

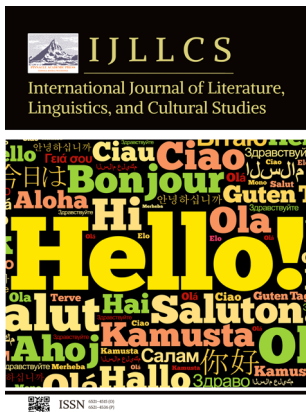
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Constructing Cultural Identity with Traditional Chinese-Style Music in Soundscapes

Bingyi Yan ^{1,*}

¹ Department of Contemporary Music, Graduate School, Hanyang University, Seoul, 04763, South Korea

* Correspondence: Bingyi Yan, Department of Contemporary Music, Graduate School, Hanyang University, Seoul, 04763, South Korea



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Abstract: In recent years, China's film and television industry has increasingly incorporated Traditional Chinese-style Music (TCM), not only to enhance narrative expression but also to construct culturally resonant soundscapes. By integrating traditional instruments and operatic motifs, these productions evoke imagery and collective memory, transforming auditory experience into cultural recognition. This study investigates how TCM contributes to soundscape construction that fosters audience identification. It examines how musical elements shape perception, how sonic imagery conveys cultural symbolism, and how creators reinforce strategies of cultural identification. Through case studies of *The Legend of Zhenhuan* and *Kung Fu Panda*, the research analyzes three soundscape components—Keynote Sound, Sound Signal, and Sound Mark—within the framework of Hero Theory. The findings suggest that domestic dramas tend to emphasize inward cultural identification, whereas Western animations favor outward cultural integration. This comparative inquiry elucidates the mechanisms through which TCM transforms sound into cultural signifiers and offers insights into how film and television music can further promote the global dissemination of Chinese culture.

Keywords: Traditional Chinese-style Music (TCM); soundscape; cultural identity; film and television music; cultural representation; traditional Chinese instruments

1. Introduction

1.1. The Rise of Traditional Chinese-style Music in Screen Soundtracks

Traditional Chinese-style Music (TCM), with its distinct national characteristics, has become an increasingly integral component of contemporary film and television soundtracks. From the classical elegance of *The Legend of Zhenhuan* to the fiery passion of *Ne Zha* and the heroic grandeur of *Chang'an: Three Thousand Miles*, such compositions transcend the role of mere narrative accompaniment. They serve as essential forces in shaping emotional depth, crafting unique cultural atmospheres, and embedding collective memory. Together, these scores construct vivid soundscapes that profoundly influence the audience's cinematic experience and cultural perception [1].

Modern Chinese screen music demonstrates a growing reliance on traditional instruments and operatic elements. This integration not only enhances emotional resonance but also extends beyond the conventional boundaries of film music. The careful selection of ethnic musical elements can evoke mental imagery through auditory cues, enabling audi-

ences to recall specific scenes or emotions [2]. As music reawakens these visual associations, sound becomes a medium for cultural recollection, facilitating the dissemination of Chinese culture through auditory channels.

1.2. Soundscape as a Cultural Construct

This transformation—where auditory culture evolves into visual culture and imagery becomes embedded in the audience's psychological perception—is encapsulated in the concept of the soundscape. The soundscape bridges sound with other sensory modalities such as vision and spatial awareness. The visual system provides spatial cues, while the auditory system compensates for areas beyond the field of view. Through this cross-sensory integration, music conveys cultural information via melody, rhythm, and timbre, fostering visual synaesthesia and establishing memory anchors [3].

Audiences interpret these auditory cues within specific cultural and narrative contexts, thereby triggering recognition or reconstruction of cultural identity. In this sense, TCM serves not merely as a narrative tool but as a medium of cultural representation, constructing auditory landscapes that evoke emotional and cultural resonance.

The Chinese audience's emotional attachment to Eastern aesthetics functions as an intrinsic cultural symbol—an acoustic vehicle for expressing national sentiment [4]. This symbolic role enables film and television music to tell compelling Chinese stories through sound and imagery, communicating Chinese sensibilities while advancing the inheritance and transmission of traditional culture in the new era [5]. Contemporary youth also seek emotional resonance and cultural belonging through film and television music. In many Chinese films, traditional instruments and motifs are reinterpreted through modern cinematic forms, allowing young audiences to engage with traditional culture from more approachable perspectives and to foster a shared sense of identity [6].

1.3. Research Gaps and Objectives

Despite growing interest in TCM, current academic research on film and television music remains limited in scope. Most studies still rely on traditional musicological frameworks—focusing on form, harmony, or orchestration—or examine isolated narrative functions. While such approaches provide valuable insights, they often overlook music as a dynamic cultural practice. In the intertwined contexts of globalization and localization, the mechanisms through which Chinese-style music constructs soundscapes, evokes emotional connection, and fosters cultural identification remain underexplored [7].

From a theoretical perspective, many studies remain confined within the disciplinary boundaries of art or communication studies, without systematically employing soundscape theory to analyze cultural auditory environments [8]. Although audience engagement with TCM has been observed, there is insufficient discussion on how specific musical strategies help overcome cognitive barriers and promote identification.

In terms of research content, existing findings are largely fragmented case studies centered on individual popular productions. Analyses of well-known soundtracks provide detailed examinations of how instrumentation interacts with character development and narrative rhythm [9]. However, such works lack cross-genre and cross-era comparisons, making it difficult to generalize broader principles of soundscape construction. Most attention has been devoted to visual aesthetics such as costumes or set design, or to the superficial communicative effects of music, while relatively few studies systematically investigate the deeper relationship between sound imagery and cultural identity construction [10].

In summary, existing scholarship has demonstrated the cultural dissemination function of Chinese-style elements in film and television, as well as the emotional impetus music provides to these works. Building on this foundation, the present study seeks to explore the mechanisms of soundscape construction and cultural identity formation in TCM within film and television contexts. The following research questions are proposed:

1. How do musical elements account for variations in audience perception of TCM?
2. How do sound images convey and transmit symbols of Chinese cultural identity through musical elements?
3. How do creators of film and television music employ theoretical mechanisms of cultural representation to enhance audience identification?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Musical Elements and Perceptual Foundations of "Chinese Style"

In recent years, the rise of the "Guofeng" or Chinese-style trend has led to the growing use of Traditional Chinese-style Music (TCM) and ethnic instruments in film and television soundtracks. This development reflects contemporary society's re-examination and reconstruction of cultural identity through sound [11]. The modern "Guofeng" aesthetic refers to an evolving cultural movement that integrates historical and traditional elements into popular culture, particularly through music and costume dramas.

Chinese-style soundtracks have become cultural bridges that connect audiences emotionally with traditional heritage while enriching the historical context of visual productions [12]. Expressed through diverse traditional instruments, TCM not only amplifies emotion but also enhances visual storytelling by embodying symbolic and cultural imagery. Each instrument contributes distinctive emotional textures and sonic imagery, shaping the audience's perception of character, mood, and atmosphere. The emotional qualities and symbolic associations of representative instruments are summarised in Table 1, illustrating how each instrument contributes to the construction of Chinese-style musical narratives.

Table 1. Imagery Conveyed by Representative Instruments in Chinese-Style Music.

Category	Instrument	Musical Characteristics	Imagery Conveyed	Film/TV Example
Wind	Suona (double-reed horn)	D-tuned soprano; wide dynamic range	Great joy and sorrow; vitality and tension of life	<i>Journey with the Phoenix</i> – "Battle Hymn"
Wind	Dizi (bamboo flute)	Northern Bangdi (G/F tuning), Southern Qudi (C/D tuning); crisp and bright tone	Boldness, freedom, and aspiration	<i>The Legend of Zhenhuan</i> – "Longing for You"
Wind	Xiao (vertical bamboo flute)	G tuning, mellow and low-pitched timbre	Solitude, martial grace, inner tranquility	<i>The Smiling, Proud Wanderer</i> – "Theme Melody"
Plucked	Pipa (four-string lute)	Standard tuning A–d–e–a; expressive tremolo	Heroic spirit, cultural fusion, resilience	<i>Ten-Sided Ambush</i> – "Main Theme"
Plucked	Guqin (seven-string zither)	Range C–d ³ ; deep resonance	Transcendence, literary refinement, ethereal calm	<i>The Smiling, Proud Wanderer</i> – "Thoughts of You"
Bowed	Erhu (two-string fiddle)	Range d ¹ –e ⁴ ; warm and expressive tone	Melancholy, nostalgia, emotional depth	<i>Kung Fu Panda</i> – "Oogway Ascends"
Percussion	Chinese drum	No fixed pitch; powerful and resonant	Courage, movement, and collective energy	<i>The Legend of the Hidden Sea</i> – "The Silk-Washing Tale"

Garro noted that music occupies a central position within the visual experience [13]. When a melody resonates in the human heart, it evokes a collective vision shared by countless individuals. The synthesis of musical imagery with visual structures can generate deeply enduring memories. Beyond traditional folk instruments, national-style music inspired by intangible cultural heritage has become a prominent feature in contemporary film and television productions, as exemplified by the acclaimed series *The Legend of Zang Hai*.

Kunqu opera is a defining feature of this work. While traditional Kunqu adheres to a “delicate and refined” aesthetic, the series draws on the bold musical mode from Liang Chenyu’s Ming Dynasty Kunqu piece *The Washing of the Silk: The Hunt* (*Huan Sha Ji·Da Wei*). The inclusion of a male chorus subverts Kunqu’s traditionally feminine qualities. The fusion of Kunqu with Chinese drumming is particularly powerful [14].

In one striking scene, Eunuch Cao executes the Marquis of Pingjin. Within the grand hall, Cao beats the drum himself in anticipation of the Marquis’s arrival. The war drums resound with dense, low-frequency rhythms, evoking the presence of thousands of troops and creating an oppressive atmosphere of impending conflict. At this moment, the chorus from *The Silk-Washing Tale* rises: “With long swords and mighty bows, he ruled over Jiangdong. Chariots flowed like water, horses like dragons...” Combined with the deafening battle cries beyond the palace walls and the rebel forces breaching the gates, a unique aesthetic emerges—transforming the scene into one of solemn grandeur.

Thus, we can observe how TCM is ingeniously integrated into cinematic works, with each instrument embodying its own distinct imagery and symbolic resonance.

2.2. Constructing Soundscapes in Audiovisual Productions

The stylistic creation of audiovisual spaces plays a pivotal role in immersing audiences in the narrative world. Viewers interpret films and cultural meanings through the aesthetic interplay of spatial atmosphere, emotion, and symbolism in television dramas [15]. According to Murray Schafer, soundscape art comprises three fundamental elements: Keynote Sounds, Signals, and Sound Marks [16]. These elements serve as essential tools for analyzing and deconstructing any soundscape, forming the basis of both artistic substance and emotional expression in audiovisual works.

In film and television, each element performs a distinct yet complementary role. Keynote Sound establishes the emotional foundation and spiritual ambience of a scene; Sound Signals propel the narrative forward, guiding audience attention and intensifying psychological tension; and Sound Marks encapsulate collective memory and cultural identity, serving as distinctive auditory symbols of recognition [17].

For instance, in contemporary Chinese television dramas such as *The Age of Awakening* and *Ideals Illuminate China*, the rhetorical use of sound activates its narrative potential. Sonic elements construct period atmospheres and convey mainstream values through keynote sounds such as the subtle rustle of fluttering red flags, signal sounds like heroic musical themes, and landmark sounds exemplified by iconic collective slogans. This triadic combination not only enhances narrative authenticity but also functions as a powerful aesthetic mechanism for expressing Chinese identity and crystallizing the spirit of the era.

Furthermore, recent explorations of audiovisual soundscape design in ethnic cinema demonstrate how spatial, ritualistic, and auditory elements converge to shape cultural representation. In the study of Qiang ethnic film and television works, the integration of spatial environment, ritual performance, and soundscape construction reveals how music mediates between sacred and everyday contexts. Through the cinematic medium, such auditory frameworks help sustain cultural memory, reinforce ethnic identity, and transmit living musical heritage.

Overall, the three core elements of soundscape artistry provide a robust theoretical and methodological foundation for understanding the spiritual depth of audiovisual narratives. Sound in film and television is not merely an accessory to visual storytelling, but a central narrative instrument that shapes emotional texture, conveys symbolic meaning, and guides viewers from sensory perception to spiritual resonance. This evolution from environmental immersion to empathetic engagement exemplifies the transformative potential of sound in contemporary audiovisual art [18].

2.3. Mechanisms for Cultural Identity Construction in Soundscapes

2.3.1. Cultural Representation Practices

The modern reinterpretation of traditional elements in TCM constitutes what Hall termed “Cultural Representation”. Hall proposed pathways for generating cultural meaning, as illustrated in Figure 1 [19].

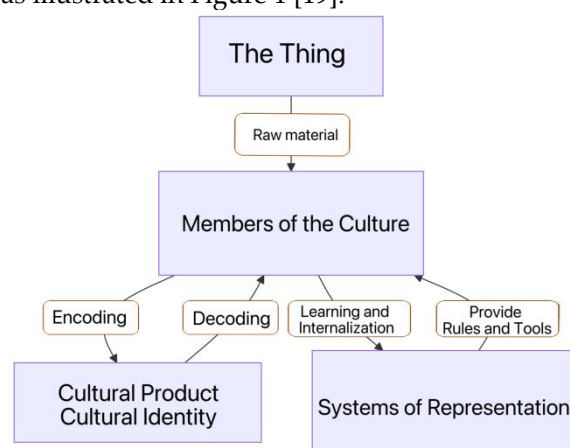


Figure 1. Model of meaning generation pathways in Hall's theory of cultural representation.

Hall indicated that cultural representation provides a crucial theoretical framework for understanding how cultural symbols generate meaning, emphasizing that meaning is not objectively given but continuously constructed through representational practices [19]. This process relies on a society's shared systems of concepts, symbols, and rules, within which particular cultural symbols are assigned to objective realities. Hall also proposed a theoretical model of cultural identity, highlighting the cyclical process of encoding and decoding [20]. Applied to film and television music, creators encode specific cultural connotations into music through shared representational systems, while audiences decode these musical symbols within the viewing context, enabling the transmission and reception of cultural meaning.

A clear example of this process can be observed in the soundtrack *Bicang Battle Hymn* from the television drama *The Legend of ShenLi* (see Figure 2).

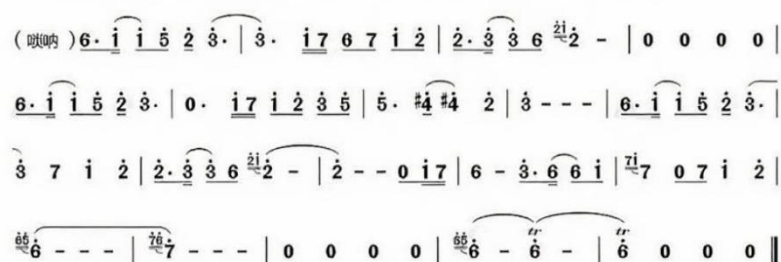


Figure 2. An example of the sheet music for “Bicang Battle Hymn”.

Here, the suona—an instrument known for its piercing and resonant tone—forms the objective basis for meaning generation. Building on this acoustic foundation, the music is encoded with connotations of heroism and resilience, corresponding to the protagonist's defiant spirit. During the viewing experience, audiences decode the music by associating the suona's timbre with the protagonist's courage and indomitable will. Through repeated exposure and shared recognition, the melody transcends its sonic form to become a cultural symbol of heroism. When audiences collectively identify the suona's first note as a signifier of victory or moral strength, the symbol achieves widespread cultural acceptance. This process demonstrates that cultural identity is not fixed but dynamically constructed through continuous representational practice, wherein music becomes a vehicle for generating, transmitting, and reinforcing shared cultural meanings [21].

2.3.2. The Role of Hero's Journey Theory in Cultural Identity

Joseph proposed the Hero's Journey theory, which describes the process by which a hero responds to a call to adventure, enters an unknown and challenging world, undergoes trials and personal growth, and ultimately returns victorious [22]. This theory outlines the complete arc of the hero, including the stages of *Initiation* and *Return*, in which the hero achieves victory and brings back a treasure [23]. As a universal narrative model, it is widely applied in global film and television scriptwriting, providing a psychological pathway that enables audiences to empathize deeply with, and grow alongside, the protagonist.

As audiences follow the hero through this journey, they engage in an active process of representation. They project their own emotions, values, and aspirations onto the protagonist, thereby forming a psychological bond. When such individual emotional experiences become collectively recognized and shared, they transform into a cultural identity that transcends the narrative itself.

The *Harry Potter* film series offers a representative example of this process. Its recurring musical motif, *Hedwig's Theme*, composed by John Williams, serves as a central representational code within the series. The theme is not merely background accompaniment but a symbolic auditory thread that guides emotional progression, marks stages of the hero's development, and anchors collective memory [24].

In the film *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, *Hedwig's Theme* corresponds closely to the three stages of the Hero's Journey:

- 1) Departure: The theme begins with a sense of mystery and wonder, using celestial timbres and fragmented motifs to evoke the protagonist's first encounter with the magical world. The music invites audiences to embark on a journey of discovery, initiating the process of identity formation.
- 2) Initiation: As the hero faces trials and self-discovery, the melody evolves through modal shifts and richer orchestration, reflecting emotional struggle and personal growth. The audience experiences these changes empathically, reinforcing identification with the hero's transformation.
- 3) Return: In climactic moments, the theme expands into a full orchestral statement with brass and percussion, symbolizing triumph and maturity. Here, the music embodies the hero's spiritual culmination and becomes a marker of collective victory.

Through these evolving variations, *Hedwig's Theme* transcends its musical form to become a ritualized cultural symbol. The melody alone evokes shared memories of courage, friendship, and moral resilience within the global audience. Thus, the Hero's Journey framework demonstrates how music, through recurring representational patterns, constructs and sustains cultural identity—transforming personal emotional resonance into collective symbolic memory.

3. Methodology

This study aims to explore how Traditional Chinese-style Music (TCM) constructs distinctive soundscapes and investigates the mechanisms through which it fosters cultural identification among audiences from diverse backgrounds. To achieve this, the research primarily employs the case study method, a qualitative approach well suited to addressing complex questions of “how” and “why.” Through systematic deconstruction and analysis of selected cases, the study examines how creators utilize musical elements, particularly traditional Chinese instruments, to shape soundscapes and facilitate the transmission and construction of cultural meaning.

3.1. Sampling

To ensure both depth and comparability, the study focuses on the Chinese television series *The Legend of Zhenhuan* and the Hollywood film *Kung Fu Panda*. The rationale for their selection is threefold. First, both works are widely recognized and influential productions, providing rich material for analysis. Second, both employ Chinese-inspired musical scores to showcase Chinese culture, using TCM to construct narrative content. Third, they differ significantly in cultural perspective and production context. *The Legend of Zhenhuan*, created by a Chinese team, is rooted in Chinese cultural narratives and aims to authentically convey the intrinsic spirit of Chinese tradition [25]. In contrast, *Kung Fu Panda*, produced by an American team, interprets Chinese culture through a Western lens, blending cultural borrowing and stylistic fusion to create a globally accessible representation of Eastern aesthetics. By contrasting these two approaches, the study aims to illuminate the encoding and decoding processes of culture in cross-contextual communication.

3.2. Analytical Dimensions

The analysis of TCM in these case studies is conducted across three interrelated levels.

First, at the level of musical elements, the study examines the fundamental components that define the “Chinese-style” character of the music. This includes the tonal qualities and symbolic meanings of traditional instruments such as the guzheng, pipa, erhu, and dizi, as well as the use of pentatonic modes, melodic progressions, and rhythmic patterns that evoke classical Chinese aesthetics. The study also considers how instrumental combinations create specific historical atmospheres or emotional tones [26].

Second, at the soundscape level, the study explores how these musical elements are organized within film and television works to construct cohesive, narratively functional soundscapes. This involves analyzing how music integrates with visuals, plot development, and character emotions to evoke temporal and spatial sensations, atmospheric qualities, and emotional resonance [27].

Finally, at the level of cultural identity, and utilising Hall’s theoretical framework, the study will analyse how soundscapes, as cultural symbols, are decoded by audiences and associated with specific cultural identities. The study will explore how music transforms from pure sound into a medium that carries national sentiment, cultural memory, and a sense of belonging [19].

4. Data analysis and results

4.1. Analysis of the Soundscape Theoretical Framework< The Story of Zhen Huan> Musical Analysis of the Work

Set in the Yongzheng-era imperial harem of the Qing dynasty, *The Legend of Zhen Huan* chronicles the protagonist’s transformation from an innocent maiden into a shrewd Empress Dowager, navigating court intrigues and political maneuvering. Through the construction of soundscapes, the composers vividly capture the class hierarchy and ritual culture of ancient Chinese society. From the overarching soundtrack to individual char-

acter theme songs, each musical element reinforces hierarchical order and power structures, making the series an ideal case study for examining how music signifies authority, social class, and feudal ethics.

Within the drama, the same musical motif, *Longing for You*, performed on different instruments, generates multi-layered audiovisual imagery and emotional atmospheres. This melody serves as the defining musical theme for Prince Guo Yunli. Beyond the solo flute rendition, a qin-flute duet appears, with pieces titled *Longing for You* and *Longing to Stay*, both originally associated with Consort Shu, Prince Guo's birth mother. Although the late emperor cherished Consort Shu deeply, the surviving instruments—the qin and flute—symbolically foreshadow the tragic fate of Zhen Huan and Yunli's relationship.

In the solo flute version, the instrument's luminous, melodious tone imbues Yunli's playing with a guardian-like presence, conveying warmth and tender affection. When Prince Guo plays outside the palace walls, the flute's sound drifts inward, reaching Zhen Huan in the wilderness, offering her solace. Here, the flute functions as an emotional conduit, allowing characters to communicate through sound rather than words.

In the duet rendition, Zhen Huan performs the ancient qin piece *Longing for Eternal Companionship*, while Yunli accompanies her on the flute with *Eternal Vigilance*. Although the qin and flute harmonize, their intertwining tones offer only fleeting joy, starkly contrasting with the pervasive sorrow and inescapable despair of the palace environment.

Zhen Huan also performs the qin in other scenes. Outside of *Longing for You*, the qin's deep, resonant tones evoke melancholy and oppression. In one key scene, as Zhen Huan is trapped within the palace, a snapped string punctuates her performance, visually and aurally emphasizing her restless state of mind. Flickering candlelight further amplifies the oppressive atmosphere. The vibrations of the qin strings resemble sighs, creating a "sensation of time standing still" that mirrors the gradual erosion of women's lives in the imperial harem.

Overall, in *The Legend of Zhen Huan*, musical instruments are not merely props but vessels of character emotion and narrative meaning. The acoustic qualities of each instrument intertwine with narrative space, refining *Longing for You* into a quintessential example of Eastern aesthetic soundscape storytelling. The interplay of Keynote Sounds, Signals, and Sound Marks in these scenes, as illustrated in Table 2, demonstrates how specific musical elements function collectively to convey psychological states, social hierarchies, and cultural symbolism.

Table 2. Analysis of Musical Elements in *The Legend of Zhen Huan*.

Plot	Keynote Sound	Signals	Sound Mark	Symbolic Meaning
An Lingrong trembles during her first imperial bedchamber duty and is sent away by the Emperor; en route, she encounters Yu Yinger singing "The Black Brocade Robe (zao luo pao)," becoming a laughingstock throughout the harem.	Flute solo evokes desolation and helplessness, establishing the auditory foundation of her abandonment.	The eunuchs whispered among themselves as Yu Yinger's palanquin travelled in the opposite direction. She sang "How splendidly the flowers bloom in all their splendour" from the "Black Brocade Robe" (Mudanting Youyuan, zao luo pao) section of The Peony Pavilion, creating a striking contrast between sound and image.	Creaking of the palanquin and tinkling of bells in the cold wind.	Highlights the trampling of the weak by power.

On Zhen Huan's first wedding night, Consort Hua laments: "Only the new bride smiles, not the weeping bride of old."	Female vocal recitation establishes an auditory backdrop of icy imperial palace, contrasting with red candlelight in Zhen Huan's chamber.	Crackling of red candles and whispers suggest fleeting affection within palace walls.	Cicadas' song accentuates desolation and solitude.	Transforms personal solitude into collective lament; all women in the harem share the same fate.
At Zhen Huan's investiture ceremony, she mistakenly wears the late Empress Chun Yu'an's garments; the Emperor enrages and imprisons her in Shuiyu Pavilion.	Female voice intones heartrending neglect; ornate canopy appears desolate, reflecting Zhen Huan's broken spirit.	Harp arpeggios mimic water clock ticks, intensifying the sense of hopelessness.	Silent tears and sobs intertwine with echoing sigh-like female voice.	Turns physical space into an auditory metaphor for a psychological prison; symbolizes feudal ruthlessness and immutability.

4.2. Analysing the Music of *Kung Fu Panda* Through the Heroic Narrative Framework

The *Kung Fu Panda* film series chronicles the spiritual and emotional journey of Po—a clumsy yet kind-hearted panda who dreams of becoming a martial arts master. As summarised in Table 3, the film's musical architecture is intricately aligned with the narrative structure of the Hero's Journey, encompassing the three archetypal stages of *Departure*, *Initiation*, and *Return*. The score operates not merely as atmospheric embellishment but as a narrative agent that externalises the protagonist's inner transformation. Through the variation and development of thematic motifs, the music traces Po's progression from naïve dreamer to enlightened hero, epitomising the fusion of Eastern and Western musical traditions in cinematic storytelling.

Table 3. Analysis of Musical Elements in *Kung Fu Panda*.

Hero's Journey Stage	Plot Milestones	Application of Traditional Chinese-style Music (TCM)	Metaphorical Significance for Po's Growth
Departure	Ordinary WorldPo dreams of becoming a martial arts hero.	The piece <i>Hero</i> begins with erhu melodies, opera-style drum rhythms, and brisk plucked instruments such as pipa and guzheng. The blend of timbres carries a humorous and exaggerated tone.	The contrast between grand musical heroism and comedic tone underscores the gap between Po's fantasy and reality.
	Call to AdventurePo accidentally crashes the selection ceremony.	<i>Oogway Ascends</i> introduces a blend of strings and flute, evoking destiny and solemnity. It transitions to <i>Dragon Warrior is Among Us</i> , which fuses gongs, drums, and erhu to create a lively folk atmosphere.	The musical transition signifies the beginning of Po's destined journey, shaped by fate and guided by destiny.

Initiation	Trials and Allies Po trains with the Furious Five, enduring repeated failure but persisting.	Light, clumsy melodies from pipa and woodwinds accompany rhythmic training sounds, merging diegetic and non-diegetic soundscapes.	The cheerful yet awkward tone symbolizes Po's resilience and growing self-awareness amid struggle.
	Approach to the Innermost Cave Under the peach tree, Master Oogway ascends to immortality.	The full <i>Oogway Ascends</i> theme returns; the flute leads with soaring strings, creating an ethereal atmosphere of transcendence.	The music conveys both loss and enlightenment, marking Po's emotional awakening and independence.
	Reward Po begins true martial arts training in the bamboo grove.	The xiao flute, gongs, and strings fuse to form an energetic climax. The xiao's timbre introduces martial nobility and serenity.	The music mirrors Po's inner transformation—from clumsy learner to self-disciplined warrior. The integration of Western orchestration and Chinese instruments symbolizes Po's complete transformation and mastery.
Return	Resurrection Po battles Tai Lung in a climactic duel.	Po's theme evolves from playful fragments into a grand symphonic form, merging Chinese drums, brass, and strings.	The peaceful melody reflects Po's harmonious balance between strength and innocence, fulfilling the hero's cyclical return.
	Return with the Elixir Po defeats Tai Lung and restores peace.	The music returns to a tranquil, heartwarming tone with flute and strings, blending joy and serenity.	

During the Departure phase, the film juxtaposes Po's fantastical aspirations with the inevitability of destiny. In the "Ordinary World" sequence, Po remains a humble noodle shop assistant, lost in dreams of martial glory. The score *Hero* opens with an erhu-led melody interwoven with exaggerated opera percussion and briskly plucked instruments such as the *pipa* and *guzheng*, producing an ironically grand yet comical tone. This sonic contrast between heroic melody and playful rhythm exposes the gap between Po's imagination and his mundane reality. When fate unexpectedly appoints him as the "Dragon Warrior," the film transitions into the "Call to Adventure." At this turning point, the profound theme *Oogway Ascends* emerges for the first time. The intertwining flute and string motifs evoke solemnity and transcendence, symbolising the awakening of destiny. Immediately following this, the exuberant *Dragon Warrior is Among Us* combines erhu, gongs, and festive percussion, illustrating both the villagers' excitement and Po's bewilderment. This musical transition signifies the hero's formal departure, uniting coincidence with the inescapable pull of fate.

The Initiation phase portrays Po's arduous trials and gradual awakening. Here, the film's music adopts a deliberately light and humorous tone. Instead of heroic orchestration, it employs delicate *pipa* and woodwind passages that accompany Po's awkward training scenes. The slightly offbeat rhythmic phrasing mirrors his clumsy movements, lending warmth and humanity to his struggle. These playful yet persistent motifs encapsulate the hero's resilience amid repeated failure. When Master Oogway transcends to immortality beneath the peach tree, the theme *Oogway Ascends* returns in its most fully developed form. Led by flute and enveloped by sustained strings, the melody ascends to ethereal heights, serving as both a requiem and a transmission of spiritual wisdom. The music functions as a moment of initiation—imparting courage to Po and prompting his first step toward independence. Later, in the bamboo grove training sequence, the score evolves again: the introduction of the *xiao* flute lends a sense of calm dignity, while the

fusion of gongs, drums, plucked strings, and full orchestration elevates the emotional intensity. This marks Po's inner transformation, as he begins to internalise the spirit and composure of the Dragon Warrior.

Finally, in the Return phase, Po's journey culminates in self-realisation and harmony. During the climactic duel with Tai Lung, Po's fragmented and comic musical theme transforms into a majestic, symphonic statement. Chinese drums intertwine with Western brass and string sections to produce a sonic grandeur that transcends cultural boundaries. This convergence of musical languages mirrors Po's personal synthesis—his evolution from uncertainty to enlightenment, from imitation to mastery. As the battle concludes and peace returns to the Valley, the music gradually recedes into a gentle dialogue between flute and strings. The restored tranquillity evokes warmth, belonging, and fulfilment, signifying that while Po has achieved heroic stature, his innocence and compassion remain intact [28].

In summary, the musical strategy of *Kung Fu Panda* demonstrates how the Western creative team skilfully employed Chinese-style musical symbols, deeply integrating them into the film's narrative rhythm and character arcs to achieve unity between musical and narrative function.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The hero's journey represents not merely an external adventure but also an internal process of overcoming challenges, self-discovery, growth, and integration. This mirrors broader perceptions of China's development, encompassing infrastructure, economic progress, and cultural as well as spiritual resurgence. Throughout this evolution, the distinctive Eastern aesthetic has radiated globally, with music reflecting the nation's maturation and embodying the essence of its cultural spirit.

The cultural resonance evoked by the soundscape in *The Legend of Zhenhuan* constitutes an inward-facing identification rooted in historical and collective memory. Through its sonic elements, domestic audiences are able to revisit specific historical contexts, understand and reflect on a cultural paradigm shaped by hierarchy, ritual propriety, and collectivism, and thereby reinforce recognition and affirmation of their own cultural roots.

Kung Fu Panda exemplifies an effective practice of cross-cultural musical representation, integrating Chinese-inspired motifs as symbolic elements within a Western heroic narrative framework and symphonic score. Unlike *The Legend of Zhenhuan*, *Kung Fu Panda* selectively draws on aesthetic elements of Chinese style to enrich a cultural product rooted in Western traditions, fostering appreciation and acceptance of Chinese elements as cultural symbols. The film presents a compelling tale of East-West cultural fusion through its evocative soundscapes and inspiring plot, demonstrating the role of music as a bridge in a globalized context.

In summary, Traditional Chinese-style Music in film and television transcends mere stylistic embellishment, emerging as a powerful force in cultural dissemination. Soundscape frameworks employ immersive auditory narratives to construct rich and interpretable cultural content, while hero narrative structures, through dramatic plot development and symbolically functional scoring, create widely popular cultural products. In today's era of deepening cultural exchange, these approaches are not competing but complementary. By balancing accessibility and cultural depth, Chinese music can genuinely captivate global audiences and resonate on a profound level.

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