

## HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL ASPECTS OF THE EVOLUTION OF TWO-PIANO MUSIC IN CHINA

**Ding Zhuxiang,**

Graduate student

Sumy State Pedagogical University named after A. S. Makarenko

ORCID ID: 0009-0006-6878-2899

*Objective:* This study aims to analyze the historical development and theoretical foundations of music for two pianos in China and to establish a periodization of its key stages. Special attention is devoted to the methodological issues related to performance techniques in this genre, as well as to the influence of Western musical traditions on the formation of Chinese two-piano music. The research seeks to identify the specific features of this genre as an important element of Chinese musical culture and to analyze its interaction with contemporary trends in musical art. *Methodology:* To achieve the research objectives, a historical-musicological approach has been applied, which allows for tracing the development of two-piano music in the context of cultural and social changes in China. A comparative method is also employed to analyze the interplay between Chinese and Western musical elements in two-piano compositions. The research is based on the analysis of musical scores, monographs, and academic works dedicated to Chinese musical traditions. *Scientific novelty:* For the first time, this study systematically examines the historical development of two-piano music in China, emphasizing the key stages of its formation and the influence of both national and Western musical traditions. It explores how Chinese composers have utilized this genre to express national identity, blending traditional Chinese elements with Western musical forms. Particular attention is given to analyzing the technical and performance innovations that have shaped the development of this genre in China. *Conclusions:* Music for two pianos in China reflects a unique synthesis of Chinese folk musical traditions and Western technical and harmonic approaches. It not only enriches the concert repertoire but also plays a significant role in shaping contemporary Chinese musical identity. Although this genre is still evolving, notable achievements in its development can already be observed, especially due to support from educational and performance initiatives. However, further expansion of the repertoire and improvement in performance standards require enhancing the system of musical education and actively incorporating new pedagogical approaches to two-piano ensemble training.

**Key words:** music for two pianos, Chinese music, piano ensemble, folk music, Chinese musical culture.

### **Дін Чжухсян. Історичні та культурні аспекти еволюції музики для двох фортепіано в Китаї**

*Мета роботи:* Метою даного дослідження є аналіз історичного розвитку та теоретичних засад становлення музики для двох фортепіано в Китаї, а також періодизація її етапів. Особливу увагу приділено вивченню методологічних питань, пов'язаних із технікою виконання в цьому жанрі, та дослідженню впливу західних музичних традицій на формування китайської двофортепіанної музики. Робота спрямована на виявлення специфіки жанру як важливого елементу китайської музичної культури та аналіз його взаємодії із сучасними тенденціями музичного мистецтва. *Методологія роботи:* Для досягнення мети дослідження використано історико-музикологічний підхід, що дозволяє простежити розвиток двофортепіанної музики у контексті культурних та суспільних змін у Китаї. Застосовано також порівняльний метод для аналізу взаємодії китайських та західних музичних елементів у творах для двох фортепіано. Основа дослідження є аналіз нотних матеріалів, монографій та наукових праць, присвячених китайській музичній традиції. *Наукова новизна:* У роботі вперше систематизовано історичний розвиток музики для двох фортепіано в Китаї, з акцентом на ключових етапах її становлення та впливі національних та західних музичних традицій. Досліджено, як китайські композитори використовували цей жанр для вираження національної ідентичності, поєднуючи традиційні китайські елементи із західними музичними формами. Особлива увага приділяється аналізу технічних і виконавських інновацій, що вплинули на розвиток жанру в Китаї. *Висновки:* Музика для двох фортепіано в Китаї відображає унікальний синтез китайської народної музичної традиції та західних технічних і гармонійних підходів. Вона не тільки сприяє збагаченню концертного репертуару, але й стає важливим інструментом у формуванні сучасної китайської музичної ідентичності. Однак для подальшого розширення репертуару та підвищення рівня виконавства необхідним є удосконалення системи музичної освіти, а також активне впровадження нових педагогічних підходів до навчання ансамблевому виконавству на двох фортепіано.

**Ключові слова:** музика для двох фортепіано, китайська музика, фортепіанний ансамбль.

Introduction. The development of two-piano music in China marks a significant chapter in the country's musical evolution, blending ensemble performance with solo piano traditions. Over recent decades, China has experienced a transformation in its musical landscape, influenced by social, cultural, and political changes. This is particularly evident in two-piano music, which has grown in prominence and reflects the integration of traditional Chinese elements with Western techniques.

Historically, the rise of two-piano music parallels China's engagement with Western classical traditions, espe-

cially after the late 20th-century opening to the world. Chinese composers began blending national styles with Western forms, and two-piano compositions became a platform for this cross-cultural dialogue, merging Western harmonic structures with the melodic richness of Chinese folk music.

Today, two-piano performance holds great significance in Chinese concert life, representing a dynamic artistic expression that evolves alongside contemporary tastes. The genre's demands for coordination between pianists have

fostered innovations in composition and performance, creating a rich body of work that merits academic exploration.

**Materials and method.** To analyze the development of two-piano music in China, various sources and methodologies were employed, focusing primarily on repertoire by Chinese composers. This includes both adaptations of well-known works and original compositions, such as "Ode to the Red Flag" and "Spring Dawn." Scholarly articles, monographs, and anthologies like the "Collection of Chinese Works for Two Pianos" provided insights into the genre's history and development.

A review of scholarly works and publications reveals a number of studies primarily focused on the performance aspects of ensemble art. However, among these, the studies by O. Shcherbakova and I. Polskaya stand out for their comprehensive examination of the practical development of concert-stage culture in the context of the ensemble genre. For instance, Shcherbakova's work highlights the aspects of program content and the methods composers use in sound production. These themes are also explored by Liu Xiaoxi, who investigates the implementation of program music in various piano duets. Technical aspects of ensemble culture are discussed in the works of authors such as T. Baynov, M. Hinson, I. Trots, and L. Yefremova. Additionally, in the context of studying the dynamics of interaction within ensemble performance, the research of M. Arvidson and N. Yazykov can be mentioned.

A literature review highlighted the cultural and social changes influencing two-piano music in China. The research utilized comparative stylistic and historical musicological approaches, enabling the identification of similarities and differences in performance and composition styles, as well as the influence of Western traditions on Chinese music. This comprehensive approach facilitated a deeper understanding of two-piano music's evolution and its role within the global musical landscape.

**The purpose of this** article is to identify the history and theory of the development of two-piano playing in China, as well as to periodize its stages. The subject of the research is the study of methodological and other issues related to two-piano performance.

**Results and discussion.** The emergence and establishment of two-piano playing in China occurred during the second half of the 20th century. In 1964, Yin Chengzong and Chu Wanghua co-authored the first published piece for two pianos in China, titled «New Rural Song», thereby laying the foundation for the formation of Chinese music for two pianos. In the 1970s, the first public performances by Chinese professional pianists playing on two pianos took place [1, p. 162]. This unique performance style and stage effects, given the historical context of that period in China, attracted the attention of the cultural community. In particular, Professor Li Zude, the former rector of the Shenzhen School of Arts, made significant contributions to the development of Chinese music written for two pianos. He proposed the idea of holding a competition for pianists performing on two pianos, which was subsequently realized [2, c. 104]. It can be asserted that this type of piano performance expanded the Chinese perspective on piano art while

also fostering a growing interest in the development of this genre.

Due to the particular circumstances in China during that time, the historical era dictated that the path of development for two-piano performance was neither straightforward nor easy; rather, it was difficult and winding. After the decade of the «Cultural Revolution», China experienced a general decline in cultural development, with every art form subjected to destruction, including piano music. The development of two-piano playing could not escape this stagnation either. The innovation established by the emergence of «New Rural Song», with its «Chinese style», was effectively halted.

The creation of Chinese music for two pianos can be generally divided into three stages: emergence, establishment, and development.

**Emergence Stage (1960s–1970s):** During these years, the creation of Chinese piano music was closely tied to the events of the era and reflected the spirituality of Chinese society. Works from this period were often based on simple and everyday themes, and compositions for two pianos were no exception. Only one piece, «New Rural Song» was published during this period, and it undoubtedly holds paramount importance for the development of two-piano music in China. At this stage, the creation of piano music for two instruments was essentially a «harmony of folk song», connected to the simplicity of folk thinking, as exemplified by the piece «New Rural Song». In this work, the musical texture is based on the combination of melody and accompaniment, divided between the parts. The accompaniment features simple repetition, yet the expressiveness and complementarity of the two instruments create an effect that cannot be achieved by playing on one piano with four hands. After its first performance, this piece immediately resonated with listeners [1, p. 163-165].

At the emergence stage, piano music for two instruments clearly suffered from a lack of knowledge among performers in this field. The early attempts were somewhat unskilled. The compositions were characterized by their limited scope and narrow focus, with the exception of «New Rural Song». Nevertheless, music for two pianos continued to exist and gradually developed through the efforts of individual piano performers. The experience necessary for the establishment of two-piano performance only came with China's opening to the West.

**Establishment Period of Chinese Two-Piano Music (1980s and 1990s):** After the implementation of China's «opening-up» reforms in 1978, cultural and artistic exchanges between China and the West gradually expanded. During this time, the artistic form of two-piano performance began to attract the attention of Chinese musicians and educators, which stimulated the creation of such works. In this period, the most important feature of two-piano performance in China was that it moved away from the initial idea of «harmony of folk song» [3, p. 95-99]. Composers began to explore how to delve into folk music to shape a national style, how to find richer harmonies, and how to utilize the expressive and flexible qualities of two pianos in their joint sound. Another example is the piece «Spring Dawn», composed by

Lin Pingjin. The composer succeeded in conveying the folk character in this work without using traditional folk melodies. The pitch series of this piece is exhausted only at the end, in the final chord. The organization of rhythm is particularly interesting; it begins with the formula of one note per measure, progresses to two notes per measure, then three notes per measure, and ultimately establishes a new formula of one measure – four notes. Eventually, the situation is reached where eight notes fit into one measure. All these rhythmic complexities help the listener perceive the sound as if hearing the drumming drops of an increasingly cheerful spring rain.

Further Development Stage of Chinese Two-Piano Music (2000s and 2010s): With the onset of the 21st century and the conditions of global political, economic, and cultural integration, there has been increasing attention to piano music. During this period, the number of compositions for two pianos sharply increased, and the themes and ideas became even more diverse, indicating the onset of a new developmental phase. In the first decade of the new century, a total of 32 works for two pianos were published in China [4, p. 26]. Based on their content and form, three main categories can be identified: a) arrangements (transcriptions) for two pianos of folk music and pieces from other genres originally written for different instruments; b) original works for two pianos.

Arrangements for Two Pianos: In foreign countries, the arrangement of musical works for performance on two pianos (such as orchestral pieces, symphonies, and excerpts from operas) follows a traditional approach. This method – arranging for a piano ensemble – serves as one of the primary means of creating such works. At this new stage, four major compositions were written.

Adaptations for Two Pianos. These adaptations include «Ode to the Red Flag» (by Lü Qimin and other composers), «Guess», «Hundred Birds Towards the Phoenix» (both composed by Wang Jianzhong), and «Ba Shan Xuan» (composed by Zeng Zhen and others). This type of arrangement is based on existing originals, which are adapted for performance on two pianos, adding interest to works originally written for other instrumental ensembles. It can be said that these adaptations enhance the originals beyond their initial state. Zeng Zhen, one of the composers of «Ode to the Red Flag» and «Ba Shan Xuan», employed specific methods for arranging solo works for piano ensembles, including: a) breaking down the texture into lines to uncover or introduce hidden voices; b) transforming the combination of right and left hand parts on a single piano into an exchange of material between the two pianos. This approach reflects the characteristics of two-piano performance and has become a fundamental technique in arranging music originally written for other instruments [5, p. 73-74].

To integrate the expressive and powerful artistic form of two-piano performance into Chinese society and musical life, composers frequently turn to what is known as the «Chinese national style», aligning with their artistic goals. The main features of such works include the extraction and reworking of Chinese folk musical material. These compositions often emphasize the specific sound qualities of the instruments and are closely linked with ancient folk

customs, myths, and traditions. In summary, they exhibit strongly pronounced national characteristics and rely on the locality of the folklore used (for example, «Beijing Style» by Liu Ding, «Song of the Four Seasons» by Su Ting, etc.).

The political landscape has shifted, leading Chinese society to gradually open up and reconnect with the outside world. Chinese musicians gained access to various contemporary techniques and styles prevalent globally, and the creative idea of combining Chinese and Western elements became a primary direction in two-piano music.

For instance, consider He Miao's two-piano piece «The Border Between Day and Night»: the work is infused with impressionistic sounds, yet its structure is centered around the continuous development of the main theme and the free alternation of elements from Chinese national music. Another example is Zha Gan's piece «Joyful Struggle», where the listener witnesses the competition between two performers and the rivalry between the two instruments. The main theme revolves around this competitive and playful interaction.

From this, it can be concluded that contemporary Chinese composers aim to embody not merely the so-called «Chinese national style», but rather a portrayal of deeply rooted national charm and spirit.

Despite the relatively small number of two-piano compositions in such a large country as China, the development of two-piano music has been progressing steadily, becoming more sophisticated in both musical technique and artistic expression. By the end of the 20th century, two-piano performances began to gain prominence on larger concert stages in China. The uniqueness and novelty of this performance style captured the attention of audiences, significantly increasing its popularity. A landmark event occurred on November 12, 1997, when the «All-China Young Performers Two-Piano Competition – 97» was held in Shenzhen, marking a pivotal moment for the development and popularization of two-piano performance. This competition sparked interest and led to the inclusion of two-piano studies in various musical institutions across the country.

In 2003, motivated by the scarcity of two-piano compositions, Zhang Ouyu, a professor at the Wuhan Conservatory of Music, organized the "First Two-Piano Composition Competition in Chinese Style." By 2006, the best works from this competition, along with pieces by professors from the Wuhan and China Conservatories, were compiled in the «Collection of Chinese Works for Two Pianos». This collection was significant as it exclusively featured works by Chinese composers in a national style for two pianos.

In 2012, the collection «Piano. Two Pianos» was published, curated and edited by Fan Hao from the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, which included works by foreign composers for two pianos. He meticulously presented the musical compositions and added the histories of their creation. This collection, with the additional subtitle «All-China Professional Methodological Guide for Higher Music Education», has since been recognized as the best in its category.

Solo piano performance is the art of one performer, characterized by individual freedom and expression. In contrast, two-piano performance involves the collaboration of two dis-

tinct performers, requiring a shared understanding and interpretation of the piece. This duet approach not only emphasizes the synergy between the pianists but also demands a harmonious integration of their interpretations and technical skills. In the academic environment in China, the teaching of two-piano music has also gradually progressed. General classes, small group lessons, and specialized auditoriums for two-piano instruction have been introduced. However, at present, the proportion of two-piano ensemble classes in higher music education remains relatively low, and many lessons are offered only as electives. There are relatively few teaching materials of this kind, and the teaching methods are not systematic. Objectively, this situation hinders the advancement of two-piano performance to the next level of development [6, p. 104].

As the musical landscape evolved, there was a notable shift towards more sophisticated techniques and a broader range of stylistic influences. Composers started to experiment with contemporary methods and global musical trends, blending them with traditional elements to produce innovative and diverse works. This period saw an increase in the complexity and richness of two-piano compositions, reflecting a deeper engagement with both Chinese and international musical languages.

Currently, the overall high level of piano art in China and the spread of two-piano performance are not evenly matched or interrelated. This disparity is reflected in various aspects, such as teaching methods, the availability of instructional material for two pianos, and the original Chinese rep-

ertoire created to date. It is essential to study international practices and apply them to our specific context of music education. By advancing teaching methodologies, developing instructional materials, and examining works by Chinese composers, we should actively create a distinctive Chinese system for two-piano instruction. This system should emphasize the discipline and organization of performers and their pursuit of unique effects in two-piano ensemble performance.

**Conclusion.** The development of two-piano performance in China illustrates a dynamic interplay between cultural heritage and contemporary innovation. Beginning with foundational works like *New Rural Song* in the 1960s, the genre has evolved significantly, influenced by both domestic creativity and international trends. The establishment of competitions and collections dedicated to two-piano music has spurred a renaissance in this art form, leading to a rich repertoire that showcases the unique qualities of Chinese national style.

Despite ongoing challenges in education and resource availability, the dedication of composers and educators is gradually advancing the sophistication of two-piano performance. As the genre continues to grow, it has the potential to foster deeper artistic collaborations and expand its reach within the global musical landscape. By embracing both traditional and contemporary influences, Chinese two-piano music is poised to carve out a distinct identity that resonates with audiences, while contributing to the broader dialogue of global music education and performance.

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