

# Research of Differences Between Chinese and Western Music



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## Introduction

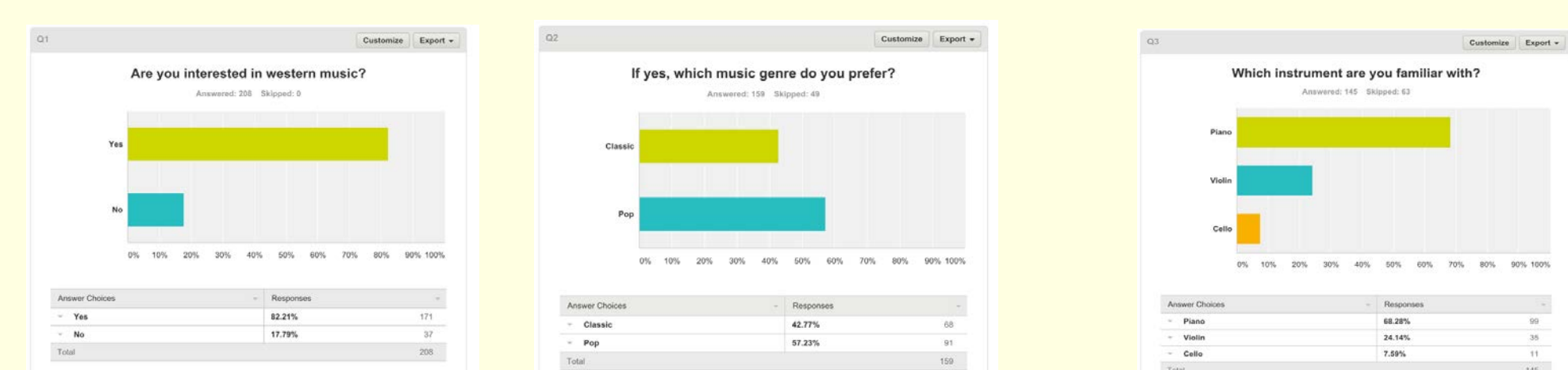
Music is the language of the world, and the carrier of culture. Like the Chinese and English languages, Music has both ethnic and regional differences, due to cultural differences that lead to the diversity of Chinese and Western music. By learning about differences present in Western and Chinese Music, society can blend these cultures to create new and better styles of Music. In this research, we studied typical features in both Chinese and Western music via the analysis of relevant materials such as books, music and a student survey.

## Background

The author has been trained playing "Guzheng", a traditional Chinese musical instrument, for more than 10 years, and has a deep understanding of Chinese classic music culture. At the same time, as an immigrant spending time in the US, the author has come to know about western music which has been helpful in studying and comparing both music types. This research will analyze and compare typical features of both Chinese and Western music through web research and questionnaire results, aiming to discover a new form of music by combining two very different types of music.

## Data

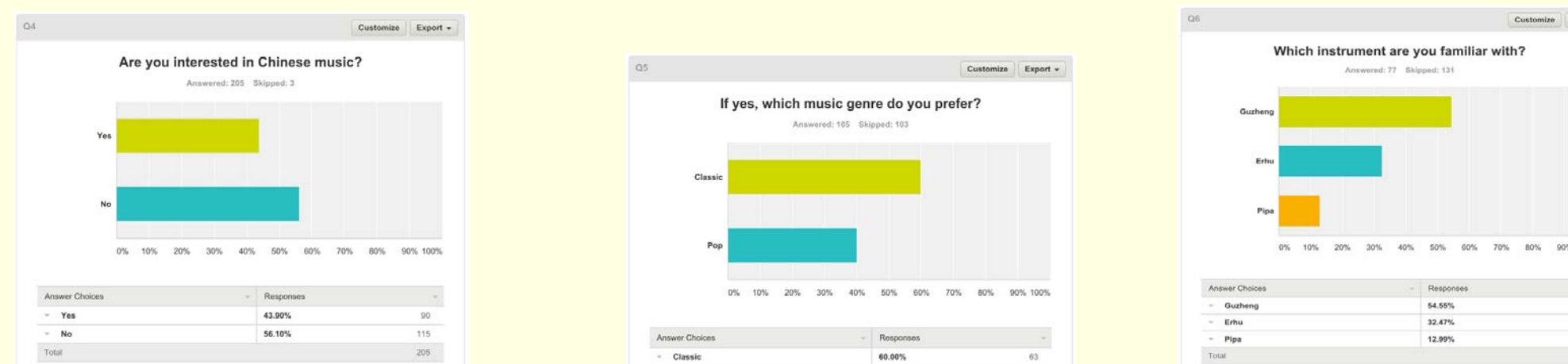
Through an online survey, I collected 209 responses. The purpose of the questionnaire was to gauge whether or not students were interested in both Chinese and Western Music and if students thought the two genres could combine to create a new form of music.



Q1 shows mostly student's (82.21%) are interested in music. This is the foundation for the interest in music.

Q2 shows more student interest in pop music, but classic is not much less than that.

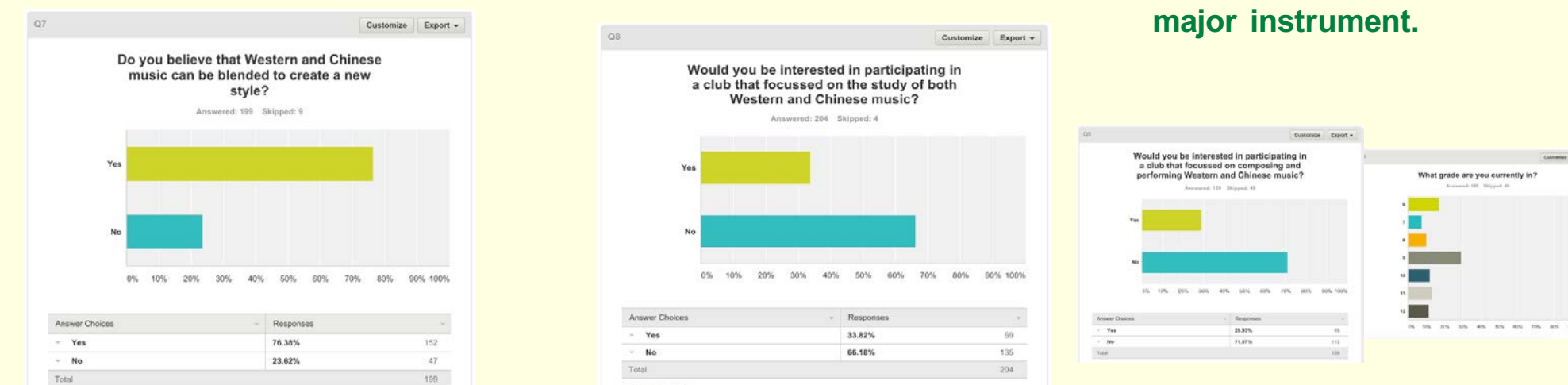
Piano is the most well known instrument



Apparently, student's are not familiar with Chinese music, but still 43.9% are interested in it.

Chinese classical music has more influence in US.

Guzheng is the most famous Chinese instrument in US, which happens to be my major instrument.



Q7 shows that most student's (76.38%) believe that the two kinds of music can be combined together to create a new form, which is encouraging us to pursue in the future.

Even though most students are not interested in joining such club, this still has 33.83% potential to develop.

Q10 shows that mostly students who participated in this survey are in grade 9 (28.93%), followed by grade 6(16.98%), and finally grade 11 (13.21%)

## Results

### a. Features of Chinese Music

Chinese music was originally created by priests, for the purpose of praying for rain and food, over thousands of years. During that time, the instruments were made of stones and animal bones. After the dynasties began, music developed quickly. It became a reflection of the world view, and included the beliefs of the primitive ancestors. Also in that time, Chinese created their own five music note "宫商角徵羽" system which matches the five natural elements of "metal, wood, water, fire and earth". During that time, the instruments developed more forms, some of them are mostly typical for classic Chinese music (pictured below).



Chinese music was mainly composed with monophonic melody, which dictated a very simple structure in the instrument. Through the music, the goal is not to tell specific stories, but is an expression of harmony and ceremony of the Confucian. Classic Chinese music has deep relationship with the theory of Chinese traditional religions', such as the combination of human and natural from Taoism, or the insights of Zen from Buddhism. An example is the world famous composition <Gao Shan Liu Shui>. "Through performance of this composition, the deep friendship between mountain and river are described."

### b. Features of Western Music

Like the Chinese music, Western music also has a long history and can be traced back to ancient Greek and Rome. This artistic form combines music and poem, which evolved into classical drama set to music. These classical music dramas depicted real events, such as war, banquet, and daily life. This style of music is now known as classical Opera. When the medieval times began, Pope Gregory The Great reformed Christian music into Gregorian chant, which created the link between music and religion. During the Renaissance period, two famous genres were created. The minstrel told stories through music and Gothic style was born in Northern Europe. During this time, many modern instruments were also invented.



"Piano" "Pipe Organ" "Trombone" "Trumpet" "Violin" "Cello"

During the Baroque era there were many great musicians whose music is still famous and widely performed today, such as Bach, Antonio Vivaldi, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert. At this time, forms such as the <Serenade>, the <Divertimento>, and the Symphony were developed. Some of the most famous compositions from this era were Haydn's Cello Concertos', numerous concertos for winds and strings by Mozart, and Beethoven's amazing piano works such as the "Pathetique", and the "Moonlight Sonata". The "Romantic Period" refers to the late 19 centuries, when Chopin, Mendelsohn, Liszt and Tchaikovsky made their names. Music in this period has more emphasis on the expression of people's spiritual realm and the subjective feelings of the music genre in the emergence of a new solo style of instrumental music.

### c. Further Research

Based on the above analysis results, it shows there are students in school who are interested in both Chinese and Western music. For further research there will be an initiation of a music club which will aim towards composing and performing music that combines by both Chinese and Western styles. Following are the next steps:

- Discuss with the school music teacher to ask for help and ideas.
- Set up the running system and instructions; activity rules.
- Recruit by hanging posters throughout campus
- Interview individuals. Candidate must have basic music knowledge and ability, with the goal of finding 5-10 students interested in this project.
- Create works and seek performance opportunities.

## Conclusions

The differences between Chinese & Western music

### 1. Aesthetic Differences

Chinese music has Harmony as it's core culture. Key descriptors of Chinese music are ideals, nothingness, ethereal, charm, deep thinking, conception, intuition and respect for human race. Western music is more practical, in the background of opera. It focuses on esthetics and functional life, describes specific stories, and most importantly has a well developed and structured music theory.

### 2. The difference of music creation and the idea of music

Chinese classical music does not have specific rules or theory, it can easily be lost in the history because much is not written down. Western music has specific rules and theory and is written down, which is why it is still widely performed today and has circulated throughout the globe. Like Chinese classical painting and calligraphy, the music is mainly performed in single lines, but western music has greater diversity of harmony and rhythm, similar to how a painting shows real events.

### 3. Differences in musical instrument development

As the Chinese music is made up of monophonic melodies, this style lends to the simplicity of Chinese instruments. These instruments do not harmony. The more simple instruments show more distant mood. For example, pipa, Yangqin, flute, Sheng and suona mainly use "silk", "bamboo" as material, so they play with soft, fine, clear music features. Western musical instruments for example the French horn, trumpet and saxophone mainly use metal as materials, the structure is complex which allows a more rich tone, wide range of notes, and louder performance capability.

### 4. The main reason for the differences:

Chinese and western music origins are different, and the differences are generated by the culture. The is rooted in Chinese music sounding sentimental, and western music grounded in harmonies. Western harmonies find their source in mathematics and geometry in ancient Greece, and mathematical coordination in ancient Rome. China's charm can be found in the pre Qin dynasty philosophy, even as originated from the ancient's worship of animal totems. In the end, the differences of outlook, culture, and history between both Chinese and Western is the basic reason for the difference in musical styles.

### 5. Possibility of combination

I believe there exists the possibility to combine the two kinds of music and create a new form of music.

## Literature

1. Literary Works:  
 (Introduction to Chinese traditional music) (Yuan Jingfang/Shanghai Music Publishing House/2000-10)  
 (A Brief History of Ancient Chinese Music) (Liao Fushu/People's Music Publishing House/1965-3)  
 (An Outline History of Western Music) (Milo Wood/Gary Martin/James Miller, 2012-1)  
 (Music in Western Civilization) (Paul Henry Lang/2003-3)

2. Music Work  
 (Gao Shan Liu Shui) (Chun Jiang Hua Yue Yue) -Guzheng  
 (Shi Man Mai Fu) -PiPa  
 (Wan Ni Ben Teng) -ErHu  
 (Ode to Joy) - Beethoven - Piano  
 (Tocatta and Fugue) - Bach - Piano  
 (MENDELSSOHN Concerto in E minor) - Mendelssohn - Violin  
 (Valse Sentimentale) - Tchaikovsky - Cello

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## For further information

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