

Traditional Chinese Musical Resources in Chinese and China-Themed Games: Contextual Aesthetic Orientations

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ABSTRACT

Chinese and China-themed games increasingly mobilize traditional Chinese musical resources within hybrid contemporary scores, yet the aesthetic function of these resources varies by scene and is often discussed without a clear separation between production facts and interpretation. This study develops a qualitative, source-sensitive framework around four source-verified focal units: “Liyue” in Genshin Impact, “Mighty Descent” in Black Myth: Wukong, “Solemnity” in Total War: Three Kingdoms, and scene music from Jiangnan Baijingtū. Rather than constructing a broad ontology or genre taxonomy of traditional musical symbols, the study narrows the unit of analysis to cue- or scene-level evidence. Analysis considers timbre, melodic profile, rhythm, texture, pacing, cultural association, and game situation. The comparison proposes four provisional aesthetic orientations: artistic-conception, martial/kinetic, solemn/historical, and regional-life. These are not universal genre rules. The main contribution is an evidential procedure that distinguishes verified catalogue and production information from interpretive close listening, offering a cautious basis for future transcription, reception, and cross-cultural research.

1. Introduction

The international visibility of Chinese-developed and China-themed games has increased attention to the ways music participates in cultural representation. Recent discussion of Chinese game soundscapes has addressed questions of identity, technology, aesthetics, and cross-cultural influence (Wang et al., 2025). Research on mediated Chinese soundscapes also shows that the affective and cultural meanings of traditional instruments can shift across media and social contexts rather than remain fixed (Wang & Li, 2024). The present article therefore treats traditional Chinese musical resources as context-sensitive materials whose aesthetic function must be examined at cue or scene level.

The central problem is therefore not whether each game genre has one correct instrument, scale, or musical formula. Such a claim would oversimplify both Chinese musical practice and contemporary game scoring. The more useful question is how traditional Chinese musical resources acquire different aesthetic functions when they are placed in different narrative, spatial, and gameplay situations. A restrained sonority may support distance or contemplation in one scene, while stronger rhythmic direction or textural accumulation may support conflict or movement in another. The relationship is contextual rather than mechanically determined.

Existing game-music scholarship provides useful methods for examining relationships between musical organization and audiovisual meaning. Crathorne (2010) compared music across game genres, Atkinson (2019) demonstrated how recurring musical topics and tropes can connect musical features with audiovisual meaning, and Summers (2016) emphasized analysis of game music in relation to the game as a complex source. A closely related study by Hu and Chong (2026) examined 34 Chinese games and 48 traditional musical-symbol samples to construct a broad ontology organized around temperament, instrument, form, and genre. That study addressed classification and transformation across a large corpus. The present article asks a narrower question: how can source-verified musical materials be interpreted within individual cues or scenes while keeping catalogue facts, production credits, and close-listening claims analytically distinct? Accordingly, the unit of analysis shifts from a broad symbol corpus to four focal musical units.

This study therefore complements rather than repeats ontology-centered classification research. It compares four deliberately contrasting cue or scene functions: reflective fantasy world-building, mythic conflict/action, historical gravity, and regional everyday life. It asks how timbre, melodic profile, rhythm, texture, pacing, and cultural association interact with these specific game situations. The study does not claim universal genre laws. Instead, it proposes provisional aesthetic orientations that can be tested, refined, or challenged by later research.

1.1. Significance of the Study

The theoretical value of the study lies in moving from broad symbol classification to cue- and scene-level contextual interpretation. Ludomusicology has established that game music should be studied in relation to the structures, worlds, and actions of games rather than as isolated audio (Summers, 2016; Fernández-Cortés, 2021). Hu and Chong (2026) provide an ontology-centered account of traditional Chinese musical symbols across a broad game corpus. The present article narrows that scale and examines how documented musical resources function within four specific audiovisual situations.

Methodologically, the study emphasizes evidence discipline. Official soundtrack catalogues, production credits, developer materials, and released game recordings are separated from the author's interpretive close listening. This distinction is important because a soundtrack credit may confirm that an instrument was recorded for an album without proving that the same instrument dominates every individual cue. The approach therefore avoids unsupported claims about exact modes, frequencies, dynamics, or instrumentation when the primary source does not establish them.

Culturally, the study contributes to wider discussion of how Chinese-developed and China-themed games participate in cultural circulation. Research on Genshin Impact has

shown that online audiences use games as spaces of cultural interaction (Zhang et al., 2024), while Yuan (2025) discusses Chinese games as instruments of soft power. The present article remains focused on music rather than audience effects or diplomacy, but it clarifies one aesthetic route through which cultural references can become audible within digital game worlds.

1.2. Research Problem and Objectives

The research problem is the lack of a transparent cue-level framework for explaining how traditional Chinese musical resources acquire different aesthetic functions in contrasting game situations. To address this problem, the study treats musical meaning as an interaction among audible musical features, cultural associations, and the narrative or gameplay situation in which the music appears.

Accordingly, the study pursues the following objectives:

- i. Identify how timbre, melodic profile, rhythm, texture, and pacing function in the four focal musical units.
- ii. Compare how musical resources support different aesthetic functions across four contrasting scene functions: reflective fantasy world-building, mythic conflict/action, historical gravity, and regional everyday life
- iii. Distinguish verifiable production facts from interpretive close-listening claims and use triangulation where possible.
- iv. Propose provisional, context-sensitive aesthetic orientations rather than fixed prescriptions for game-music composition.
- v. Extend ludomusicological discussion of culturally specific and non-Western game-music practices.

These objectives position the article as a qualitative musicological study rather than a composition manual or an audience-effects study. Its contribution lies in a reproducible way of relating musical detail to game context while keeping the evidential status of each claim visible.

These objectives are addressed through three research questions:

- i. How do traditional Chinese musical resources function aesthetically across four contrasting cue- or scene-level game situations?
- ii. How do timbre, melodic profile, rhythm, texture, and pacing contribute to those scene-specific aesthetic functions?
- iii. How can source verification and close listening be combined to distinguish documented production facts from interpretive musicological claims?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Framework

2.1.1. Musicological Context

Ludomusicology studies music as part of the playable and audiovisual organization of games. Summers (2016) emphasizes that the game itself is a complex musical source and that analytical methods should be adapted to the research question. Atkinson (2019) shows how topic theory can connect recurring musical features with audiovisual and narrative meaning, while Cheng (2014) demonstrates the broader interpretive possibilities of studying music within game worlds and player experience. These

approaches support the present study's attention to audible features together with their game context.

Cultural semiotics provides a complementary perspective. Following the broader semiotic principle that cultural signs acquire meaning through systems of association and context (Barthes, 1972), the analysis does not treat a timbre, instrument, melodic gesture, or performance style as having one fixed meaning. Instead, it asks how musical materials are framed by setting, narrative, character, and play.

2.1.2. Traditional Chinese Musical Resources

In this article, traditional Chinese musical resources is an operational term for musical materials used in contemporary game scoring whose association with Chinese musical traditions is either documented in primary or scholarly sources or made explicit as an interpretive claim. These resources may include traditional instruments and timbres, performance gestures, melodic or pitch organizations, rhythmic-textural practices, and culturally recognized aesthetic associations. The term does not imply that a game cue is itself an unchanged example of historical traditional music. Wang and Li (2024), for example, show how the affective and cultural meanings associated with suona shift across mediated contexts, supporting a contextual rather than fixed-symbol approach.

The cultural meaning of these resources is therefore treated as contextual rather than inherent. A guqin timbre, pentatonic inflection, ornamental gesture, or other recognizable resource may contribute to different aesthetic effects depending on orchestration, pacing, narrative position, visual setting, and gameplay function. The analysis consequently requires cue- or scene-level evidence before assigning a specific aesthetic function, and it avoids using a single musical feature as proof of a whole game genre.

2.2. Western and China-Focused Game Music Scholarship

Western and international game-music research has developed several useful analytical routes. Crathorne (2010) addresses relationships between video-game genres and music, Summers (2016) provides a systematic account of sources and analytical methods, and Atkinson (2019) demonstrates a topic-based approach to recurring musical meaning. Fernández-Cortés (2021) also argues for the normalization and broadening of ludomusicological inquiry. Together, these works justify comparative analysis but do not by themselves establish a fixed taxonomy for Chinese game-music aesthetics.

Research focused on China provides cultural context but has different aims. Cao et al. (2025) use a cultural-historical approach to examine Wuxia games and Xia identity. Wang et al. (2025) bring scholars and industry practitioners together to discuss Chinese game soundscapes, identity, technology, and aesthetics. Zhang et al. (2024) study cultural interaction through Genshin Impact YouTube comments, and Yuan (2025) examines Chinese games in relation to soft power. Most directly, Hu and Chong (2026) classify traditional Chinese musical symbols across a broad corpus and discuss their aesthetic transformation across game types. The present study does not reproduce that taxonomy. Instead, it concentrates on claim provenance and cue-level contextual interpretation, using official catalogues and production documentation to delimit what can be asserted as fact and what remains close-listening interpretation.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Research Model

This study adopts an exploratory qualitative comparative case-study design based on four focal musical units. Its analytical foundation combines close listening and contextual music analysis with cultural semiotics (Barthes, 1972) and game-music methods developed in ludomusicology (Atkinson, 2019; Summers, 2016). The primary unit of analysis is a specific musical cue or scene rather than an entire game soundtrack or a game genre. The four focal units are “Liyue” in Genshin Impact, “Mighty Descent” in Black Myth: Wukong, “Solemnity” in Total War: Three Kingdoms, and scene music from Jiangnan Baijingtū. Genshin Impact and Black Myth: Wukong also appear as representative works in Hu and Chong (2026), but they are reused here for a different analytical purpose: source-verified cue-level interpretation rather than ontological symbol classification. Where an official catalogue or production credit identifies a track, composer, performer, or instrument, that information is treated as documented production evidence. Other musical observations are explicitly treated as interpretive findings of the present study.

3.2. Literature and Sample Selection

3.2.1. Selection Criteria

A two-tier purposive study set of 10 games released between 2015 and 2024 was a purposive four-case corpus was assembled to maximize contrast at the level of musical situation rather than to reproduce a broad genre taxonomy. Selection required: (1) a clear Chinese cultural, historical, mythological, or regional frame; (2) public access to the focal cue or stable scene recording; (3) reliable catalogue, soundtrack, developer, or production documentation sufficient to verify basic factual claims; and (4) contrast in scene function. The final corpus therefore contains one focal unit for reflective fantasy world-building, one for mythic conflict/action, one for historical gravity, and one for regional everyday life. The corpus is intentionally small because this article prioritizes traceable cue-level evidence over breadth.

3.2.2. Sample Characteristics

The four cases are intentionally heterogeneous in development origin, game form, and scene function. They include Chinese-developed fantasy and action games, a China-themed historical strategy game produced outside China, and a Chinese regional-life simulation game. These labels describe the function of the selected cue or scene, not the official genre identity of the entire game. Table 1 lists the four focal units and the evidential role of their primary materials.

Table 1. Structure, analytical status, and evidential role of the 10-game study set

Game/focalunit	Developer/release	Scene-functioncontrast	Primary materials and evidential role
Genshin Impact — “Liyue”	miHoYo; 2020	Reflective fantasy world-building	Official Liyue OST + production material. Cue-level close listening; soundtrack-level credits are not generalized to every cue.

Game/focalunit	Developer/release	Scene-functioncontrast	Primary materials and evidential role
Black Myth: Wukong — “Mighty Descent” (众圣降凡尘)	Game Science; 2024	Mythic conflict / action	Official soundtrack + project credits. Cue-level close listening; project-level instrument credits are not assigned to the cue without evidence.
Total War: Three Kingdoms — “Solemnity”	Creative Assembly / SEGA; 2019	Historical gravity	Official soundtrack + production credits. Cue-level close listening within a documented hybrid Chinese/orchestral palette. Official developer page + in-game material. Scene-level close listening; no unverified English cue title or unsupported track-specific production claim.
Jiangnan Baijingtū (江南百景图) — scene music	Coconut Island Games; 2020	Regional everyday life	

3.3. Data Analysis Logic

The analysis follows three stages: source verification, close listening and contextual music analysis of the four focal units, and cross-case comparison for orientation formation. Secondary literature is used to contextualize findings, while primary materials and close listening provide the evidence for cue- and scene-level claims.

3.3.1. Source Verification

First, the identity and status of primary materials are checked. Track titles are taken from official soundtrack catalogues or stable publisher/label releases wherever possible. Developer or soundtrack credits are used to verify production information such as recorded performers or instrument families. When no authoritative per-track catalogue is available, the analysis refers to the game or scene rather than assigning an unverified English track title. Each claim is therefore tagged conceptually as catalogue fact, production fact, or authorial interpretation.

3.3.2. Close Listening and Contextual Music Analysis

Second, close listening of the four focal units focuses on five dimensions: timbre and instrumentation as heard or documented; melodic profile and pitch organization; rhythm and pacing; texture and density; and the relationship between these musical features and the game situation. The study does not assume that a published score exists for every cue. It therefore avoids claims such as exact frequency ranges, decibel differences, or bar-by-bar note counts unless such measurements have actually been produced and documented. Likewise, a named mode or instrument is not presented as a production fact unless it can be supported by the available source or by a clearly described transcription.

3.3.3. Cross-Case Comparison and Orientation Formation

Third, the four focal analyses are compared to identify similarities, contrasts, and context-sensitive aesthetic functions. Because this exploratory article uses one focal unit

for each scene-function contrast, the resulting orientations are treated as provisional interpretive propositions rather than recurring, validated, or frequency-based patterns. Published scholarship is used to interpret the broader cultural and ludomusicological significance of the comparison (Summers, 2016; Kamp et al., 2016). The comparison is therefore case-to-case rather than a claim about the prevalence of these orientations across the wider game industry.

4. Results

4.1. Four Focal Scene Functions and Comparative Focus

Four contrasting cue or scene functions were selected before close analysis to maximize contextual variation: reflective fantasy world-building, mythic conflict/action, historical gravity, and regional everyday life. They are not presented as game genres or as a replacement for the broader symbol taxonomy developed in prior work. The four focal units are used to examine how musical organization can support different aesthetic functions within these situations. Table 2 summarizes the comparative focus and the provisional orientation associated with each case.

Table 2. Focal scene functions and provisional aesthetic orientations

Focal scene function	Typical game situation	Provisional aesthetic orientation	Evidential status
Reflective fantasy world-building	Exploration, reflection, regional world-building, imagined distance	Artistic-conception: spacious pacing, lyrical foregrounding, textural openness	Provisional orientation illustrated by the verified “Liyue” focal cue; no claim is made about fantasy games as a whole.
Mythic conflict / action	Large-scale confrontation, combat, accelerated dramatic movement	Martial/kinetic: directional rhythm, textural build-up, strong contrast	Provisional orientation illustrated by “Mighty Descent”; the claim concerns this focal cue, not a universal martial-game formula.
Historical gravity	Dynastic setting, political weight, restraint, historical atmosphere	Solemn/historical: controlled pacing, sustained sonority, formal restraint	Provisional orientation illustrated by “Solemnity” within verified Total War soundtrack documentation.
Regional everyday life	Local place, everyday movement, social space, regional imagery	Regional-life: lighter movement, ornamental motion, spatial/social atmosphere	Most tentative orientation; illustrated by Jiangnan Baijingtú scene music without an unverified English cue title.

4.2. Comparative Musical Dimensions and Evidence Boundaries

The four focal cases do not support rigid one-to-one rules such as “one context = one instrument” or fixed key/mode assignments. Instead, the comparison identifies dimensions through which contrasting aesthetic functions can be described: timbre, melodic profile, pacing, articulation, texture, and the relation between musical organization and game situation. Table 3 summarizes these comparative dimensions and, equally importantly, the evidential limits of the claims.

Table 3. Comparative musical dimensions and evidential boundaries in the four focal cases

Analytical dimension	Comparative proposition	Contrasts observed in focal cases	Evidence boundary
Timbre / instrumentation	Traditional and orchestral timbres are treated as context-sensitive resources rather than genre-deterministic markers.	Liyue and Total War foreground different forms of hybrid scoring; Black Myth documents a broad traditional-instrument palette at project level; Jiangnan is discussed at scene level.	Instrument identities are stated only when documented by production sources or clearly established in the focal analysis; soundtrack-level credits are not automatically assigned to individual cues.
Melodic / pitch organization	Melodic contour and phrasing are compared qualitatively; no fixed named mode is assigned to an entire context.	The focal cases differ in lyrical breadth, directional motion, sustained phrasing, and ornamental flexibility.	Specific mode or scale claims require a documented score or a clearly presented transcription.
Rhythm / texture	Pacing, density, articulation, and textural build-up are interpreted in relation to scene action and spatial function.	The focal comparison ranges from relative spaciousness in Liyue to stronger momentum in Mighty Descent, formal restraint in Solemnity, and lighter scene movement in Jiangnan.	No invented dB, Hz, or note-density measurements are used. Quantitative claims require an explicit measurement procedure.
Aesthetic function	Musical meaning is interpreted through the interaction of audible feature, cultural association, and game context.	The focal cases support four contrasting interpretive orientations: artistic-conception, martial/kinetic, solemn/historical, and regional-life.	These are provisional comparative interpretations based on four focal units, not universal genre prescriptions or statistically recurring patterns.

4.3. Source-Verified Illustrative Cases

4.3.1. Reflective Fantasy World-Building: “Liyue” in Genshin Impact

“Liyue” is a verified track on Genshin Impact – Jade Moon Upon a Sea of Clouds (Original Game Soundtrack), composed by Yu-Peng Chen and released with HOYO-MiX in 2020

(Chen & HOYO-MiX, 2020). Official behind-the-scenes material documents the use of the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra together with guest Chinese traditional musicians for the Liyue soundtrack (Genshin Impact Official, 2020). In the present close listening, “Liyue” is treated as an example of hybrid regional scoring: the music balances lyrical melodic foregrounding with orchestral support and a comparatively spacious pace, helping the region acquire a reflective and culturally differentiated sound world. Because the official sources do not identify the instrumentation of every cue separately, this article does not claim that one specific traditional instrument dominates “Liyue,” nor does it assign a fixed mode without a documented transcription.

4.3.2. *Mythic Conflict/Action: “Mighty Descent” in Black Myth: Wukong*

“Mighty Descent” (众圣降凡尘) is track 64 of the official Black Myth: Wukong Soundtrack Selection (Game Science, 2024). The soundtrack’s production credits confirm that the project recorded a broad range of traditional instruments, including pipa, guzheng, guqin, dizi/xiao/xun, suona, guanzi, huqin, sanxian, and konghou. These credits apply to the soundtrack production as a whole and are not, by themselves, proof of the instrumentation of this individual cue. The close-listening analysis therefore focuses on the cue’s dramatic momentum, textural build-up, and strong contrast as features that support large-scale mythic confrontation. No track-specific claim about a dominant traditional instrument or named mode is made without cue-level evidence.

4.3.3. *Historical Gravity: “Solemnity” in Total War: Three Kingdoms*

“Solemnity” is track 21 of the official Total War: THREE KINGDOMS – Original Soundtrack (Creative Assembly, 2022). The official soundtrack description and credits identify xiao, dizi, bawu, erhu, violin, cello, percussion, vocals, and live orchestra as part of the soundtrack’s recorded palette. Within this documented hybrid sound world, the cue is used here as an example of historical solemnity. The analysis emphasizes restrained pacing, sustained sonority, and controlled textural movement. It does not attribute bianzhong, court Yayue, or a specific named mode to the cue because the available primary sources do not establish those details.

4.3.4. *Regional Everyday Life: Jiangnan Baijingtú (江南百景图)*

Jiangnan Baijingtú (江南百景图; translated here as Jiangnan Hundred Scenery Map) is presented by Coconut Island Games as a game centered on everyday life in a Ming-dynasty Jiangnan water-town setting (Coconut Island Games, n.d.). For this case, the analysis is conducted at the level of scene music and regional atmosphere. Because an authoritative English cue catalogue was not established for the material examined, no English cue title is assigned and no specific instrument, mode, or exact note density is presented as a verified production fact. The case provides a contrasting regional-life context in which lightness, ornamental motion, and everyday spatial atmosphere can be discussed as interpretive musical qualities.

4.4. Provisional Aesthetic Orientations

The four focal analyses support four provisional aesthetic orientations. These labels are comparative interpretations of four specific cue or scene functions, not general laws about Chinese game genres. Their value lies in showing how combinations of musical features, cultural association, and game situation can produce different aesthetic effects.

Because each orientation is illustrated by one focal unit, further cue-level studies are required before any claim of recurrence or stability can be made.

4.4.1. Artistic-Conception Orientation

The artistic-conception orientation describes an effect of distance, contemplation, or imagined transcendence produced through relatively spacious pacing, lyrical melodic foregrounding, timbral differentiation, and textural openness. In the Liyue focal case, documented collaboration between symphonic and Chinese traditional musicians contributes to a culturally differentiated fantasy sound world (Genshin Impact Official, 2020). This orientation describes the aesthetic function of the focal configuration; it does not prescribe guqin, xiao, or any fixed mode for fantasy games.

4.4.2. Martial/Kinetic Orientation

The martial/kinetic orientation describes an effect of movement, confrontation, and dramatic momentum produced through directional rhythm, textural build-up, articulation, register, and dynamic contrast. “Mighty Descent” provides the focal illustration in this study. Wuxia scholarship helps situate the broader cultural importance of martial and jianghu identities (Cao et al., 2025), but it is not used as evidence for the musical details of the Black Myth cue. The category therefore accommodates mythic action as well as Wuxia-oriented conflict without treating them as identical genres.

4.4.3. Solemn/Historical Orientation

The solemn/historical orientation describes an effect of historical weight, restraint, or ceremonial gravity through controlled pacing, sustained sonority, and measured textural movement. “Solemnity” provides the focal illustration. The Total War: Three Kingdoms soundtrack documents Chinese winds and erhu alongside Western strings and live orchestra (Creative Assembly, 2022), demonstrating one hybrid solution without implying that historical authenticity depends on bianzhong, court orchestra, or a single traditional scale.

4.4.4. Regional-Life Orientation

The regional-life orientation describes the construction of local place, everyday movement, and social atmosphere through comparatively light motion, ornamental detail, and spatial pacing. Jiangnan Baijingtou provides the focal scene-level illustration. Because cue-level documentation is less complete for this case, the interpretation is deliberately limited to audible scene qualities and the verified regional setting. This is the most tentative of the four orientations and requires further officially catalogued regional and folk-oriented soundtracks before stronger generalization is attempted.

5. Discussion

5.1. Theoretical Contributions

First, the study proposes a source-sensitive framework for the analysis of traditional Chinese musical resources in Chinese and China-themed games. Its contribution is deliberately narrower than the ontology-centered classification developed by Hu and

Chong (2026): rather than classifying symbol types across a broad corpus, it moves from verified primary material to cue- or scene-level close listening and then to contextual comparison. This responds to the methodological emphasis in ludomusicology on treating the game and its music as complex sources (Summers, 2016; Kamp et al., 2016). Second, the focal comparison suggests a three-part relationship among musical feature, cultural association, and game context. A timbre or gesture can carry recognizable cultural associations, but its aesthetic meaning is shaped by how it is organized musically and by what is happening in the game. The four provisional orientations therefore function as interpretive hypotheses rather than deterministic genre mappings. Third, the source audit undertaken in this study shows why musicological interpretation should be separated from production facts. Published catalogue data can verify a track title; soundtrack credits can verify that performers or instruments participated in a production; close listening can describe audible relationships. These forms of evidence are complementary but not interchangeable. Making that distinction explicit improves the reproducibility of qualitative game-music research.

5.2. Practical Implications

For game-music practitioners, the findings are best understood as design questions rather than prescriptions. A creator can ask what kind of space or action the scene should communicate, which timbral associations are culturally appropriate, how melody and texture shape pacing, and whether traditional resources are functioning as integrated musical materials or merely as surface markers. The study does not recommend fixed modes or fixed instruments for each context, because the verified cases demonstrate several hybrid solutions.

For research on cultural circulation, the analysis suggests that game music can participate in the broader cultural work of Chinese games without assuming that music alone determines audience interpretation. Studies of Genshin Impact comments demonstrate cross-cultural interaction around game content (Zhang et al., 2024), and Yuan (2025) situates Chinese games within soft-power processes. Future audience research can test whether the musical orientations proposed here are actually perceived in similar ways by players from different cultural backgrounds.

6. Conclusion

Using a source-verified qualitative design, this study examined four focal musical units representing contrasting scene functions: reflective fantasy world-building, mythic conflict/action, historical gravity, and regional everyday life. Cue- or scene-level analysis of “Liyue,” “Mighty Descent,” “Solemnity,” and Jiangnan Baijingtou scene music supported four corresponding provisional orientations—artistic-conception, martial/kinetic, solemn/historical, and regional-life. These orientations are exploratory propositions rather than a new genre taxonomy or a repetition of broad ontological classification. They describe how timbre, melodic profile, rhythm, texture, pacing, cultural association, and game situation can interact within the selected focal materials.

The study’s most important methodological conclusion is that production documentation and musical interpretation must be kept distinct. Official catalogues establish verifiable titles such as “Liyue,” “Mighty Descent,” and “Solemnity”; production credits establish soundtrack-level information about recorded performers and instruments; close listening supplies interpretive observations about texture, pacing,

and aesthetic function. Keeping these evidence types separate makes the framework more reproducible and makes its limitations visible. Future work can expand the focal corpus through additional officially documented cues, detailed transcription, and player-reception research.

6.1. Research Suggestions

6.1.1. *Suggestions for Researchers*

Extend close listening with clearly documented transcriptions of selected cues so that modal, harmonic, and rhythmic claims can be demonstrated rather than asserted. Conduct diachronic comparison of Chinese game music to examine how instrumentation, orchestration, and hybrid scoring practices change over time (Fritsch, 2013).

Compare Chinese-developed games with China-themed games produced elsewhere to examine cultural adaptation and different strategies of musical representation (Dong & Mangiron, 2018).

Add player-reception research to test whether the aesthetic orientations identified by close analysis correspond to actual emotional or cultural perception (Klimmt et al., 2019).

6.1.2. *Suggestions for Practitioners*

Treat traditional Chinese musical resources as context-sensitive materials rather than assigning one instrument or mode to an entire genre.

Document performers, source traditions, and adaptation decisions where possible so that claims of cultural specificity can be traced to verifiable production information.

When publishing soundtrack or development documentation, provide cue-level credits where feasible; this would make later scholarly analysis substantially more reliable.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The study does not recruit human participants and does not collect personal, confidential, or private production data. Only legally accessible and attributable materials are used.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare there are no conflicts of interest

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