

How China made the piano its own

The piano used to be a rare foreign import in China; now four in five are made here. Much of this can be traced back to the tiny Chinese island of Gulangyu.

After the first opium war in 1842, foreign powers forced the emperor to permit their residents to live in several “treaty ports”. One of those was Xiamen. Gulangyu, which lies just a five-minute ferry ride offshore, was an international settlement. *Expatriates* popularised the piano as an everyday amusement. There was soon hardly a family on the island that did not host or go to hear an evening *recital*.

expatriate 侨民; 移居; 放逐

recital 朗诵; 独奏

For decades the island has claimed a distinction: the largest number of pianos per person in China. The result was a stream of outstanding musicians. The island’s most celebrated musician is Yin Chengzong. In 1969 he arranged an earlier revolutionary cantata into the “Yellow River Piano Concerto”. It remains China’s most famous orchestral composition.

Where once Western classical music flowed into China, pianists and their *renditions* are pouring out. Of the 50m children learning the instrument worldwide, as many as 40m may be Chinese. The government *lavishes* money on orchestras, which now number over 80, and new concert halls. Fastidious parents and cool young things fill them to hear the latest *wunderkind* — among whose number, in recent decades, have been Lang Lang, Li Yundi and Yuja Wang — play some beautifully judged Bach or *fiendishly* hard Rachmaninov.

rendition 演奏

lavish 浪费的; 大方的

wunderkind 神童

fiendish 恶魔的; 残忍的