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From cultural references to performance decisions: a practice-led study of selected Chinese piano works

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Abstract. This study examines three contemporary Chinese piano works: Chen Yi's *Duo Ye*, Lei Liang's *Garden Eight*, and Qigang Chen's *Instants d'un opéra de Pékin.* Drawing on embodied music cognition and personal practice, it investigates how performers translate cultural connotations into performance decisions through practice logs, audio and video recordings. Cultural references do not provide direct performance instructions, but can guide performers to perceive sonic features and shape musical exploration. Bodily and sensory experience also participate in this process, yet bodily sensations may diverge from the sounds actually produced. Repeated practice and listening are essential to evaluating and refining interpretive choices. Using these three case studies, the study explores how cultural understanding, bodily experience, and auditory feedback jointly inform performance decisions.

Keywords: cultural references, embodied music cognition, piano performance, contemporary Chinese piano works, performance decision-making

1. Introduction

During the practice of contemporary Chinese piano works, it gradually realised that even when following the dynamic and rhythmic markings in the score, different approaches to touch, bodily movements and pedalling can still produce different sonic results. When performing Chen Yi's *Duo Ye*, all the accents in the same way. As a result, the music sounded flat, with little variation. After learning more about the folk song and dance background of the work, the different accents were reconsidered in relation to the dance movements. The music then became livelier. This experience led to reconsider performance choices and pay closer attention to the relationship between cultural understanding, bodily actions and auditory perception.

Contemporary Chinese piano works often incorporate elements of folk songs, traditional Chinese instruments, folk dances, opera and traditional musical aesthetics. These cultural elements help performers understand the works, but they do not directly indicate how the music should be performed. In practice, performers need to explore different bodily approaches and listen to the resulting sounds to identify suitable ways of producing the intended sound.

Previous studies have mainly discussed contemporary Chinese piano works in terms of musical structure, compositional techniques, performance techniques and cultural background. They provide useful references for understanding the musical features and cultural meanings of these works. Merleau-Ponty's [1] discussion

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of the relationship between bodily experience and perception provides a philosophical foundation for understanding the role of the body in musical perception and performance. However, how performers' bodily experiences shape their performance decisions in contemporary Chinese piano works, and how bodily actions and auditory feedback help translate cultural references into performance expression, remain areas for further investigation.

This study examines three works: Chen Yi's *Duo Ye* [2], Lei Liang's *Garden Eight* [3] and Qigang Chen's *Instants d'un opéra de Pékin* [4]. Drawing on researcher's own piano performance practice, it explores how embodied experience informs the performance of these works. It focuses on how cultural references influence sound expectations, bodily experimentation and performance decisions. The aim is to show how bodily experience contributes to the expression of Chinese musical elements, rather than to propose a set of technical approaches applicable to all performers.

2. Research background and conceptual framework

2.1. Embodied interpretation in piano performance

Piano performance involves not only understanding and following the score, but also the ongoing interaction between bodily actions, auditory perception and performance decisions. Performers coordinate their fingers, wrists, arms and bodies to produce sound. They also adjust their playing based on what they hear. The body is therefore not only involved in sound production, but also serves as an important means through which performers perceive, evaluate and adjust musical expression.

Merleau-Ponty's [1] work on bodily experience and perception offers one starting point for understanding how the body is involved in perception. In the field of music, Leman and Maes [5] also explore the relationship between bodily actions and musical perception through their research on embodied music cognition. Doğantan-Dack's [6] work on piano performance practice and research provides a further reference for considering how performance practice contributes to the development of knowledge.

In practice, performers may develop different associations based on their own cultural understanding and use them to explore related bodily movements and approaches to sound. For example, they may draw on dance movements, the sounds of traditional instruments or gestures from opera performances as references for shaping sound. However, whether these cultural interpretations help performers understand the music and inform appropriate performance decisions needs to be examined through practice. Cultural associations can provide a starting point for exploring sound. Their effectiveness must ultimately be evaluated through bodily experimentation and auditory feedback.

2.2. Cultural references in the selected works

Existing studies of contemporary Chinese piano works mainly focus on compositional analysis and performance interpretation. Compositional studies examine how Chinese musical elements are incorporated into the works, while performance studies discuss how these elements are expressed through specific performance approaches.

Compositional research often examines how traditional Chinese elements, such as folk music materials and the characteristics of traditional instruments, are incorporated into modern piano writing. For example, the use of Dong ethnic song and dance elements in *Duo Ye* is reflected not only in its musical materials but also in compositional techniques such as mixed metres and tempo counterpoint. Yang [7] analysed the relationship between the song and dance characteristics of the Dong tradition of *Duo Ye* and their use in the piano composition.

In contrast, Wu [8], in a study of *Garden Eight*, examined the relationship between pitch leaps and hand movement patterns from the perspective of guqin tablature. This approach brings bodily movement into the analysis of the compositional process. These studies show that Chinese musical elements in piano works are not limited to melodic quotations. They may also be reflected in rhythmic organisation, sonic design and the logic of bodily movement. However, compositional analysis alone cannot fully explain how performers might interpret and realise these musical features.

In performance studies, scholars have paid further attention to the relationship between the cultural meanings of a work and the ways it is performed. Studies of *Instants d'un opéra de Pékin*, for example, have examined how the stage characteristics of Peking opera, including singing, recitation, acting and martial arts, are reflected in piano textures, rhythmic patterns and timbral layers. Xu [9] discusses the performance of *Instants d'un opéra de Pékin* in terms of pedalling, sound layers and dramatic tension. This study addresses how the cultural features of the work are translated into specific performance approaches. It also provides a starting point for further examination of the role of bodily movements in this process.

Research on *Garden Eight* has also begun to address the performer's bodily involvement. Zheng [10] points out that kinaesthetic factors related to finger and arm movements are closely connected to piano performance. The study also emphasises the importance of bodily movement control. These two studies approach musical expression from different perspectives: one focuses on the cultural characteristics of the work, while the other examines the performer's bodily movements. However, how cultural understanding influences bodily actions, and how bodily adjustments affect the sounds produced, remain insufficiently explored.

Overall, existing studies have provided a useful foundation for research on contemporary Chinese piano works through compositional analysis and performance practice. However, there remains a lack of systematic theoretical and practical research into how performers can interpret Chinese musical elements through bodily experience and translate them into specific performance decisions, such as key touch, tone production, bodily movements, and the organisation of musical time and space.

Table 1 summarises the main cultural references and performance problems in the three selected works. The performance questions listed are the focus of this study and do not imply that each cultural element necessarily corresponds to a particular playing technique.

Table 1. Cultural references and performance issues in the selected works

Work	Cultural References	Main Performance Issues	Key Performance Decisions Examined
Chen Yi, *Duo Ye*	Dong ethnic song and dance traditions	Relationships between different accents	Accent strength, touch, bodily movements and rhythmic organisation
Qigang Chen, *Instants d'un opéra de Pékin*	Peking opera music and theatrical characteristics	Clarity of sound	Tempo, touch and pedalling
Lei Liang, *Garden Eight*	Traditional Chinese musical aesthetics	Sound onset, resonance, decay and timing between notes	Touch and timing

Through these three case studies, this study explores three questions: How do cultural references shape performers' sound expectations? How do auditory perception and auditory feedback inform the development

of a performance approach? When bodily sensations differ from the sounds actually produced, how should the performer make a choice?

3. Research methods and practice materials

3.1. Positioning as a pianist and researcher

This study draws primarily on researcher's piano performance practice. The author is both a performer and a researcher, and the selected works were observed and analysed during the practice process. Through practical experience, performance difficulties, bodily sensations and the evolution of performance decisions. At the same time, the observations were affected by the researcher's own playing background, technical habits and musical aesthetic preferences.

The research used the scores, background materials and audio and video recordings from different stages of practice. Problems encountered during practice, bodily sensations and performance adjustments in practice logs. Personal bodily sensations are not treat as objective facts, nor is a direct causal relationship between a particular movement and a particular sound based only on researcher's own impressions. Instead, performance records from different stages with the actual sound results to examine the relationship between bodily adjustments and changes in sound.

Doğantan-Dack's [6] discussions of piano performance and practice-based research provide a methodological reference for using performance practice as research material. However, the case study structure, methods of comparing materials and criteria for evaluation used in this study are part of researcher's own research design. They do not directly follow a fixed procedure proposed by any particular author.

3.2. Materials and practice process

The materials used in this study mainly included musical scores, background information about the works, performance audio and video recordings, and practice logs.

For the scores, priority was given to editions that are widely used and have a certain level of recognition. Performance videos by pianists and tried to use the same editions where possible for comparison. For Chen Yi's *Duo Ye* and Lei Liang's *Garden Eight*, editions that include the composers' notes. For *Instants d'un opéra de Pékin*, a more recent edition that had undergone several revisions. The scores were mainly used to check the notes, dynamics, rhythm and articulation in the selected passages. Composers' notes, programme introductions and relevant academic literature were used to understand the background of the works and their cultural references. These materials also helped the researcher distinguish existing interpretations of the works from the researcher's own performance associations.

The three case studies are all based on researcher's personal performance practice during the first and second years of the master's degree. At the beginning of the research, the complete works were mainly recorded, and the difficulties encountered during practice and the responses to them were documented. As familiarity with each work gradually increased, the selection of fragments more closely related to the research problem, focus on these passages for audio and video recording, and keep more detailed practice logs. Table 2 lists the practice period, selected fragments and representative recording dates for each case.

An independent recording device was used to collect audio. Videos, including close-ups of the hands and full-body shots, were filmed using a smartphone mounted on a stand in the practice room. The sound was evaluated by listening to the audio, focusing on volume, sound onset, tone, rhythm, resonance and ending attenuation. The video recordings were used to review the movements of fingers, wrists, arms and the whole body, as well as the use of the pedals. Audio and video recordings can supplement the subjective memory of

the performer, but they cannot fully capture internal bodily sensations or provide an accurate assessment of the force exerted during a movement based on visual evidence alone.

To compare the performance changes across different practice stages, consistent identifiers were assigned to the representative audio and video recordings. Audio recordings were labelled A and video recordings V, with matching numbers for the same stage, e.g. A1 and V1, A2 and V2. A0 denoted the initial performance, while A1 and A2 and their corresponding video recordings represented subsequent practice stages. The number did not indicate the actual number of practices, but served only to identify representative versions showing clear changes in performance approach and sound outcomes.

The expected sound, problems encountered, bodily sensations and adjustment plans were recorded in the practice log. When the expected sound effect was considered to have been achieved, the relevant entry was marked and replayed the recording for verification. Sometimes a change when playing, but could hardly hear the difference in the recording. After each day's practice, a brief summary was written, and important progress was reviewed every week, selected relevant passages and recorded changes in performance decisions.

The information in Tables 3 and 4 was drawn primarily from the practice logs, and the relevant details were supplemented and clarified using the supporting audio and video recordings. Some observation records were made in real time during practice, while others were added retrospectively after reviewing the videos and reflecting on the practice process.

Table 2. Practice records

Selected Work	Practice Period	Analytical Focus	Recording Dates	Practice Record Sources
Qigang Chen, *Instants d'un opéra de Pékin*	May–Jul 2025	Bars 41–67: rhythm and pedalling	A0/V0:2025.5.20 A1/V1:2025.6.1 A2/V2:2025.6.3 A3/V3:2025.6.10 A4/V4:2025.6.21	Daily logs and stage summaries
Chen Yi, *Duo Ye*	Jan–Mar 2026	Bars 1–24: accents, singing and dance rhythms	A0/V0:2026.1.17 A1/V1:2026.2.1 A2/V2:2026.2.1	Daily logs, stage summaries and video reviews
Lei Liang, *Garden Eight*	Mar–May 2026	Tian: sound decay and rests.	A0/V0:2026.3.10 A1/V1:2026.3.12 A2/V2:2026.3.13 A3/V3:2026.4.15 A4/V4:2026.5.6	Daily logs and audio-video reviews

3.3. Analytical process

Across the three cases, specific performance problems were explored by comparing practice records and multi-stage recordings to summarise shifts in interpretive plans from initial attempts to final choices. The analysis centred on how the works' cultural references shape the researcher's understanding of timbre, rhythm and musical expression, and how these understandings inform bodily movement and playing style. The analysis also contrasted logged bodily sensations with actual auditory outcomes to assess whether sonic aims were met and to identify the basis for retaining or discarding performance approaches.

The focused was on the difference between bodily sensations and sound results. When an adjustment of the limbs produced clear sound changes, the relationship between the change and the expected performance effect was examined. If the bodily sensation changed but there was almost no difference in the recording, subjective

bodily sensation was not taken as the basis for sound improvement, instead, consideration was given to whether the adjustment mainly optimised movement coordination and performance stability.

This research method preserved the uncertainty in the practical process. Practice did not always produce a solution immediately. The value of practice lay in excluding inappropriate solutions or recognising that the problems originally identified needed to be redefined.

4. Practice analysis

4.1. Differentiating accents in *Duo Ye*

The author selected the 2012 edition of *Duo Ye* [1], published by People's Music Publishing House, as the score for this study. It includes the composer's notes in Chinese, which helped researcher understand the background of the work and the musical materials that inspired it. This provided a reference for the subsequent performance practice.

After studying the score notes and watching Chen Yi's interview about the composition of *Duo Ye* in *Oral History of Chinese Contemporary Music: The interviews with Renowned Musicians (1931–1999)*[1], revealed that the work draws on the singing and dancing traditions of the Dong people. In the interview, Chen Yi explained that the first two notes at the beginning are derived from the vocal syllables "*Ya Duo Ye*" in Dong group singing (see Figure 1), and imitate the melodic character of the singing. The accented chords that follow can also be understood as a reference to dance steps, based on the reading of the score and the work's cultural background.

This led to a reconsideration of the different expressive functions of the accents at the beginning of the piece. In the initial version (DY-A0), these notes were played with similar dynamics and articulation, without clearly distinguishing their different roles.

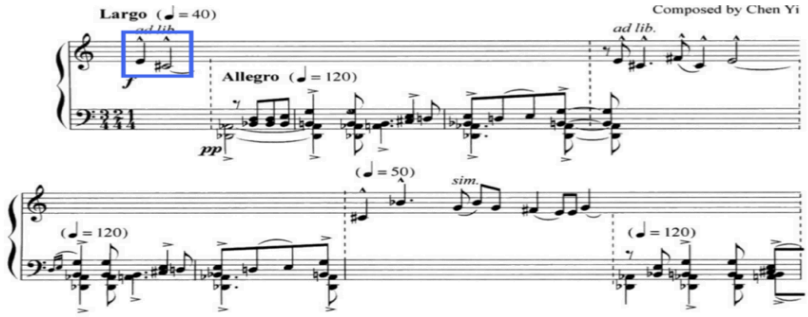

Figure 1. Example 1: *Duo Ye*, mm. 1–9, 2012 edition (People's Music Publishing House) [1]

After watching video recordings of traditional Dong singing and dancing, The second note, corresponding to the syllable "*Ye*", falls at the end of the three-beat dance pattern, where the dancers complete their movement. Slightly more emphasis was given to this note to bring out the calling character of "*Ya Duo Ye*" and the sense of closure in the phrase. In the first revised version (DY-A1), the volume of this note was increased. In a later version (DY-V2), shifting body weight towards this note was explored, linking the bodily movement to the change in sound. Repeated practice and listening showed that this approach better conveyed

[1] Chen Yi Music Archive, "The story behind the composition of Duo Ye: 'Motif'", Bilibili, September 22, 2025, 3:19–3:38, https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1RCJfzdEu9/, accessed January 15, 2026.

the character of the phrase. This approach was retained in subsequent performances.

For the accented chords that imitate dance steps, a downward arm movement was initially used when playing, aiming to create a contrast with the first two notes. However, the trial recording of DY-A1 showed that changing only the opening notes while keeping the original approach to the chords left their tone rather heavy and lacking in dance-like movement. After watching further videos of Dong dancing[2], the lightness of the dancers' movements became more apparent, suggesting a similar quality in the chords. An upward release from the keys was therefore explored, with the upper arm guiding the fingers as they left the keyboard. In the DY-V2 video, the hands can be seen moving upwards after each group of chords. The DY-A2 audio recording, meanwhile, shows a more focused chord attack and a more even, crisp rhythm. This combination of bodily movement and sound treatment was retained in the final performance.

Table 3. Practice records for *Duo Ye*

Recording Version	Opening Two Notes	Subsequent Chords	Audio-Visual Evidence
DY-A0/V0	Similar dynamics and touch	Uniform downward movements	Dull sound, lacking a dance-like character
DY-A1/V1	Emphasised the second note	Subsequent chords remained unchanged	Greater dynamic contrast, but limited overall change
DY-A2/V2	Increased touch depth and shifted body weight towards the second note	Upward finger movements after each chord	Clearer musical layers, crisper chords and more distinct accents
Final Version	DY-A2/V2	DY-A2/V2	DY-A2/V2

4.2. Rhythm, clarity and pedalling in *Instants d'un opéra de Pékin*

For *Instants d'un opéra de Pékin*, this study selected the revised 2004 edition published by Éditions Billaudot [3].

In Peking opera, *yuan chang* (circular stage movement) is not only a stylised walking pattern but also serves to guide stage movement and create transitions between scenes. After entering the stage, performers move in circles, creating an imagined sense of changes in time and space. In *Instants d'un opéra de Pékin*, the right hand repeats two-note intervals from bars 41 to 67, with the eighth-note rhythm gradually accelerating. The passage stands out from the surrounding music. Its continuous rhythmic movement evoked the accelerating steps in yuan chang. This prompted closer attention to rhythmic continuity and note clarity as the tempo increased.

In the initial performance, the pedal was used on a bar-by-bar basis to build towards the climax. Listened back to the recording (IP-A0), revealed that the notes overlapped, making the passage less clear. Videos of Peking opera yuan chang provided a reference for understanding how the actors' steps become progressively faster while each movement remains distinct[3].

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[2] Guizhou Channel 2 – Baixing Guanzhu, "Shandi Hui Xiang: a musical journey through Guizhou – 'The hand-in-hand Duo Ye dance and the bonds it creates'", Bilibili, December 31, 2025, https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1WGiGB8Ev4, accessed January 28, 2026.

[3] National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts, "Episode 4 | Opera mini-class: Talking about yuanchang gong", Bilibili, November 15, 2022, https://m.bilibili.com/video/BV1X24y12791, accessed May 23, 2025.

The passage was then practiced without the pedal. The recording (IP-A1) showed a noticeable improvement in clarity. However, slurs begin to appear after bar 50, particularly a long slur in the left hand from bar 63 (see Figure 2). It was difficult to maintain the connection between notes using only the hands. Playing the entire passage without the pedal also reduced the contrast between connected and detached sections.

Further experimentation involved using a light, brief pedal change for each chord. Listening to the recording (IP-A2), revealed little difference compared with IP-A1. A live performance video of Sun Qilin playing *Instants d'un opéra de Pékin* at Carnegie Hall in New York on 24 February 2023[4] was the consulted. The full-view footage shows that she does not use the pedal in bars 41–62. From bar 63, where the long slur begins, she uses a shallow pedal, changing it quickly with each note. Her foot does not lift completely between changes but makes small lifting and releasing movements.

A similar approach was then treated (IP-V3). The recording (IP-A3) showed a clearer contrast between connected and detached passages. The approach was therefore retained in the final performance.

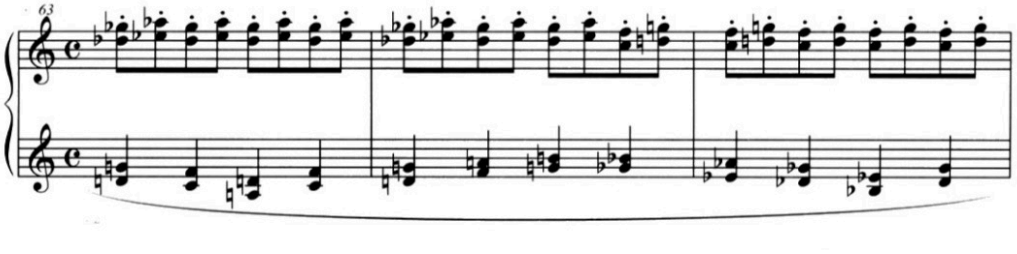

Figure 2. Example 2: *Instants d'un opéra de Pékin*, mm. 63–65, revised 2004 edition (Éditions Billaudot) [3]

In addition, the performers' ability to maintain a relatively stable body posture as their steps gradually accelerate in the circular movement led to greater attention to bodily stability in fast passages. During subsequent practice, unnecessary movements were reduced, with greater focus placed on finger movement. The video (IP-V4) shows that as the tempo increases, the arms, wrists, and upper body remain relatively stable, while finger movement is controlled mainly through the metacarpophalangeal joints.

4.3. Resonance and timing in *Garden Eight*

Garden Eight is a suite consisting of six pieces. This study focuses on the first piece, "Tian" (Heaven). The main score used in practice was Lei Liang's revised 2004 piano version, published by Schott Music [2]. This study also referred to the original proportional-notation manuscript from 1996 (see Figure 3).

The two versions use different notation systems. The 2004 revised version uses conventional bar-based notation, with relatively clear indications of note durations and dynamics. The 1996 manuscript uses proportional notation without fixed bar lines. Dashed phrase lines indicate connections between musical phrases. The spacing between notes and the dynamic markings also leave room for interpretive decisions.

The 2004 version was used as the main performance score and referred to the 1996 manuscript to better understand the work's temporal organisation and relationships between sounds. In subsequent practice, the

[4] Sun Qilin, "Chen Qigang: Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin (Moments of Peking Opera), Live at Carnegie Hall, New York", Bilibili, February 24, 2023, https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV14b411Q7s6/, accessed June 3, 2025.

notation in both versions was consulted, and timing, sound layers and continuity were explored through repeated attempts and audio playback. Performance decisions were shaped by the score references, practical experimentation and listening feedback. This study does not seek to separate the individual influence of these factors.

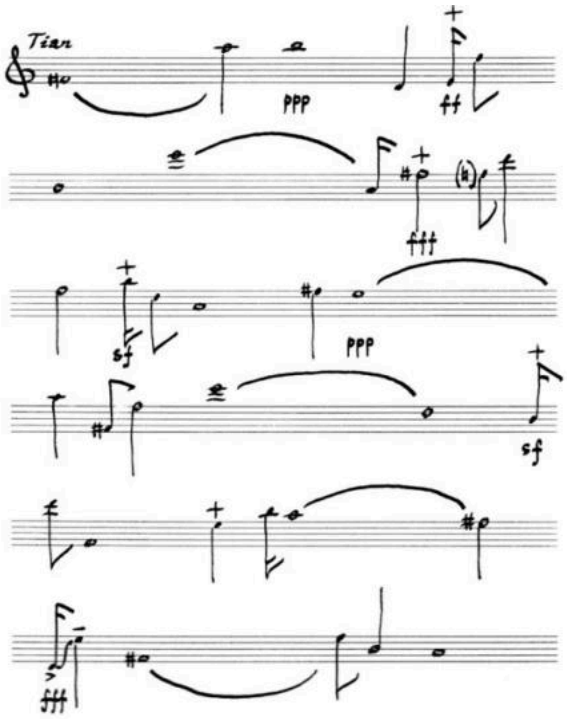

Figure 3. Example 3: "Tian" from Lei Liang's *Garden Eight*, 1996 version[5]

Reading the composer's notes and other materials about the work, provided further insight into Liang's musical ideas behind *Garden Eight*. In an interview, he described the work as "music of tea" and expressed his wish for the music to have "the free expansion and contraction of breathing"[6]. He also compared performing the work to "walking through a garden of sounds" in the programme notes[7]. These descriptions led to closer attention to the timing between notes and to how sounds continue and decay after they are played.

In the initial performance, the notes were played the notes one after another in the usual manner. Listening back to the recording (GE-A0) revealed that the transitions between notes were rather close together. The previous note had not fully decayed before the next one began. The resulting sound lacked continuity and did not create the sense of sonic space that had been expected. A closer look at the score revealed that the dashed phrase lines had been overlooked. In subsequent practice (GE-A1), greater attention was paid to the phrase connections indicated by these lines and the way one phrase led into the next. After listening to

5 Lei Liang. Garden Eight. manuscript, 1996. 3.

6 Lei Liang, Shuqin Li, and Guoping Jia. "Breaking Cultural Boundaries through Music: A Conversation with Composer Lei Liang (Part II)." Philharmonic, no. 7 (2020): 99–108, accessed March 7, 2026.

7 Lei Liang, Garden Eight, programme note, PSNY / Schott Music,https://www.eamdc.com/psny/composers/lei-liang/works/garden-eight/, accessed March 7, 2026

recordings and watching videos of other pianists performing the work[8], the performances suggested that the notes were not always connected according to a fixed rhythm. The timing of each new note seemed to depend on how the previous sound continued and decayed. Zheng [10] discusses the concept of *liubai* in *Garden Eight*, providing a basis for relating this approach to timing to Chinese musical aesthetics.

In this context, *liubai* does not simply involve adding rests or lengthening pauses. It also concerns how the time between notes is shaped and how the resonance of each sound is allowed to linger, creating a sense of space and musical breathing. Kawamura's [11] use of the original 1996 score and practice notes on the rests further highlighted their role in the work, the 1996 manuscript was used as an additional reference in the researcher's performance practice.

The initial performance was compared with later versions to examine how the playing developed across different stages of practice. Particular attention was paid to the timing between notes, touch, and the transitions between different sound-producing approaches. These changes are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4. Practice records for Tian

Record	Performance Approach	Bodily Movements	Audio-Visual Evidence	Subsequent Decisions
GE-A0/V0	Followed the score markings without actively adjusting the timing between notes	Metronome-guided movements	Stable tempo, but overlapping sound decay and limited spatial clarity.	Focused on timing between notes
GE-A1/V1	Followed dashed phrase lines	Hand suspension during sustained sounds	Greater sense of space, but abrupt movements during leaps and rests	Focused on phrase connections and bodily preparation
GE-A2/V2	Refined phrase endings and rests	Prepared posture and controlled breathing	More natural phrase connections	Retained bodily preparation during rests
GE-A3/V3	Waited for natural sound decay	Relaxed wrists and fingers	Excessively long pauses disrupted continuity	Abandoned waiting for complete sound decay
GE-A4/V4	Adjusted timing according to actual sound	Movements guided by listening rather than the metronome	More flexible timing between notes	Retained sound decay as a guide for note entry

After many attempts, it gradually became clear that leaving space is not simply equivalent to prolonging pauses. The approach used in GE-A3, which involved waiting for the sound to attenuate naturally before playing the next note, was not followed completely. Instead, attention continued to be paid to sound attenuation, drawing on the practice experience of GE-A4 and adjusted the entry timing of each new sound according to auditory feedback. At the same time, the bodily preparation and breathing regulation methods explored during the rests in GE-V2 were retained. This approach helped avoid mechanical timing and prevent the pauses from becoming too long and disrupting the coherence between the phrases.

[8] Rosa Descalzo, "Lei Liang – Garden Eight (1996/2004)", YouTube, 2016, 0:00–2:46, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTbx0BtbavU, accessed March 12, 2026.

In the plucked-string passage (Figure 4), the lingering resonance generated by plucking the string overlaps with the notes played on the keyboard, requiring the coordination of two different sound-producing methods. The plucked string is marked forte, while the following keyboard notes are marked piano. The timing and volume of the keyboard sound, using a slight hooking movement of the fingers and a gentle touch on the keys to avoid the keyboard sound obscuring the resonance of the plucked string. These two performance movements were coordinated so that both sound sources could be heard clearly without either masking the other.

Through these experiments, it gradually became clear that the sense of space in *Garden Eight* comes not only from timbre, but also from the timing between notes, the preservation of lingering resonance and the continuity of bodily movements.

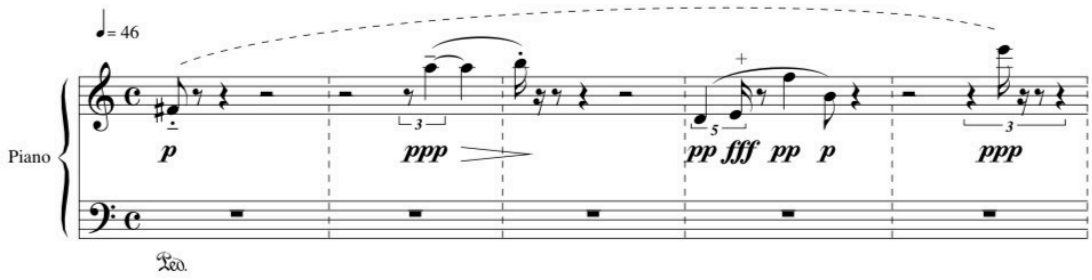

Figure 4. Example 4: *Garden Eight*, mm. 1–5, revised 2004 piano version (Schott Music) [2]

5. Discussion

The cultural references in these three cases influenced the researcher's understanding of music in different ways. In *Duo Ye*, information about Dong singing and dancing changed the understanding of the function of accents; in *Instants d'un opéra de Pékin*, the circular movements of Peking opera performers prompted a reconsideration of the relationship between speed and clarity; in *Garden Eight*, an unsuccessful attempt showed that extending the pause may not create the expected sense of space. During the practice of these works, initial interpretations were gradually revised through listening to and evaluating the actual sound. This also highlights the role of bodily experience in piano performance decision-making.

This study is mainly based on the practical exploration of three selected works and passages from those works by a single performer. The results are influenced by personal playing experience, bodily habits and the context of the work. Audio and video recordings can present changes in movement and their sound results, but they cannot fully reflect the bodily sensations of the performer. Therefore, the conclusions of this article are limited to the three cases studied and cannot be directly applied to the playing methods of all Chinese piano works.

6. Conclusion

Through practice-based analysis of *Duo Ye*, *Garden Eight* and *Instants d'un opéra de Pékin*, this study suggests that cultural references do not directly prescribe how performers should use touch, control bodily movements or organise musical time. Instead, they help performers understand the sonic characteristics of a work from different perspectives and consider how these characteristics might be expressed through bodily movements and performance approaches. A review and analysis of the practice process showed that

approaches suited to specific passages through repeated experimentation, listening to recordings and adjusting bodily movements.

Drawing on embodied cognition, this study examines the relationships between auditory perception, bodily actions and performance decisions. The findings suggest that there is no direct formula linking cultural references to performance decisions. Rather, this is a process of exploration and adjustment that takes place through actual performance practice. These findings are based on the practice-based analysis of the three works and selected passages examined in this study. They reflect the process of exploration within specific performance contexts and should not be taken as a general approach to performing Chinese piano music.

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