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# MUSICAL MESTIZAJE AND SYNCRETISM: A HISTORICAL STUDY OF PANDILLERO HUAYÑO IN PUNO REGION

Renzo Valdivia<sup>1\*</sup>, Feliciano Morales<sup>2</sup>, Omar Huahuachampi<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1\*</sup>National University of the Altiplano, Puno, Peru [rvaldivia@unap.edu.pe](mailto:rvaldivia@unap.edu.pe)

<sup>2</sup>National University of the Altiplano, Puno, Peru [emorales@unap.edu.pe](mailto:emorales@unap.edu.pe)

<sup>3</sup>National University of the Altiplano, Puno, Peru [ohuahuachampi@unap.edu.pe](mailto:ohuahuachampi@unap.edu.pe)

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Corresponding Author: Renzo Valdivia  
([rvaldivia@unap.edu.pe](mailto:rvaldivia@unap.edu.pe))

## ABSTRACT

*This study considers all the possible present and past forms of pandillero huayño and the way it functions as a cultural form of musical mestizaje and syncretism in the Puno Region of Peru. It derives pandillero huayño from a historical ethnomusicological framework and utilises a qualitative method, combining analyses of music, interpretation of cultural practices in festive gatherings, and a literature review. The analysis shows that pandillero huayño is a hybrid cultural formation, and that the Andean Indigenous components mostly represented by the pentatonic system and collective performance, play a predominant role. Also, in the present circumstances of globalisation and digital technology, the traditional foundations are invariably changed. The study articulates pandillero huayño as a cultural system, and underlines the importance of this system in the cultural continuity and social organization of the community. Therefore, pandillero huayño is a cultural system that is integrated with other cultural systems, and for that reason, it is useful in analyzing cultural transformation, and, in addition, it helps in the study of the contemporary persistence of the intangible cultural heritage.*

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**KEYWORDS:** Pandillero huayño; musical syncretism; cultural heritage; Andean identity; ethnomusicology.

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, scholars have considered more carefully Andean musical practices because of how they articulate colonial, postcolonial, and global narratives of identity, resistance, and transformation within and across socio-cultural contexts. This is particularly the case for Huayño, Andean and regionally specific (in Puno) style, which is more than simply an artistic expression of the Andean community (Romero, 2001). Alternatively, Anthropologists have often argued that music is an aspect of everyday life that permeates all dimensions of society in non-literate communities (Escalante, 2018). Of particular relevance to this study and operating within the cultural domain of popular culture, *pandillero huayño* is characterized by the integration of music and dance of improvisation within the ritual and festive cycles, and predominantly within the context of the carnival. As such, it embodies resistance to essentialist interpretations that are based on a single cultural static framework. It is more useful to consider *pandillero huayño huayño* as a cultural crossroads. This is where the application of affect theory becomes useful because it provides for the possibility of establishing a connection between music, politics, and the transnational, as well as establishing the relations of Latin American music subjection (Snyder, 2025). It is within these relations that an analysis of musical *mestizaje* and *syncretism* becomes relevant.

Musical *mestizaje* is often confused with the more simplistic notion of cultural mixing. It is not simply about mixing sounds and cultures; there is a dynamic, often negotiated, order by which an assemblage of cultures Indigenous, European, contemporary, and whatever inscribed cultural trajectories each element harbors—are reconfigured into new sounds and forms of expression. Put simply, all that is perceived as culture is deeply imbedded in both the symbolic and the social (Asensio, 2011). Likewise, musical *syncretism* does not restrict itself to the mere coexistence of ethnologically diverse elements, but rather the functional integration of these elements into a culturally coherent system in a specific locale.

The Puno region, situated in the Peruvian Altiplano, with a notable presence of the Quechua and Aymara peoples, is a fundamental region for studying these types of processes. Recent studies show that Andean music practices are social structures in themselves, and, in addition, help to reproduce, transform, and sustain social structures in terms of social cohesion, collective memory, and political voice (García, 2019). In such a sense, *pandillero huayño* emerges as a cultural field in the contemporary negotiation of local identities concerning modernity and globalization.

In opposition to homogenization theses, recent studies show that globalization in peripheral or marginal contexts tends to foster new, and often, unexpected forms of cultural hybridization (López, 2024). The case of *pandillero huayño* is situated and exemplifies such processes, where its digital production, new forms of musical circulation, and shifting cultural markets are embedded in the social and territorial identity.

From an ethnomusicology perspective, *pandillero huayño* is an artistic social practice that comprises a certain configuration of the rhythmic, melodic, and instrumental sonic elements or elements of sound. The Latin and Greek root, *sonus* meaning sound, and situated in the socio-historically defined structures of relations of power and other forms of social relations. Following Grebe, (1981) ethnomusicology is concerned with having music and the social processes of music making, that is, having music and the social processes of music making, embedded within a specific socio-cultural structure. The presence of Andean pentatonic systems, European instruments, and modern theatrical techniques show that this musical style is a hybrid of different musical elements.

For this reason, this research focuses on *pandillero huayño* for the first time as an instance of musical *mestizaje* and musical *syncretism* in the Puno city, attempting to analyze the major cultural influences that have this phenomenon and the major cultural influences that have shaped this phenomenon, as well as the cultural expression's trajectory in the various socio-political, and economic configurations of the southern Andean region, and the large historical processes that have shaped them. Thus, this study both expands the field of Latin American ethnomusicology and provides insights on the ways in which ethnomusicology local cultures study, and contest, and the ways in which local cultures define, and re-define their socio-political and economic global relations as the world intertwines.

## 2. Methodology

This study utilizes a qualitative historical-ethnographic methodology. This methodology is effective for identifying cultural complexities of *pandillero huayño*, not just as a musical system, but as a social practice that is active and dynamic, and is systemically related to historical processes, social construction, identity formation, and a construction of symbolic meaning.

Within this framework, one can study musical phenomena vis-a-vis society, as well as their social and cultural context, social memory, social formation, and the constellation of spaces, and their

mutations (Akeson et al., 2017). This study, thus, is mainly interpretive and multi-focal. It combines various methods to study the phenomenon in a more comprehensive way.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

#### 3.1. Historical Analysis and Theoretical Perspectives

The present review attempts to situate pandillero huayño in the cultural heterogeneity and intangible cultural heritage debates as one component of an interconnected system of signification. In non-industrialized societies, music performance is not separated from the use of everyday artefacts and actions (Stobart, 2008).

The historical analysis concentrated on the interpretation of secondary sources concerning the evolution of the musical practices of the Peruvian Altiplano from the colonization to present times. This provided the opportunity to identify the processes of insertion, adaptation, and resignification of European musical traditions within Indigenous cultural frameworks, demonstrating processes of cultural transformation of prolonged duration. Music, therefore, is understood as a historical field of the social interrelation of asymmetries, where the interplay of cultural relations and the continuity of the social construct exist.

Latin America has a high degree of cultural heterogeneity from one region to another, often attributed to its geographical closeness to the USA, and poses the question of how specific musical genres can be perceived as cultural diffusion and soft power (Alaminos-Fernández, 2023).

#### 3.1.2. Influence of the Andalusian Scale on Pandillero Huayño

The musical configuration of pandillero huayño in Puno incorporates certain elements of music derived from the Iberian Peninsula, primarily associated with the modal and tonal structures that were disseminated

as a result of colonisation. Perhaps the most significant is the so-called Andalusian scale or Phrygian dominant mode, which is prominently found in Spanish folk music and associated with the musical traditions of the southern regions of Spain.

This system includes a descending sequence and the expressiveness of a descending Phrygian dominant scale. This came to the Andean area during the evangelization and colonial musician movement. Instead of just adopting it, it was integrated into the Indigenous structures, forming a new hybrid structure of European modal and tonal elements over a traditional pentatonic scale. This recontextualization and appropriation gave rise to newer sound structures. The Andean contribution was crucial to the pandillero variant of huayño, especially to extending the melody and harmony, and the contribution of the P. Andean was crucial to the variant of the Extended andel iande fcnopct. This variant of folklore is punk, which is huayño with (Perrone, 2018).

This is the reason why from the point of view of 'mestizaje' music, one sound system is not replaced by another, but rather the coexistence of local and external systems integrated into an identity. The evolution of huayño in the Puno Altiplano is reflected in the presence of descending melodic variants, characteristic intervals and the presence of European (tonal).

Turino, (2008) the native Andean pentatonic scales are fundamental building blocks of musical structuring associated with social and ritual practices and reflect cultural continuity in indigenous communities.

The dominant phrygian scale (or phrygian dominant mode or mixolydian b2 b6 in certain contexts) is essential for the understanding of music in Spain (especially in andalusian and flamenco music) and its influences in South American music.

It is built from the fifth degree of the harmonic minor scale.

Example in E:

E - F - G# - A - B - C - D - E

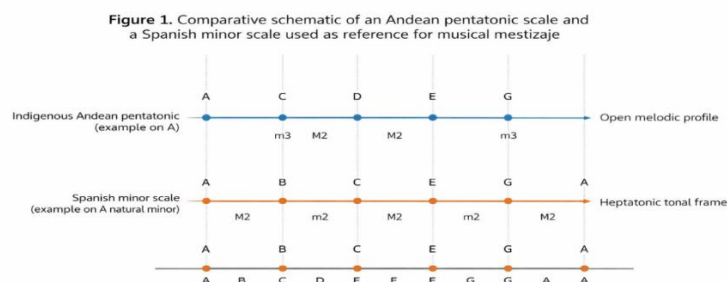


Figure 1. Comparative schematic of an Andean pentatonic scale and a Spanish minor scale

### 3.2. Musical Mestizaje. The genesis of European influence in Pandillero Huayño

Based in the Altiplano region of Puno, Pandillero huayño is a performing arts expression that must be contextualised in the broader cultural, migratory framework of mestizaje, where Andean Indigenous and European music elements converge. Several researchers have pointed out that huayño is a descendant of Pre-Hispanic musical traditions from the Quechua and Aymara peoples. These musical traditions include the use of pentatonic scale, dual rhythmic patterns, and a strong interdependence of music, dance, and the rituals.

According to García, (1990) musical mestizaje is the integration and evolution of various cultural elements, resulting in hybrid forms that encapsulate a fusion of cultures in collaboration and assimilation within the Latin American vicinity.

With the Europeans came a swift and deep shift in the musical framework with the introduction of the guitar, violin, harp, and accordion, which changed the genre's sonic and structural organization. This is a case of musical syncretism in which the external elements are not simply incorporated, but rather, modified to be constructed into a holistic, local cultural system. This local culture, set within the context of a developing nation, is actively involved in the making of a new cultural identity and the reordering of its horizons (Romero, 2001).

I've studied the European musical systems - especially the Iberian - that signal the first step in the process of gradual incorporation of major and minor diatonic scales into strongly colonized territories. The case of the huayño shows that, besides the originally pentatonic structures, there emerged a proliferation of patterns that, in Western music, are considered formalized, showing hybridization. Besides that, music can elicit a great variety of feelings in the listeners (Faus et al., 2002).

The link to Andalusian musical traditions can be analyzed as part of the larger scheme of cultural circulation during the colonial era. Because of the evangelization processes, colonial administration, and the celebration of festivals, Spanish music, and the popular forms of music and dances and

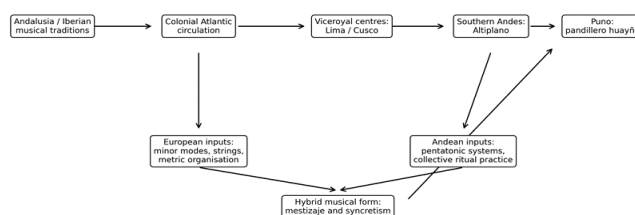
characteristics of the Andalusian region, came to the Americas. These weren't just influences, but rather, the Indigenous populations received them and actively reconstructed them, producing new music forms of an Andean system with a European structure. Thus, Conceptualizing culture from the vantage point of the historical construction of relationships between resources and meanings, and the culture as a site of conflicts, struggles, and negotiations of class, race, gender, life style, etc. is yielding for the music study (Gatto, 2022).

The Andean highlands, in particular, witnessed this phenomenon, resulting in the blending of music structures where the Indigenous components like pentatonic melodies and music as part of a ritual were fused with the Western components of music as tonal harmony and the presence of string instruments. It is this cultural fusion and diverse practices that make huayño what it is, and as a result, it is absolutely correct to say that it is not a single, homogenous musical form. As stated by Lanzillotta, (2022) should a manual exist that organizes specific historiographical research methodologies? Up until recently, many of us history students understood history to be a craft, that, "one learns to do research by doing research."

Especially in the time of the republic, composers and musicians like Rosendo Huirse have played a role in the making and changing of Puno huayño by incorporating Andean popular music into Western music with orchestral arrangements. It was this change that the first spread of huayño perhaps reached beyond its original 's context. These changes show the evolutionary phase of music in which new and old forms are fused.

This makes it possible to understand the outcomes of long processes of the interaction of scales, structures, and the use of (in this case, partially linked to the Andean music traditions) European instruments) as (the) Andean (with) instruments, processes that create and reinvent the cultural identity of the Andean people, and, more particularly, result in the loss of cultural identity. Rather, this process led to the emergence of new musical forms that express the intricacies of the local-global continuum.

Figure 2. Historical-cultural route of musical transfer and reconfiguration from Iberian traditions to pandillero huayño in Puno



### 3.3. Indirect Cultural Observation

The technique of indirect cultural observation was implemented through the analysis of audiovisual materials, digital collections, and ethnographic accounts of the traditional celebrations of the Puno region, especially during the carnival season. This method offered the possibility of studying the various dimensions of collective participation in the pandillero huayño, whether through dance, music, performance, and the social function that is involved. In ethnographic studies, indirect observation is especially useful when direct access to the field is restricted and cultural practices have to be reconstructed through documented analysis. In addition, it has been argued that, in most of the history of ethnomusicology, performance has not been an end in itself, but rather a means of studying one facet of the human condition or one facet of human society in a more integrated way (McKerrel, 2021).

### 3.4. Musical Analysis

This analysis is mainly concerned with the study of pandillero huayño and its rhythmic, melodic, and

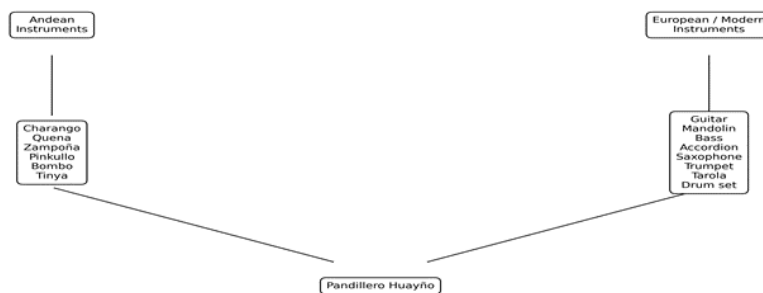
instrumental aspects, as well as some of the most notable structural properties of the genre. Particular emphasis is placed on the use of pentatonic scales, the presence of hybrid rhythmic combinations, and the integration of traditional Andean instruments (such as charango and quena) with European and modern instruments (including guitar, accordion, and keyboard).

These findings confirm the syncretic nature of pandillero huayño as a musical discourse wherein various sonic traditions are present and operating.

### 3.5. Instrumentation: Evidence of Musical Miscegenation (Andean and European)

The traditional music instruments in the Altiplano clearly show evidence of mestizaje musical, andean and european roots converging into the same sound system. This coexistence is more than the simple juxtaposition of instruments, rhythms, clothes, etc. It is a functional integration in which each element plays a distinct role in the musical structure.

Figure 3. Integral instrumentation of pandillero huayño: Andean, European, and Contemporary musical interactions



On one hand, Andean instruments, for example, quena, zampoña, and bombo, have retrogressive elements, which can be linked with pre-Hispanic practices, such as the use of five-note scales, music being played in an ensemble, and of rituals and celebrations. All of this makes up the fundamental identity of pandillero huayño, which connects with elements of a culture that is deeply rooted in the peoples of the Altiplano. On the other hand, there is the presence of European-associated instruments, such as the guitar and violin, which provide the criteria of tonal organization that are European, such as harmonization, progression of chords, higher melodic extension, etc. This influence does not disrupt the traditional, what it does is fuse it more.

All of this ensures that the two systems are maintained in a more functional organization in music.

Huayño pandillero can be seen as European music and native huayño music, where mestizaje is not only present in the instruments but also in the variety of structures, spatially and temporally in the total organization, the synthesis of history. This explains the modifications Andean communities have made in the frame of interrelation of the traditional and the modern, the new function of music, and the change of the culture of the people, the identity. This has the music as a situated structure, a living structure that organizes itself in the various layers of social phenomena (Stobart, 2011).

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Perceptions of Cultural Identity in Pandillero Huayño

Interviews with local residents and some contemporary musicians from Puno, as well as cultural authority figures, show an overwhelming appreciation of the chanting of huayño as an integrative center of regional identity. They praise the phenomenon as an unparalleled living cultural manifestation of collective memory, social belonging, and historical longevity.

A resident from Juliaca district expressed:

“Pandillero huayño is not just music; it is part of our lives. It brings us together during carnival and reminds us of where we come from.” (Resident, 45)

Likewise, a local musician who plays in contemporary ensembles stated:

“We can change instruments or arrangements, but the feeling of pandillero huayño will always remain the same. It is identity, not just sound.” (Musician from Puno, 32)

These testimonials reinforce the position of pandillero huayño as a phenomenon not belonging to a single musical genre, but as a cultural system that articulates social, emotional and symbolic dimensions.

### 4.2. Aspects of Musical Mestizaje and Syncretism

The data from the interviews show that social actors construct pandillero huayño as a resultant configuration from the interplay of several identified cultural influences. Correspondingly, three constituent dimensions can be identified: musical structure, instrumentation, and performative context.

An educator from Puno explained:

“Before, Andean instruments predominated, but now there is a mixture. The keyboard for instance, is already part of the sound without removing the Andean essence.” (Music teacher, 50)

A cultural authority for the carnival said:

“Pandillero huayño has changed, but that does not mean it has lost its essence. It has simply evolved.” (Cultural authority, local municipality)

These case studies describe musical mestizaje as not a loss, but rather a cultural shift.

### 4.3. Social Function and Cultural Cohesion

Another outcome is to highlight the key role of pandillero huayño in promoting social cohesion.

Interviewees describe its performances during the festivities as a way to enhance community integration and a collective sense of participation.

A community leader had this to say:

“When there is a ‘pandilla’ during carnival, everyone gets involved—no one stays behind. It is a way of sharing in unison.” (Community leader, 54)

A regional cultural official explained:

“Pandillero huayño organizes the celebration, but it also organizes people. It directs identity.” (Cultural officer, Puno)

These case studies attest to the fact that music has a definable role in shaping local social systems.

### 4.4. Changes in Contemporary Situations

The impact of globalization and new technology is also apparent from the interviews. Both the musicians and the younger respondents highlighted the role of digital media in the spread of the genre.

A young musician explained:

“Now we just record, share on social media, and reach more people. Previously, we played just local events. Now, the music can be heard everywhere.” (Musician, 24)

There are changes and people are not seeing them as possibilities.

“Of course technology helps, but the essence remains. Using a keyboard doesn’t mean we stop being Andean.” (Musician, 38)

This indicates the incorporation of modernity without a cultural break.

### 4.5. Intergenerational Perspectives

When it comes to understanding pandillero huayño, there are variations between different age groups. Older participants emphasize authenticity, preservation, and documentation, while the younger ones focus on innovation and cultural projection.

One older inhabitant recalled:

“It sounded more natural, and had less mix. It felt more real.” (Resident, 68)

On the other hand, a young artist said:

“If we do not innovate, the music dies. It is essential to modernize it without losing its roots.” (Musician, 27)

The above mentioned views are some of the different perceptions of pandillero huayño. There is always a kind of tension between tradition and innovation. Further, the NVivo coding matrix of interview data indicates that it is a system in constant development.

Open Code	Subcategory	Axial Category	Core Category	Empirical Evidence
Cultural identity	Sense of belonging	Collective identity	Pandillero huayño as a dynamic cultural system	"It reminds us of where we come from." (Resident)
Collective memory	Festive tradition	Collective identity	Pandillero huayño as a dynamic cultural system	"It is part of our lives during carnival." (Resident)
Musical adaptation	Changes in instrumentation	Musical transformation	Cultural continuity and change	"We can change instruments, but not the feeling." (Musician)
Innovation	Use of technology	Musical transformation	Cultural continuity and change	"Now we use social media to share it." (Young musician)
Social participation	Community integration	Social function	Sociocultural cohesion	"Everyone participates; no one is left out." (Community leader)
Cultural organization	Festivities	Social function	Sociocultural cohesion	"It organizes both the celebration and the people." (Authority)
Globalization	Digitalization	External influence	Cultural reconfiguration	"The music reaches more places." (Musician)
Tradition	Authenticity	Generational perspective	Tradition-innovation tension	"It used to sound more natural." (Older adult)
Modernization	Generational change	Generational perspective	Tradition-innovation tension	"We must innovate without losing our roots." (Young participant)

## 5. Discussion

The findings show that pandillero huayño is, in fact, an outcome of processes of historical and cultural interaction. Along with that, in this instance of the musical mestizaje, there is no identity erosion but rather a restructuring of identity and its components in a different socio-cultural context.

There is a consensus among various ethnomusicologists that there is such a thing as musical syncretism, and in this regard, all the disparate and contradictory elements, such as those of the Indigenous and the Western or the Classical, can experience coexistence. The above directly speaks of, and in positive terms, the cultural tenacity of the Puno communities when facing the consequences of colonialism and the contemporary and globalizing challenges.

Moreover, pandillero huayño can be seen as a place of symbolic and social transformation due to all the

traditions of simplification and all the social-change grabbing elements that exist within it.

## 6. Conclusions

The pandillero huayño of the Puno region is a clear and evident example of musical mestizaje and syncretism. It is a phenomenon that is shaped by an unprecedented historical process of seamless merging of the Indigenous, Colonial, and Contemporary processes.

It is a clear fact, based, on available evidence, that pandillero huayño is:

- A sophisticated cultural expression resulting from the fusion of various distinctive traditions.
- influential in the creation of the regional identity and social cohesion.
- The Andean culture's ability to adapt and evolve over time.
- An example of a continuum that makes it transformed intangible cultural heritage.

As a whole, the research portrays pandillero huayño as an exceptional phenomenon of great importance to the Latin American region with respect to the cultural changes, identity, and the intangible cultural heritage that is not lost but rather preserved.

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