzheng ensembles can realistically convey the harmonic sophistication and textural richness of Western piano music if suitable technical solutions are identified and utilized.

The arrangement of Arabesque No. 1 for the ensemble of the Guzheng involves negotiating the demands of range, texture, and rhythmic sophistication on one hand and staying true to the expression of Debussy's piece on the other. Figures 14 and 15 give important indications of the means by which these demands are met by division of voices and harmonic sophistication in the ensemble. These conclusions are discussed below in

relation to theorizing perspectives:

4.3.3 Orientalism and Musical Exoticism

- Adaptation of Arabesque No. 1 by the Guzheng ensemble can also be understood in the contexts of Musical Exoticism and Orientalism (Locke, 2009). These allow one to see how Western composers like Debussy borrowed music that was non-Western, presenting it in a way that it is alien to Western listeners. In adapting the music of Debussy, a Western composer, for a traditional Chinese instrument, the Guzheng, the ensemble has to deal with the natural cross-cultural conflict between the Western impressionist aesthetic of the original composition and the sonic fabric of the Guzheng. Adaptation in this sense goes beyond changing the original composition to something new, it also overcomes the conventional Western-oriented presentation of exotic instruments by providing the ensemble of the Guzheng an active voice in presenting a Western composition.

- Utilizing the ensemble of the Guzheng to achieve polyphonic textures and respond to the rhythmic complications is a cross-cultural re-contextualizing gesture. Through the adaptation, the instrument's distinctive capabilities are respected while remaining faithful to the expressive richness of the original work of Debussy, transcending easy exotic depiction in favour of productive cultural synthesis.

4.3.4 Musical Semiotics and Cultural Signification

- Such adaptation is also tied in to the theme of Musical Semiotics and Cultural Signification. The Guzheng embodies Chinese music tradition with cultural meanings and associations, and these are negotiated in adapting a Western classical composition like Arabesque No. 1. Through adapting Debussy's composition for the ensemble of Guzheng, the cultural semiotics of the instrument are translated in relation to Western music and give rise to an intersection of cultural signifiers.

- The division of voices among the ensemble, as illustrated in Figures 14 and 15, indicates how various cultural connotations contained in the Guzheng are incorporated in a Western musical structure. Melodic voices, harmonic texture, and rhythmic components each represent a distinct cultural significance, and their incorporation in the ensemble makes it possible to provide a novel reinterpretation of Debussy's composition, syncretizing Western impressionistic textures and Chinese traditional

performance practices. Syncretizing semiotic components is a reflection of the effort to devise a new cultural narrative that is in respect of both Western classical and Chinese folk music traditions.

4.3.5 Cross-Cultural Musical Adaptation Theory

- Philosophically, Arabesque No. 1 can also be analyzed using Cross-Cultural Musical Adaptation Theory (Tokita & Hughes, 2008). It deals with concerns of adapting music between cultural boundaries, addressing authenticity, hybridity, and creative synthesis in specific. In the ensemble of the Guzheng, adapting rhythmic flow and polyphonic textures translates to balance in terms of authenticity to the original composition by Debussy and adaptation to the hybridity of the Guzheng.

- Sustained note sharing among ensemble members, illustrated in Figure 14 and 15, is a model of hybrid adaptation in which Western notation of music and Chinese practices of ensemble performance are combined in order to form a true yet original interpretation. Employing tremolo in reproducing sustained notes also demonstrates creative strategies used in bridging the instrument music organological playing restrictions of the Guzheng in favour of a transcultural music experience that retains the expressive value of the original composition.

4.3.6 Organological Considerations in Transcultural Performance

- The adaptation also encompasses significant contribution of music instrument considerations (Campbell et al., 2017). The monophony and restricted capacity of sustain in the Guzheng contribute a significant aspect to the adaptation. Although the Guzheng does not sustain notes as well as on the piano, the ensemble of the Guzheng offers the alternative of spreading the sustained notes among various players and using tremolo instrumental effects to simulate uninterrupted sound. The adaptation exploits the distinctive expressive potential of the Guzheng, including richness of timbre and fine ornament, to add depth to the interpretation of music.

- The iterative adaptation approach is concerned with determining how to interact with the limitations of the Guzheng while leveraging its unique characteristics to add richness to the overall performance. The distribution of harmonic and melodic material among the ensembles shows the formation of polyphonic melody in Guzheng despite its monophonic instrument. Polyphonic melody in Guzheng ensemble transforms what was previously considered a seasonal limitation into a creative opportunity.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Key Findings

5.1.1 Sound Distribution and Harmonic Enhancement:

- By contrast, this Guzheng Ensemble adaptation of Arabesque No. 1 successfully solves the structural challenges of the original piano composition. Having several musicians take on different duties makes it easier to recreate multi-voiced textures. This separation allows Guzheng musicians to focus on different musical components - melody, harmony, and bassline - giving the piece a complex sound structure, similar to what you hear in Debussy's piano piece.

- The depth of expression is enhanced through the technique of broken chord patterns and overlapping musical lines, mimicking the subtle expression of the original work. The distinctive sound quality of the Guzheng adds a special flavor to this cross-cultural interpretation.

5.1.2 Adaptation Strategies For Rhythmic Changes :

- 14 and 15 show how the Guzheng ensemble solves problems such as notes sustaining or holding beyond their intrinsic capabilities, which easily occur in monophonic instruments. While simulating sustained notes through tremolo technique and sharing singlet sustains with pairs, the performance remains continuous enough to meet Debussy's impressionistic needs.

- This collaborative strategy to preserving rhythmic and melodic continuity highlights the Guzheng's adaptability in catching Debussy's flowing manner in spite of natural instrumental limitations.

5.1.3 Theoretical Perspectives:

- The adaptation relates to several theoretical frameworks, including Orientalism and Musical Exoticism, Musical Semiotics and Cultural Signification, Cross-Cultural Musical Adaptation Theory, and Organological Considerations.

- Orientalism and Musical Exoticism: The adaptation reclaims the Guzheng from being an exotic embellishment to an active participant in the performance of Western classical music, emphasizing cultural synthesis rather than subjugation.

- Musical Semiotics: The adaptation blends Chinese traditional performance practices with Western impressionistic textures, creating a new cultural narrative that respects the traditions of both music forms.

- **Cross-Cultural Musical Adaptation:** The Guzheng ensemble exemplifies the balancing act of maintaining authenticity while embracing the hybrid nature of a cross-cultural performance.
- **Organological Considerations:** The inherent characteristics of the Guzheng shape the adaptation process, where its limitations are creatively addressed to enhance musical expression.
 - The adaptation fits in with several theoretical frameworks, including Orientalism and Musical Exoticism, Musical Semiotics and Cultural Signification, Cross-Cultural Musical Adaptation Theory, and Organology Considerations.
- **Orientalism and Musical Exoticism:** The adaptation removes from the Guzheng a foreign element and has turned it into an active participant in the performance of Western classical culture, which emphasizes synthesis rather than violation.
- **Musical Semiotics:** The adaptation combines traditional Chinese performance techniques, Western impressionist textures, and a fresh cultural narrative that dignifies both musical traditions.
- **Music Adaptation is Cross-Cultural:** This is the true essence of the Guzheng ensemble! It strikes a balance between maintaining authenticity and bearing the marks of a cross-cultural performance.

5.2 Recommendations for Future Study

1. Future research could aim to explore how the large body of Western classical pieces suited for performance in the concert hall might be adapted to the guzheng. This may not only afford us some insight into the music of composers who were inspired by non-Western traditions sonder Nile adds further insight- providing us with comparisons between various musical forms from different cultures and times.
2. Conducting surveys of audience reaction to products that have successfully transplanted Western classical works onto traditional Chinese instruments in different parts of the world could be very useful in providing guidance for future synthesis and integration of various arts. Research might be performed on innovative playing styles or instrument adaptations that could enable the guzheng to produce notes with a duration almost as long as those played on a violin. This would allow the instrument better ability for long sustained passages with tied-over notes and should therefore widen its compatibility in Western classical music performance where legato phrasing is often required.
3. Extending the research to involve cross-instrument adaptations--- combining guzheng with other Chinese instruments like the erhu and pipa,

for instance---would enable more instrumental richness in performance. Consequently we are able to reproduce complex polyphony and harmonies which match those from Western music as it has so exhaustively been composed over the centuries. An alternative idea might be to use electronic effects and mechanical improvements here- thus allowing traditional music instruments like the guzheng to play Western classical style compositions as far back as possible. This opens out a new field of cross-whatever in music, where incompletely Westernized instruments can more successfully handle the musical dynamic range and forms.

Progress continues in bringing traditional instruments into Western classical music. The result is not only an expanded repertoire, but also a meaningful discourse among varied cultural heritages. These recommendations aim to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation for the cross-cultural adaptation of musical works, highlighting both the artistic opportunities and challenges inherent in bridging different musical traditions. The continued study of integrating traditional instruments into Western classical music not only enriches the repertoire but also serves as a meaningful dialogue between different cultural legacies.

References

- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (2013). *Post-colonial studies: The key concepts*. routledge.
- Babyak, T. B. (2014). *Nietzsche, Debussy, and the shadow of Wagner*. Cornell University.
- Campbell, P. S., Sarath, E. W., & Myers, D. E. (2017). Redefining music studies in an age of change. In: New York: Routledge.
- Chen, H., & Li, Y. (2023). ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSIGHTS INTO THE EVOLUTION OF CHINESE TRADITIONAL MUSIC: THE INFLUENCE OF GUZHENG PLAYING TECHNIQUES. *Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry*, 23(1), 296-296.
- Davies, S. (1988). Transcription, authenticity and performance. *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 28(3), 216-227.
- Day-O'Connell, J. (2007). *Pentatonicism from the eighteenth century to Debussy* (Vol. 46). University Rochester Press.
- Djahwasi, H., Saidon, Z. L., Pongpradit, P., & Sampurno, M. B. T. (2023). Interpretation of technical and expression aspects on Mauro Giuliani's "Grand Overture, Op. 61". *Rast Müzikoloji Dergisi*, 11(4), 563-587.
- Djahwasi, H., Sampurno, M. B. T., Saidon, Z. L., & Anggoro, R. R. M. K. M. (2024). Interpretative Lens of Segovia's classical guitar transcription on Bach's Chaconne from Partita No. 2 in D Minor Bwv 1004. *Rast Musicology Journal*, 12(4), 419-444.
- Everett, Y. U., & Lau, F. (2004). *Locating East Asia in western art music*. Wesleyan University Press.
- Han, M. (2001). *Historical and contemporary development of the Chinese zheng* [University of British Columbia].

- Han, M. (2013). *The emergence of the Chinese zhang: traditional context, contemporary evolution, and cultural identity* [University of British Columbia].
- Hinson, M. (2000). *The pianist's guide to transcriptions, arrangements, and paraphrases*. Indiana University Press.
- Howard-Jones, E. (1935). Arrangements and transcriptions. *Music & Letters*, 16(4), 305-311.
- Howat, R. (1983). *Debussy in proportion: a musical analysis*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kaufmann, W. (1967). The Mudrās in Sāmavedic Chant and Their Probable Relationship to the Go-on Hakase of the Shōmyō of Japan. *Ethnomusicology*, 161-169.
- Locke, R. P. (2009). *Musical exoticism: Images and reflections*. Cambridge University Press Cambridge.
- Marisi, R. (2023). 2. DEBUSSY'S PRÉLUDES AS CULTURAL MEDIATORS BETWEEN EAST AND WEST. *Review of artistic education*(25), 7-15.
- Mingyue, L. (1985). Performance Practice as a Recreative Process in Chinese Zheng Zither Music. *The World of Music*, 27(1), 48-67.
- Patke, R. S. (2006). Postcolonial cultures. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 23(2-3), 369-372.
- Peirong, W., Yodwised, C., & Panyanan, P. (2023). Development of guzheng school and Chinese guzheng education in China. *Journal of Modern Learning Development*, 8(6), 317-325.
- Qu, M. (2017). The Development and Innovation of Chinese Guzheng Playing Techniques [J].
- Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism* pantheon books. New York.
- Schmitz, M. D. (1995). *Oriental influences in the piano music of Claude Achille Debussy*. The University of Arizona.
- Tamagawa, K. (2019). *Echoes from the East: the Javanese Gamelan and its Influence on the Music of Claude Debussy*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Thom, P. (2007). *The musician as interpreter*. Penn State Press.
- Tien, A. (2015). The semantics of Chinese music.
- Tokita, A., & Hughes, D. W. (2008). *The Ashgate research companion to Japanese music*. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.
- Wang, T., & Lollini, A. (2024). Research on traditional playing techniques and modern inheritance and development of guzheng.
- Wen-Chung, C. (1971). Asian concepts and twentieth-century Western composers. *The Musical Quarterly*, 57(2), 211-229.
- Wu, N. (2018). The development of Guzheng playing technique and its application in teaching. 2017 7th International Conference on Education and Management (ICEM 2017),
- Xia, X. (2017). *The Aesthetics of Nature, Harmony, and Pentatonicism in Chinese Culture and Its Influence on Selected Piano Works of Claude Debussy*. Shenandoah University.
- Zheng, C., & Knobloch, Y. (1983). A Discussion of the History of the Gu Zheng. *Asian Music*, 14(2), 1-16.
- Zinkiv, I., & Ren, J. (2024). CHINESE ZITHER SE IN ANCIENT AND TRADITIONAL MUSICAL AND INSTRUMENTAL CULTURES OF TURKISH, MONGOLIAN AND TUNGUSKA-MANCHU ETHNIC GROUPS. *Yegah Müzikoloji Dergisi*, 7(4), 510-533.