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Creative Innovation of Traditional Chinese Music Under Industrial Development

Zeng Haiyun[1] and Nutthan Inkhong[2]

[1]Ph.D. Candidate, Doctor of Philosophy in Arts Performance Communication Academy of Arts and Philosophy, Shinawatra University, Thailand

[2]Dr.Academy of Arts and Philosophy, Shinawatra University, Thailand

[1]E-mail: 805860985@qq.com, ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0001-2184-9252

[2]E-mail: nutthan.i@siu.ac.th, ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0002-1208-2763

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Abstract

Background and Aims: This study examines the relationship between the music industry and traditional Chinese music and identifies commercial composition techniques that enable heritage preservation within industrial logic.

Methodology: This study adopted a mixed-methods research design. The qualitative part used co-occurrence analysis of literature and industry documents published between 2004 and 2024. The quantitative part used a stratified survey of 300 digital-music consumers in China. The sample included respondents from different city levels, age groups, and music-learning backgrounds. The collected data were analyzed through reliability testing, descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis, multiple regression analysis, and one-way ANOVA. The results showed strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha of 0.928.

Results: The quantitative results confirmed that record-company influence, brand marketing, and platform attitudes significantly drive stylistic and communicative changes, explaining 37.3% of the variance in music style change. Popular cultural attitudes also served as a critical moderating factor. In addition, we identified five commercial creation dimensions from cross-media cases and an original studio-based composition: melodic adaptation, harmonic fusion, orchestration innovation, flexible structure, and multimedia integration.

Conclusion: The findings suggest that the sustainable market integration of traditional Chinese music depends on the synchronous alignment of industrial infrastructure and compositional innovation. Rather than advocating isolationist conservation, this study argues that effective heritage preservation requires transforming traditional musical identifiers into commercially operational variables. In this process, creative technique functions as an integral component of industrial strategy rather than as a mere artistic embellishment.

Keywords: Chinese Traditional Music; Music Industry; Popular Music Composition Techniques

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Introduction

The contemporary Chinese music industry has entered a stage of rapid digitalization, phantomization, and market expansion. The music industry itself has evolved through four developmental phases since 1979: accumulation, spontaneous growth, explosive expansion, and conscious regulation. By 2023, the total market scale reached 4695.62 billion RMB, with digital music contributing 893.45 billion RMB (CUC, 2024). This development indicates that music in contemporary China is no longer only an artistic product, but also a cultural commodity shaped by record companies, platform mechanisms, copyright systems, brand marketing, media technologies, and consumer preferences. Globally, Western pop music genres, including pop, rock, hip hop, rap, dance, and electronic music, continue to dominate consumer preferences, with 52% of respondents identifying music as a source of social and identity belonging (IFPI, 2023). In China, these Western-derived styles similarly capture primary audience attention among post-90s and post-00s demographics, who represent the core digital music consumer base (Tencent Music Research Institute, 2021). Therefore, the contemporary Chinese music industry provides both new opportunities and new pressures for the transformation of traditional Chinese music.

Traditional Chinese music faces significant challenges in the contemporary commercial market. On the one hand, traditional Chinese music contains distinctive cultural and technical systems, including Qupai and Gelu frameworks in theatrical music, pentatonic modal systems, traditional instrumental timbres, and rubato rhythmic freedom. These elements constitute the cultural identity and aesthetic value of traditional music. On the other hand, these characteristics may create structural mismatches with commercial music's demand for standardized phrase lengths, memorable hooks, clear rhythmic organization, and rapid audience capture. In the current market, traditional Chinese music still faces severe marginalization. It ranks last in popularity among young Chinese audiences, scoring merely 82 points in digital influence reports, while its conventional performance and creation models remain largely confined to government-subsidized institutions that resist market-oriented adaptation (Wang, X. D., 2016). This situation shows that the key issue is not only how to preserve traditional Chinese music, but also how to make it communicable, recognizable, and commercially adaptable in the digital music environment.

Previous studies and historical cases have shown that industrial mechanisms can reshape musical styles and communication paths. Historically, Western musical forms, including jazz, rock, and R&B, entered China through record companies and commercial channels. These genres progressively hybridized with local elements and generated new stylistic variants, ranging from jazz-fusion albums to rock bands incorporating Xiao and Sanxian. These precedents suggest that record companies, commercial production systems, and communication channels can strongly influence the transformation of musical forms.

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However, existing scholarship has usually treated the music industry, traditional Chinese music, and commercial composition techniques as separate or dyadic fields. Some studies have focused on the development of the music industry, while others have emphasized the cultural and historical value of traditional Chinese music. Comparatively less attention has been given to the integrated relationship among industrial mechanisms, traditional musical heritage, and practical commercial creation techniques. As a result, there remains a research gap in explaining how industrial forces reshape traditional Chinese music and how composition techniques can bridge heritage preservation with market logic.

Therefore, this study investigates the relationship between the music industry and traditional Chinese music and identifies actionable commercial creation techniques that enable heritage preservation within industrial logic. Specifically, the study examines how record companies influence brand marketing, music platform attitudes, and popular cultural attitudes, and how these relate to changes in music style and communication paths. It also explores how traditional musical identifiers can be adapted through melodic adaptation, harmonic fusion, orchestration innovation, flexible structure, and multimedia integration. By combining qualitative co-occurrence analysis of literature and industry documents with quantitative survey data from digital-music consumers, this study aims to clarify both the industrial conditions and the compositional strategies that support the creative innovation of traditional Chinese music under industrial development.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the Relationship Between the Music Industry and Traditional Chinese Music
2. To analyze Commercial Creation Techniques for Traditional Chinese Music

Literature Review

The development of China's music industry

Contemporary commercial creation for traditional Chinese music employs five innovative dimensions. Melodic techniques incorporate classical poetry into lyrics, converting tonal patterns and emotional registers into modern melodic contours, or reinterpreting traditional folk tunes through rhythmic and pitch adjustments. Harmonic approaches fuse pentatonic modal frameworks with modern coloristic chords—seventh, ninth, suspended, and altered chords—to create culturally specific atmospheres without abandoning functional syntax. Orchestration innovates through expanded performance techniques on traditional instruments, for instance, Pipa, Erhu, Guzheng, and hybrid combinations with Western orchestral or electronic synthesizer timbres. Structural layouts abandon rigid traditional forms in favor of free sectional designs or multi-thematic narratives that accommodate media-specific timing. Finally, multimedia integration utilizes digital audio workstations, virtual ethnic

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instruments, and visual-art synchronization to enhance immersive presentation in broadcast and online platforms (Ji, 2014).

Traditional music forms in China

Traditional Chinese music encompasses four historical categories: folk, literati, court, and religious music. Its creation follows distinctive structural principles: theatrical music adheres to Qupai (modal melodies) and Gelu (prosodic patterns) dictated by poetic text structures, while guqin music employs documented techniques such as Tanpo, Jianzi, and Tousheng. Theoretical systems utilize pentatonic scales (Gong, Shang, Jue, Zhi, Yu) with regional variations. Southern traditions favor fourth-third intervals; Northern traditions favor fifth-fourth progressions. Instrumentation includes Wind (Dizi, Xiao, Suona), Bowed (Erhu, Jinghu), Plucked (Pipa, Guzheng, Ruan), and Percussion (Luo, Dagu) families, combined in ensemble forms such as Gu Chui Yue and Si Zhu Yue. These characteristics create inherent formal constraints for commercial adaptation, as melodic lengths depend on textual patterns rather than autonomous musical logic (Cheng, 2016).

The development of Western pop music

Western compositional techniques evolved through three interconnected dimensions. Modal concepts progressed from medieval church modes to tonal centrality based on tonic functionality, later expanding into modal-tonal hybrids in the twentieth century. Harmonic development traversed from Renaissance intervallic consonance through Baroque figured bass and Rameau's fundamental bass to Classical functional harmony (tonic-dominant-subdominant), Romantic chromaticism, and modern pluralistic resources including jazz chords and electronic textures. Contrapuntal concepts shifted from Renaissance strict counterpoint and Bach's fugal architectures to underlying structural polyphony in Classical homophonic forms, and ultimately to contemporary micropolyphony. This technical evolution established standardized phrase structures, cyclical chord progressions, and timbral palettes that became foundational to commercial music production worldwide Hall, 2023).

Research Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods design combining qualitative co- occurrence analysis with quantitative survey research to investigate the industrial and creative transformation of traditional Chinese music. The qualitative phase systematically analyzes academic and industry literature from 2004 to 2024, drawing from CNKI, Wanfang, and VIP databases alongside professional outlets such as Music Finance and mainstream media, including People's Daily. Core keywords: Music Industry, Popular Culture, Music Communication, and Contemporary Chinese music undergo rigorous text preprocessing: punctuation and numerical removal, tokenization, functional word filtering, and synonym standardization. Co-occurrence matrices are then constructed to map keyword clusters,

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revealing cross-domain intersections such as “traditional culture–pop music culture” (37 co-citations) and “music industry–copyright” (40 co-citations), which inform subsequent variable selection.

The quantitative phase targets consumers of Chinese digital music platforms through stratified random sampling (n=300), proportionally distributed across first- tier (32%), second-tier, third-tier, and rural areas, with age cohorts from 18 to 65 and music education backgrounds ranging from professional systematic study to unsystematic learning. A structured questionnaire collects demographic data, weekly listening durations, access channels, and Likert-scale measurements (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree) across four dimensions: perceived music style changes, brand marketing effectiveness, attitudes toward traditional element integration, and digital platform evaluation. The instrument operationalizes six latent variables: record company influence (4 scale questions), music brand marketing (4 scale questions), music platform attitude (4 scale questions), popular cultural attitude (4 scale questions), changes in music style (4 scale questions), and changes in communication path (4 scale questions).

The research process follows six sequential steps: (1) textual preprocessing and vocabulary standardization; (2) co-occurrence matrix generation and cluster interpretation to identify research hotspots; (3) variable identification and hypothesis modeling based on qualitative patterns; (4) instrument design, pilot testing, and item reliability confirmation; (5) stratified distribution, digital dissemination, and data collection with quality screening; (6) statistical evaluation including reliability testing, descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, multiple regression, and one-way ANOVA. Internal consistency achieves Cronbach’s α=0.928, substantially exceeding the 0.8 threshold; variance inflation factors remain below 5, confirming the absence of multicollinearity; Durbin-Watson values approximate 2, indicating no autocorrelation.

Findings

This section presents empirical results derived from mixed-methods analysis, combining qualitative co-occurrence analysis of 10,000+ documents (2004–2024) with quantitative survey data (n=300 stratified consumers). The research findings are presented in accordance with the two research objectives. The research findings are presented in accordance with the two research objectives. The Relationship Between the Music Industry and Traditional Chinese Music: Historical evidence indicates that China’s music industry has exerted systematic influence on traditional music since the 1920s. Shanghai-based record companies (Pathé, Great China, New Moon) established complete production-distribution chains encompassing recording factories, retail agencies, and newspaper advertising.

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Table 1 The development of modern Chinese record companies

Stage of development	Development situation
Early 20th century-1916	Foreign record companies entered Shanghai to carry out record production and management.
1917-1939	Shanghai set up several Chinese record companies to carry out record production and management.
1937-1965	The number of record companies has fallen sharply because of the
1966-1976	Record production has declined due to the unstable situation.
1980s to present	The domestic situation has gradually stabilized; the production and operation of records have gradually recovered, embracing the wave of digital music technology, presenting a variety of music styles, and

Table 2 The production content of representative record companies in Shanghai, China, at the beginning of the 20th century

The record company	Production and distribution
A century of Oriental generations	Selling vinyl records and record players
Greater China	Record Peking Opera, local traditional drama, and songs
crescent	Record traditional music in Guangdong, China, and film music.

The industry evolved through four phases: accumulation (1979–1992), spontaneous growth (1992–2003), explosive expansion (2003–2015), and conscious regulation (2015–present). Contemporary digital platforms function as dual-purpose infrastructure; 163 Music research clusters emphasize user behavior, virtual communities, and cultural space construction, whereas Tencent Music studies concentrate on profit models, copyright monetization, and paid subscription rates.

Commercial imperatives drove stylistic hybridization. Jazz (Kong Hongwei's Summer Palace), rock (Tang Dynasty Band's incorporation of xiao and sanxian), and R&B (David Tao and Jay Chou's Sinicized rhythms) entered China through record- company channels and subsequently fused with pentatonic modal elements. Co-occurrence analysis of 2,331 music-industry documents identifies dominant clusters: "New Media Time–Copyright" (40 co-citations) and "Industrialization–Copyright" (26 co-citations).

Quantitative regression analysis indicates that record company influence (β=0.264,

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p<0.001), music brand marketing (β=0.213, p<0.001), and music platform attitude (β=0.352, p<0.001) exert significant positive effects on changes in contemporary Chinese music style, explaining 37.3% of variance (R^2=0.373). The same factors significantly reshape communication paths (β=0.218–0.251, p<0.001, R^2=0.297). Commercial Creation Techniques for Traditional Chinese Music

Qualitative co-occurrence data reveal disciplinary convergence around commercial creation: "traditional culture–pop music culture" (37 co-citations) and "nationalization–Chinese pop music" (5 co-citations). Five compositional dimensions operationalize heritage-market synthesis.

First, melodic adaptation transforms classical poetry into vocal lines by mapping tonal prosody to pitch contours or modernizes folk tunes through rhythmic acceleration and intervallic compression. Second, harmonic fusion retains pentatonic modal frameworks while incorporating seventh, ninth, suspended, and altered chords. Third, orchestration expands traditional instruments' performance techniques and hybridizes them with Western orchestral or electronic synthesizer timbres. Fourth, structural layouts abandon rigid qupai conventions in favor of free sectional forms or multi-thematic narratives calibrated to media timing. Fifth, multimedia integration employs digital audio workstations, virtual ethnic instruments, and visual synchronization.

Cross-media cases substantiate these techniques. Guan Dazhou's scoring for National Treasure combines pentatonic modes with rock drum patterns, jazz ornamentation, and narrative pop structures. Zhang Qu's dance dramas and festival series deploy dance-rhythmic zed melodies, extended national-modal harmony, and festive processional architectures. The author's original composition Po Lang validates studio-based production: a three-part form with "a" and "b" themes integrates virtual instruments (pipa, guzheng, sheng, erhu, yangqin) with Western brass, strings, and synthesizers within a hexatonic yu-mode framework centered on perfect fifth and major third intervals.

Table 3 Different research focus areas

Digital music platform	Research focus
163.com Music	Virtual communities' Cultural structure
	Emotional construction, Cultural space construction, public connectivity Social behavior, Interactive behavior
Tencent Music	Profit model, consumption model business model Profit object development: payment rate

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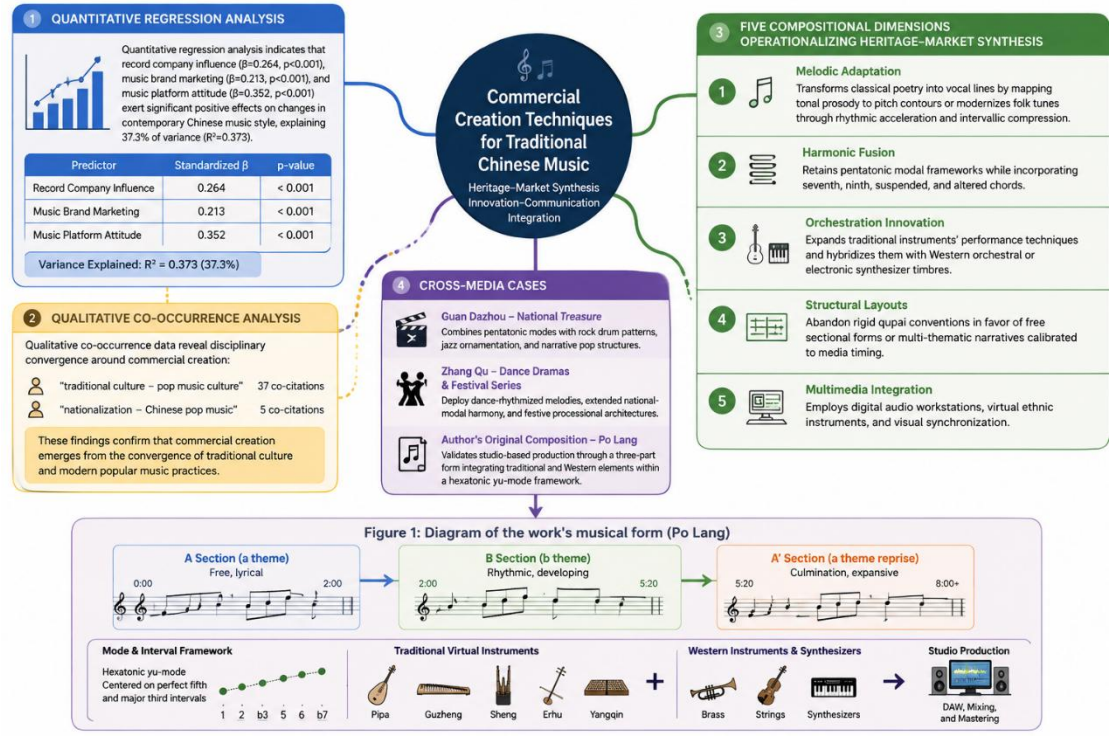


Figure 1 Diagram of the work's musical form

Discussions

The music industry drives traditional music transformation through infrastructural penetration.

The findings regarding Objective 1 demonstrate that the music industry has reshaped traditional Chinese music through a century-long process of infrastructural penetration, from early record-company ecosystems to contemporary digital platforms. This resonates with Sun's (2013) analysis of American blues commercialization, which illustrates how a traditional music form achieves industrial longevity by progressively seizing media-revolution opportunities. However, while blues commercialization occurred within a predominantly market-driven context, the Chinese case reveals a more complex institutional tension. Wang (2016) notes that government-subsidized creation units resist market-oriented adaptation, and Liu (2013) observes that state institutions bear personnel costs without commercial accountability. The present regression data—confirming that record-company influence, brand marketing, and platform attitude significantly drive stylistic change—demonstrate that this institutional inertia is being incrementally overridden by industrial infrastructure rather than by policy reform. Thus, Sun's blues trajectory illustrates market-endogenous transformation, whereas the Chinese case suggests an exogenous industrial penetration into a protected cultural ecosystem.

The regression result identifying platform attitude as the strongest predictor (β=0.352) of stylistic change validates Yi's (2023) argument that media-technology advances

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fundamentally reconfigure music-industry competitiveness. Yi contends that the internet, once a force that crushed traditional music industries, has become an essential tool for constructing emerging industrial models. Zhang (2017) observes that Chinese music underutilizes internet channels and suffers from weak audience- research capacity in international dissemination. The present findings offer a nuanced correction: while Zhang's diagnosis holds for cross-border outreach, domestic digital platforms—exemplified by the divergent strategies of 163 Music and Tencent Music—have already become powerful infrastructures reshaping traditional music forms internally. Dong (2019) further calls for proactive exploration of digital-art communication paths for Chinese cultural elements; the present regression data, showing that industrial factors significantly reshape communication paths (R^2=0.297), substantiate this appeal by demonstrating that such digital transformation is statistically verifiable in consumer behavior.

Furthermore, Hesmondhalgh (2013) notes that the tension between commerce and creativity constitutes a fundamental characteristic of cultural industries, while Victor and David (2018) argue from an economic perspective that music has evolved into a market-oriented activity. The present study extends these abstract propositions into concrete historical mechanics: the "tension" manifests not merely as an ideological conflict between art and business, but as a structural collision between government- protected traditional forms and commercially driven Western genre imports. The regression model explaining 37.3% of variance in stylistic change suggests that when industrial infrastructure reaches sufficient density, the balance tilts decisively toward commercial adaptation, compelling traditional music to absorb standardized phrase lengths and hook-based structures foreign to its qupai and gelu heritage. Commercial techniques re-grammaticize heritage constraints into industrial variables.

The findings regarding Objective 2 identify five commercial composition techniques that operate as a practical response to the formal constraints documented by Wang and Du (2018) and Yu (2024). Wang and Du emphasize that traditional Chinese music's structural characteristics—including melodic lengths dictated by textual patterns and rubato rhythmic freedom—are inextricably linked to language, literature, and historical culture. Yu demonstrates that qupai (modal melodies) and gelu (prosodic patterns) rigidly bind theatrical music to poetic text structures. Rather than dismantling these constraints, the five techniques identified in this study— melodic adaptation, harmonic fusion, orchestration innovation, flexible structure, and multimedia integration—re-grammaticize traditional identifiers into commercially operational variables. This represents a shift from descriptive ethnomusicology (documenting what traditional music is) to prescriptive composition theory (defining how it can be industrially reproduced without losing cultural coherence).

The specific technique of harmonic and structural hybridization engages directly with

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Western popular-music scholarship. Blendell (2015) notes that popular music employs fixed two- or four-bar chord structures as production constraints, and Park (2025) observes that post-millennial pop relies on short, looping diatonic progressions generating "ambiguous or floating tonality." The cross-media cases of Guan Dazhou and Zhang Qu do not, however, replicate Western functional harmony wholesale. Instead, they exhibit a selective grafting: seventh, ninth, and suspended chords are absorbed as coloristic resources, yet their deployment remains governed by pentatonic modal centers rather than by the tonic-dominant-subdominant hierarchy. This suggests that Chinese commercial composition has developed a "modal- coloristic" hybrid syntax distinct from both traditional qupai conventions and Western pop grammars.

Finally, the author's original composition, Po Lang, produced entirely within a digital audio workstation using virtual ethnic instruments and loudness-standard compliance, situates itself within the technological trajectory documented by White (2023) and McGeough (2018). Alexander traces how Les Paul's "sound-on- sound" and tape-delay technologies transformed the recording studio from a site of reproduction into an instrument of sound manufacturing. Tyler notes that the Eurorack modular synthesizer revival returns electronic composition to hands-on, system- exploratory practice. Po Lang extends this Western technological history into a non- Western cultural context: rather than using digital tools to explore unknown sonic territories, the work employs virtual pipa, guzheng, sheng, erhu, and yangqin to recombine traditional timbres within standardized commercial workflows. This confirms that the "studio-as-instrument" paradigm, originally developed for Western pop and rock, now serves as a viable infrastructure for heritage preservation— provided that composition is reconceptualized not as isolated artistic expression but as an integral component of industrial strategy.

Conclusions

This study advances an integrated framework by reorganizing dispersed historical, quantitative, and practice-based data around two tightly coupled objectives. For Research objective, The Relationship Between the Music Industry and Traditional Chinese Music, archival evidence of 1920s Shanghai record ecosystems and co- occurrence clusters—including "music industry–copyright" (40 co-citations) and "new media time–copyright" (40 co-citations)—are consolidated with regression data confirming that record company influence (β=0.264), brand marketing (β=0.213), and platform attitude (β=0.352) significantly drive stylistic change, explaining 37.3% of variance (R^2=0.373), while popular cultural attitudes further moderate these industrial effects (β=0.180–0.227, $p<0.01$); communication-path metrics (R^2=0.297) are repositioned here as industrial transmission mechanisms rather than a separate investigative strand. For the research objective, Commercial Creation Techniques for Traditional Chinese Music, the "traditional culture–pop music culture" cluster (37 co- citations) is aligned with five

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validated commercial dimensions—melodic adaptation, harmonic fusion, orchestration innovation, flexible structure, and multimedia integration—while the original composition "Po Lang" and cross-media cases by Guan Dazhou and Zhang Qu provide practice-based validation. This rearrangement demonstrates that traditional music's sustainable market integration depends on a recursive system: industrial infrastructure creates the channels, and innovative techniques supply the culturally coherent content flowing through them. By collapsing fragmented evidence into two sequentially dependent streams, the study establishes that heritage preservation in the digital era requires simultaneous institutional and compositional intervention, with technique functioning not as artistic ornament but as an integral industrial variable.

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