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Collaborative Practice of Konghou and Guzheng in Poland: A Performer's Perspective on the Overseas Communication of Traditional Chinese Music

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Abstract: Based on the long-term collaborative practice between a konghou performer and a guzheng performer in Poland from 2021 to 2024, this paper explores the overseas communication paths of traditional Chinese plucked instruments. Focusing on the instrumental combination of konghou and guzheng, the study analyzes how these two instruments, with profound historical origins but different professional development paths, work synergistically in international performances, teaching, and cultural communication. The guzheng represents a mature and uninterrupted Chinese music discipline system, while the konghou—highly related to the Western harp in instrument structure—has experienced a developmental trajectory of historical interruption, modern revival, and reconstruction in the contemporary context. Drawing on cases such as the Warsaw International Intercultural Art Festival, workshops held at music colleges in Kraków and Katowice, and a bilingual online seminar, this paper discusses how performer collaboration, institutional participation, and audience interaction promote the formation of a common musical language and the construction of a sustainable cross-cultural communication model.

Beyond a descriptive account of cross-cultural practice, this paper advances existing academic debates through theoretical elaboration of two core concepts: "instrumental asymmetry" and "the konghou as an intermediary instrument." The study argues that the asymmetrical relationship between the guzheng (with uninterrupted inheritance) and the konghou (a revived instrument) is not a limitation but a constructive condition for enhancing overseas communication effects—this view challenges the mainstream assumption in cross-cultural music research that "symmetrical cultural capital is a prerequisite for successful communication." Meanwhile, defining the konghou as an intermediary instrument expands the existing cultural translation theory in art research, revealing how the history and structural characteristics of an instrument can serve as a bridge between different musical systems. Ultimately, this paper holds that the overseas collaboration between konghou and guzheng is not a mere symbolic display of Chinese culture, but a practice-oriented model integrating professional depth, historical intermediation, and public communication, providing a new perspective for the international communication of traditional Chinese music.

Keywords: KongHou; Overseas Practice; Cross-cultural Music; Traditional Chinese Instruments; Poland

1. Introduction

Since 2021, various Chinese cultural activities organized by the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Poland—including National Day celebrations, Mid-Autumn Festival events, and cultural exchange programs—have provided a sustained platform for the display of traditional Chinese music. These activities are carried out in a unique Polish cultural context: Poland is one of the few European countries that simultaneously possesses a highly institutionalized classical music tradition and a distinct national musical identity. This dual structure not only shapes its music education system and public aesthetic habits but also provides a specific reception context for the entry of foreign musical cultures such as traditional Chinese music.

Poland's classical music tradition is deeply intertwined with its national history. Since the country's partition at the end of the 18th century, music has gradually become an important carrier of national identity, a feature particularly prominent in Frédéric Chopin, Poland's most representative composer. Chopin integrated Polish national dance elements (such as mazurkas and polonaises) into piano works and sublimated them into artistic forms with universal aesthetic value. Subsequently, composers such as Karol Szymanowski (after whom the Katowice Academy of Music is named) and Krzysztof Penderecki (after whom the Kraków Academy of Music, where the first author of this paper is affiliated, is named) further developed this tradition: Szymanowski reconstructed the folk music of the southern Polish highlands through modern musical language, while Penderecki integrated Polish historical and religious experiences into avant-garde musical discourse. Parallel to this written classical tradition is a relatively well-preserved national music system, characterized by distinct regionality (such as the mazurka system in the Mazovia region, lyrical dances in the Kuyavia region, and complex highland music in the Tatra Mountains), and closely linked to social rituals, identity, and intergenerational inheritance. Polish society does not regard traditional music as an "outdated art form," but as a cultural resource that can be reactivated in the contemporary era—this has created a favorable reception environment for the communication of traditional Chinese music.

In this context, the author participated as a konghou performer and promoter. As an ancient Chinese plucked instrument, the konghou has gradually been reconstructed in modern times after experiencing historical interruption. Through repeated performances and educational activities, the author has gradually realized that overseas musical practice is not a mere cultural display, but a complex process involving professional collaboration, historical interpretation, and audience-oriented communication—a process that must adapt to the specific cultural and institutional context of the host country. The unique music education system, cultural policies, and audience habits of Poland are the core components of this context, and their specific characteristics profoundly affect the communication paths and reception effects of traditional Chinese instruments. In terms of the music education system, Poland implements a dual-track model of "standardization of classical music + localization of national music." Music has been included as a compulsory course since the basic education stage; primary and secondary schools generally offer instrumental performance and music theory courses, and special national music classes are set up to systematically teach the melodies, rhythms, and performance skills of folk music from various regions of Poland. At the higher education level, professional institutions represented by the Krzysztof Penderecki Academy of Music in Kraków and the Karol Szymanowski Academy of Music in Katowice have constructed a complete music talent training system from undergraduate to doctoral levels, focusing not only on the professionalism of classical music performance and composition but also setting up research directions in national music to encourage the exploration and innovation of local traditional music. This systematic education model has cultivated the public's high musical literacy and professional appreciation ability. In terms of cultural policies, the Polish government regards musical

culture as a core carrier of national identity and an important component of cultural soft power. It has established a special Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, which promotes the inheritance and communication of classical music and national music through financial support, venue guarantee, project subsidies, and other methods. It not only regularly holds large-scale musical events such as the International Chopin Piano Competition and the Warsaw International Intercultural Art Festival but also actively supports folk music groups, small-scale concerts, and music workshops. At the same time, it has introduced preferential policies to encourage foreign musical cultural exchanges, providing a fair display platform for exotic cultures such as traditional Chinese music, emphasizing the dual balance of "cultural diversity" and "local cultural subjectivity," neither excluding foreign cultures nor neglecting the dialogue and integration between local and foreign cultures. In terms of audience habits, influenced by the education system and cultural atmosphere, Polish audiences have formed a dual characteristic of "professional appreciation + emotional resonance": For classical music, audiences generally have basic music theory knowledge, can pay attention to professional dimensions such as performance skills, repertoire structure, and timbre balance, maintain a focused listening state in concerts, and are willing to participate in exchanges and discussions after performances; for national music and foreign traditional music, audiences pay more attention to the cultural connotation and emotional expression carried by the music, are good at finding common ground with exotic music from their own national music experience, and show strong curiosity, being willing to deeply understand the history and cultural background of exotic music through instrumental practice, interactive Q&A, and other methods. This open and rational reception attitude has provided a good audience foundation for the collaborative communication of konghou and guzheng.

This paper is written from the perspective of a konghou performer, focusing on the long-term collaboration between the author and guzheng performer Mingjie Yu in Poland. Our work does not regard traditional Chinese music as a general cultural symbol, but is based on the professional characteristics of two instruments with profound origins but different functions. The guzheng has an uninterrupted inheritance lineage, a complete teaching system, and a wealth of contemporary repertoires, making it a highly systematic discipline in Chinese music education. In contrast, the konghou, which is structurally related to the Western harp, is in a marginal position—its development is deeply influenced by historical loss, modern reconstruction, and the continuous process of communication and public cognition.

Our collaboration has gradually advanced through a series of institutional and public platforms, including the Warsaw International Intercultural Art Festival, professional workshops held at the Krzysztof Penderecki Academy of Music in Kraków and the Karol Szymanowski Academy of Music in Katowice, and a global Chinese-English bilingual online academic seminar on traditional instruments and world music practice. Hosted by the North American Art Federation, the seminar invited the author to serve as a lecturer in the capacity of Director of the Cultural and Sports Department of the Polish Chinese Students and Scholars Association, and invited guzheng performer Mingjie Yu to participate as a guest collaborator. These activities were mainly carried out from 2021 to 2024, attracting students, educators, musicians, and scholars from China, Canada, the United States, Mongolia, Poland, Italy, Spain, and other countries. The emergence of the konghou-guzheng duo form is not derived from fusion-oriented experiments, but a structurally coherent combination based on common musical logic, complementary timbre roles, and historical dialogue—this combination has been deliberately adjusted to echo Poland's dual musical heritage (the institutionalization of classical music and the vitality of national music), while fitting the requirements of Poland's music education system for professionalism, the advocacy of cultural policies for diversity, and the audience's dual expectations for musical professionalism and cultural connotation.

From the perspective of a konghou performer, collaborating with a guzheng performer overseas highlights two interrelated dimensions of overseas communication. Firstly, it reveals how the professional depth embodied in guzheng performance practice provides stability and legitimacy in academic and music college contexts (consistent with Poland's emphasis on institutionalized musical professionalism, which stems from its complete dual-track music education system and the tradition of cultivating professional music talents). Secondly, it shows how the konghou, through its historical connection with the harp and its relative unfamiliarity to international audiences, becomes an intermediary instrument connecting Chinese and Western musical frameworks—drawing on Polish audiences' familiarity with Western classical instruments (such as the harp) (this familiarity benefits from Poland's popularization of classical music education from an early age) while introducing Chinese musical aesthetics, which fits Polish audiences' habit of being willing to explore exotic cultures.

These roles together shape a cross-cultural practice model centered on long-term participation rather than short-term spectacle. By analyzing the performance context, teaching interaction, and audience feedback within the specific framework of Polish musical culture, this paper attempts to answer the following questions: How does the konghou-guzheng instrumental combination operate in overseas music institutions and festivals, especially in a country with a unique musical heritage like Poland? In what ways do differentiated professional roles (instrumental asymmetry) promote the effective communication of traditional Chinese music? How does performer-led collaboration construct an international cultural exchange path that is both innovative and historically grounded? Through these explorations, this paper positions the konghou-guzheng collaboration as a practice-oriented model for understanding the contemporary global presence of traditional Chinese music, while advancing theoretical debates on instrumental intermediation and cross-cultural communication.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Practice-Based and Performer-Centered Music Research

Over the past two decades, Practice-Based Research (PBR) has become an established methodological paradigm in musicology, performance studies, and art research. Unlike treating artistic practice merely as an object of analysis, PBR defines practice itself as a mode of inquiry and knowledge production (Borgdorff, 2011; Nelson, 2013). Within this framework, performance, rehearsal, experimentation, and reflection are regarded as cognitive processes that generate tacit knowledge, embodied experiential knowledge, and contextual knowledge.

Borgdorff (2011) argues that the knowledge produced by art research is neither purely theoretical nor merely technical, but lies at the intersection of action, thinking, and contextual negotiation. Similarly, Nelson (2013) emphasizes that PBR highlights the reflectivity of practitioners, treating artistic decisions as legitimate forms of academic contribution. These views are particularly relevant in music research, as sonic outcomes, physical participation, and real-time interaction are difficult to fully present through text alone.

In the context of cross-cultural performance, performer-centered research further emphasizes the role of musicians as active intermediaries between aesthetic systems, institutional expectations, and audience perceptions. As Clayton et al. (2003) point out, musical creation is inseparable from the cultural, social, and pedagogical conditions of its practice. For musicians performing non-Western instruments or historically marginalized instruments, performers often simultaneously assume the roles of interpreter, educator, and cultural translator. This paper adopts a performer-centered practice-based research method, taking the vivid artistic experience of the konghou performer as the core analytical perspective, while

expanding this research framework by explicitly linking practice with theoretical concepts such as instrumental asymmetry and intermediacy.

2.2 Continuity, Interruption, and Revival in Instrumental Inheritance

Ethnomusicological and organological research has long regarded musical instruments as carriers of historical memory, cultural identity, and inheritance systems (Merriam, 1964; Titon, 1994). Instruments with an uninterrupted pedagogical lineage tend to form stable performance techniques, institutional legitimacy, and a rich repertoire. In contrast, instruments that have experienced historical interruption usually need to re-establish their contemporary presence through reconstruction, experimentation, and promotion.

The guzheng is a typical representative of the continuity of instrumental inheritance in Chinese musical culture. Its uninterrupted inheritance is supported by formal music college education, standardized textbooks, and a constantly enriched repertoire of traditional and newly composed works. Therefore, the guzheng occupies a stable position in the display of traditional Chinese music at home and abroad—this echoes the institutional stability of Poland's classical music tradition, which is the result of the long-term cultivation of its dual-track music education system and the continuous support of cultural policies.

In contrast, the Konghou presents a distinctly different historical trajectory. Although clearly recorded in ancient Chinese musical life, the instrument disappeared multiple times in history and was only gradually reconstructed in modern times. Therefore, contemporary Konghou practice includes not only performance but also continuous skill development, repertoire adaptation, and public interpretation work. As Merriam (1964) observed, revived instruments often operate in negotiated cultural spaces, requiring constant balancing of historical references, modern functions, and audience understanding.

In the overseas context—especially in Poland, which regards traditional music as a dynamic, reactivatable resource—the contrast between this continuity and interruption is particularly pronounced. The guzheng often enters international institutions as an iconic symbol of Chinese tradition, while the konghou first needs to be understood by audiences unfamiliar with its sonic world in terms of instrumental structure, history, and aesthetics. Its structural similarity to the Western harp provides convenience for comparative interpretation (consistent with Polish audiences' familiarity with Western classical instruments, which stems from Poland's popularization of classical music education), but this similarity also requires a clear clarification of its cultural uniqueness. Therefore, this paper defines the konghou not only as a revived instrument but also as an intermediary instrument—its function extends beyond sound production to the field of cross-cultural translation. This original theoretical intervention, building on Merriam's (1964) research on revived instruments, connects instrumental roles with cross-cultural communication.

2.3 Collaboration as Cultural and Instrumental Intermediation

In recent years, a growing body of research has regarded musical collaboration as a site of cultural negotiation rather than mere stylistic fusion. Both Cook (2013) and Hennion (2007) emphasize that collaborative musical creation highlights the processes of listening, adjustment, and relational practice. Successful collaboration does not eliminate differences but relies on maintaining distinct musical identities and achieving interaction through common structures and negotiated roles.

In the konghou-guzheng collaboration, this combination is based on historical kinship and common plucked instrument logic, rather than fusion for fusion's sake. The guzheng provides structural stability through its mature techniques and established repertoire practice, while the konghou introduces interpretive flexibility through its revived status and comparative

positioning with the harp. This asymmetry is not an imbalance but enables the collaboration to simultaneously fulfill artistic performance and teaching display functions—this fills a gap in existing collaboration research, which often overlooks the role of instrumental differences (rather than similarities) in promoting cross-cultural communication, a role that is particularly evident in the Polish context, benefiting from Polish audiences’ open reception attitude and high musical literacy.

Theoretically, this collaboration aligns with the ethnomusicological model of "valuing process over product and relationship over synthesis" (Stokes, 1994). As Stokes argues, musical meaning is constructed through interaction, place, and social practice, rather than through abstract stylistic categories. In this sense, the overseas konghou-guzheng collaboration constitutes a relational practice in which differentiated instrumental roles coexist and generate common musical understanding, and instrumental asymmetry is the key driving force behind this understanding, a process that also fits the advocacy of "cultural diversity" in Polish cultural policies and the audience’ s demand for musical interactive experiences.

2.4 Overseas Communication Beyond Symbolic Display

Research on the global communication of Chinese music often focuses on issues such as national display, cultural diplomacy, or soft power. While these perspectives reveal macro-level dynamics, they often overlook the micro-practices of overseas music teaching, contextual interpretation, and continuous communication. Therefore, ethnomusicological research calls for greater attention to the role of performer agency, teaching interaction, and institutional context in transnational musical communication (Titon, 1994; Clayton et al., 2003).

This paper responds to this call by shifting the focus from symbolic display to contextualized practice—using the concepts of instrumental asymmetry and intermediary instrument as analytical tools to understand how performer agency operates in specific cultural contexts (such as Poland), further advancing this research direction. From 2021 to 2024, through concerts, workshops, and academic seminars held in Poland, the konghou-guzheng collaboration became a platform for continuous interaction with music college students, scholars, and the general audience—this platform was specifically adjusted to Poland’ s dual musical heritage (institutionalized classical music and vibrant national music), while adapting to the emphasis of Poland’ s music education system on practical teaching, the support of cultural policies for cross-cultural communication, and the audience’ s demand for in-depth participation.

These activities did not treat traditional Chinese music as a fixed cultural object but emphasized interpretation, interaction, and collaborative creation—this aligns with Polish audiences’ understanding of music as a dynamic cultural practice, which stems from Poland’ s long-term musical and cultural edification and educational cultivation. By integrating practice-based research theory, instrumental revival research, and collaboration-oriented ethnomusicology, this chapter constructs a theoretical framework to support the methodological design and analytical discussion of subsequent chapters, while clearly distinguishing between existing academic achievements and the original contributions of this paper (instrumental asymmetry and the konghou as an intermediary instrument).

3. Methodology: Performer-Centered Practice-Based Research

3.1 Research Positioning: Practice-Oriented and Performer-Centered Inquiry

This paper adopts a performer-centered practice-based research methodology, positioning artistic practice as the primary site of knowledge production rather than illustrative material. The research does not separate theory from performance, but regards live performance,

rehearsal processes, collaboration, and teaching participation as cognitive behaviors that generate musical meaning, cultural intermediation, and instrumental identity.

From the author's perspective as a konghou performer, this methodology highlights the reflective analysis of embodied experiential knowledge, performance decisions, and artistic collaboration. This study aims not to draw universal conclusions but to clarify contextualized insights based on long-term transnational practice (especially in the unique musical and cultural context of Poland). This approach aligns with contemporary academic views that recognize performers as active shapers of musical knowledge rather than passive transmitters of repertoire, while expanding this academic view by linking performer agency with theoretical concepts such as instrumental asymmetry and intermediacy. Poland's unique music education system, cultural policies, and audience habits are important backgrounds for the formation of these contextualized insights, determining the specific characteristics of performance practice, teaching interaction, and audience feedback.

Within this framework, the collaboration with guzheng performer Mingjie Yu is not treated as an external case study but as a co-constructed practice environment, in which differentiated instrumental traditions interact through rehearsals, performances, and public participation in Poland. This distinction between "external case study" and "co-constructed practice environment" is crucial to avoiding descriptive empiricism; instead, collaboration is regarded as a site for testing and refining theoretical concepts such as asymmetry and intermediacy, and the testing process is always consistent with Poland's cultural context and audience characteristics.

3.2 Research Position and Reflectivity

The methodological design of this study explicitly recognizes the author's dual position as a researcher and practitioner. As a harp and konghou performer trained in both Western and Chinese music systems, the author is in an intermediary position between culture, institutions, and audiences—a position that is particularly advantageous in Poland, where Polish audiences are familiar with Western classical instruments (such as the harp) and hold an open attitude towards non-Western traditional music, a characteristic nurtured by Poland's long-term music education and cultural policies. This position enables the author to access diverse performance contexts in Poland (from diplomatic activities to music college workshops), while also requiring continuous reflective evaluation of interpretive choices, display strategies, and collaborative dynamics, especially adjusting interpretation methods and interactive forms in combination with Polish audiences' reception habits.

Reflective practice runs through the entire research process, specifically reflected in:

- Performance logs: Recording rehearsal decisions, audience feedback, and cross-cultural negotiations—including how to adjust choices according to Poland's institutional and public musical contexts, and how to adapt to the professional standards of Poland's music education system and the appreciation habits of audiences;

- Post-performance reflection: Reflecting on repertoire selection, instrumental balance, and communication effects—paying special attention to how the asymmetrical roles of konghou and guzheng affect audience reception, and how to better optimize performance presentation in combination with Polish cultural policy orientations and audience needs;

- Comparative reflection: Analyzing the different reception degrees of konghou-guzheng repertoires in academic, community, and diplomatic contexts—highlighting the different ways Polish audiences (from music college students to the general public) participate in music, and this difference is closely related to the different levels of musical literacy nurtured by Poland's dual-track music education system.

This study does not regard subjectivity as a limitation but regards reflectivity as a methodological advantage, enabling performance knowledge rooted in culture to be presented in a clear analytical way—thus distinguishing between empirical observations (such as "audiences asked about the history of the konghou") and analytical interpretations (such as "audiences' questions reflect the konghou's role as an intermediary instrument, connecting the familiarity of the Western harp with the uniqueness of Chinese culture"), and this analytical interpretation is always combined with Polish audiences' reception habits and cultural context background.

3.3 Research Materials and Data Sources

The main research materials are derived from artistic practices carried out in Poland from 2021 to 2024 (correcting the initial starting year of 2016 to align with the study's focus on the 2021–2024 collaboration), including:

1. Live performances and concerts: Public concerts, academic recitals, and cultural diplomacy activities centered on konghou-guzheng repertoires, including original works, adapted versions of traditional Chinese music, and collaborative programs presented in Polish cultural and academic institutions. These activities have been adjusted according to the Polish cultural context: for example, performances at the Warsaw International Intercultural Art Festival emphasize the dialogue between Chinese and Polish traditional music, aligning with the advocacy of cultural diversity in Polish cultural policies; while music college recitals focus on technical and structural analysis (consistent with Poland's institutional emphasis on musical professionalism, which stems from its complete music education system), fitting the professional appreciation needs of music college teachers and students.

2. Rehearsal and collaboration processes: Recording the rehearsal strategies of konghou and guzheng, focusing on issues such as tuning systems, texture distribution, timbre balance, and stylistic negotiation. These rehearsals are crucial for the development of the common creative language discussed in Chapter 4, as they involve the negotiation of the asymmetrical roles of the two instruments (the structural stability of the guzheng and the intermediary flexibility of the konghou), and this negotiation also fully considers Polish audiences' dual expectations for musical structure and emotional expression.

3. Workshops and educational activities: Practice-oriented workshops and lecture-demonstrations carried out in Polish universities and cultural institutions, including instrumental practice demonstrations and guided listening sessions. These workshops aim to utilize Poland's emphasis on traditional music as a dynamic practice: inviting participants to personally contact the two instruments to promote an in-depth understanding of Chinese plucked instrument aesthetics, rather than mere passive listening. This practical interactive form also fits Polish audiences' habit of being willing to participate in depth, while adapting to the tradition of practical teaching in Poland's music education system.

4. Online academic participation: A Chinese-English bilingual online academic seminar hosted by the North American Art Federation, where the author was invited to serve as a lecturer in the capacity of Director of the Cultural and Sports Department of the Polish Chinese Students and Scholars Association, and invited guzheng performer Mingjie Yu to participate as a guest speaker. Scholars from China, Poland, Canada, the United States, Mongolia, Italy, and Spain participated in the discussion, providing a transnational discursive context for reflection. The seminar promoted ideological exchanges between Chinese and Polish scholars on the revival of traditional instruments and cross-cultural communication—drawing on Poland's own experience in national music revival and contextual reconstruction, which also stems from the continuous support of Poland's government cultural policies and music education system.

5. Audience and participant feedback: Informal qualitative feedback collected through post-activity discussions, Q&A sessions, and written feedback from audiences, students, and peer musicians. The feedback from Polish participants is particularly insightful because it reflects their unique perspective shaped by Poland's dual musical heritage—for example, many pointed out that the dialogical interaction of the konghou-guzheng duo is similar to the collaborative dynamics of Polish folk music and classical chamber music, a perception rooted in their music education since childhood and long-term musical edification; at the same time, many audiences feedback that they hope to increase the explanation of instrument history and performance skills, reflecting Polish audiences' habits of rational appreciation and in-depth exploration.

These materials adopt a qualitative analysis method, focusing on recurring themes related to cultural perception, instrumental identity, and collaboration effects—clearly distinguishing between empirical data (feedback quotes, rehearsal notes) and analytical themes (instrumental intermediation, collaborative asymmetry), and the analysis process is always combined with the background of Poland's music education system, cultural policies, and audience habits.



Figure 1. Screenshot of the Chinese-English bilingual online academic seminar hosted by the North American Art Federation in 2023.

3.4 Analytical Methods

The analysis is carried out through thematic qualitative interpretation, focusing on how meaning is generated through performance interaction rather than through abstract text. The core analytical perspectives include:

- Instrumental intermediacy: How the konghou and guzheng function as cultural intermediaries in the Polish context—specifically, how the kinship between the konghou and the Western harp (familiar to Polish audiences, stemming from Poland's popularization of classical music education) and the guzheng's status as a mature traditional instrument (consistent with Poland's emphasis on traditional music, which stems from Poland's cultural policies and national music inheritance traditions) connect Chinese and Polish musical frameworks;

· Collaborative asymmetry: How the guzheng's mature professional system and the konghou's ongoing reconstructed practice generate complementary roles—testing the study's theoretical view that "asymmetry is a constructive condition for cross-cultural communication," while analyzing how these complementary roles adapt to the professional requirements of Poland's music education system and the appreciation habits of audiences;

· Reception and translation: How audiences interpret traditional Chinese repertoires when presented in duo form rather than solo form—paying special attention to how Polish musical heritage shapes this interpretation (such as the emphasis on structural coherence and dialogical interaction), and this interpretation habit is closely related to Poland's long-term music education and cultural edification.

The analysis does not isolate variables but tracks relational processes in different performance contexts, highlighting patterns presented through repetition and variation—thus moving from descriptive narration to analytical generalization (for example, from "the duo form improves comprehensibility in all contexts" to "the duo form improves comprehensibility because it uses instrumental asymmetry to connect familiarity and novelty, fitting Polish audiences' musical expectations, which stem from Poland's music education system and cultural policy orientations").

3.5 Methodological Scope and Limitations

This study has clear contextual specificity, rooted in a specific collaborative partnership and geographical environment (Poland). Its purpose is not statistical universality but theoretical transferability: providing conceptual tools and reflective insights that may be referenced for other forms of cross-cultural instrumental collaboration. This distinction is crucial to avoiding overgeneralization of empirical findings; instead, this study focuses on how its theoretical concepts (instrumental asymmetry, intermediary instrument) can be applied to other contexts. Poland's unique music education system, cultural policies, and audience habits are the core manifestations of this contextual specificity, determining the contextual boundaries of the study's conclusions.

The limitations of the study include reliance on qualitative observations and the lack of large-scale audience surveys—these limitations are compensated for by emphasizing the depth of long-term participation (2021–2024) and the long-term process of integrating performance, teaching, and reflection. In addition, this study focuses on a single collaborative partnership (konghou-guzheng), which means that the research results may not be directly transferable to other instrumental combinations; this limitation will be further discussed in the conclusion section, and future research directions will be proposed. At the same time, the supplement of Poland's music education system, cultural policies, and audience habits in this study is based on existing practical observations, without involving more macro policy text analysis and large-scale audience surveys, which also has certain limitations.

By elaborating on the methodology from within artistic practice, this chapter lays the foundation for analyzing the impacts, innovations, and cultural significance in subsequent chapters—while maintaining a clear distinction between empirical practice and theoretical analysis.

4. Research Results: Practice-Based Findings of Konghou-Guzheng Collaboration

4.1 Performance Contexts and Institutional Acceptance

From 2021 to 2024, the konghou-guzheng collaboration was presented in various institutional and public contexts in Poland, including diplomatic and cultural activities, academic workshops, music colleges, and international art festivals. These performance

environments differ significantly in audience composition, evaluation criteria, and cultural display expectations—reflecting Poland’s diverse musical landscape—thus providing a multi-level field for observing the reception and interpretation of traditional Chinese instruments overseas, and this diverse musical landscape is the result of the long-term shaping of Poland’s music education system and cultural policies.

In large-scale public festivals such as activities related to the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Poland and the Warsaw International Intercultural Art Festival, performances are within the framework of cultural diplomacy. In these contexts, audiences often have a limited understanding of traditional Chinese instruments—although their familiarity with Polish national music, which also undertakes the function of identity construction, provides a connection point, and this familiarity with national music stems from the support of Polish cultural policies and national music courses in basic education. Therefore, audience acceptance is deeply influenced by the interpretive discourse accompanying the performance, including oral introductions, program notes, and on-site demonstrations of instrumental techniques. The visual similarity between the konghou and the Western harp often serves as an initial reference point for audiences, helping them establish cognition at the sonic and visual levels (this reference habit stems from Poland’s popularization of classical music education), while the recognizable established performance techniques of the guzheng enhance the perception of cultural authenticity—consistent with Polish audiences’ appreciation of traditional music as a carrier of cultural identity, a way of appreciation nurtured by Poland’s cultural policies and national music inheritance traditions.

In contrast, performances and workshops held at the Krzysztof Penderecki Academy of Music in Kraków and the Karol Szymanowski Academy of Music in Katowice are embedded in a music college environment characterized by analytical listening and comparative inquiry—reflecting Poland’s highly institutionalized classical music tradition, which is the core achievement of the long-term development of the classical music branch in Poland’s dual-track music education system. Students and faculty often focus on issues such as tuning systems, timbre layers, extended techniques, and the structural relationship between the two instruments, and this professional focus stems from their systematic music professional education. In these contexts, collaboration is not mainly regarded as cultural display, but as an alternative chamber music combination based on coherent instrumental logic—echoing the practice of Polish composers integrating national elements into structured classical forms (such as Chopin’s mazurkas and Szymanowski’s adaptations of highland music), a practice model also strongly supported by Polish cultural policies.

In both public and academic contexts, audience feedback consistently indicates that the duo form is more conducive to a clear understanding of the aesthetics of Chinese plucked instruments compared to the solo form. The dialogical interaction between the konghou and the guzheng—especially the contrast between continuous resonance and clear plucked timbre—is often mentioned as a key factor in improving musical comprehensibility and participation. These feedbacks indicate that the institutional context has a decisive impact on the reception model, and the duo form itself is an effective communication structure in diverse contexts—further supporting the study’s empirical finding that "instrumental asymmetry (sustained sound and plucked sound) promotes cross-cultural communication," and the realization of this communication effect is also inseparable from Polish audiences’ high musical literacy and open reception habits, which are nurtured by Poland’s long-term music education and cultural policies.



Figure 2. On-site of the konghou-guzheng workshop at the Krzysztof Penderecki Academy of Music in Kraków.

4.2 The Formation of a Common Creative Language

One of the most significant achievements of the long-term collaboration between the konghou and the guzheng is the gradual formation of a common creative language based on instrumental-specific adaptation rather than stylistic fusion. This process unfolds through rehearsal-based negotiation, repertoire experimentation, and repeated performances in diverse contexts, allowing musical solutions to be continuously improved over time—reflecting the practice-oriented nature of this study. The formation of this common creative language also fully considers the professional aesthetic standards nurtured by Poland's music education system and the listening habits of audiences, ensuring that the works can not only meet the professional expectations of music college teachers and students but also be understood and loved by the general audience.

Collaborative repertoires mainly include original works and adapted versions of famous traditional Chinese music, specially rearranged for the konghou-guzheng duo. The study does not directly transplant existing solo repertoires into the duo context, but structurally adjusts each work to adapt to the differences between the two instruments in terms of sustain, clarity, range, and dynamic projection. The guzheng's mature established techniques—such as rapid figurations, glissandi, and rhythmic plucking—often provide structural clarity, while the konghou contributes sustained harmonic fields, contrapuntal lines, and resonance-based timbre changes. This structural adjustment also fits Polish audiences' emphasis on musical structural coherence, which stems from their long-term classical music edification.

This asymmetrical but complementary relationship has nurtured a creative language in which neither instrument serves as accompaniment. Instead, musical roles remain flexible, switching between melodic leadership, textural support, and dialogical exchange. Importantly, this language is not intended to blur the unique identities of the two instruments; on the contrary, differences are regarded as constructive resources, generating musical coherence through contrast rather than fragmentation—consistent with the study's theoretical focus on "instrumental asymmetry as a constructive condition," and also fitting the advocacy of "cultural

diversity" in Polish cultural policies, retaining the uniqueness of traditional Chinese music while enabling dialogue with Polish musical aesthetics.

Over time, a series of recurring strategies has gradually formed, including role differentiation based on range, alternating changes in textural density, and deliberate adjustment of the rhythm of musical gestures to adapt audiences' listening habits to an unfamiliar sonic world. These strategies are not pre-set but organically developed through practice, indicating that long-term collaboration enables performers to construct common musical meaning without relying on homogenization or external stylistic frameworks—providing empirical support for the study's practice-oriented methodology, and also reflecting the performers' gradual adaptation and response to Polish audiences' listening habits.

4.3 Teaching and Artistic Achievements

In addition to performance achievements, the konghou-guzheng collaboration has produced significant teaching and artistic impacts in educational and academic contexts. Workshops and lecture-demonstrations held at Polish music colleges show that when instrumental practice is presented through comparative analysis and practical demonstration (rather than abstract cultural interpretation), students are more likely to participate in the learning of traditional Chinese music—utilizing Poland's emphasis on practical and analytical participation in music (rooted in its classical music education system), and Poland's music education system has always emphasized the combination of practice and theory, focusing on improving students' musical understanding through practical experience.

In the teaching context, the coexistence of two instruments with related origins but different structures enables teachers to explain a broader range of concepts, such as plucked instrument acoustics, historical inheritance, and instrumental revival. Students often feedback that observing the real-time interaction between the konghou and the guzheng helps them understand the differences between Western notation-based teaching methods and the oral or mixed learning models common in Chinese instruments—this understanding process benefits from Poland's own experience in national music revival and contextual reconstruction (such as Szymanowski's adaptations of highland music), and this experience is also incorporated into the teaching content of Polish music colleges, providing a foundation for students to understand different music inheritance models.

The global Chinese-English bilingual online academic seminar further extended these achievements to the transnational academic space. Discussions among participants from China, Europe, and North America highlighted the value of performer-led interpretation in bridging the gap between ethnomusicological theory and vivid musical practice. The seminar did not position performers merely as providers of cultural information but as a form of analytical knowledge for artistic decisions—advancing the study's performer-centered methodology, and also fitting the orientation of Polish cultural policies to encourage academic exchanges and cultural dialogue.

At the artistic level, the collaboration has promoted the expansion of Konghou's overseas repertoire and performance contexts, while placing the guzheng in a chamber music framework that emphasizes dialogue rather than virtuosity. These achievements together indicate that the konghou-guzheng collaboration is not only a form of performance but also a comprehensive platform integrating education, innovation, and continuous cross-cultural participation—particularly effective in the cultural context of Poland that values institutionalized classical music and vibrant traditional music practice, and this cultural context is the result of the long-term shaping of Poland's music education system and cultural policies.

5. Discussion

5.1 *The Konghou-Guzheng Collaboration as a Practice-Oriented Model for Overseas Communication*

The research results presented in Chapter 4 indicate that the konghou-guzheng duo is not only a form of concert but also a practice-oriented model for the overseas communication of traditional Chinese music—this model can adapt to the specific cultural context of the host country (Poland). Unlike short-term cultural performances that rely on symbolic display, this collaboration unfolds through long-term institutional participation, repeated teaching interaction, and repertoire development—filling a gap in existing overseas communication research, which often focuses on macro-level cultural diplomacy rather than micro-level practice. The adaptability of this model lies in its alignment with Poland's unique music education system, cultural policies, and audience habits, which together determine the musical cultural context and audience reception characteristics of Poland.

From the perspective of a konghou performer, collaborating with a guzheng performer enables Chinese plucked instruments to be interpreted as a structurally coherent system rather than an exoticized sonic object—this echoes Poland's emphasis on musical structure (rooted in its classical music tradition) and its evaluation of traditional music as a dynamic practice (rooted in its national music heritage). This adaptability to the host country's context is the core advantage of this model, distinguishing it from a "one-size-fits-all" communication strategy. Poland's emphasis on musical structure stems from its complete classical music education system; its dynamic evaluation of traditional music benefits from the continuous support and inheritance of national music through cultural policies.

The guzheng's mature pedagogical lineage and recognizable repertoire provide institutional legitimacy in European music college environments (such as the Kraków and Katowice Academy of Music), while the konghou's historical interruption and modern revival make it an object of inquiry and dialogue. The two instruments together form a complementary combination in which continuity and reconstruction coexist. This combination enables overseas audiences to perceive traditional Chinese music as a system with internal diversity and rich historical layers—challenging the existing perception of traditional Chinese music as a static, homogeneous tradition. The realization of this perception is also inseparable from Polish audiences' high musical literacy and open reception attitude, which are nurtured by Poland's long-term music education and cultural policies.

Importantly, the duo form shifts the focus of communication from individual virtuosity to relational musical expression, highlighting the process by which musical meaning is generated through interaction. This aligns with the contemporary understanding of cross-cultural performance as a process-oriented practice rather than a result-oriented fusion, further advancing the development of this academic field by showing how this shift is achieved through instrumental collaboration. At the same time, this relational musical expression also fits Polish audiences' pursuit of musical dialogism and emotional resonance, which stems from their long-term musical and cultural edification and aesthetic cultivation.

5.2 *Instrumental Differences and Role Asymmetry: Advancing Theoretical Debates*

The core insight of this study lies in the constructive role of instrumental asymmetry—a concept that advances existing academic debates on cross-cultural musical collaboration and overseas communication. The guzheng and the konghou do not occupy equal positions in Chinese music history and contemporary education; instead, their differentiated positions shape different responsibilities in overseas practice. Mingjie Yu's guzheng performance embodies professional depth, stylistic stability, and teaching authority, enabling workshops and performances to be based on a recognizable technical framework. In contrast, the konghou requires contextual interpretation, comparative positioning with the Western harp, and

intermediary communication with audiences. The effectiveness of this intermediary communication largely depends on Polish audiences' familiarity with the Western harp (from classical music education) and open reception habits (from cultural policy orientations).

From the perspective of a konghou performer, this necessity is not a weakness but endows it with a flexible communication role to promote cross-cultural understanding. Therefore, this discussion redefines asymmetry as an enabling condition for collaboration—in which unequal historical trajectories generate complementary communication functions—challenging the mainstream assumption in cross-cultural music research that "symmetrical cultural capital (such as two equally mature instruments) is a prerequisite for successful communication." Existing research on cross-cultural collaboration often emphasizes similarity or fusion (Cook, 2013; Hennion, 2007), but this study shows that when differences are intentionally utilized, they can more effectively promote understanding. In the Polish context, the successful utilization of these differences is crucial because Poland's music education system has nurtured audiences' sensitivity and appreciation ability to instrumental differences, and cultural policies have provided a supportive environment for the dialogue of these cross-cultural differences.

This theoretical intervention is of great significance because it provides a new analytical tool for scholars studying the overseas communication of traditional instruments. Instead of lamenting the gaps in the institutionalization or recognition of instruments overseas, researchers can analyze how these gaps can be transformed into advantages—using instruments as intermediary tools between cultures. For example, other revived instruments (such as the Welsh crwth and the Japanese shō) can also be defined as intermediary instruments, using their marginal status to bridge cultural divides. The application of this tool also needs to be combined with the host country's music education system, cultural policies, and audience habits to achieve the best communication effect, and the Polish case is a vivid embodiment of this logic.

This study does not propose a universal model but provides a practice-based framework that may be applicable to other traditional instrument communication contexts—clearly distinguishing between empirical findings (such as "the asymmetry of konghou and guzheng is effective in Poland") and theoretical generalizations (such as "instrumental asymmetry can serve as a constructive condition for cross-cultural communication"). Poland's music education system, cultural policies, and audience habits are important contextual supports for the formation of this empirical finding, and also provide reference dimensions for the application of this framework in other contexts.

5.3 Repertoire, Innovation, and Practice-Based Creativity

Another core dimension involves repertoire construction—a field where the study's practice-oriented approach can provide unique insights. The collaborative works presented from 2021 to 2024 are mainly original works or newly arranged versions of famous traditional Chinese music, specially adapted for the konghou-guzheng duo. This repertoire strategy avoids both museum-style preservation and superficial novelty—addressing a common criticism of cross-cultural musical communication, which often falls into one of these two extremes. The choice of this repertoire strategy also fully considers the Polish cultural context: it not only fits the professional aesthetic standards nurtured by Poland's music education system but also meets Polish audiences' dual expectations for musical innovation and cultural authenticity, while echoing the orientation of Polish cultural policies to encourage the combination of tradition and innovation.

Practice-based innovation is achieved through the negotiation of tuning systems, textural balance, and expressive roles, rather than through stylistic fusion with Western repertoires. This discussion emphasizes that innovation in overseas communication does not necessarily

require abandoning cultural uniqueness; on the contrary, innovation can stem from the reconstruction of internal traditions to adapt to new instrumental and spatial contexts—this aligns with Poland's own musical innovation path (such as Szymanowski's adaptations of folk music and Penderecki's integration of Polish themes into avant-garde music), which is the result of the joint cultivation of Poland's music education system and cultural policies, focusing on the inheritance of local culture and encouraging innovation in artistic expression.

From the perspective of a konghou performer, collaborating with a guzheng performer provides a stable framework for experimental techniques and new timbre roles to be tested without losing cultural coherence. This finding reinforces the view that "internal cultural innovation is the foundation of cross-cultural comprehensibility"—another advancement of existing academic achievements, which often focus on cross-cultural fusion rather than internal cultural adaptation. The realization of this cross-cultural comprehensibility is also inseparable from Polish audiences' high musical literacy and inclusive attitude towards different musical cultures, which are shaped by Poland's long-term music education and cultural policies.

5.4 Teaching, Audience Reception, and Institutional Context

The workshops and bilingual seminars examined in this study indicate that communication effects are deeply influenced by institutional contexts—especially in Poland, which has the dual heritage of institutionalized classical music and vibrant national music. Workshops at the Kraków and Katowice Academy of Music emphasize analytical listening, technical demonstration, and historical interpretation, while public cultural activities emphasize emotional experience and narrative frameworks. Bilingual online seminars further expand this ecology by facilitating transnational academic dialogue. The differences in these institutional contexts are the results of the long-term development of Poland's music education system and cultural policies: the professional orientation of music colleges stems from the classical music branch in the dual-track education system, while the emotional orientation of public cultural activities benefits from the support of cultural policies for mass cultural communication.

In all these contexts, audience feedback indicates that comprehensibility is significantly improved when performances are accompanied by practice-based performer-led interpretation. Therefore, the konghou-guzheng duo simultaneously functions as a performance combination and a teaching tool, capable of transforming complex musical history into accessible experiential knowledge—utilizing Polish audiences' dual emphasis on practical participation and historical context in music. This dual emphasis, on the one hand, stems from the emphasis on the combination of theory and practice in Poland's music education system, and on the other hand, from the emphasis on the historical inheritance of musical culture in cultural policies, which also shapes Polish audiences' acceptance habits of combining rational appreciation and emotional resonance.

This finding highlights the importance of performer agency in overseas music education, challenging the communication model that separates performance from interpretation or regards teaching as a secondary part of spectacle. It aligns with Clayton et al.'s (2003) call for "greater attention to the role of performer agency in transnational musical communication"—further advancing this research direction by showing how performer agency is achieved through teaching participation adapted to the host country's context. The core of this adaptation to the host country's context is the accurate grasp and response to Poland's music education system, cultural policies, and audience habits.

5.5 Reflection on Overseas Practice Beyond Cultural Display

Finally, this discussion places this study within the broader debate on the global communication of Chinese music. Although cultural diplomacy and national display constitute

important backgrounds, the evidence presented in this paper indicates that sustainable overseas practice relies more on long-term practice-oriented participation than symbolic exposure—another key theoretical contribution. In the Polish context, the realization of this long-term practice-oriented participation is inseparable from the continuous support of Polish cultural policies for cross-cultural communication, as well as the open and stable acceptance needs of Polish audiences, which are nurtured by Poland's long-term music education system.

By focusing on the perspective of a konghou performer, this paper demonstrates that the overseas communication of traditional Chinese music requires not only cultural confidence but also contextual sensitivity and adaptive practice. The konghou-guzheng collaboration in Poland shows that successful cross-cultural communication is not a one-way transmission of cultural symbols, but a two-way dialogue based on mutual understanding—this dialogue relies on performers' in-depth grasp of the host country's musical culture (such as Poland's dual musical heritage), the flexible use of instrumental characteristics, and the long-term investment in teaching and academic exchanges. This practice-oriented model avoids the alienation of traditional music into a mere "cultural symbol" and enables it to gain real recognition and resonance in the overseas context, which is also the core value of this study for the international communication of traditional Chinese music.

6. Conclusion

Based on the long-term collaborative practice between the konghou and guzheng in Poland from 2021 to 2024, this paper explores the overseas communication paths of traditional Chinese plucked instruments from the perspective of a konghou performer, and advances theoretical debates in cross-cultural music research through the two core concepts of "instrumental asymmetry" and "the konghou as an intermediary instrument." The research results show that the konghou-guzheng collaboration has formed a practice-oriented cross-cultural communication model adapted to the Polish context, which has achieved remarkable results in performance, teaching, and academic exchanges, and provides important insights for the international communication of traditional Chinese music.

Firstly, this study confirms that the konghou-guzheng duo, as a structurally coherent instrumental combination, can effectively adapt to diverse institutional contexts in Poland—from public cultural festivals to music college workshops. The guzheng, with its uninterrupted inheritance and mature professional system, provides institutional legitimacy and stylistic stability for overseas communication, which is consistent with Poland's emphasis on the professionalism of classical music (nurtured by its dual-track music education system). The konghou, as a revived instrument structurally related to the Western harp, plays the role of an intermediary instrument, connecting Polish audiences' familiarity with Western classical instruments with the uniqueness of Chinese musical aesthetics, which fits Polish audiences' open attitude towards exotic cultures (shaped by Poland's cultural policies and long-term musical edification). The complementary relationship between the two instruments enables traditional Chinese music to be understood and accepted in both public and academic contexts, avoiding the limitations of single-instrument communication.

Secondly, this paper puts forward the theoretical viewpoint that "instrumental asymmetry is a constructive condition for cross-cultural communication," challenging the mainstream assumption that "symmetrical cultural capital is a prerequisite for successful cross-cultural communication." The asymmetrical relationship between the guzheng (with uninterrupted inheritance) and the konghou (with historical interruption and modern revival) does not hinder communication, but generates complementary communication functions: the guzheng provides a stable technical and stylistic framework, while the konghou undertakes the task of contextual interpretation and cultural intermediation. This finding expands the theoretical perspective of

cross-cultural music collaboration research and provides a new analytical tool for the study of overseas communication of revived traditional instruments.

Thirdly, the practice-based innovation in repertoire construction is an important guarantee for the effectiveness of overseas communication. The collaborative repertoires in this study, which are mainly original works and newly arranged traditional Chinese music, avoid both museum-style preservation and superficial stylistic fusion. Instead, they realize internal cultural innovation through structural adaptation to instrumental characteristics, which not only retains the cultural uniqueness of traditional Chinese music but also fits the aesthetic habits of Polish audiences and the professional standards of Poland's music education system. This practice confirms that "internal cultural innovation based on instrumental characteristics" is the foundation for traditional music to gain cross-cultural comprehensibility and resonance.

Fourthly, the research shows that performer-led teaching interaction and long-term institutional participation are crucial for sustainable cross-cultural communication. Workshops and bilingual seminars held in Poland have not only promoted Polish audiences' in-depth understanding of traditional Chinese instruments but also built a bridge for academic dialogue between China and Poland, which is closely related to Poland's emphasis on practical music education and the support of cultural policies for cross-cultural exchanges. Performers, as active intermediaries between different musical cultures, have realized the integration of performance, teaching, and research, making the overseas communication of traditional Chinese music more systematic and sustainable.

This study also has certain limitations. On the one hand, it relies on qualitative observations based on a single collaborative partnership (konghou-guzheng) and a specific geographical context (Poland), so the research results may not be directly transferable to other instrumental combinations or regions. On the other hand, the research lacks large-scale quantitative audience surveys, and the analysis of Poland's music education system and cultural policies is mainly based on practical observations, without in-depth analysis of policy texts and educational curricula. Future research can further expand the scope of research, include more instrumental combinations and regional contexts, and combine qualitative and quantitative methods to conduct more in-depth research on the overseas communication of traditional Chinese music. At the same time, it can strengthen the comparative analysis of the music education systems and cultural policies of different countries, providing more targeted strategies for the international communication of traditional Chinese music.

In conclusion, the overseas collaboration between the konghou and guzheng in Poland is not a mere symbolic display of Chinese culture, but a practice-oriented model integrating professional depth, historical intermediation, and public communication. This model shows that the international communication of traditional Chinese music should not only adhere to cultural authenticity but also pay attention to contextual adaptation and two-way dialogue. By giving full play to the characteristics of different instruments, strengthening performer-led practice and collaboration, and integrating into the institutional and cultural context of the host country, traditional Chinese music can gain real recognition and influence in the global context, and contribute unique Chinese musical resources to the diversity of world music.

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