

Eastern Philosophical Paradigms in Contemporary Piano Cycles: Structural-Semantic Dimensions

Paradigmas Filosóficos Orientais em Ciclos Contemporâneos para Piano: Dimensões Estruturais-Semânticas



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Abstract: The article examines how Eastern philosophical concepts of time and being inform contemporary compositional thinking beyond stylistic and thematic allusion. The study aims to identify how Eastern categories of time are integrated into the structure of twenty-first-century cyclic piano works and how they shape the organization and semantics of musical time. The corpus comprises three cyclic piano works: Bakir Bayakhunov's *Triptych (Esoteric)* (2006), Michel Allard's *Yoga Suite* (2013) and Chen Yihan's *Spirits* (2013). The methodology combines hermeneutic interpretation, a semiotic and philosophical approach to archetypal temporal models, comparative and typological analysis, and intonational-semantic analysis of textural and registral processes. The results demonstrate three distinct structural-semantic models of cyclicity: a ritual path in *Triptych (Esoteric)* (duality – causality – liberation), a spiral model in *Yoga Suite* (recurrence through transformed returns and

accumulated states) and metamorphosis in *Spirits* (continuous transformation across crystallization and dissolution). On this basis, the article substantiates the genre-form model as an integrative analytical category linking genre premise, temporal organization and philosophical semantics, and argues that contemporary cyclic piano works may be approached as processes of semantic formation rather than as fixed schemes of repetition.

Keywords: Piano cycle. Structural-semantic analysis. Contemporary composition. Cross-Cultural Interaction. Genre-form Model.

Resumo: Este artigo examina como conceitos filosóficos orientais de tempo e de ser informam o pensamento composicional contemporâneo, para além de alusões estilísticas e temáticas. O estudo busca identificar como categorias orientais de tempo se integram à estrutura de obras cíclicas para piano do século XXI e como moldam a organização e a semântica do tempo musical. O corpus reúne três ciclos para piano: *Triptych (Esoteric)*, de Bakir Bayakhunov (2006), *Yoga Suite*, de Michel Allard (2013), e *Spirits*, de Chen Yihan (2013). A metodologia combina interpretação hermenêutica, abordagem semiótica-filosófica de modelos temporais arquetípicos, análise comparativa e tipológica e análise entonacional, com atenção a processos texturais e registrais. Os resultados identificam três modelos estruturais-semânticos de ciclicidade: caminho ritual em *Triptych (Esoteric)* (dualidade – causalidade – libertação), modelo espiral em *Yoga Suite* (retornos transformados e estados acumulados) e metamorfose em *Spirits* (transformação contínua entre cristalização e dissolução). Com base nesses achados, o artigo fundamenta o modelo de gênero e forma (genre-form model) como categoria analítica integrativa que articula a premissa de gênero, a organização temporal e a semântica

filosófica, defendendo que ciclos pianísticos contemporâneos podem ser abordados como processos de formação semântica, e não como esquemas fixos de repetição.

Palavras-chave: Ciclo para piano. Análise estrutural-semântica. Composição contemporânea. Interação intercultural. Modelo de gênero e forma.

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1. Introduction

Interest among composers working within Western European genre conventions in Eastern themes and musical language elements has a long history. In contemporary practice, however, this engagement often takes on a different emphasis: rather than focusing primarily on stylistic markers or external imagery, many composers turn to Eastern philosophical and spiritual traditions, whose conceptual frameworks enable new artistic meanings. In particular, Eastern conceptions of time (cyclical, continuous rather than discrete, process-oriented) attract composers because they enable the development of alternative approaches to formal design and the relation of musical structuring to ideas of time and existence characteristic of Eastern thought.

These tendencies are evident in contemporary piano music, especially in cyclic multi-movement piano works, which are well suited to gradual unfolding and to the interplay of recurrence and transformation. Precisely these features make such works receptive to philosophical models of time in which repetition does not imply stasis but functions as a mechanism of change.

This perspective informs the three works selected as the material for the present study: Bakir Bayakhunov's *Triptych (Esoteric)* (2006), Michel Allard's *Yoga Suite* (2013) and Chen Yihan's *Spirits* (2013). Although the three composers belong to different compositional traditions (Kazakh, Canadian, and Chinese), each work engages with Western genre conventions while reinterpreting Eastern categories of cyclical time as both structural and semantic mechanisms.

At the same time, the musical embodiment of Eastern philosophical concepts in contemporary piano repertoire remains insufficiently examined, which motivates the present study. The aim is to identify how Eastern philosophical categories are integrated into the organization of musical time in twenty-first century cyclic piano works and to determine how these

categories shape principles of formal design and semantic articulation.

To achieve this aim, the study addresses the following objectives:

1. to outline the historical and cultural background of contemporary composers' engagement with Eastern spiritual traditions;

2. to survey current approaches to cyclicity and, on this basis, clarify key interpretations of time in Eastern philosophy and their relationship to principles of cyclical composition;

3. to identify compositional strategies through which Eastern philosophical models interact with Western formal principles in the selected works;

4. to substantiate the concept of the genre-form model as an integrative analytical category that links structural and semantic levels within a work and to demonstrate why cyclic piano compositions provide an especially productive object for its application.

The article's structure includes an Introduction outlining the research problem and aims, a Literature Review situating the study within the interdisciplinary and musicological approaches to musical time and cyclicity, and a Methodology section describing the methods employed. The Results section develops the analytical argument in three subsections, each devoted to one piano cycle and its dominant structural and semantic model (path, spiral, metamorphosis). The Discussion proposes the genre-form model as an integrative framework linking temporal organization and semantic logic across the three case studies. The article concludes by summarizing the findings and outlining directions for further research.

1.1 Historical and Cultural Context: Three Waves of Orientalism in Music

Broadly speaking, a modern phase of intensified East-West interaction began between the late eighteenth and the mid-nineteenth centuries. In this initial period, which can be described as the *first wave of musical orientalism*, European composers were drawn to the East primarily as a reservoir of evocative imagery and stylistic coloration. The aestheticization of Oriental topics and musical markers appears in a wide range of European operatic and symphonic repertoire (e.g., Mozart, Rossini, Weber, Bizet) and, with particular prominence, in nineteenth-century Russian music (e.g., Glinka, Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov). This early fascination created conditions for later, more conceptually intensive forms of engagement.

A *second wave*, associated with the early to mid-twentieth century, reflects a markedly different cultural context. Against the background of a perceived spiritual crisis in European culture and growing dissatisfaction with a purely rationalist paradigm, interest in Buddhism, Hinduism, Sufism, and other Eastern traditions expanded and increasingly functioned as an intellectual alternative to dominant Western frameworks (Eliade, 1970). Whereas earlier Orientalism often involved surface imitation, this stage is more frequently characterized by attempts to integrate Eastern philosophical categories into Western artistic thought.

This shift is especially evident in the works of composers for whom Eastern traditions became a substantive conceptual resource. Olivier Messiaen, drawing on Indian rhythmic systems and Japanese temple music, developed ideas of “immeasurable time” and natural cyclicity in *Catalogue d’oiseaux* (1958) (Sherlaw Johnson, 1989). John Cage, engaging with Zen Buddhism, articulated notions of “impartial time” and reconfigured prevailing assumptions about musical form and

sound (Pritchett, 1993; Revill, 1992). Lou Harrison combined Western harmonic practices with Indonesian gamelan, producing new modal and rhythmic organizations (Miller & Lieberman, 1999). Karlheinz Stockhausen, informed by Hindu and Buddhist cosmologies, developed a conception of musical time aligned with an “eternal present”, articulated with particular clarity in opera cycle *Licht* (1977–2003) (Kurtz, 1994; Parsons, 2019). In each case, Eastern-derived concepts are not treated merely as exotic color but are incorporated into a coherent artistic design shaped by individual compositional logic.

A *third wave*, emerging in the late twentieth century and continuing into the twenty-first, is commonly linked to globalization, digital media and the expansion of intercultural communication. Composers increasingly gain direct contact with Eastern traditions (musical, ritual, philosophical, etc.), which contributes to new forms of artistic synthesis. As Tatyana Mdivani argues, contemporary developments can be understood within a longer historical trajectory:

“from the impressions and images of the East (nineteenth century) through the refraction of stylistic, compositional and genre idioms (twentieth century) to the creation of a new concept of music – an ‘Orientalized’ musical integrity [...] demonstrating and amalgam of European and Eastern principles and, accordingly, a new style of musical thinking[...]” (2020, p. 514).

It is within this contemporary cultural context that the three cyclic piano works examined in this article emerge. The composers’ affiliations with different national traditions nonetheless suggest shared conditions of creative development in an era of globalization and the formation of comparable principles of intercultural musical thinking. All three works display a sustained tendency toward philosophical reflection, which makes them illustrative examples of contemporary East-West synthesis.

2. Literature Review

Questions of musical cyclicity and its philosophical foundations have remained prominent in humanities research throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In an interdisciplinary context, ideas of cyclicity are developed in the works of Nikolay Kondrat'ev (1922), Alexander Chizhevsky (1924), Arnold J. Toynbee (1934-1961), Pitirim Sorokin (1937-1941), Fernand Braudel (1979) and Yuriy Yakovets (1999), where the cycle is treated as a broad model for organizing natural social and cultural processes. In these approaches, cyclicity is not understood as a mechanical repetition but as a dynamic phenomenon involving variability, phases, and metamorphosis. This perspective offers a methodological framework for analyzing artistic work in which the temporal organization of the musical text carries a worldview dimension.

In art criticism and related disciplines, the concepts of "cycle" and "cyclicity" have likewise received expanded interpretations. The works of Mikhail Bakhtin (1975), Yuriy Lotman (1992), and representatives of Western structural and semiotic scholarship show that the cycle can be understood not merely as a compositional unification of parts, but as a mode of semantic organization based on variable repetition and a specific chronotope. Studies of literary and artistic cycles emphasize that cyclicity shapes particular kinds of time, from ritual and sacred time to symbolically transformative temporal models. These ideas form methodological prerequisites for approaching the musical organization of the works considered here as a phenomenon in which temporal structure functions as a bearer of cultural and philosophical meaning.

In musicology, foundational premises for understanding form as a process were articulated by Boris Asafyev, who conceptualized the development of musical form through "intonational formation" (1971). This line of thought was developed later by Yevgeniy Nazaikinskiy (1972; 2003), Lev Mazel'

(1979), Viktor Tsukkerman (1980), and Ekaterina Ruch'yevskaya (2011), who treat the form of works, including cyclic ones, as a temporal process in which repetition and return operate as mechanisms of semantic dynamics. Parallel concerns appear in Western phenomenological approaches to musical form, particularly in the writings of Carl Dahlhaus (1989) and Theodor W. Adorno (2002; 2006), which emphasize the relationship of formal function and large-scale form, including the works of William Caplin (2001; 2013) and of James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy (2006; 2021), where form is treated as a dynamic interaction of structural and rhetorical forces.

Contemporary studies of musical time have further contributed to the understanding of cyclicity as a cultural and artistic phenomenon. Jonathan Kramer's theory of multiple temporalities (1988) enables cyclicity to be considered as a specific configuration of temporal processes. Semiotic approaches by Jean-Jacques Nattiez (1990) and Eero Tarasti (1994; 2002) provide analytical tools for addressing musical meaning and, by extension, for revealing the philosophical charge of cyclic structures. From a cultural perspective, the works of Mircea Eliade (1970; 1987) and contemporary ritual theory emphasize repetition and return as mechanisms of semantic renewal, which invites comparison with musical models of cyclicity.

Researchers such as Yuriy Tyulin (1974), Oleg Sokolov (1994) and Ekaterina Ruchyevskaya (2011) have addressed musical cycles in their works. They show that cyclicity in Music can be understood as a mode of internal movement linked to memory, transformation repetition and the dramaturgy of time. Other authors, such as Leonid Yanitskiy (2000), Svetlana Goncharenko (2014), and Ekaterina Motsarenko (2020), interpret the cycle as a semantic structure capable of integrating disparate elements into a coherent process, which is particularly relevant in the context of contemporary culture with its multi-level temporal organization.

A comprehensive analysis of existing research shows that an adequate account of musical cyclicity nowadays requires the integration of multiple perspectives: historical and theoretical, philosophical and cultural, phenomenological, semiotic and structural-analytical. This interdisciplinary combination enables addressing not only compositional parameters but also the deeper semantic logic of cyclic organization – that is, the models of time and existence that define a composer’s artistic thinking. This is especially significant for the study of twenty-first century works, where the interaction of Western and Eastern concepts of time may function as an independent creative strategy.

3. Methodology

The methodological basis of this study is interdisciplinary. An *intercultural approach* provides the guiding framework, enabling the musical text to be examined as a space of dialogue between Western structural models and Eastern philosophical categories. This framework also determines the overall direction of the analysis within which specific musicological and interdisciplinary methods are applied.

A *semiotic and philosophical approach* is used to identify universal archetypes through which music conveys Eastern philosophical ideas. In this context, the musical texts under study are understood as systems of symbolic relations in which interpretations of musical time may reflect the archetypes of path, circle, initiation, and metamorphosis.

A *hermeneutic approach* supports the interpretation of semantic layers in cyclic organization by clarifying internal connections between structure, process and the conceptual foundations of a work. It enables meanings to be addressed that are not fully captured by formal analysis alone, but become accessible through symbolic interpretation of musical

time, dramaturgy, thematic material and texture. In this study, hermeneutic interpretation enables relating compositional decisions to philosophical archetypes and identifying how these archetypes are realized in the musical text. In this way, cyclic organization can be approached as a process of semantic development rather than merely as a succession of parts.

A comparative typological method is used to identify shared patterns of cyclicity across the three works and to relate them to Western and Eastern cultural traditions. The comparison examines musical parameters including intonation, meter, rhythm and texture, as well as large-scale organization and strategies of temporal articulation in the works under study. This approach enables the identification of typological invariants that emerge independently of individual compositional style and may indicate broader cultural and philosophical tendencies.

Intonational-semantic analysis identifies elements of the musical fabric that carry symbolic and philosophical significance. The focus is on intonation as a basic semantic unit of musical discourse and on patterns of development, return and transformation. This allows the study to examine how recurring intonational figures and textural solutions relate to archetypes associated with Eastern philosophy and how their shifts shape the perception of musical time in the analyzed works.

The combination of methods ensures movement from the conceptual level to the analysis of musical fabric and enables tracing how Eastern philosophical categories are translated into structural and semantic mechanisms in twenty-first-century cyclic piano works.

An additional analytical tool is the concept of the *genre-form model*, understood here as an integrative category that links genre function, compositional organization, philosophical and semantic content. This concept allows considering each work not only as a product of formal design but also as a process of semantic development that expresses the unfolding of an internal idea.

4. Results

4.1 Philosophical Foundations of Cyclicity and Eastern Models of Time

Considering the philosophical foundations of cyclicity and identifying the archetypal model of time associated with it is a necessary stage of the analysis. At this level, it becomes possible to clarify the internal logic of the compositional decisions that shape the cyclic piano works discussed in this article. This perspective helps to show how universal, and in some cases specifically Eastern, models of cyclicity are translated into the musical structures of time and how they condition the type of semantic development that characterizes each work. Archetypal figures such as the circle, spiral, path, dualism, and the ouroboros function here not only as symbolic constructs, but also as patterns of thought that inform the metaphorical dimension of musical dramaturgy.

Cyclicity is a fundamental category of human experience and for centuries has served as a means of conceptualizing natural rhythms, ritual processes and artistic structures. Across philosophical and cultural traditions, repetition is interpreted not as mechanical reproduction, but as a means of renewing and intensifying meaning, which grants cyclicity the status of a broad archetypal model. This perspective also helps explain how such patterns may operate in music, especially when compositional thinking is shaped by broader conceptual models of time.

One of the oldest symbols of cyclicity is the ouroboros – the image of a snake biting its own tail. In Egyptian and Greek traditions, and later in Gnostic and alchemical texts, it functions as a sign of an eternal cycle of birth, destruction, and rebirth, and as a model of self-generation and inner integrity (Eliade, 1987). Ancient philosophy develops the idea of cosmic cyclicity in a rational mode. Pythagoras and Plato present the world

as a harmonically ordered structure governed by numerical relations; the Stoics develop the concept of a sequence of cosmic phases, including destruction (*ekpyrosis*), purification (*catharsis*), and restoration, repeating in an eternal rhythm (Durand; Shogry; Baltzly, 2023).

In Eastern spiritual traditions, cyclicity is often framed in a more process-oriented and existential way. In Indian philosophy, the principle of *samsara* describes a continuous cycle of birth and rebirth, from which liberation (*moksha*) is possible through spiritual practice and knowledge (Koul, 2024). The Chinese yin-yang model conveys the idea of continual intertransition between states, in which the completion of one cycle becomes a precondition for the emergence of the next. These concepts emphasize not only repetition but also internal transformation, with clear parallels to musical processes.

Western philosophy of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries also developed distinct interpretations of cyclicity. Arthur Schopenhauer describes it through the cycle of will and suffering, while Friedrich Nietzsche's idea of eternal return takes the form of a radically affirmative principle (Kain, 2007; Stewart, 2023). Mircea Eliade, in turn, contrasts sacred cyclical time with linear historical time and argues that return to the source in archaic cultures signifies renewal rather than a return to the same (1970; 1987).

Cultural-historical theories of the twentieth century extend these ideas by proposing cyclical models of civilizational development. Oswald Spengler interprets culture as an organism that passes through stages of birth, flourishing and decline (1918). Arnold Toynbee describes historical process through the logic of "challenge and response" (1934-1961). Pitirim Sorokin relates historical dynamics to the succession of cultural supersystems, sensory, ideational and idealistic (1937-1941). In these concepts, the cycle is presented as a form of evolution in which repetition is linked to qualitative transformation.

In contemporary humanities research, cyclicity is often conceptualized through a spiral model, understood as a structure in which return includes an element of change and movement to a new level (Smith; Riley, 2009). This idea is particularly productive in a musical context, where repetition can combine the invariability of a motif with textural, registral or semantic transformation. Such a notion of spirality allows us to connect musical processes of recurrence and change with broader philosophical models of self-development.

In musical art, cyclicity can manifest at multiple levels, including large-scale organization, strategies of thematic development, and textural and intonational transformation. The archetype of the circle may be realized through a return to initial material or through symmetrical construction, producing a sense of completion. The archetype of the spiral may be realized through variational development in which timbre and register change while motif remains recognizable (Kramer, 1988). The path model correlates with the sequential passage of stages, such as preparation, culmination, and transformation, which brings musical organization into proximity with ritual structures of initiation (Eliade, 1970). Dualism may be articulated through the juxtaposition of contrasting thematic or textural zones. The ouroboros may be read in symmetrical intonational designs, arch-like structures or finales that return to an initial state in a renewed form. In this way, philosophical and cultural models of cyclicity provide a theoretical perspective from which to approach cyclic organization as a process of semantic development. The interplay of repetition and transformation shapes musical time and is essential for understanding the compositional logic of contemporary cyclic piano works.

4.2 Structural-Semantic Models in Three Piano Cycles

A structural and semantic analysis of the three selected cyclic piano works reveals different ways of embodying Eastern philosophical categories of time in musical texture. Despite the

composers' affiliations with different national traditions and their distinct individual styles, all three works share a common tendency: the integration of cyclical principles into musical process through models of circular return, spiral development, and metamorphic transformation. In each case, cyclicity functions not only as a mechanism of formal organization, but also as a bearer of meaning, shaping the type of musical time and the character of semantic development across the work.

4.2.1 Triptych (Esoteric) by Bakir Bayakhunov: the archetype of the path

In Bakir Bayakhunov's *Triptych (Esoteric)*, cyclicity is realized through the archetype of a ritual path. The three-movement design traces a trajectory from inner contradiction to anticipation and, finally, to liberation. This logic is articulated less through programmatic commentary than through the musical fabric itself and its developmental principles, which are grounded in the gradual transformation of intonational, textural, and registral structures.

The first movement, titled "*Yin and Yang*", activates an archetypal model of Taoist dualism and implies a mutually generative interaction between two opposing principles. This is already apparent in the opening, where two melodic strands are closely interrelated. The upper voice presents an initiating gesture that functions as a question. Its impulsive character may be associated with the "yang" principle. The lower voice responds with a more stable, stepwise line that embodies "yin" and completes the initial impulse. The resulting texture takes the form of a micro-dialogue in which opposites do not collide, but complement one another, establishing the movement's initial energetic balance (see Music example 1).

Music example 1 – Bakir Bayakhunov, Triptych (Esoteric): 1. Yin and Yang, mm. 1–4.

Source: prepared by the authors based on Bayakhunov (2006).

Description of the image: Opening measures showing two closely interrelated melodic strands in the upper and lower voices (question–answer exchange).

As the movement unfolds, the duality announced in the opening acquires a larger-scale realization. The intonational correspondence between the two strands – initiating (upper and receiving (lower), becomes a periodic alternation of zones of different energy. On the level of overall organization, this appears as a pulse between impulsive ascending gestures and more stable settling lines, distributed between the right- and left-hand parts. Each new phase of development reactivates the initial “question–answer” model, but in transformed form. The initiating phrases intensify, while the responding ones become more extended and stable. As a result, the process cannot be reduced to a straightforward contrast. Instead, it suggests a gradual reconfiguration of the poles in which opposition gives way to mutual generation. The climactic passage marks a point of maximal energetic tension, where the “yang” line temporarily prevails. Resolution, however, again leads toward a balance between the two principles. The closing returns to the opening model not as literal repetition, but as a state of internal equilibrium, corresponding to the Taoist idea of “returning to oneself”.

In this movement, then, dualism is articulated not as static opposition but as a process of establishing equilibrium, in which musical organization reflects the cyclical interaction of yin and yang energies. At the same time, the conclusion does not yield a final reconciliation. Duality remains tense and unresolved.

This lack of harmonization determines the semantic vector of the work as a whole, since dualism generates karmic causality as an inner impulse that must be experienced before liberation becomes possible. The second movement continues this logic by focusing on anticipation, a moment in which the action has already occurred, but its consequences have not yet emerged.

The musical dramaturgy of the second movement, *“Waiting for Karma”*, is shaped by a state of suspended time that can be compared with the philosophical model of karmic anticipation. A recurring pitch class C plays a central role. It appears in different registers and contexts as an unchanging axial point toward which sonic motion repeatedly gravitates. This “karmic core” prevents the musical fabric from projecting forward. Intonational gestures that seem to strive toward resolution or development are drawn back, creating the effect of a temporal loop. The pulsing of dense clusters and the alternation with more transparent intervallic structures produce an acoustic image of internal tension, in which the sound oscillates between the possibility of disclosure and the necessity of return (see Music example 2).

Music example 2 – Bakir Bayakhunov, *Triptych (Esoteric)*: 2. *Waiting for Karma*, mm. 12–15.



Source: prepared by the authors based on Bayakhunov (2006).
Description of the image: Excerpt featuring a recurring pitch class C in different registers.

Thus, the second movement embodies not development, but a state of predetermination and anticipation. It presents a moment in which causality has already been established, while its consequence has not yet unfolded. The musical process seems suspended between impulse and realization, articulating

the philosophical idea of karmic inevitability. Here, time does not advance, but condenses around an axial point, compelling the listener to experience the very structure of arrested becoming.

The third movement, *“Vision of Nirvana”*, brings the work’s dramaturgy to a different state, marked by extreme rarefaction, loss of directional drive, and the dissolution of material sound. In contrast to the dense and causally saturated texture of the second movement, the finale relinquishes teleological orientation. The texture mirrors this change by breaking into isolated gestures dispersed across the instrument’s distant registers.

Already in the opening bars, the characteristic registral divergence is audible. The upper voice occupies a high register and articulates isolated strokes, while the lower part provides sparse, deep points of support. This registral polarization produces a sense of a “weightless” verticality, as the stable supporting ground seems to disappear.

Melodic events here are fundamentally fragmentary. Instead of a directed line, the listener encounters isolated sonic gestures that often lack traditional motivic linkage. Between them, resonance-filled temporal gaps remain suspended. Pedaling, including half-pedaling, sustains a continuous overtone field that blurs sonic contours and turns the texture into a single vibrational continuum (see Music example 3).

Music example 3 – Bakir Bayakhunov, *Triptych (Esoteric)*: 3. *Vision of Nirvana*, mm. 1–5.

Moderato ♩ = 100



Source: prepared by the authors based on Bayakhunov (2006).
Description of the image: Opening measures showing registral polarization between the voices.

Particularly significant are the composer's performance indications that foreground interpretative freedom, including *quasi improvisando*, *freely*, flexible dynamic cues and the absence of strict metric control. These instructions introduce indeterminacy into the musical fabric and reinforce the connection with meditative practices, in which linear temporality yields to a reorientation of attention toward states of consciousness. The performer thus becomes not only an interpreter but also a participant in the process, since interpretive variability renders the movement open in its realization and newly actualized in each performance.

In this movement, development is replaced by dispersion. Individual gestures do not converge toward a climax; rather, they recede and dissolve into acoustic space. The effect is one of departure beyond cyclical closure. The ending is marked by a high-register flash that does not return the listener to an initial "circle" but instead releases the accumulated cyclical tension. The finale, therefore, does not close the work's organization; instead, it opens it toward the transcendental, corresponding to Buddhist and Taoist understandings of nirvana as the cessation of causal chains.

In other words, "*Vision of Nirvana*" articulates a transition into liberation, not as a logical conclusion but as phenomenological dissolution. Within the work as a whole, this movement functions as an overcoming of intonational, psychological, and karmic conditioning, completing a ritual trajectory from duality (yin-yang) through predetermination (karma) to liberation (nirvana). The cyclicity of *Triptych (Esoteric)* is realized not as a return to the beginning, but as a spiritual vector of ascent.

4.2.2 Michel Allard's *Yoga Suite: The Spiral Archetype*

Whereas in Bayakhunov's *Triptych (Esoteric)*, cyclicity is articulated as a ritual path structured through a sequence of spiritual states, Michel Allard's *Yoga Suite* presents a different symbolic configuration. The work is grounded in a spiral

archetype, in which repetition does not return the music to a point of origin, but produces a new semantic and acoustic state. This model corresponds to yogic practice, where each repeated posture and each breath implies an internal shift. Subtle in itself yet accumulative in its transformative effect.

The work consists of six movements: *Tadasana*, *Uttanasana*, *Trikonasana*, *Virabhadrasana*, *Sukhasana*, and *Savasana*, each oriented toward a particular bodily and mental state¹. The movements, however, do not form a contrasting suite in the traditional sense. Instead, the work functions as a continuous trajectory of inward concentration to equilibrium and, finally, to contemplative rest. Cyclicity here manifests not through literal structural repetition, but through a particular kind of inner return. Certain intonational and rhythmic formulas recur in different movements, yet each recurrence appears in transformed form, as if arriving at a new stage of development.

Already in the opening movements, characteristic formulas emerge, including short rhythmic pulsations, gradually descending gestures and persistent modal reiterations, which later reappear in subsequent pieces. These returns do not produce a reprise effect. Rather, they are embedded in a process of gradual state differentiation. Register shifts, changes in textural density and modifications of the modal background render each recurrence an act of semantic transformation. The result is a sense of spiral motion in which the material remains recognizable while sounding from a different perspective each time, suggesting interval evolution.

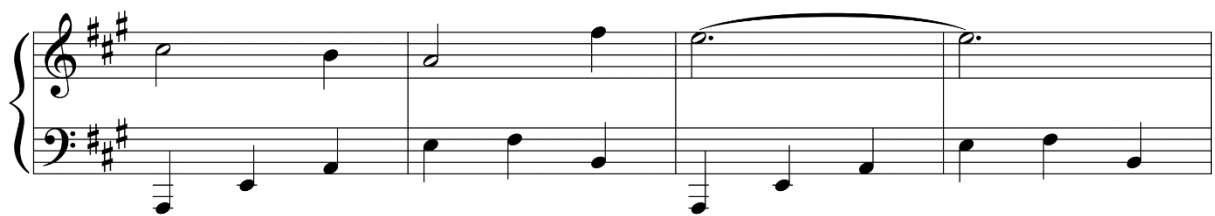
This compositional logic is particularly clear in "*Trikonasana*", which can be taken as a representative instance of the work's overall design. From the opening, a meditative atmosphere is established. The chant-like line is organized around a stable

¹ Audio recordings of all six movements, performed by the composer, are freely accessible via the International Music Score Library Project (IMSLP). QR codes linking to each recording are provided below:



sonic center that anchors the subsequent transformations (see Music example 4). This formula functions as an initial energetic focus, yet the process does not unfold linearly. Subsequent episodes return to the same material in altered form, through slight rhythmic displacement, registral reorientation or increased textural density. These changes do not disrupt continuity. Instead, they create a persistent sense of internal rotation, motion around a single axis that nevertheless shifts its level.

Music example 4 – Michel Allard, *Yoga Suite: 3. Trikonasana*, mm. 17–20.



Source: prepared by the authors based on Allard (2013).

Description of the image: Excerpt showing the melodic line that anchors the following transformations.

The closing passage of “*Trikonasana*” makes this spiral dynamic especially explicit. The initial formula returns not as a completed reprise but as a clarified version of the opening, with altered modal coloring and an expanded registral perspective. In this sense, return does not close the work’s organization. It points beyond closure by articulating a new quality of state. This unclosed return, understood as the semantic transformation of a recurring gesture, constitutes a central principle of cyclicity in *Yoga Suite*.

Comparable processes of gradual transformation are also evident in other movements. In “*Virabhadrasana*”, recurring rhythmic pulsations contribute to a sense of internal balance. In “*Sukhasana*”, shifts in texture produce a slow, diagonal trajectory of unfolding. In the concluding “*Savasana*”, motifs dissolve into an extended acoustic field, preserving only distant traces of earlier gestures. Each movement thus functions as a new turn of the spiral. Repetition appears not as reproduction of what precedes it, but as its transformation.

In *Yoga Suite*, then, cyclicity is realized through a spiral model that differs fundamentally from the ritual path articulated in *Triptych (Esoteric)*. Here, cyclicity does not present a sequence of stages, but operates as a mechanism of internal change unfolding through the gradual transformation of musical material. The work's trajectory is not circular. The familiar returns without reverting to its initial state; instead, it is reconfigured. This understanding of repetition as semantic transformation aligns with the philosophical logic of Eastern practices, in which insight emerges through repeated, yet continually renewed, experience.

4.2.3 Chen Yihan's *Spirits*: The Archetype of Metamorphosis

Chen Yihan's cycle *Spirits* represents a distinctive structural and semantic model, the archetype of metamorphosis, in which musical organization unfolds not through return, as in a circular model, nor through upward-directed variability, as in a spiral, but through continuous transformation of state. The work's internal logic is grounded in a two-phase design. *Frost* and *Rain* articulate two successive yet qualitatively distinct states within a single process of formation. The two movements form a unified whole not through thematic linkage, but through a shared model of fluid change, in which each phase does not negate the previous one but transforms its latent potential.

The first movement, *Frost*, unfolds a process of transformation based on the gradual condensation of material. In the opening bars (see Music example 5), the texture consists of short, isolated intonational figures in a high register, separated by long temporal spans. These fragments resemble thin, point-like traces of sound dispersed in space and correspond closely to the composer's metaphor of frost or hoarfrost, a fragile condition that precedes the emergence of a more stable configuration.

By the middle of the movement, however, this transparent surface begins to thicken. Intervals become denser and individual sonic points coalesce into larger vertical sonorities, forming zones of crystallization. In this way, the movement

traces a transition from diffuseness to structural density, a metamorphic process in which the initial state does not vanish but is reconfigured into a new quality.

Music example 5 – Chen Yihan, *Spirits: 1. Frost*, mm. 7–10.

Source: prepared by the authors based on Chen Yihan (2013).
Description of the image: Excerpt illustrating the transition from sparse high-register pointillistic figures toward greater registral and vertical density.

The passage under discussion captures this transitional moment precisely. The sparseness of the “hoarfrost” remains audible, yet the tendency toward condensation is already apparent. Short motivic grains become more coherent, while pedal resonance contributes to a sense of gradual adhesion within the sonic space.

The second movement, *Rain*, presents an opposing yet internally connected state, not crystallization but dissolution. If *Frost* moves from fragile sparseness toward density, *Rain* unfolds in the reverse direction, from continuity toward dispersal. Already in the opening bars, long descending lines emerge, generating a rippling texture that recalls the continuous fall of water (see Music example 6). Pedaling binds the phrases into a single acoustic field, producing a soft blurring of contours. In contrast to the fragmentary quality of *Frost*, a smooth, continuous fluidity appears here, in which the boundaries between gestures are largely erased.

Music example 6 – Chen Yihan, *Spirits*: 2. Rain, mm. 1-2.

The musical score for Chen Yihan's *Spirits*: 2. Rain, mm. 1-2, is presented in two systems. The first system shows a treble clef staff with a 6-measure phrase marked *ppp* and *mp*, and a bass clef staff with a tempo of quarter note = 54. The second system shows a treble clef staff with a 6-measure phrase marked *pp* and *p*, and a bass clef staff with a tempo of quarter note = 54. The score includes various dynamics (*ppp*, *pp*, *p*, *mp*), articulations (*rit.*, *dolce*, *push*), and rhythmic markings (triplets, 5:4 ratio). The overall texture is characterized by sustained pedaling and a continuous acoustic field.

Source: prepared by the authors based on Chen Yihan (2013).

Description of the image: Opening measure showing sustained pedaling that blends the texture into a continuous acoustic field.

The rhythmic organization reinforces this sense of fluidity. Shifting accents, the absence of stable metric support and asymmetrical groupings create the impression of “time without a frame”. Rhythm ceases to function as a structural grid and instead becomes a means of shaping a changing state. Rather than projecting forward through tempo-driven motion, the music conveys an acoustic sense of fluidity, in which intonational gestures dissolve without settling into stable configurations.

Unlike *Triptych (Esoteric)* and *Yoga Suite*, where cyclicality is articulated through a sequence of stages or through spiral development, *Spirits* presents a two-phase model of formation based on qualitative transition from one state to another:

- *Frost* – condensation, crystallization, formation;
- *Rain* – dissolution, fluidity, openness.

Despite the contrast in texture and dramaturgy, the two movements are linked by a single principle: singularity and the absence of return. There is no return to the initial sound configurations and no stable supporting structure that would restore the music to its point of origin. Each new phase undoes the previous one through transformation. The material changes to such degree that it cannot be reinstated in its earlier form. This logic makes *Spirits* an embodiment of an Eastern philosophical idea of continual becoming, in which the essence of the world is conceived through ongoing renewal.

In summary, the analysis of the three cyclic piano works reveals different models of structural and semantic organization grounded in philosophical conceptions of cyclicity and time. Each work articulates its own model of musical process, in which compositional decisions correlate with archetypal patterns associated with Eastern philosophy.

In *Triptych (Esoteric)*, cyclicity is realized as a ritual path unfolding through three states: duality, causality and liberation. Here, repetition functions as a means of symbolic movement from internal contradiction toward transformation. In *Yoga Suite*, cyclicity takes the form of spiral development, in which motivic structures recur in transformed guise and register shifts in the level of inner state. The trajectory is defined by upward-directed change. *Spirits*, by contrast, realizes a model of continuous metamorphosis, in which musical material undergoes ongoing transformation without returning to earlier states. Its two-movement design forms a dynamic system based in transition from crystallization to dissolution.

Taken together, these analyses suggest that cyclicity in contemporary piano music acquires not only a compositional but also a conceptual dimension, serving to organize artistic time. The archetypes of path, spiral, and metamorphosis are

realized as principles of musical organization that shape the compositional logic of each work. This enables us to describe a type of structural thinking in which composition operates as a process of semantic formation rather than as a fixed configuration grounded in conventional models of repetition. Within this context, the analysis calls for a category capable of integrating the work's genre orientation, its compositional organization, and its philosophical and semantic foundations. The concept of the *genre-form model* provides such an integrative framework, allowing cyclic works to be interpreted as a unity of genre premise, organizing mechanisms, and latent semantic dynamics. Addressing the genre-form model, therefore, makes it possible to move beyond the three case studies and to identify broader patterns in the interaction between Eastern concepts of time and contemporary modes of musical thinking.

5. Discussion

5.1 The Genre-Form Model as Structural and Semantic Integration in Three Cycles

A comparative examination of the three cyclic piano works reveals differences in their internal artistic models, yet they are united by a shared philosophical focus. In each case, the composition is governed by a specific temporal logic, correlated with a particular archetype in Eastern thought. It is this correlation that allows the structural organization of each work to be interpreted through the lens of the *genre-form model*.

In this article, the *genre-form model* is understood as an integrative analytical category that links a work's genre premise, its mode of temporal organization, and its strategies of semantic unfolding. If "genre", in a traditional sense, denotes a sociohistorical model, while "form" describes a constructive principle of organization, then the genre-form model brings these levels into a single framework. It clarifies how a genre

idea is realized through processes of formal organization and how sonic structure becomes a carrier of philosophical content. In this sense, the genre-form model reflects not only a work's architecture, but also its semantic orientation. Approaches to time, texture, register, and dynamics cohere into a holistic mode of artistic thinking that distinguishes each of the works analyzed here.

In *Triptych (Esoteric)*, the genre-form model is articulated as a ritual path. The duality of the first movement (*Yin and Yang*) establishes the initial tension. The ostinato persistence of the second movement (*Waiting for Karma*) conveys a state of karmic predetermination. The sonorous rarefaction of the finale (*Vision of Nirvana*) projects the removal of causality and a transition into liberation. Here the genre-form model does not function as an abstract scheme. It articulates an initiatory process in which the work unfolds as a trajectory of spiritual ascent and each movement corresponds to a stage of an inner journey.

In Allard's *Yoga Suite*, the genre-form model is realized as a meditative practice. The sequence of miniatures functions not as a catalog of asanas, but as a trajectory moving from concentration toward equilibrium. The recurrence of intonational formulas in transformed form produces a spiral development, an archetypal pattern aligned with yogic culture. The genre-form model here operates through the accumulation of states. Each movement captures a specific bodily and psychic quality, while the work as a whole forms a unified space of internal process.

In Chen Yihan's *Spirits*, the genre-form model is grounded in the archetype of metamorphosis. The material neither returns nor develops through variation. It undergoes continuous transformation, moving from crystallization in *Frost* to fluid motion and dissolution in *Rain*. Calligraphic plasticity of notation, proportional notation, and the systematic use of resonance and silence turn the work into a model of becoming, in which each gesture continues what precedes it without repeating it.

The genre-form model is thus construed not as a structure of return, but as a structure of transition, an acoustic metaphor for continuous change.

Despite substantial differences in compositional strategies, musical time functions as a central unifying concept in all three cycles. It exceeds a purely formal role and operates as a philosophical metaphor: time as a journey in *Triptych (Esoteric)*, time as practice and internal rotation in *Yoga Suite*, and time as fluid transformation in *Spirits*. In each case, the temporal model shapes not only the cycle's dramaturgy, but also the ways in which performer and listener are drawn into a space of spiritual experience. In this sense, the composer's treatment of temporal categories reflects a broader philosophical premise: time becomes a mode of being through which a subject experiences the relations among past, present, and possible future.

Closely linked to temporal logic is textural organization, which extends and concretizes the underlying philosophical idea. In *Triptych (Esoteric)*, texture performs a ritual function by articulating energetic zones of initiation. In *Yoga Suite*, transparency and regenerative design support a bodily and meditative state. In *Spirits*, texture takes on a calligraphic quality, in which sound and silence acquire comparable semantic weight. In each case, texture translates an abstract conception of time into a tangible sonic space.

The choice of instrument is also crucial. The piano enables a wide range of sonic states, from dense sonorous strata to extreme sparseness, and can therefore function as a mediator of philosophical meaning. In *Triptych (Esoteric)*, it supports the sense of ritual action. In *Yoga Suite*, it projects a bodily and sensory experience. In *Spirits*, it evokes an acoustic form of "painting".

These observations suggest that the genre-form model in twenty-first century music increasingly operates as a semantic mediator. It integrates a cyclic work's genre orientation, its mode of temporal organization, and its philosophical semantics. The genre-form model thus functions not only as an analytical tool but also as a means of understanding how an individual compositional logic relates to broader models of spiritual experience. Through work with temporal and textural categories, contemporary composers can turn cyclic piano works into spaces of philosophical reflection in which sound operates as a medium of cultural memory and internal transformation.

6. Conclusions

This study demonstrates that contemporary composers' engagement with Eastern philosophical traditions extends beyond stylistic borrowing or thematic allusion. Using three cycles: Bakir Bayakhunov's *Triptych (Esoteric)*, Michel Allard's *Yoga Suite* and Chen Yihan's *Spirits*, it shows that Eastern concepts of time and being can function as structural and semantic principles for organizing musical process. The study's aim, to identify ways of integrating Eastern philosophical categories into the structure of a twenty-first-century piano cycles and to show how they shape the formation and organization of musical time, is addressed through comparison of three models of cyclicity: ritual path, spiral, and metamorphosis.

Triptych (Esoteric) offers a model of ritual ascent, unfolding from yin–yang duality through karmic predetermination to phenomenological dissolution in nirvana. Here cyclicity functions as a means of articulating spiritual experience. In *Yoga Suite*, cyclicity is realized through the spiral logic of meditative practice. Recurring intonational and rhythmic formulas reappear in transformed form, registering a shift in the level of inner state. In *Spirits*, continuous metamorphosis becomes the governing principle. The two-movement design

is built on a transition from crystallization to dissolution, and musical material does not return to initial configurations but undergoes ongoing change. Taken together, these three works demonstrate different ways of conceiving musical time as a philosophical category.

A central outcome of the study is the substantiation of the *genre-form model* as a category for describing the structural and semantic integrity of cyclic organization. The genre-form model makes it possible to show how genre premise, temporal organization, and philosophical semantics converge into a single mode of artistic thinking. In *Triptych (Esoteric)*, the genre-form model is articulated as initiation. In *Yoga Suite*, it takes the form of meditative practice. In *Spirits*, it is realized as formation and transformation. In each case, the temporal model, path, spiral or metamorphosis, shapes not only constructive parameters of work, but also the ways in which performer and listener are drawn into a space of spiritual experience.

From a methodological perspective, the study demonstrates the productivity of combining hermeneutic, semiotic, and philosophical, comparative and typological, and intonational-semantic approaches to the analysis of musical cyclicity. This combination makes it possible to trace a movement from abstract philosophical models of time to concrete mechanisms of textural, intonational, and temporal organization in piano cycles, and to identify points of intersection between compositional logic and intercultural conceptions of time and being. The results also extend beyond the three case studies by offering a broader perspective on contemporary strategies of musical organization within intercultural dialogue. The proposed genre-form model illustrates how categories associated with Eastern philosophy can be integrated into the analytical vocabulary of musicology, thereby expanding the discussion of temporal logic and semantic organization in contemporary piano cycles. In this way, the study contributes to the development of interdisciplinary approaches to musical organization that are relevant within the contemporary humanities.

Several directions for further research can be identified. First, the corpus may be expanded to include chamber, orchestral, electronic, and multimedia cyclic works in which Eastern models of time are realized through other media and techniques. Second, a more detailed typology of genre-form models in twenty-first-century intercultural practice is needed to systematize strategies of interaction between Eastern and Western temporal conceptions. Finally, it is important to examine how such genre-form models shape performance interpretation and pedagogical practice, transforming piano cycles into a space not only of aesthetic experience, but also of spiritual and existential engagement.

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Gulnar Abdirakhman: conceptualizing the study, defining the overall research direction and manuscript structure. Developing and specifying the methodological framework, co-authoring key sections of the paper, supervising the research and writing process throughout, critically revising and editing the manuscript, and validating the final version of the text.

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