



## Exploring the Artistic Representation of the Chinese National Spirit in Zhang Zhao's Piano Work "Ballade - Singing the Little Cowboy"

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### Abstract

**Background and Aim:** This study explores the life and works of Zhang Zhao, analyzes the compositional techniques of his modern national piano piece "Ballade - Singing the Young Cowherd," and investigates the manifestation of the Chinese national spirit in Zhang Zhao's modern national piano works. This can enrich people's understanding of the Chinese national spirit and provide new ideas for inheriting the Chinese national spirit and strengthening the consciousness of the Chinese national community.

**Materials and Methods:** The literature research method involves consulting, analyzing, and integrating documents based on specific research objectives and topics to understand the current state of the research field and identify better research paths. The work analysis method involves collecting examples of works and analyzing aspects such as their form structure, harmonic texture, rhythm expression, and thematic variations, ultimately extracting the compositional techniques and elements of national style characteristics. This study will provide a detailed analysis and summarization of the characteristic entries of national music elements based on a broad review of relevant literature and examples of works from both domestic and international sources, offering references for further research.

**Results:** Through the analysis of the work "Ballad - Singing the Little Cowherd," it is found that Zhang Zhao cleverly integrates elements of traditional Chinese music with Western musical structures, not only showcasing his profound musical skills but also inheriting and promoting the cultural essence of the Chinese nation. It reveals the innovative, patriotic, inclusive, harmonious, and resilient spirit embedded in the work.

**Conclusion:** The modern national piano work "Ballade - Singing of the Little Cowherd Wang" by Zhang Zhao, with its unique artistic style and profound historical and cultural connotations, demonstrates the indomitable and hard-working spirit of the Chinese nation. This is not only an innovative interpretation of music but also an inheritance and promotion of the Chinese national spirit.

**Keywords:** Zhang Zhao; Modern National Piano Works; Spirit of the Chinese Nation; Creative Techniques; Inclusion and Harmony; Perseverance

### Introduction

With the development of the times and the progress of Chinese society, the research on the inheritance of the Chinese national spirit and the popularization of the Chinese national community consciousness has received increasing attention. The Chinese national spirit reflects the social life of the Chinese people of all ethnic groups, represents the most essential and concentrated embodiment of Chinese culture, and is a cultural condensation of the lifestyles, ideals, beliefs, and values of various ethnic groups. It is the spiritual bond, support, and driving force for the survival and development of the Chinese nation, and the national soul of innovative socialist advanced culture (Fan, 2019). Modern Chinese national piano works, as an important research carrier, will receive more attention in future research. How to inherit the national spirit through national music is also an important content that researchers need to think about and explore in practice.

For modern Chinese piano music, Zhang Zhao is an indispensable figure. His works encompass various characteristics of national folk music, spanning an era from light-hearted pieces to profound poetic works. Zhang Zhao's compositions also possess deep cultural foundations, integrating elements of traditional Chinese music, including Chinese folk music, opera music, and instrumental music. By studying Zhang Zhao's works, we can better understand the cultural origins of Chinese music, delve deeply into the connotations of Chinese musical culture, and promote the exchange and integration of Chinese and Western musical cultures. From his works, we can discover many significant innovations that help us better appreciate the beauty of music and understand the essence of the national spirit inherent in music. Therefore, studying Zhang Zhao's national piano works holds significant research value, as it can help us better





understand the development trajectory of Chinese music and provide inspiration and guidance for future musical creations.

Therefore, Zhang Zhao's modern folk piano works have integrated folk music elements from various regions of China. With the development of Chinese society and the refinement of ethnic folk elements, Zhang Zhao's modern folk piano works have gradually presented the cultural connotation expression of the Chinese national spirit. Based on the analysis and interpretation of Zhang Zhao's modern national piano work *Ballade -- Singing the Second Little Cowboy*, this study explores the artistic embodiment of the Chinese national spirit in the work.

## Objectives

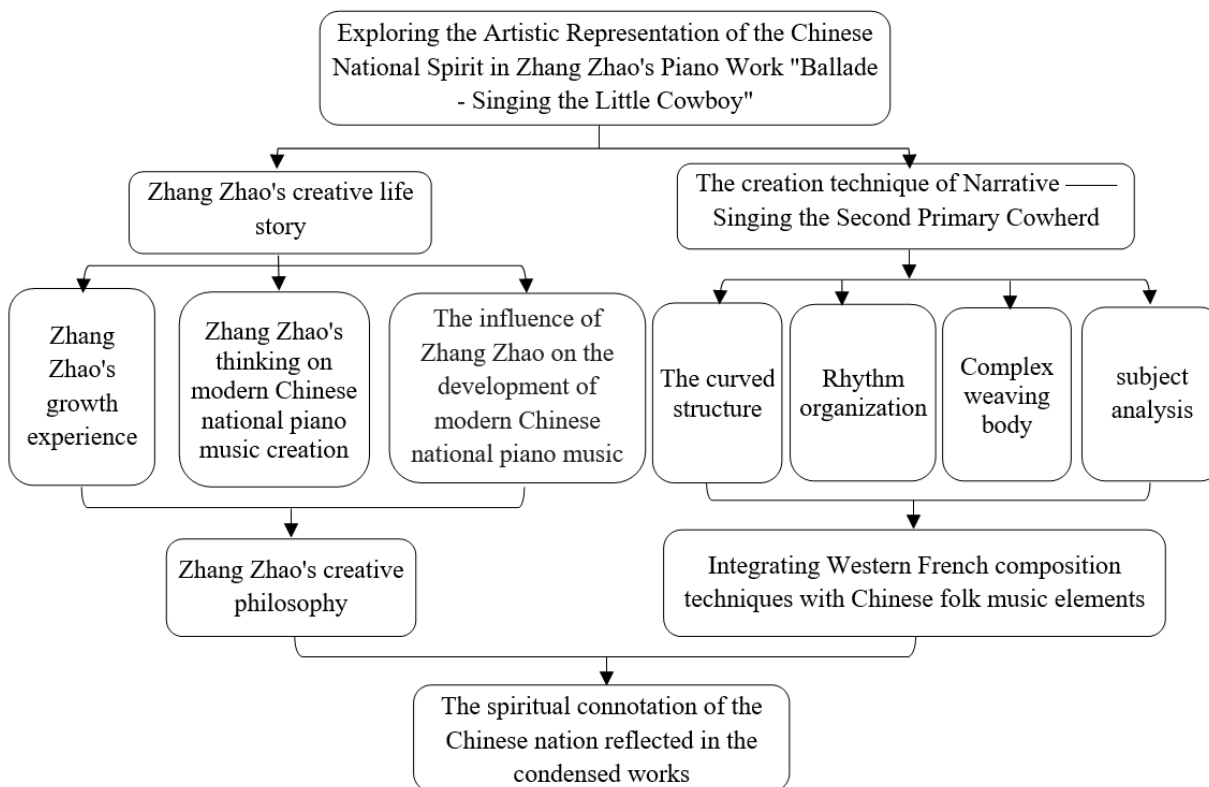
1. To study Zhang Zhao's creative life
2. To analyze Zhang Zhao's piano work "Ballad—Singing the Young Cowherd's Song" and its creative techniques
3. To explore the embodiment of the Chinese national spirit in Zhang Zhao's national piano works.

## Literature Review

Currently, there is considerable research on Zhang Zhao's musical works, focusing on the analysis of compositional techniques, national music styles, national characteristics, performance techniques, and aesthetic thoughts. Sun (2014) analyzed the unique harmonic colors and dramatic themes in Zhang Zhao's piano concerto "Ai Lao Rhapsody," proposing a modal structure with national characteristics and a pattern of Western sonata form. This combination of sincere and profound national emotions and personal experiences made this work a unique and influential piece in the history of contemporary Chinese piano concertos, providing a successful example of the coexistence of national characteristics, contemporaneity, and originality in national music creation. Zhou (2016) conducted an in-depth exploration of the concept of "Dao" in Chinese traditional artistic spirit reflected in Zhang Zhao's solo piece "Chinese Dream," proposing the manifestation of the concept of "Dao" in artistic works, integrating philosophical thoughts with the connotations of the work's style to elucidate the relationship between "technique" and "Dao." It was suggested that the success of Zhang Zhao's work offered initial insights into the nationalization of Chinese piano music. Xian (2017) explored Zhang Zhao's work "In That Distant Place" from aesthetic and national perspectives, proposing that relying on national culture and integrating musical aesthetic thoughts in creation is an innovative way to think about the development of national music creation. Tang (2019) conducted an in-depth analysis of the creative materials and content in Zhang Zhao's piano work "Three Yunnan Folk Songs," focusing on the cultural characteristics of Yi ethnic music, absorbing and transforming traditional Yi music, and proposing that grafting Yi music culture onto Western piano suites is conducive to shaping the unique artistic level and style characteristics of the work.



## Conceptual Framework



**Figure 1** Conceptual Framework  
**Note:** Constructed by the researcher

## Methodology

This paper will use literature research methods, work analysis methods, and practice summary methods to study Zhang Zhao's "Ballad - Singing the Cowboy Xiao Fang." By researching and organizing books and journal papers, understanding and refining the connotation of the Chinese national spirit, and then learning, sorting, and integrating materials such as score examples and audio, this paper analyzes the creative techniques and folk music characteristics of Zhang Zhao's "Ballad - Singing the Cowboy Xiao Fang." Combining the Chinese national music style and humanistic care expressed in the work, it summarizes how the Chinese national spirit is reflected in Zhang Zhao's modern national piano pieces, enhancing people's understanding of Zhang Zhao's modern national piano works and perception of the Chinese national spirit.

## Results

### 1. Zhang Zhao's Creative Life

#### 1.1 Zhang Zhao's Growth Experience

In 1964, Zhang Zhao was born into a musical family; his father was the renowned composer Zhang Nan. After the liberation, his father moved to the Hani and Yi Autonomous Prefecture of Honghe in Yunnan and lived in the Ailao Mountains for over thirty years. Zhang Zhao was born and raised in this area, which is densely populated by ethnic minorities. Despite living in the mountains, Zhang Zhao began his musical journey early with his father's efforts and support: learning the yangqin at 5, the violin at 6, the piano at 7, the accordion at 10, and composition with his father at 12. At 14, he was admitted to the Yunnan Provincial Arts School, embarking on a five-year educational journey under Professor Ye Jinsong to study piano. At the age of 16, his talent was recognized by Mr. Wang Zhenya, and he published his debut piece



"Scherzo" in "Music Composition," marking his official start as a composer. ("Music Composition" was first published in 1956, managed by the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles, and hosted by the Chinese Musicians Association.)

Zhang Zhao's father was part of the first batch of young people involved in China's first Five-Year Plan and rooted in the Honghe frontier for over 30 years, deeply influenced by the ethnic music of Honghe. Zhang Zhao was born on this red soil plateau, nurtured by the local culture. In that unique era, he learned composition and piano from his father, Zhang Nan, and folk songs and yangqin from his mother, Ma Jingfeng. Although young Zhang Zhao initially loved art, he gradually fell in love with music. Zhang Zhao said, "Looking back at that era feels like watching a black-and-white film, but hidden in the old piano was my colorful world. I expressed my beautiful dreams of the world through music. I felt that this beautiful world was brought by musicians, and I was eager to join their ranks. I felt like a 'music devotee'." (Zhang, 2018). While Zhang Zhao played Western music in his childhood, he was surrounded by excellent ethnic music in the minority areas, inspiring him to promote these precious traditions.

At 19, Zhang Zhao was admitted to the Music Department of Minzu University of China, majoring in piano and composition, and was retained as a teacher due to his excellent performance. In 1997, seeking further advancement in composition, he applied for graduate studies at the Central Conservatory of Music under Professor Guo Wenjing. He once said, "I am fortunate to be in the best era; Minzu University of China provided me with a solid foundation in ethnic music, and the Central Conservatory of Music opened a window to the world for me." These educational experiences laid a profound foundation for Zhang Zhao's future career in ethnic music composition.

### 1.2 Zhang Zhao's Reflections on the Creation of Modern Chinese National Piano Music

Zhang Zhao's creative career coincides with the fourth phase of the development of Chinese national piano music (1990 to present), which is the transition phase of Chinese national piano music to modern Chinese national piano music. During this period, Chinese national piano music has shown characteristics of internationalization and diversification. Composers are paying more attention to drawing nourishment from ethnic and folk music, deeply exploring and utilizing music elements with Chinese characteristics. In an interview, Zhang Zhao once said: "Looking at the history of the piano in China, the piano was introduced to China as war booty since the Yuan Dynasty, and it was called the seventy-two string pipa at that time. Emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty systematically studied the piano and Western music theory. At that time, the father of Western music, Bach, had not yet been born, but Kangxi had already tried to play Chinese guqin pieces on the ancient piano and had the desire for the piano to carry Chinese culture to the world. However, three hundred years have passed, and with the influx of a large amount of Western music into China, we have not turned that dream into reality." As Zhang Zhao talked about this, he couldn't help but shed tears and paused for a moment, revealing in his eyes the deep love and intense responsibility of a Chinese person with the blood of the descendants of Yan and Huang, facing the situation of his national music culture. He said: "Only when Chinese culture is integrated into world culture can we truly contribute to the world, and only then will the world respect us!" (Nie, 2014). To fulfill his long-cherished wish, Zhang Zhao composed the piano piece "Dream of China" in 2013, which is composed of four bells that traverse time and space. The first bell is imitated by the piano as the sound of ancient Chinese chime bells, "The piano is not only an instrument that can sing, but also an instrument that can touch the soul and make the heart sing!" It is this Western imported instrument that produces the lingering charm of the East, cleverly building a bridge of communication between Eastern and Western cultures. The second bell is the passionate alarm bell of the era, as China has been impacted by the Western Industrial Revolution since the Opium War, experiencing great social changes. At this moment, the great dream of revitalizing the Chinese nation has gathered countless righteous individuals, who united as the most enterprising force to move towards the ideal of national rejuvenation. The third bell represents the triumphant horn, as the Chinese nation has risen, and the reform and opening-up have brought about the revival and prosperity of the national economy. The fourth bell is the bell of a bright future that we all look forward to, continuing the cultural revival after the economic revival brought by reform and opening-up, with both economic and cultural legs standing tall in the world. "The Chinese Dream is the dream of the nation, the dream of every Chinese, and also the music dream of us as music workers." Zhang Zhao's simple and plain words reflect his indomitable spirit that bursts from his flesh and blood. As a creator on the front line of Chinese music culture, Zhang Zhao has dedicated decades to creation with the same diligence and hardship, solidifying his music dream.

### 1.3 Zhang Zhao's Influence on the Development of Modern Chinese National Piano Music



In his childhood, Zhang Zhao was fortunate to receive piano enlightenment education from the Chinese piano maestro Mr. Zhou Guangren, who continuously encouraged him to create Chinese piano works. Mr. Zhou Guangren has told him more than once, "You come from a border area, immersed in ethnic culture, and you can play the piano yourself. You should create piano works with a strong Chinese style." Famous musicians Wu Zuqiang and Wang Zhenya discovered Zhang Zhao's piano debut works "Seagull" and "Scherzo" at the first Nie Er Music Week when Zhang was 14 years old. Mr. Wang Zhenya published "Scherzo" in the national core journal "Music Composition," making Zhang Zhao the youngest composer in the country at that time and thus embarking on his creative path. Internationally renowned composer Guo Wenjing was Zhang Zhao's mentor when Zhang was a graduate student in composition at the Central Conservatory of Music, providing him with much inspiration and help. The famous pianist Bao Huijiao was the first performer of "Three Songs from Southern Yunnan," which was included in this year's "Chinese Piano Classics." She has always been enthusiastic about promoting Zhang Zhao's works, making great efforts. Notable music theorist Wei Tingge was very fond of "Pihuang," including it in the "50 Chinese Piano Classics," and personally revised and promoted it. The melody of music chases the rhythm of time year after year. From his connection with music to his current creative path, every teacher's nurturing and dedication have deeply moved Zhang Zhao, encouraging him to devote himself to China's music education career. Besides being a composer and pianist, Zhang Zhao has another important role — a professor at Minzu University of China. Zhang Zhao, who integrates creation, performance, and teaching, not only imparts technical knowledge of music to his students but also focuses on guiding their inner cultivation and aesthetic taste during the teaching process, sharing his aesthetic standards and musical ideas with them. Many of his students have become accomplished composers in society, such as Kang Zhuqing, Xu Liang, Ma Hui, and Li Yongmin, whose works have won various national composition awards, including the "Wenhua Award," "Five-One Project Award," "Chinese Cup Composition Award," among others. Additionally, prominent national composers like Siqin Zhaoketu, the author of "I Have a Date with the Prairie," have also emerged from his tutelage. In addition to his dedication to higher education, Zhang Zhao's work "Children's World" has been selected for inclusion in elementary school music textbooks. He expressed that there are very few children's songs domestically and hopes to contribute to early childhood education through his works. Zhang Zhao believes that "Music is not ordinary sound, but a special and extremely delicate language system that conveys inner culture. As a spiritual sustenance for humanity, music has not only entertainment functions but, more importantly, functions of joy and enlightenment. Entertainment is temporary, but joy is long-lasting and eternal. The beauty of classical music lies in its ability to provide spiritual enlightenment and joy to humanity." As long as the media positively guides the public to listen to classical music, classical music will become popular around us, and the nation's artistic aesthetic will gradually improve.

## 2. The Creative Techniques of "Ballad — Singing the Little Cowherd"

### 2.1 Characteristics of "Concert Adaptation Collections" Creation

In terms of the overall style of musical works, composer Zhang Zhao integrates nationalized music, Western compositional techniques, and self-individualized musical creation characteristics. Regarding melodic style, Zhang Zhao focuses more on the use of linear melodic lines from Chinese traditional music artistry, complemented by Western traditional harmonic systems and contrapuntal techniques, forming a highly distinctive artistic style. In the use of modes and tonality, the composer bases it on "tonal thinking," incorporating atonality's textures, functional harmonic concepts, and the collage of tonality and atonality within national modes, while adhering to the polyphonic vocabulary of piano music, striving to showcase the style and charm of traditional Chinese national music art.

In the creation of piano works, Zhang Zhao composed a large number of pieces in the Chinese national style. In these piano compositions, Zhang Zhao extensively draws from the folk music language and artistic characteristics of various regions and ethnic groups in China, conducting diversified artistic practice explorations. The main types are as follows: Piano works with opera themes and Piano works with national folk music themes. In piano works with opera themes, Zhang Zhao skillfully uses musical elements from traditional operas, such as the "Er Liu Ban" and "Copper Gong" rhythms, composing pieces with distinct opera characteristics, such as "Pihuang" and "Moments of Peking Opera." In piano works with national folk music themes, Zhang Zhao actively explores and excavates folk music materials, transplanting them into the creation and adaptation of piano compositions, producing works with the traditional national music style and charm of China. Examples include "Chinese Melodies," "Tibetan Suite," "Three Ballads from Southern Yunnan," and the "Concert Adaptation Collection" composed of seven piano pieces.



The seven pieces in the "Concert Adaptation Collection" include "My Motherland," "In That Distant Place," "Song of Mei Niang," "Story of Spring," "March of the Volunteers," "Song of the Chinese People's Liberation Army," and "Ballad—Singing of the Little Cowherd." These works have relatively grand overall structures and rich musical content. For instance, Zhang Zhao adapted the piano pieces "My Motherland" and "Story of Spring" from the interlude "My Motherland" from the movie "Shangganling" and the song "Story of Spring," expressing love for the motherland. He adapted the piano pieces "In That Distant Place" and "Song of Mei Niang" from Wang Luobin's folk song "In That Distant Place" and the interlude "Song of Mei Niang" from the drama "Song of Rejuvenation," expressing feelings of love. He adapted the piano pieces "Song of the Chinese People's Liberation Army," "March of the Volunteers," and "Ballad—Singing of the Little Cowherd" from compositions by Zheng Lücheng, Nie Er, and Li Jiefu, respectively, expressing admiration for national heroes.

The "Concert Adaptation Collection" is a self-definition of Zhang Zhao's creation, referring to the piano works adapted and created using seven classic Chinese songs as thematic material between 2009 and 2013, with the piano as the medium. Its main feature is the in-depth exploration of the musical themes and melodies of the original songs, expanding their structure and content, and using the unique artistic tension of the piano to achieve the development and reshaping of the thematic content. These piano works, due to their complex performance techniques and compositional methods, are specifically designated as the "Concert Adaptation Collection" to distinguish them from previous adaptations and creations of piano works using national and folk materials (Zhang & Dong, 2017).

Composer Zhang Zhao skillfully uses compositional techniques to deeply explore the musical vocabulary of classic songs, incorporating his creative concepts and thoughts, elevating the charm of the original song themes to a new realm and forming a new artistic image. Zhang Zhao's "Concert Adaptation Collection" holds an important position and role in the adaptation of traditional Chinese music and the development of piano music. Through the analysis of the texts of the seven works in the "Concert Adaptation Collection," it can be found that these works have certain correlations in terms of form structure, texture forms, and tonality. In terms of form structure, these piano pieces are relatively short, mostly having a ternary structure. In terms of texture forms, there are not only homophonic textures with four-part harmony but also contrapuntal textures in forms of contrasting polyphony, imitative polyphony, and accompaniment polyphony, with linear development of the melody. In terms of tonality, based on "tonal thinking," they ingeniously combine Western compositional techniques with national modes, integrating atonality into the logical system of tonal development, forming a sound characteristic that combines modern and traditional elements (Dong, 2015).

## 2.2 "Ballad - Singing of the Little Cowherd" Creation Techniques

Composers from different periods, countries, and ethnic groups, influenced by their social environments and cultural customs, employ various techniques in their musical creations. In the composition and arrangement of piano music in our country, composers often choose thematic forms, thematic materials, and musical structures based on the content they wish to express, aiming to accurately convey the musical message. The piece "Ballade - Singing the Cowherd Boy Erxiao" studied in this article is one of the works in Zhang Zhao's "Concert Arrangement Collection." During the adaptation and creation process of the original theme, composer Zhang Zhao skillfully uses musical form structures, rhythm and meter, counterpoint techniques, and other methods to profoundly showcase his adept musical composition skills. In this chapter, the analysis of the compositional techniques used in the work will focus on the following aspects.

### 2.2.1 Form Structure

"Ballad - Singing of the Young Herdsman" is a ternary form with an appendix structure, consisting of four parts: A, B, A1, and an epilogue. The first part A of the ternary form is a double section composed of musical segment A and its varied repetition A1, totaling 32 measures, with the same mode as the original piece, still in the C pentatonic scale. Among them, musical segment A (measures 1-16) is the first appearance of the theme melody, the highest voice part is a strict reproduction of the original theme melody, and A1 (measures 17-32) is a varied repetition of theme A, with the melody starting from the inner voice and gradually moving to the lower voice, eventually developing to the high voice part. At the same time, in measure 32, Zhang Zhao uses the omission of the modal tonic to form an imperfect cadence, providing momentum for the development of the musical emotion and the unfolding of conflicts in the middle part B. The second part B of the ternary form consists of five musical segments B, C, D, E, and F, totaling 190 measures. In musical segments B, C, D, and E, the composer Zhang Zhao incorporates different

harmonies into a fixed pattern, using harmonic thinking to handle atonality. Segment F (measures 208-222) is a false recapitulation in A pentatonic mode, preparing for the subsequent true recapitulation. A1 is the recapitulation part of the piece, totaling 46 measures. Segment A2 (measures 223-241) is a dynamic recapitulation in #C pentatonic mode. From the small connecting segment to segment A3, the mode returns to the initial C pentatonic. The epilogue, totaling 9 measures, is the final part of the entire ballad, summarizing the musical emotions of the whole piece and concluding it in the C major mode.

### 2.2.2 Rhythm Organization

As one of the fundamental means of musical expression, rhythm, with its unique independence and dynamism, plays an important role in the development of music. In "Ballad - Singing the Young Cowherd," composer Zhang Zhao constructs the entire piece by developing and varying the thematic material, achieving a unified musical rhythm. Throughout the piece, a large number of triplets and syncopated rhythms are used, which not only enhance the colorfulness of the music but also provide momentum for the changes in musical emotion. For instance, in section D of the development section, the composer uses continuously even triplets at a presto tempo to convey a tense and passionate musical emotion; see Figure 2. In section B of the development section, Zhang Zhao employs continuous syncopated rhythms with a lingering effect, breaking the original eighth-note rhythm, creating a floating and uncertain rhythmic effect, thereby expressing the nuanced characteristics within the passionate emotion; see Figure 3.



Figure 2 Sheet 1

Note: Constructed by the researcher



**Figure 3 Sheet 2**  
**Note:** Constructed by the researcher

### 2.2.3 Polyphonic Texture

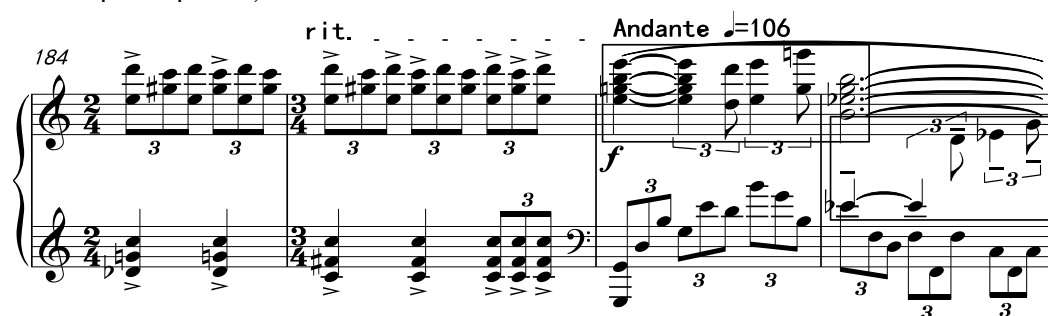
Throughout the entire work, the composer Zhang Zhao incorporates polyphonic thinking based on monophonic music. In the first part of the piece, section A, and the recapitulated part A1, the traditional contrasting polyphonic texture is used, creating a contrast between the thematic melody and the inner voices. For example, in theme A of the "Ballade," the high-pitched melodic part and the inner voices form a parallel contrasting texture of the same character. The melodic part is in the pentatonic scale of C Yu mode, while the inner voices are in the hexatonic scale of C Yu mode (a variation of the palace mode). Moreover, the ending note of the contrasting melody is also the starting note of the thematic variation's recapitulation. Refer to Figure 4 for the contrasting two voices (the parts marked with squares are the thematic melodies, and the parts marked with circles are the contrasting melodies of the inner voices).



**Figure 4 Sheet 3**  
**Note:** Constructed by the researcher



In section E of the development of "Ballade," a contrapuntal form of close imitation appears between the high melody part and the inner voices. The main phrase of the high melody part and the response phrase of the inner voice in the alto range form a semi-strict imitation. The main phrase is first played in the E pentatonic mode, and the response phrase is played in a descending augmented unison form. See Figure 5 (the part marked in the upper box is the main phrase, and the part marked in the lower box is the imitative response phrase).



**Figure 5** Sheet 4  
**Note:** Constructed by the researcher

#### 2.2.4 Theme Analysis

##### 2.2.4.1 Theme Melody

The thematic passage of "Ballade - Singing the Cowherd Boy" is a recreation by composer Zhang Zhao, who strictly based it on the single melody theme of the original song, developing its harmony and texture into a multi-part composition. The entire theme section is constructed from a continuously developing single musical idea, consisting of 16 bars, structured into four phrases following the progression of introduction, continuation, transition, and conclusion, with each phrase comprising four bars, forming a one-part structure of four phrases. The entire theme section is in the pentatonic mode centered on C; the tempo is Largo; the melodic line is undulating and melodious, primarily progressing stepwise with few leaps of thirds or fourths; the rhythm is predominantly smooth with eighth and quarter notes, employing the strict rhythmic form of Kunqu opera; the meter is a strongly rhythmic 2/4 time. The melody of the entire theme section exhibits the musical characteristics of Kunqu opera, being gentle and lingering, with strong lyrical and narrative qualities. Refer to Example Figure 6 for the musical theme.

##### 2.2.4.2 Theme Motif

In "Ballade - Singing the Cowherd Boy," composer Zhang Zhao employed the technique of motif material sequence development. For instance, at the end of the fourth phrase of the musical theme, in the last beat of bar 15 and the long note in bar 16, the technique of motif material sequence development is used. This theme motif consists of a four-note phrase, with the notes being bB-C-D-C, and the rhythm pattern being a sixteenth note followed by an eighth note and a half note, refer to Figure 6. In bar 71 of the melodic part, Zhang Zhao varied the rhythm to triplets and half notes, using an ascending fifth sequence of the theme motif phrase to depict the sound of a battle "bugle call," refer to Figure 7. In the middle section of the piece, in bars 238-241 of section F, the theme motif phrase repeats three times in different registers, from a high register one octave up to two octaves higher, then returning to the middle register, creating a distant and empty echo effect. Additionally, the repeated use of the tail note of the theme motif in bar 241 provides the impetus for the continuous rapid flow of thirty-second notes in bar 242, refer to Figure 8.



Figure 6 Sheet 5

Note: Constructed by the researcher



Figure 7 Sheet 6

Note: Constructed by the researcher

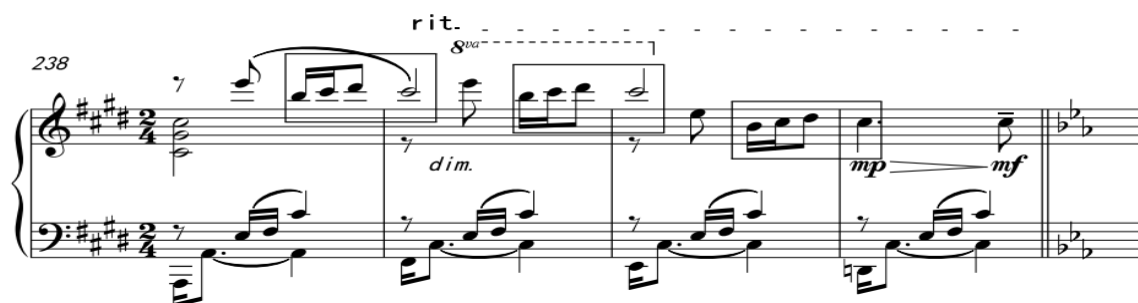


Figure 8 Sheet 7

Note: Constructed by the researcher

### 3. The Reflection of Chinese National Spirit in Zhang Zhao's National Piano Works

The Chinese national spirit reflects the social life of all ethnic groups in China. It is the most essential and concentrated embodiment of Chinese culture, a cultural condensation of various ethnic lifestyles, ideals, beliefs, and values. It is the spiritual bond, support, and driving force for the survival and development of



the Chinese nation, and the national soul for innovating advanced socialist culture (Fan, 2019). The Chinese national spirit is an unavoidable theme in Zhang Zhao's piano adaptations. Through the unique art form of music, he expresses his profound love for the motherland and pride in national culture. This emotional expression goes beyond superficial praise and penetrates every note, allowing listeners to deeply feel the intense patriotism during the listening process. "Ballade - Singing the Shepherd Boy Wang Er Xiao" is a piano narrative piece with distinct Chinese national characteristics from the "Concert Adaptation Collection." Composer Zhang Zhao uses the ballade form to explicitly state the source of the thematic material through the title, and by incorporating Chinese elements and colors, he creates a narrative work with a "Chinese style." Additionally, Zhang Zhao employs narrative techniques and a three-part structure to describe the complete storyline of the shepherd boy "Wang Er Xiao" fighting against enemies and ultimately sacrificing himself, as well as the spirit of the Chinese people during the Anti-Japanese War (Pei, 2020). The combination of classic Chinese folk songs and Western traditional musical techniques is highly significant. The use of atonality, the integration of modulations with national modes, and the combination of homophony and polyphony are crucial for the development of musical conflict and the expression of musical themes. This approach not only revitalizes this narrative song created during the Chinese Anti-Japanese War but also endows it with a sense of the times and an international flair. Such adaptation demonstrates Zhang Zhao's respect for and inheritance of traditional culture and showcases his innovative spirit in musical creation. Through this piece, Zhang Zhao successfully combines the charm of traditional Chinese folk music elements with modern musical elements, allowing more people to enjoy the music while experiencing the profound heritage and unique charm of traditional Chinese culture. This love and esteem for traditional culture are important manifestations of patriotic spirit. Moreover, his works enable the world to better understand and appreciate Chinese national music, further promoting the cultural confidence of the Chinese nation.

In Zhang Zhao's national piano works, one can often hear folk music elements from different regions. He skillfully integrates these elements to form a unique musical style. This integration not only reflects the diversity of Chinese national culture but also showcases the composer's deep understanding and proficient use of various musical styles. For instance, in the piece "Sound Poem," Zhang Zhao bases his creation on the folk songs of the Hani ethnic group and incorporates Western compositional methods. This cross-cultural combination makes the piano piece rich in ethnic flavor while retaining a modern feel. The Chinese nation is composed of 56 ethnic minorities, each with its unique musical traditions and cultural characteristics. Zhang Zhao's musical works, by integrating these different musical elements, essentially tell the story of the diverse unity of the Chinese nation through music. His pieces are not mere imitations of single ethnic music styles but explorations of how to organically combine these styles to create a richer and more diverse musical expression. Through the presentation of musical works, Zhang Zhao also conveys the value of harmonious coexistence pursued by the Chinese nation.

## Discussion

Zhang Zhao, as one of the most active and outstanding composers in the contemporary history of piano music composition in China, has shown through his entire body of work—from the earliest piano solo pieces "Seagull" and "Scherzo" to the piano concertos "Mountain Forest" and "Ailao Rhapsody," and then to the piano miniatures collection "Chinese Melodies," as well as piano adaptations of classic Chinese folk songs like "In That Distant Place" and "Narrative—Singing the Cowherd Boy Er Xiao"—that the creation of national piano works acts like a resilient guiding thread that runs through his entire musical creation. In the creation of national piano music, composer Zhang Zhao skillfully uses composition techniques to cleverly present different themes and melodies within a single work, thus integrating the foreign instrument of the piano into traditional Chinese music in a sophisticated manner. Through the unique artistic expression methods and musical language of the composer, the essence of the Chinese national spirit is fully showcased.

This study, through the analysis of Zhang Zhao's modern national piano work "Narrative—Singing the Cowherd Boy Er Xiao," explores Zhang Zhao's life and creative process, extracting the essence of the Chinese national spirit expressed in the work. Unlike most studies that remain at the level of appreciation and performance analysis of the works, this research has a positive effect on the development and promotion of modern Chinese national music, and it also helps to enhance the public's understanding of the Chinese national spirit in various fields and levels.



## Conclusion

Through the exploration of Zhang Zhao's growth and creative experiences, we gain an understanding of Zhang Zhao's insights and contributions to the development of modern Chinese national piano music composition. By analyzing the compositional techniques of "Ballade—Singing the Cowherd Boy," we observe the characteristics of the piece's form, rhythm organization, polyphonic texture, and thematic melody usage. Zhang Zhao skillfully integrates elements of traditional Chinese music with Western musical structures, thereby forming his unique style of modern Chinese national music. Through the analysis of the artistic expression techniques in "Ballade—Singing the Cowherd Boy," we uncover the work's embedded essence of patriotism, resilience, and the spirit of self-improvement inherent to the Chinese nation. Zhang Zhao not only showcases his profound musical foundation but also inherits and promotes the cultural essence of the Chinese nation. The piece, with its beautiful melody and sincere emotions, inspires people's yearning for a better life and resonates with the spirit of self-improvement of the Chinese nation.

## Recommendation

Based on the results of the study, the following recommendations are made to enhance the competency of student leaders in private colleges and universities:

First, a screening mechanism based on the competency model was established. The screening criteria Theoretical Suggestions: This study mainly focuses on exploring Zhang Zhao's creative life and analyzing the compositional techniques of "Ballad - Singing of Er Xiao, the Cowherd". Currently, the research is concentrated on this single direction to reflect the spirit of the Chinese nation. The exploration of the aesthetics and style of Zhang Zhao's modern national piano music is not in-depth enough, which will be an important direction that I need to pay attention to in future research.

Practical Suggestions: It is recommended to strengthen the performance analysis of Zhang Zhao's modern national piano works and the exploration of the connotations of Chinese national music styles. This will guide piano performers to better express Zhang Zhao's modern national piano works. The appreciation and teaching of national music are crucial for the continued and better development of Chinese national music in the future. I will continue to focus on Zhang Zhao's works and conduct more in-depth and multi-level studies of modern national piano music.

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