

Liang Yunjiang's Contributions to the Preservation and Transmission of Erhu in Contemporary Composition Techniques

Xianzhao Xu*, Sarawut Choatchamrat

College of Music, Mahasarakham University, Thailand

Corresponding author: Xianzhao Xu, E-mail: xianzhuoxu.msu@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates Liang Yunjiang's contributions to the preservation and transmission of Erhu through performance, composition, education, and technological innovation. Liang Yunjiang, a renowned Erhu musician and educator, has been instrumental in increasing the instrument's popularity in China and worldwide. Through over 100 concerts in more than ten countries, he has aggressively promoted Chinese folk music internationally, enabling cultural interchange and improving the Erhu's prominence in current music. His technical advancements, notably the "gravity bowing" method, transformed the instrument's timbral expressiveness by increasing its dynamic range and tone depth. As an instructor, Liang has taught award-winning students and incorporated scientific procedures into Erhu instruction, such as biomechanics-based performance techniques and interdisciplinary approaches that combine traditional Chinese music with Western composition. His founding of the "Chinese Style Erhu Orchestra" has offered an important performance venue for students, nurturing a new generation of musicians capable of integrating tradition with contemporary.

Key words: Erhu, Liang Yunjiang, Preservation, Transmission, Chinese Folk Music, Contemporary Composition

INTRODUCTION

The Erhu is a typical representation of traditional Chinese string instruments, with deep cultural significance and historical relevance. The Erhu, which originated as the "Xiqin" of the Tang Dynasty and evolved over centuries, has progressed from a marginal street performance tool to a core instrument in modern Chinese orchestras. This shift, distinguished by creative innovation and cultural elevation, has been pushed by generations of musicians, including Liu Tianhua and Hua Yanjun, whose pioneering compositions established the Erhu as a powerful solo instrument with global reach (Qiaoyi, 2024; Li, 2022; Wang & Kantasiri, 2024). This progress continues in the twenty-first century, thanks to the creative and instructional contributions of major artists such as Liang Yunjiang, whose work epitomizes the dynamic balancing of tradition and innovation.

Liang Yunjiang has been instrumental in rethinking the function of the Erhu in modern composition and performance. His creative vision, founded on the concept of Zhong Guo Feng (Chinese Erhu Song), combines traditional Erhu aesthetics with Western musical genres, broadening the instrument's expressive capabilities. Liang's seminal pieces, Jiang He Yun Meng and Zhong Guo Feng, established the Erhu's versatility in symphonic and chamber

music situations and reinterpreted its role in cross-cultural discourse. His paintings connect the past and the present, East and West, demonstrating the Erhu's ability to recreate itself without losing its cultural identity (Chao & Karin, 2020; Lian, 2019).

In addition to composition, Liang has had an impact on education and academic research. As chairman of the Department of Folk Music at the Sichuan Conservatory of Music, he has created a systematic approach to Erhu education, developing a new generation of artists who have succeeded worldwide. He has raised the global profile of Chinese folk music with initiatives like the Blue Dream Chamber Orchestra and overseas tours. His scholarly contributions, which include a study on performance approaches, instrument innovation, and music history, provide crucial theoretical frameworks for the further growth of Erhu as both an art form and an academic field (Hu & Liu, 2024; Zhang & Alijla, 2019).

This article investigates Liang Yunjiang's multifarious contributions to Erhu preservation and transmission in light of modern composing approaches. Analyzing his works, teaching philosophy, and research output illustrates how traditional folk instruments can be creatively adapted and how such efforts contribute to the long-term transmission of cultural heritage in a globalized musical context.

Research Question

- How has Liang Yunjiang contributed to the preservation and transmission of Erhu in contemporary composition techniques?

LITERATURE REVIEW

General Knowledge about the History of Erhu

The Erhu, a quintessential traditional stringed instrument of China, originates from the Tang Dynasty's "Xiqin," played by rubbing bamboo strips between two strings. Over the ages, the instrument underwent evolution, with notable advancements during the Song and Yuan Dynasties when horsetail bows supplanted bamboo, establishing the preliminary design of the contemporary Erhu. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the Erhu underwent structural maturation and acquired prominence as an accompanying instrument in opera and folk music, while its rank remained subordinate to more prestigious instruments such as the Guqin and Pipa. The 20th century was pivotal with Liu Tianhua's inventions; he created new Erhu pieces such as "Song in Sickness" and used scientific teaching techniques inspired by Western violin education. This initiated the Erhu's evolution into a professional solo instrument and established the foundation for further upgrades (Gai, 2022).

In contemporary society, Erhu has adopted both innovation and globalization. The Erhu has cultivated a vast creative repertoire by merging Chinese folk tunes with Western methods and integrating several regional styles, including the refined Jiangnan style and the ethnically inspired Shu School. The international proliferation has been enabled by media channels, global performances, and an expanding network of aficionados, rendering it a symbol of Chinese cultural identity outside. However, the issues of repertory constraints and the potential loss of traditional essence persist in the face of modernity. Creating new compositions and instructional initiatives is vital for preserving Erhu's cultural heritage and maintaining its vibrant presence in national and international music scenes (Song et al., 2024).

General Knowledge about the Erhu Instrument

The Erhu is a traditional Chinese two-stringed bowed instrument distinguished by its emotive, vocal-like tone. Its main components are a sound box (often hexagonal or octagonal), python-skin soundboard, neck, headstock, pegs, bridge, bow, and strings. It is played by rubbing horsetail bow hair between two steel or nylon strings, with the tuning typically set to a perfect fifth (D-A). Modern versions include electroacoustic Erhus and folding designs for convenience, while regional variations such as the Shu and Jiangnan schools maintain distinct local characteristics. The Erhu's workmanship is based on high-quality wood (such as ancient mahogany or rosewood) and python skin, and the instrument's acoustic qualities are intimately related to its construction, particularly the tension and arrangement of the skins (Shuoxian et al., 2008; Ren & Thotham, 2023).

Making a high-quality Erhu demands precise handcrafting skills that have been passed down through centuries.

Critical stages include sculpting the sound box, binding the python skin under exact circumstances, and tweaking the instrument's tone using a process known as "sound opening," which can take 150-200 hours of playing time to settle and mature properly. The Erhu's sound quality is determined by the luthier's craftsmanship and the player's talent. Maintenance is also important for retaining tone and lifespan, which includes humidity prevention, frequent bow hair washing, and cautious rosin application. The Erhu has evolved into a potent instrument in traditional and modern Chinese music thanks to innovation in design and craftsmanship and adherence to traditional techniques (Shuting et al., 2024; Li et al., 2019).

General Knowledge about Erhu Performance Techniques

Erhu performing skills are intricate, integrating exact posture, right-hand bowing, and left-hand fingerwork to provide its characteristic vocal-like timbre. Traditional playing is often performed while seated; however, standing positions are becoming more prevalent in contemporary performances to enhance expressive range. Bowing with the right hand is fundamental to tone modulation, necessitating synchronized shoulder, arm, wrist, and fingers motions (Lau, 2007). The left hand modulates pitch and emotional expression using vibrato, glissando, tremolo, overtone creation, and positional shifting. Every move affects the Erhu's timbre and reactivity, enabling the performer to express a spectrum of emotions, from melancholic melodies to dynamic narrative sequences. These approaches allow complex musical narratives underpinned by precise finger coordination and nuanced articulation (Gao & Karin, 2023; Fan & Chuangprakhon, 2024).

Specialized approaches augment the expressive potential of the Erhu. These encompass the "big bow strike" for imitating horse hoofbeats, double-string playing for textured effects, and the renowned "neighing horse" method utilized in dramatic pieces such as War Horse Galloping. The back bow facilitates smooth transitions between phrases, and accurate tone control is crucial for expressing emotion through dynamics and timbre. The fretless architecture of the Erhu necessitates exceptional auditory acuity, precise finger placement, and comprehensive knowledge of tuning mechanisms for accurate pitch performance. The Erhu's expressive capability is derived from its design and the performer's capacity to integrate musical emotion, regulate tone, and convert technique into artistry (Gong et al., 2024; Shun & Boonsrianun, 2023).

Research Theory

This study used ethnomusicology theory to investigate the cultural and historical backdrop of Liang Yunjiang's compositions, namely how his works retain and modernize traditional traditions. Ethnomusicology provides a framework for studying the relationship between folk music and modern composition, categorizing and comparing approaches within regional and national traditions. This study will analyze the significance of Liang's inventions in Erhu music, namely his

role in creating the instrument's worldwide presence, using fieldwork, comparative analysis, and historical contextualization (Tang, 2021; Wang, 2022). By combining musicology and ethnomusicology, the research will emphasize Liang Yunjiang's contribution to the preservation, transmission, and modernization of Erhu performance and composition.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative methodology grounded in musicology and ethnomusicology to examine Liang Yunjiang's role in the preservation and transmission of Erhu. The study aims to explore his performance practices, compositional innovations, pedagogical approaches, and cultural outreach through a combination of historical, analytical, and field-based methods (Table 1).

RESULTS

Liang Yunjiang's Activities for the Preservation and Transmission of Erhu

Liang Yunjiang has significantly contributed to the Erhu's preservation, innovation, and international promotion via various artistic, educational, and cultural exchange initiatives. As a distinguished Erhu musician and educator, he has enhanced the instrument's prominence both in China and outside. Liang has performed over 100 times in more than ten countries, including Germany, Austria, Japan, South Korea, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh, effectively introducing the Erhu to international audiences. These performances transcend mere technical proficiency; they function as significant cultural interactions that promote mutual understanding and underscore the creative richness of traditional Chinese music (Figure 1).

In creative planning, Liang has coordinated and participated in significant themed concerts, like "Erhu Love, Chinese Dream," where he integrates ancient and contemporary aesthetics. These performances merge scholarly precision with approachability, presenting technically challenging masterpieces and melodically captivating compositions that appeal to broader audiences. Liang amalgamates ancient Erhu techniques with contemporary musical components,

and his focus on stage design, lighting, and ambiance cultivates an immersive experience that captivates new audiences in Chinese folk music. These initiatives substantially enhance the dissemination and rejuvenation of the Erhu and traditional Chinese music to wider audiences.

Liang Yunjiang is significantly engaged in institutional and educational endeavors related to folk music. He has participated as a juror in esteemed national contests, including the China Golden Bell Awards and the Wenhua Award, where he maintains elevated artistic standards and recognizes emerging musical potential. His involvement in these events illustrates his dedication to cultivating the forthcoming generation of performers and upholding the professional integrity of the folk music domain. Moreover, Liang actively instructs in national initiatives like the National Arts Fund, imparting his extensive performance knowledge, stage experience, and interpretative insights to emerging Erhu practitioners. His comprehensive mentoring revitalizes Erhu's transmission by integrating academic knowledge with practical performance tactics.

Liang Yunjiang's Main Honors

As of 2024, Liang Yunjiang has had a long and famous artistic career, receiving over a hundred awards for his extraordinary achievements and important contributions to the preservation and transmission of Chinese folk music.



Figure 1. Liang Yunjiang performed in Sri Lanka
Source: Xianzhuo Xu (2024)

Table 1. Methodology

Method	Description	Purpose
Fieldwork and interviews	- Conducted in-depth interviews with Liang Yunjiang, his students, and colleagues; observed rehearsals and performances.	- To gather first-hand insights on Liang's artistic philosophy, pedagogy, and real-time practices.
Document and media analysis	- Reviewed concert programs, teaching materials, competition records, published scores, and media coverage (videos, articles, interviews).	- To contextualize Liang's musical contributions and trace public dissemination of his work.
Ethnomusicological framework	- Applied ethnomusicology to interpret cultural, regional, and historical dimensions of Liang's music; explored its role in intangible cultural heritage.	- To understand how Liang's work contributes to the preservation and transmission of Erhu in context.
Analytical synthesis	- Integrated findings from all sources and approaches.	- To evaluate Liang Yunjiang's comprehensive role in Erhu preservation, innovation, and education.

Internationally, he placed first in the professional category of the Chamber Music Competition at the 8th World Music Festival in Austria. His exceptional technical ability and deep, nuanced understanding of musical compositions enabled him to outperform top-tier musicians worldwide. This accomplishment validated his talent and increased the global exposure of Chinese folk music, proving its distinct appeal and expressive strength in the international arena.

Liang's Erhu concerto "Jiang He Yun Meng" has received high praise in the composing world. The piece won first place in the "Autumn in Chengdu" composition competition and was recognized with the renowned Bashu Literature and Art Award. The Chinese Music Encyclopedia's Erhu Volume recognized its artistic brilliance and impact, making it essential repertory for national-level contests. These accolades recognize the work's long-term significance and emphasize Liang Yunjiang's contribution to the preservation and transmission of national music traditions via contemporary creative expression.

Liang has also excelled in school. The Sichuan Provincial People's Government presented him with the Teaching Achievement Award for his long-term commitment to music instruction and the unique approaches he devised to promote talent. Liang's gentle mentorship and strong commitment to student growth demonstrate his dedication to preserving and transmitting Erhu arts, which has earned him the title of "excellent instructor" on several occasions. His impact continues to inspire new generations of artists, cementing his reputation as a performer and professor of Chinese folk music.

Liang Yunjiang's Significant Teaching Contributions

Liang Yunjiang, an extraordinary educator with significant achievements in the field of national music education, has mentored a number of exceptional pupils who have won major international competition honors. His distinctive and successful teaching techniques and pedagogical principles have left an indelible mark in the sector, providing significant expertise for preserving and transmitting traditional Chinese music.

In terms of technical innovation, Liang Yunjiang has extensively researched the biomechanics of Erhu performance and the scientific nature of posture, offering groundbreaking theories such as "gravity bowing" and "hip positioning." The gravity bowing technique improves the expressiveness and layering of the Erhu sound by adjusting the distribution of arm weight during performance, whilst the hip placement approach assures stability and body synchronization. These advances have considerably revolutionized Erhu education by offering a more scientific, efficient approach to skill development, fostering both technical excellence and long-term performance habits. This scientific framework directly contributes to the preservation and transfer of Erhu skills by current educational standards.

Liang Yunjiang regularly uses a teaching philosophy that combines theory and practice. He established and promoted the "Chinese Style Erhu Orchestra," which provides students with a dramatic stage experience. Students translate

theoretical knowledge into real-world artistry via rehearsals and public performances, honing their musical interpretation, collaboration, and stage presence. These performing activities improve technical skills and build a stronger emotional connection to folk music, critical to its preservation and transmission in modern culture (Figure 2).

Furthermore, Liang Yunjiang actively supports interdisciplinary learning by including Western composing techniques—such as impressionistic harmony and contemporary polyphony—in his curriculum. This expanded pedagogical viewpoint allows students to rethink traditional Chinese folk music through the prism of global musical culture, fostering creativity while preserving legacy. Liang Yunjiang cultivates a generation of musicians who are great performers and unique cultural ambassadors by fusing East and West. His pedagogical program offers a compelling template for preserving and transmitting Chinese folk music in an increasingly globalized society.

Novel Erhu Techniques Developed by Liang Yunjiang

Throughout the extensive history of Erhu performance and composition, Liang Yunjiang has constantly embodied a spirit of creativity, audaciously confronting tradition and developing several groundbreaking methodologies that have significantly influenced the preservation and dissemination of Erhu art. His contributions enhance the instrument's expressive capabilities and establish a progressive framework for its sustained evolution in contemporary musical contexts (Figure 3).

Liang Yunjiang's most significant innovation is his "gravity bowing" technique. Through comprehensive performance testing and theoretical investigation, he has attained a breakthrough in the timbre creation of the Erhu by meticulously calibrating the distribution of arm weight during performance. Traditionally, the Erhu has had constraints because of its slender volume and restricted tonal diversity. Liang's approach addresses these challenges by dynamically regulating arm weight in accordance with bow speed and pressure, yielding a richer, more resonant tone. In vigorous musical sections, heightened gravitational application



Figure 2. Chinese style Erhu Orchestra by Liang Yunjiang
Source: Xianzhuo Xu (2024)



Figure 3. Liang Yunjiang's album of Erhu
Source: Xianzhao Xu (2024)

enhances strength and tension; gentler control yields softness and delicacy in lyrical segments. This invention significantly enhances the emotional and auditory range of the Erhu, thus aiding its preservation and transmission by improving its adaptability to traditional and contemporary music.

Liang Yunjiang has incorporated contemporary musical elements into Erhu compositions, transcending traditional folk music's rhythmic and tonal limitations. In his piece *Miluo River*, he explores compound rhythms and atonality, providing a novel aural experience and broadening the expressive potential of the Erhu. These methodologies enable the instrument to express intricate emotions and abstract concepts, embodying a contemporary creative vision while preserving a connection to its cultural heritage. These developments facilitate the preservation and transmission of Erhu by maintaining its significance in modern creative expression.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The preservation and transmission of indigenous musical traditions, exemplified by the Erhu, have gained significance in a more globalized and swiftly modernizing world. Liang Yunjiang's many contributions—encompassing performance, composition, teaching, and cultural exchange—exemplify an efficient and progressive framework for preserving the continuity and vibrancy of this emblematic Chinese instrument (Wang & Thotham, 2024; Cao & Boonsrianun, 2023). His work demonstrates that preservation does not include a static reproduction of the past; instead, it necessitates innovative involvement, contextual adaptation, and intergenerational transmission via developing platforms and practices.

Liang Yunjiang has transformed the Erhu from its conventional function into a widely acknowledged solo and ensemble instrument. His global tours and themed performances not only exhibit the artistic depth of the Erhu but also reintroduce it to varied audiences in novel cultural contexts. These performances extend the instrument's influence and enable its traditional sound to reverberate in contemporary concert venues—maintaining its core while facilitating

cross-cultural communication (Xiaodun & Xiaohui, 2004; Ye et al., 2023).

Liang Yunjiang's breakthroughs in composition and technique—such as gravity bowing, the integration of compound rhythms and atonality, and the structural unification of Eastern and Western musical forms—redefine the possibilities of Erhu music. These developments exemplify a dynamic transmission strategy wherein tradition is not simply transmitted but adapted to meet modern creative and cultural demands (Xuelai, 2023; Zhang & Bhengsri, 2024; Yue & Seekhunlio, 2023). By connecting folk idioms with contemporary musical languages, Liang guarantees the Erhu's relevance to emerging generations of composers, performers, and audiences.

Education is arguably the most vital medium for the enduring preservation and transmission of knowledge. Liang Yunjiang's systematic teaching model—focusing on bio-mechanical technique, stage practice, and interdisciplinary learning—establishes a holistic environment for students to assimilate conventional information while fostering inventive potential (Hu, 2022; Chang et al., 2024). His synthesis of theory and practice and his focus on performance-oriented learning have cultivated a generation of Erhu performers and educators prepared to advance and transform the art form.

In conclusion, Liang Yunjiang's Erhu preservation and transmission methodology represents a comprehensive model—anchored in tradition but adapting to modern exigencies. By preserving the cultural essence of the Erhu while broadening its expressive and pedagogical scope, he establishes a significant benchmark for protecting intangible cultural assets in contemporary society. His endeavors confirm that authentic preservation of heritage resides not in seclusion but in creativity informed by profound reverence for cultural origins.

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