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Entertainment Juncture of Two Castes: The identity and representation of Guqin and Guzheng

Sarah Alia Ahmad Jamal, Afiqah Aisyah Saiful Bahar

College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam Selangor Malaysia

sarahalia@uitm.edu.my, afiqahaisyah@uitm.edu.my
Tel: +60166848483

Abstract

Similar physical features of two traditional Chinese musical instruments, Guqin and Guzheng, have mistakenly led the general public to discern them as complementary duos. Contrary to this belief, both instruments have different historical backgrounds and purposes. Therefore, this research is conducted to (i) identify the identity of the two instruments and (ii) signify the representations of each instrument. This qualitative research adapted the descriptive comparative research design and used individualizing as an analysis method. In conclusion, despite the similarities in shape and playing techniques, these two instruments depict different messages, leading to other representations and purposes.

Keywords: Guqin, Guzheng, Musical Identity, Musical Representation

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1.0 Introduction

Music has been a part of human civilization for thousands of years. Despite the lack of means in materials, capital, and knowledge in the early years, music has found its way to flourish as a form of entertainment for the old-age and current communities spread around the world. Heavily influenced and moulded by the surrounding cultures, norms, beliefs, and lifestyle, music and its instruments are unique to its community. Guqin and Guzheng are two Chinese musical instruments that are a part of ancient musical culture traced back to 1046 BCE (Gaywood, 1996). Due to their almost similar physical features, these zithers are usually mistaken for one another or wrongly deemed a complimentary duo, as mentioned by the same scholar.

As many traditional musical instruments are created in complementary forms to provide different ranges of tone and pitch, it is understandable that Guqin and Guzheng are falsely considered as a set of devices that compliments one another. However, Gaywood (1996), in her master's degree thesis, suggests otherwise; the two instruments were not only created in different eras but for different purposes and served other communities in China.

Despite the current public knowingly able to differentiate the two instruments apart due to countless written mediums that discuss their minor physical differences; in which, the Guzheng has more than 20 strings and moveable string bridges, whilst the Guqin only has five to seven lines with no string bridge; the identity that each instrument hold is briefly discussed and hardly given the attention they deserve. These two heritage musical instruments are not only rich with history but also have individual significance, meaning, purpose and representation. Compiling written mediums that briefly and partially discuss the identity and representations of the two instruments, this research aimed to; (i) identify the identity of the two instruments and (ii) signify the representations held by each instrument.

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2.0 Literature Review

During the 'Spring and Autumn period', one of the most influential members of the literati was Kong Qiu (551-479 BC), whose name is now known as Confucius. The motivation behind the teaching of Confucius was a distrust of modern values and a desire to return to the former ritual correctness in behaviour based on an idea of cultivated morality by the individual that should be practised at all times as a way of life. Confucius recognized the value of music as a moral force and distinguished between good, pure music, such as the sounds of the Guqin, and lowly pieces, such as the music of Guzheng (Gaywood, 1996). These teachings were the foundations of Confucianism, a philosophy that was to form a significant part of Chinese teaching. It was also believed that the Guqin represented the morality of the upper class, mystical values, and self-cultivation. In contrast to the Guqin, the Guzheng was an instrument of the people and was used as a medium solely for entertainment and pleasure (Gaywood, 1996).

A style of Chinese classical music known as "yayue" was invented and played at imperial courts during the Zhou Dynasty. In this idea, music was closely linked to nature and contained five primary elements, which are wood, fire, water, earth, and metal (Gaywood, 1996). The sound of this "nature" is integrated into the Chinese philosophical term "yin yang", a form of oppositional balance that plays a significant role in the Chinese thought processes on music. According to the Zhou concept, the music would involve instruments related to the five elements of nature and would bring harmony to it (Gaywood, 1996).

Before the seventh century, a system of pitch generation called the pentatonic scale was primarily used, and it appeared based on a ratio of 2:3 symbolizing Heaven and Earth (Gaywood, 1996). It is said that the essence of harmony consists between Heaven, Earth, and man. Chinese philosophers have varied approaches to music, and Confucius thought that a correct form of music is very important for the upbringing of an individual and also considers that the formal music "yayue" symbolizes a stable government and a good ruler (Gaywood, 1996). It is said that music is a necessity and a key to a good government. According to Chinese ideas, music lies on two fundamental principles, which are "shen-li", which means spiritual, and "chi-shu", which translates to tangible form. All natural elements are represented by unity, while everything that needs to be perfected is called a plurality (Gaywood, 1996). As a result, the agreement is above, symbolized by Heaven, while plurality is below, represented by Earth (Gaywood, 1996). During the ancient time in China, the social status of musicians was much lower than painters, despite the music being considered the centre of harmony and longevity.

2.1 Musical Identity

Due to the relationship between a culture and a music selection being so interwoven with an individual's identity, it is difficult to determine how much of one's identity formation is influenced by external forces and how much of one's identity is internally created and expressed through their music selection. Emile Durkheim, a leading sociologist, theorized that individuals create their own identity during the ongoing tension with their own culture. DeNora (2000) takes a sociological perspective to show how music is entangled in everyday life and draws a direct relationship between the importance of music and self-development. Individuals involved in music-making develop an identity essentially influenced by these activities. Another critical point to note is that the identity of a musician is a social concept and culturally defined. The public does not label a musician by simply achieving advanced technical skills. Through this, researchers understand that whether or not one sees themselves as a musician or music is crucially influenced by social space and culture and the ways in which one connects to the people around them (Green, 2002). In all, DeNora. (2000) suggests the idea that an individual interacts with music while music acts on them, and this can be reflected in the community perspective by Durkheim, who believed that an individual is in a community. Still, on the other hand, society is in an individual. Different sorts of musical activity may produce different kinds of musical identity, but how the music works to form identities is the same. The difference between high and low culture, in other words, does not depict anything due to the different class-bound tastes but the effect on various social activities.

3.0 Methodology

Contrary to the standard approach used in a comparative study, this research utilized the qualitative research approach to provide a deeper understanding of the significance of Guqin and Guzheng towards the community that beholds the tradition. Despite the similar physical features and physical techniques used on the two instruments, each instrument has a seemingly different historical background, meaning and purpose. Due to the ancient socialization classification practised in the early years of China, these two instruments are used by different levels of social communities for various functions and upheld other representations in their musical playing. According to Denzin et al. (2005), qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. As the nature of this research is to interpret the meaning that each of the instruments holds, the qualitative approach was deemed the best option by the researchers.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

According to Adom et al. (2018), the overall aim of the framework is to make research findings more meaningful, acceptable to theoretical constructs in the research field, and ensure generalizability. These two scholars believe that a key to quality research is to base research on a theoretical framework to guide the researchers in conducting the research. As this research is designed as a descriptive comparative study, the researchers adopted grounded theory as the base framework in conducting this research. According to Tie et al. (2019) grounded theory sets out to discover or construct theory from data systematically obtained and analyzed using comparative analysis.



Figure 1: Summary of the interplay between the grounded theory methods and processes

For this particular research, the researchers relied on secondary data, written forms on Guqin and Guzheng. Compilation of data from multiple sources will be completed during the data collection process. As for the initial coding, the researchers had formed a coding, namely, identity. For the intermediate coding process, the researcher had themed the initial coding, identity and followed by association as the intermediate coding and lastly, the purposes as the advanced coding.

3.2 Data Analysis

Comparative analysis methods consist of four different types methods which are individualizing, universalizing, varying finding and encompassing. According to Pickvance, C. (2001), individualizing comparison involves discovering how other two or more cases are. The scholar further mentioned that it is an essential precondition of comparative analysis since an accurate, descriptive grasp of the specificities of issues is necessary before a comparison can begin. Suitable for the process of forming a grounded theory, this individualizing analysis method helped the researchers to identify the significance and the extended individual image held up by Guqin and Guzheng as traditional musical instruments and their music playing.

3.3 Validity and Reliability

As mentioned by Tanveer et al. (2008), validity in qualitative research means the extent to which the data is plausible, credible and trustworthy; thus can be defended when challenged, while if the results can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered to be reliable. Therefore, to ensure the validity of this research, the researchers only relied on published writing as the secondary data. No non-formally published data were used in this research. As for the reliability of the study, the researchers based the research on the well-established grounded theory developed by well-known sociologists; Glasser and Strauss.

4.0 Findings

Data were analyzed using the individualizing comparison of comparative analysis methods, which helped to identify the codings initially set by the researchers.

Table 1. Comparison of Guqin and Guzheng

	Guqin	Guzheng
Physical	Zither is made of seven strings with no moveable bridges.	Zither is made of 21 strings with moveable bridges.
Technique	Plucking, tremolo and wide vibrato.	Plucking, tremolo and wide vibrato.
Identity	Musical playings reflect esteemed status in Chinese high society.	An instrument of the people.
Association	Scholars, and poets, were used for imperial court entertainment. Exclusive to nobles.	Workers, farmers, and soldiers. Used mainly for public entertainment.
Limitations	To keep the musical playings remain within the noble society, musical notation available did not include the harmonic and positional information, which requires one-to-one lessons of memorizing.	They were previously deemed as low-class entertainment and against the country's Confucius teaching in promoting an ethical and elitist society.
Political affiliation	Due to its nature of exclusiveness, soft volume and loose rhythm, it was not affiliated with political movements.	Due to its loud nature and vibrant-marching rhythm, it was used as an instrument to promote Communism openly.

4.1 Limitations of the Jianzipu Tablature

By reducing traditional Chinese characters and allowing the inclusion of performance guidelines addressing speed, tone colour, touch, harmonics and playing techniques, jianzipu replaced the wenzipu, the earliest extant Guqin notation. Chinese characters are used in the note, which comprises instructions for which string to play, at which position, and with which finger. Information about how to interpret these relatively complicated symbols is preserved in manuscripts, which also offer information about finger technique, theory, and tablature symbol descriptions. To prevent confidential information from being communicated to those not of the proper social status or disposition, the passages indicating how to read the tablature were frequently cut off (Gaywood, 1996). As a result, when confronted with a foreign piece of jianzipu, musicians cannot intuitively understand the tune of the written music. The newly registered Guqin score was unable to

provide clear harmonic and positional information, as one must first learn the five-line staff and spend their time memorizing every position of any given pitch, which doubles the effort required for Guqin study and is counterproductive in spreading the art to the general public.

To learn a musical piece, the concept of the melody must be taken into account first, then use the provided fingering to reach the position and sound and express the music as needed. However, the jianzipu does not provide transcription of pitches as it only records fingerings, in which the learner cannot grasp the melody in mind (Gaywood, 1996). Due to this, the jianzipu is restricted to within the Guqin circle, which makes it hard to convey outside with different instruments. Performers who are not educated in jianzipu would not be able to comprehend the tune of Guqin pieces, which would prompt a few arranger's incapability to get to the instrument for their work (Gaywood, 1996). This is, to some degree, the justification for the closed nature of Guqin music. Due to the nature of jianzipu high stroke count, which makes it visually complicated to read, a Guqin player can only remember a limited number of pieces despite numerous works being recorded and passed down.

4.2 Identities Surrounding the Guqin and Guzheng

The Guqin is the most highly regarded as an ancient Chinese musical instrument because of its rich heritage and antiquity of associations with scholars and poets. The Guqin has been associated with scholars and sages, restricted to males, giving it a special place in Chinese culture and history. Although learning the Guqin was a requirement for scholars and gentlemen before the third century, the Guqin was engaged mainly to accompany poetry recitations, played at ceremonial courts, or form a duet with the Guzheng. It is said that a duo of Guqin and Guzheng symbolizes a harmonious friendship or even a married relationship (Gaywood, 1996).

After the Han Dynasty, as the ceremonial court music gradually lost its popularity, the Guqin surfaced both as a solo instrument and the accompanying instrument for the vocal genres. The literati initiated the scholarly study of the Guqin and wrote compositions specifically for the device; therefore, its status and prestige were lifted (Gaywood, 1996). The playing of Guqin was restricted within the court circles gaining its popularity at the higher social level; however, outside the court, the Guqin was neglected. The importance of Guqin and Guzheng lies not only in its construction but in the symbolism correlated with it. Every part of the Guqin and Guzheng construction has mythological associations. The names of the body parts are related to the phoenix and dragon. The relations with the phoenix are said to be rooted in the creation of the pitches. The importance of the dragon as a mythological symbol is suggested as "lofty and awe-inspiring qualities... and its rolling growls when it roams through the clouds, suggest the solemn tones of ceremonial music". However, the real reasons behind the names have got to do with vitality and fertility (Gaywood, 1996).

At the end of the Nineteenth Century, China was still a rural economy continuing in a feudal style that had existed for centuries. Although economic and political developments had been observed in other countries, China lacked a suitably applicable method that could be used to develop and modernize in a similar way. The political turmoil which then developed during the Twentieth Century differed from previous eras in that the influences were not the results of invasions by external factions but the conscious borrowing of political models, in particular from Russia. During the late Nineteenth Century, foundations were laid in Russia by political activists of Marxist ideology with a plan to overthrow the Tsarist regime and feudal system, which dominated the country. The design, later known as Communism, focused on creating an egalitarian, working-class-led society (Gaywood, 1996). According to Gaywood (1996), these communist developments in neighbouring Russia were observed and led to the planning of a similar system by the opposition to the ruling party in China during the Twentieth Century. These developments were intended to improve every aspect of life, and one of the methods used to achieve this was through music.

The Guqin had traditionally been a solo instrument of the educated elite, and ideologically it was not suited to the communist policy of equality and togetherness. Furthermore, in practical terms, the volume of the Guqin was not loud enough, and the musical repertoire was predominantly of a much looser rhythm than the strict up-tempo march melodies valued by the Communist government. The Guzheng, by contrast, provided an ideal vehicle for furthering the subliminal musical message of Communism. The Guzheng, an instrument of the people, was not only suited in volume but also capable of performing the new Communist repertoire. The instrument fulfilled the view of Communism (1942) that "art and literature must serve the workers, farmers, and soldiers. Art must submit to politics" (Cheng, 1991).

The first recognition of the Guzheng as politically applicable was signified in 1948 when Cao Zheng was employed by the National Music Academy as a teacher of the instrument. This led to structural development, the teaching of the instrument in other institutions, and the composition of new pieces to suit the Marxist ideology (Gaywood, 1996). In 1954 Liu Yuanqing advocated the establishment of The Musical Instrument Research Institute and the National Instruments Research Committee, which was followed by the establishment of several instrument reform factories. By this time, the Guzheng was viewed as the instrument of the people. The tools which were formerly built by the performers could now be structurally researched, a process which was facilitated by the new factories. The research was undertaken into the number of strings and the potential for expanding the volume, timbral and tonal range.

5.0 Conclusion

The importance of music as a governing force in China had been recognized 2000 years earlier by the establishment of the music bureau. Yet, the Twentieth Century differed from previous eras by the decision from within China to superimpose a foreign political model as a governing system by in such an all-embracing way that even art forms became political vehicles.

According to Gaywood (1996), the Communist regime was successful in using music as a political vessel by portraying the Guzheng as an instrument of the people and the Guqin as an elitist aristocratic symbol. A new repertoire for the Guzheng developed, but Guqin players were treated as traitors. However, since the Cultural Revolution, the Guqin has enjoyed a revival, which has included the establishment of conservatory courses for learning the Guqin, the revival of Guqin clubs, new recordings, and recitals of the repertoire.

Musical identities are an important consideration for researchers interested in the psychology of music, not least because all of us have musical identities but also because identity 'work' is a fundamental psychological process in which many of us engage. This identity work can take the form of musicians reflecting on their practice and how this practice is related to their lifestyle, or it can be how children view their own sense of musical skill and development. In short, we are suggesting that talking about music and, through this, developing and negotiating musical identities influence our engagement with music in important ways.

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