The Formation Process and Artistic Characteristics of the Shaanxi Guzheng (Zither) School of Chinese

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Abstract

The guzheng (Zither) has a long history and rich schools in China. The Shaanxi guzheng school is one of the eight major schools of guzheng with distinct characteristics. This paper focuses on the Shaanxi guzheng school and aims to explore 1) its formative process and 2) its artistic characteristics.

The research sample includes relevant historical documents, musical works, information about inherited figures, and field research information. The data are collected through consulting various materials, visiting relevant people, collecting activity materials, etc. Data collection is carried out using literature collection forms and interview outlines, and descriptive statistics and content analysis methods are used for analysis. The results of the study are as follows:

1. Shaanxi zither school originated in Qin, revived in the early days of the founding of new China, and developed through germination, consolidation, and expansion. The creative styles of each stage are different.

2. Its inheritance is mainly based on the master and apprentice of colleges and universities, with families as a supplement, showing an open and pan-inheritance mode, and the inheritance population is diversified.

3. Shaanxi music culture has a great influence on its formation, and local language, regional culture, folk instrumental music, songs, and opera play their roles in melody, style, and material, respectively.

Keywords: Formation process; Shaanxi Guzheng school; Artistic characteristics; Music culture

Introduction

This article focuses on the important branch of Chinese guzheng art, the Shaanxi Guzheng School, systematically exploring its background, development trajectory, inheritance system, and artistic characteristics. As one of Chinas oldest musical instruments (Figure 1), the guzheng has been deeply integrated with regional culture over more than two thousand years, forming a variety of styles. The Shaanxi Guzheng School, as a latecomer, once faced the threat of extinction due to historical reasons However, after the founding of the Peoples Republic of China, it was revived through national cultural protection policies and the efforts of Xian Conservatory of Music. Led by musician Zhou Yanjia, the school proposed the concept of "Qin Guzheng Returns to Qin," promoting the revival of Shaanxi folk music (such as Mi Hu and Wan Wan Qiang). Ultimately, this led to the development of a distinctive regional style of the guzheng school (Huang, 2024).

The core research question of this paper is: How did the Shaanxi Guzheng School achieve its revival in the modern context? How did its unique musical style and performance techniques form? The study unfolds from three dimensions—history, culture, and technique—to reveal the deep connections between the Shaanxi Guzheng School and the local dialects, regional culture, and folk music (opera, folk songs, instrumental music). For example, the tonal characteristics of the Shaanxi dialect directly influence the "bitter sound" and "joyful sound" modes of Guzheng pieces; the historical accumulation of the Guanzhong Plain and the desolate environment of the Loess Plateau in northern Shaanxi have shaped the Qin zithers artistic style of being "hot to the ear and sour to the heart"; while Xi'an drum music and other folk instrumental pieces provide rich material for Guzheng composition.

This study is reflected in two aspects: First, the revival of the Shaanxi Guzheng School serves as a typical case for the protection and innovation of traditional culture, offering valuable lessons for the inheritance of other endangered art forms. Second, by analyzing the impact of regional culture on musical schools, it deepens our understanding of the diversity of Chinese ethnic music and promotes creative transformation of traditional music in a modern context. The article not only traces the historical development and artistic characteristics of the Shaanxi Guzheng School but also emphasizes its role as a bridge connecting tradition and modernity, local and international contexts, providing some references for academic research and practical development in ethnic music.

Research Objectives

1. To study the historical development context and revival mechanism of the Shaanxi Guzheng School (historical origin tracing).

2. To study the construction of the inheritance system of the Shaanxi Guzheng School and its supporting role (genealogy research).

3. To study the shaping of the artistic characteristics of the Shaanxi Guzheng School by regional cultural elements (cultural influence).

Literature Review

The study of the origins, inheritance, and development of the Shaanxi Guzheng school has garnered significant attention in academic circles. "A History of Qin Zither (Guzheng)" is currently the only monograph that systematically examines the history and evolution of the Shaanxi school of Qin zither, consisting of five chapters totaling 127,000 words and 200,000 characters. It traces the development of Qin zither from pre-Qin to Ming-Qing times, filling gaps in historical literature. Its highlights include extensive citations (over 2,000 entries involving various types of documents) and multidimensional exploration of cultural and artistic value, drawing on research findings from traditional opera arts.

Since the 20th century, Wang Yingrui' s "The Art of Chinese Zither in the 20th Century" has traced the development of the qin zither from its folk origins to different periods after the founding of the Peoples Republic of China. It also explores the revival process of the Shaanxi school, broadening academic perspectives. Ma Huan' s "Five Studies on Zither Studies" examines the origin and evolution of the term "qin zither," presenting new insights that offer fresh perspectives on source studies.

In addition, there are research findings from various perspectives. Studies focusing on the analysis of Shaanxi zither pieces, such as papers by Shao Jimin and Chang Yue, explore their aesthetic characteristics through the analysis of musical elements like melody and structure. Research from the perspective of scales and modes, such as journal articles by Qu Yun and Zhao Manqin, reveals the sound characteristics and regional cultural significance of Shaanxi zither music. Based on local musical elements, studies analyzing the style of Shaanxi zither music, such as theses by Cai Ran and Xu Wei, delve into the integration of Shaanxi zither with local musical scales and the formation of its unique style.

Conceptual Framework

This study is focus on the formation and characteristics of Shaanxi zither school in the field of music. The researchers determined the conceptual framework of the study by combining the theory of ethnomusicology, the development process of shaanxi zither school, the inheritance lineage, the influence of shaanxi music culture, and its unique artistic style.

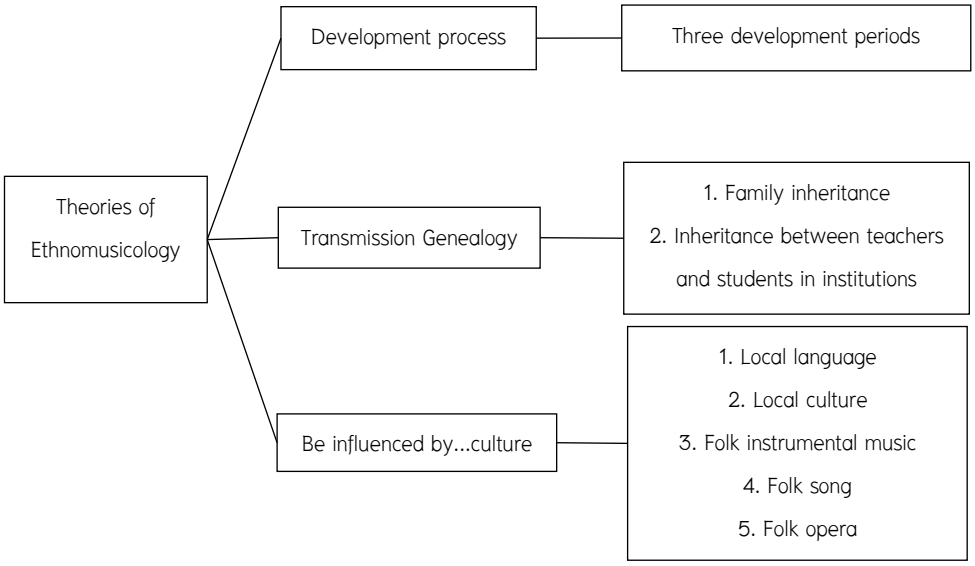


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework (source: Created by researchers, 2025)

Research Methodology

Literature Review Method.

The author consulted a large number of historical documents, including poetry, miscellaneous notes, local gazetteers, and music treatises. For instance, the author cited "A History of Qin Zither" to trace the development of the Qin zither from the Pre-Qin period to the Ming and Qing dynasties. Through extensive literature, the author gained a deep understanding of the historical origins, development trajectory, and characteristics of each period of the Shaanxi zither school, providing solid historical evidence for the research. At the same time, the author referred to previous studies, such as those by Wang Yingrui and Ma Huan, drawing on their research approaches and perspectives to avoid redundant work and further explore issues related to the Shaanxi zither school based on existing research.

Case Analysis Method.

The article delves into specific Shaanxi zither pieces as case studies, such as "Qin Sang Qu," "Xiangshan Shegu," and "Yunshang Su." It analyzes these classic works from multiple perspectives, including their creative background, melodic characteristics, musical structure, performance techniques, and cultural connotations. Through these concrete examples, the article showcases the musical style, creative features, and developmental achievements of the Shaanxi zither school across different periods. By seeing the big picture through small details, it helps readers gain a more intuitive understanding of the artistic charm and uniqueness of the Shaanxi zither school (Liu & Chuangprakhon, 2024).

Research Results

Objective 1. The Development of the Shaanxi Zither School

The historical roots of the Shaanxi Zither School can be traced back to the Qin region over 200 years ago. Throughout its long history, it has faced severe challenges of near extinction due to various complex historical factors. It wasn't until the 1950s that the state placed great emphasis on the protection and inheritance of traditional culture, introducing a series of supportive policies that breathed new life into this ancient traditional art form. Under this historical opportunity, the Xi'an Conservatory of Music took on the heavy responsibility of reviving the Qin zither. Mr. Zhou Yanjia, as a core promoter of the revival of the Shaanxi Zither School, embarked on a mission to study at the Shenyang Conservatory of Music under the guidance of renowned zither expert Cao Zheng. After delving deeply into the techniques of the guzheng, Mr. Zhou returned to Xian and joined hands with Mr. Gao Zicheng, who also had profound expertise in the field of guzheng, to dedicate themselves to teaching the guzheng.

In the process of delving into local music culture, Mr. Zhou Yanjia acutely discovered the unique charm and value of Mihu music. As a treasure of Shaanxi folk music, Mihu is widely spread among the people and deeply loved by the masses. In 1958, Mr. Zhou Yanjia, with his profound understanding of Mihu music and superb guzheng skills, composed the first Mihu guzheng piece, "Autumn Night Guzheng." This work not only showcased his personal musical talent but also marked an important milestone in the revival of the Shaanxi guzheng school, paving new paths for its development.

Germination Period (1950s–1960s): During this period, the Shaanxi Zither School was in its early stages of revival, primarily focusing on adapting local Shaanxi music for composition. Due

to the historical conditions and cultural environment at the time, the works heavily relied on melodies from local folk music, often directly selecting folk musical materials for adaptation. At the same time, influenced by the political climate, the style of the works exhibited a relatively uniform characteristic, predominantly characterized by light and lively tones. The aim was to introduce more people to and foster appreciation for the traditional guzheng through this accessible method. For example, numerous pieces were composed based on the melodies of the Mi Hu tune, which spread widely among the populace, laying a solid foundation for the development of the Shaanxi Zither School (Zou, 2022). However, in terms of compositional techniques and performance styles, the approach was relatively monolithic, mostly featuring single-verse structures, with playing techniques drawing heavily from other established guzheng schools.

Consolidation Period (1970s-1980s): During this period, the cultural and artistic fields experienced a spring of ideological liberation. The guzheng players of the Shaanxi School were greatly inspired and actively explored innovations, leading to a diversified development trend in terms of themes, genres, and aesthetics during this period (Hu, 2021). In terms of themes, they no longer confined themselves to folk music but began to venture into broader areas such as historical stories and natural landscapes; in terms of genres, forms like ensemble playing and concerto emerged, enriching performance styles; aesthetically, they broke away from the previous monolithic style, with musical emotions becoming more diverse and varied, ranging from fresh and elegant to gentle and touching, and even solemn and weighty, showcasing a higher level of artistic achievement (Wei & Roongruang, 2022).

In terms of performance techniques, artists of the Shaanxi zither school boldly innovate, integrating playing techniques and methods from other traditional Chinese instruments as well as Western instruments. For example, in left-hand techniques, they not only retain the traditional functions of intonation, vibrato, sliding, and tremolo but also innovatively incorporate melody-playing with the left hand; at the same time, they experiment with new playing methods such as striking the strings and soundboard, significantly enhancing the expressiveness of the guzheng. Many classic works emerged during this period, such as Zhou Yanjia' s "Qin Sang Qu," which draws on the local opera music bowl-bowl-chang from Shaanxi, skillfully employing innovative techniques to make the piece both anciently charming and modern. In 1982, Zhou Wang, daughter of Mr. Zhou Yanjia, won an excellent performance award at the National Ethnic Instrumental Performance Competition for her rendition of "Qin Sang Qu." This work quickly gained widespread attention in the music world, spreading through national tours to various regions and

even reaching international stages, becoming a classic representative piece of the Shaanxi zither school. Similarly significant is Qu Yuns "Xiangshan Shegu," which draws on Xian drum music and ancient pipa pieces, blending the characteristics of Shaanxi local music to vividly depict scenes of folk incense burning during worship, showcasing the classical Chinese aesthetic and the boldness and sincerity of Shaanxi zither music (Cao & Kantasiri, 2023). This work has won awards at events like the Asian Music Forum and is widely performed It has greatly enhanced the popularity and influence of Shaanxi zither school (Jing et al., 2024).

Expansion Period (1990s to Present): Entering the 1990s, with the acceleration of globalization, Western modernist music trends and compositional techniques flooded into China. The Shaanxi Zither School actively integrated these Western compositional techniques, and exchanges between various guzheng schools became increasingly frequent, with mutual learning and borrowing becoming a significant feature of this period. The involvement of professional composers injected new vitality into the Shaanxi Zither School, bringing fresh creative ideas and technical methods that led to bold innovations in tuning, melody, performance techniques, and harmony (Shu, 2024).

In terms of string tuning, the traditional pentatonic tuning method has been broken, incorporating artificial modes to reconfigure the pitch series according to the needs of the music, creating more innovative musical characteristics; in melody, the traditional pure pentatonic singing mode has been transcended(Bi,2024), adding characteristic interval movements and rhythmic motif combinations as instrumental performance techniques, making the melodic forms more diverse; in playing techniques, drawing on the expressive methods of instruments like the piano, compound techniques such as double vibrato, triple vibrato, two-hand vibrato, and large-scale string pressing have been developed; in harmonic application, no longer limited to traditional pentatonic synthesis effects, emphasis is placed on diversified sound harmony, integrating multi-layered compound chords (Lu & Sornyai, 2024), alternating major and minor chords, and other new chord types, enhancing the tension and depth of the tone color; the texture composition is also inspired by piano music, presenting a more complex and varied form.

However, in the process of active innovation, the Shaanxi Zither School also faces some challenges. Some works, while pursuing innovation, overly emphasize the use of Western musical elements, leading to a weakening of traditional charm. For example, the trend of "transforming left-hand techniques into right-hand" in some pieces, although expanding the playing functions of the left hand, has weakened the traditional characteristic of the guzheng, which is to "enhance

sound with melody." However, overall, these innovative attempts during this period have brought broader development space for the Shaanxi Zither School, allowing it to showcase unique appeal on contemporary music stages. Zhou Yugu' s "Cloud Robe Lament," for instance, skillfully integrates Qin opera music elements and modern compositional techniques, achieving innovative breakthroughs in form structure, melodic development, and performance techniques, making it an excellent representative work of the Shaanxi Zither School in the new era.

Its internal logic of development and evolution has always revolved around the commitment to and innovation of local music culture. The Shaanxi Zither School continuously delves into the rich folk music resources of the Shaanxi region, integrating them into the creation and performance of guzheng, thus forming a unique style. External driving factors include sustained national policy support, which provides a favorable policy environment and financial backing for the development of the Shaanxi Zither School; the continuous advancement of music education, which has cultivated a large number of professionals, ensuring talent for its inheritance and innovation; and increasingly frequent domestic and international music cultural exchanges, enabling the Shaanxi Zither School to absorb and draw inspiration from the essence of other musical schools, continuously enriching and developing itself.

Objective 2. The Lineage of Shaanxi Zither School

The revival of the Shaanxi Zither School is the result of efforts by many musicians. Among them, Mr. Zhou Yanjia' s concept of "Qin Zither Returns to Qin" has been like a banner, uniting the strength of numerous music theorists and performers. In the early stages of revival, the lineage of the Shaanxi Zither School mainly relied on master–apprentice relationships within schools and family traditions.

Mr. Zhou Yanjia' s early students, such as Qu Yun, Wei Jun, and Li Shibin, were deeply influenced by his teachings and personal example, receiving systematic training in guzheng techniques and musical philosophy. After graduation, they actively engaged in teaching, performing, and composing for the Shaanxi School of Guzheng, becoming the backbone of the second generation of inheritors. Professor Qu Yun emphasized cultivating her students understanding and appreciation of local Shaanxi music during her teaching, with many of her students achieving outstanding results in guzheng performance and composition; Wei Jun continuously explored and innovated in performance and composition, creating numerous representative works that contributed significantly to the development of the Shaanxi School of Guzheng; Li Shibin delved into the cultural essence of the Shaanxi School of Guzheng through

music theory research, providing solid theoretical support for its inheritance and development (Huang & Maneewattana, 2024).

At the same time, Mr. Zhou Yanjia' s children, such as Zhou Wang and Zhou Zhan, have also been influenced by their family to learn the guzheng from a young age, becoming the third generation of inheritors. They not only carry forward the family's guzheng skills but continue to explore and innovate on their own musical paths. Zhou Wang strives for excellence in performance techniques, showcasing the style of Shaanxi Guzheng on international stages multiple times, making significant contributions to its dissemination; Zhou Zhan, on the other hand, has demonstrated outstanding talent in teaching and composition, nurturing many excellent guzheng talents and creating a series of influential works (Cao & Kantasiri, 2023).

As the influence of the Shaanxi Zither School expanded nationwide, by the late 1990s, its transmission model gradually evolved into an open and comprehensive system, relying on specialized music and art colleges as well as arts departments in comprehensive universities. This diversified inheritance system has enriched the roles of inheritors. In addition to traditional performers, many composers, music scholars, and folk artists have emerged. Composers have integrated the musical elements of the Shaanxi Zither School into modern music compositions, creating numerous outstanding works (Peirong et al., 2023) music scholars have provided theoretical support for its inheritance and development through in-depth research on the history, culture, and artistic characteristics of the Shaanxi Zither School; folk artists have actively promoted the music of the Shaanxi Zither School in the social arts domain, contributing to its popularization among the general public.

The diversification of this inheritance system has not only promoted the professionalization of the Shaanxi Zither School, leading to significant advancements in teaching, performance, composition, and theoretical research, but also expanded its influence from the Shaanxi region to the entire country. Today, inheritors and enthusiasts of the Shaanxi Zither School can be found all over the nation. They continue to preserve and develop the musical culture of the Shaanxi Zither School through concerts, academic conferences, and teaching activities, securing a prominent place on the grand stage of national music culture.

Objective 3. The influence of Shaanxi music culture on shaanxi zither school

Local Language: As an important carrier of regional culture, Shaanxi dialect is characterized by its bold and smooth nature, with frequent use of reduplicated words, which differ significantly from Mandarin in pronunciation. This unique dialect feature has had a profound impact

on the melodic direction and rhythmic patterns of the Shaanxi zither school music. For example, in the classic Northern Shaanxi folk song "Embroidering the Gold Plaque," the phrase "support you" is marked as "yong hu nin" in Pinyin, while the pronunciation in Shaanxi dialect is "yong, hu, niu," with its tone falling downward compared to Mandarin. This characteristic of dialect pronunciation directly reflects in the melody of the song, causing the corresponding melodic pattern to also descend, i.e., 6–5–4–3–2. From this specific example, it is clear that there is a close connection between Shaanxi dialect and the melody of the Shaanxi zither school music. This connection is not an isolated case; it is evident in many pieces of the Shaanxi zither school, where the tonal changes of the dialect have become a crucial factor in shaping the musical melody, integrating into the musical style of the Shaanxi zither school and endowing it with a unique regional cultural flavor (Cai,2011).

Geographical Culture: Shaanxi Province is vast with diverse topography and landforms. The unique cultural characteristics of different regions have profoundly influenced the formation of the Shaanxi zither school style. The Loess Plateau in northern Shaanxi has complex terrain and numerous gullies, creating a harsh natural environment. In such conditions, the people of northern Shaanxi developed a bold and rugged character, with their lifestyle and folk activities being distinctive. Music forms like Northern Shaanxi folk songs, Daoqing from Northern Shaanxi, and Yulin small tunes emerged accordingly. Among these, the Xintianyou in Northern Shaanxi folk songs is renowned for its high-pitched and unrestrained style. As part of the Shaanxi zither school, Yulin guzheng art skillfully incorporates the phonetic features of Northern Shaanxi dialects. By extensively using minor thirds slides, such as in Zhou Yanjia' s adapted Yulin guzheng piece "Kazhutai," where the slide down on the sixth note is widely used and performed more quickly and crisply, it highlights the music high-pitched quality even more than major second slides, vividly accentuating the unique flavor of Northern Shaanxi dialects (Huang,2024).

The Guanzhong Plain has been one of the important cradles of agrarian civilization in China since ancient times, with a rich historical and cultural heritage. It was once the capital for thirteen dynasties, including the Zhou, Qin, Han, and Tang, during which culture flourished to great heights. Over the long course of history, the Guanzhong Plain gave birth to various forms of opera such as Qin Opera, Wanwanqiang, Mihu Tune, and Huayin Old Tune, as well as folk songs like labor chants and Shehuo Tune, and instrumental music forms like Xian Drum Music, which originated in the prosperous Tang Dynasty. These diverse musical cultures have provided an inexhaustible source of inspiration for the Shaanxi Zither School. The passionate and

straightforward character traits of the people of Guanzhong, along with their deep-rooted attachment to their homeland formed over a long history, have all been integrated into the music of the Shaanxi Zither School, shaping its unique style—vigorous and lofty, stirring and generous yet tinged with poignant sorrow. For example, the high-pitched and stirring nature of Qin Opera and the graceful and lingering melody of Wanwanqiang are both reflected in the works of the Shaanxi Zither School.

Folk Instrumental Music: Xi'an Drum Music is hailed as the "living fossil of ancient Chinese music." It originated in the Tang Dynasty and has been passed down and developed through the Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties. The music incorporates various musical elements from Tang Grand Tunes, Yuan Zaju, Ming and Qing Minor Melodies, Taoist music, and Buddhist music, forming a unique style that is grand and solemn, structurally complete, melodically smooth, and beautifully melodic. The scales and modes of Xi'an Drum Music are richly varied, featuring different modes within the same scale or mode, and different scales within the same mode. It is closely linked to the scales and modes of Tang Dynasty musical notation and the gongche notation system, preserving many elements of Tang Dynasty music.

The guzheng was once one of the important instruments in Xi'an drum music. Although it gradually disappeared from the repertoire later on, its connection with Xi'an drum music is profound. Since the 1950s, with the revival of the Shaanxi zither school, artists in Shaanxi have drawn inspiration from historical records of Xi'an drum music and began to incorporate its melodies and elements into their compositions. For example, Qu Yuns "Xiangshan Shegu" is based on the eponymous piece from Xi'an drum music and the ancient pipa melody "Yue er Gao." It uses the Shang mode and skillfully combines pieces such as "Yue er Gao," "Liu Qingniang," and "Xiangshan Shegu" into a suite, forming a unique musical structure. The melody vividly recreates the traditional scene of people praying for rain on the first day of the sixth lunar month through the expression of local Shaanxi music characteristics. It also integrates the creators inner emotions during their pilgrimage to Zhongnan Mountain. The work not only employs the performance techniques of the Shaanxi zither school but also fully absorbs elements of Xian drum music, showcasing strong regional cultural features and becoming one of the hallmark works of the Shaanxi zither school.

Wei Juns adaptation of "The Brahmins Prelude" also draws on elements from Xi'an drum music. In Xi'an drum music, "The Brahmins Prelude" has always been a focus in the music world. Currently, two versions of "Brahmin" have been discovered in China, including the "Brahmins

Prelude" from the seated music series of "Chao Tianzi," which was passed down by Mr. Yu Zhu, providing an important foundation for Wei Juns composition. Wei Juns arrangement of this guzheng duet retains the original pieces simplicity and elegance while adding a light and lively touch, showcasing a diverse and colorful musical style. Additionally, Wei Juns "The Walker" draws inspiration from "The Brahmins Prelude" in Xi'an drum music, incorporating relevant musical elements and using the seven-tone e-shang scale of Yan music. Through the interplay of Gong, Run, and Yu notes, it frequently presents augmented seconds, imbuing the music with a rich Western Regions flavor. This reflects the fusion of Xi'an drum music and Western Regions music, as well as Wei Juns active exploration of the contemporary development of the Shaanxi guzheng school.

Folk Songs: The variety of folk songs in Shaanxi is extensive, covering a wide range of themes such as labor life, love, and historical stories. These songs have distinct local characteristics and a strong sense of everyday life. They provide rich material for the creation of the Shaanxi zither school, becoming one of the important sources of music composition for this school. Based on their musical form and artistic features, Shaanxi folk songs can be divided into three major categories: work songs, mountain songs, and ballads. Work songs are typically sung during physical labor, serving to synchronize the rhythm and reduce fatigue; mountain songs are often improvised while working in the fields or expressing emotions, with cheerful tunes and free rhythms; ballads are popular in urban markets, featuring more artistic embellishment, balanced structures, and delicate melodies.

After the founding of New China, with the vigorous development of cultural and artistic endeavors, artists in the guzheng community seamlessly integrated Shaanxi folk songs with guzheng, creating many excellent guzheng pieces. Among these, the Shaanbei folk song "Shandian Dan Blooming Redly" was adapted into a guzheng piece and has been widely loved by people. In the introduction of the guzheng piece "Shandian Dan Blooming Redly," the technique of "finger tremolo" is used to open up, creating a broad and passionate atmosphere that quickly transports listeners to the vast land of northern Shaanxi, generating a sense of space that moves from far to near. In the slow section, the melody theme mimics singing, using descending slides of 3 to mimic the sinking tones in the folk song, making the single-note melody full of graceful variations, as if telling the story of northern Shaanxi. In the fast section, the guzheng uses chord accents from both high and low registers with its left hand, playing lively and cheerful melodies that vividly depict the bustling scenes described in the folk song: "Thousand households sighing ah

hai ah hai yo, opening doors ah hai ah hai yo... " In the final recapitulation, the finger tremolo technique from the introduction is continued, paired with left-hand chords, depicting the empty wilderness after the crowd disperses, yet the peoples enthusiasm for a better life remains intense, elevating the emotional depth of the entire piece. Through these ingenious adaptations, the unique charm of Shaanxi folk songs is captured in the guzheng piecesIt fully shows and enriches the musical expressiveness of Shaanxi zither school.

Folk Operas: Qin Opera, Mei Hu, and Wan Wan Qiang are important components of Shaanxis traditional art and culture, deeply loved by the people of Shaanxi. These folk operas are diverse and each has its own unique characteristics, providing rich inspiration and material for the creation of Shaanxi zither music. They have had a profound impact on the musical depth and expressiveness of the Shaanxi zither school.

Qin Opera, as one of the oldest dramas of the Han people in China, has distinct local characteristics of Shaanxi Province and is mainly spread in the northwest regions including Shaanxi, Gansu, Qinghai, and Ningxia. Its singing style is high-pitched and stirring, divided into two parts: "banlu" and "caiqiang." Banlu includes six basic patterns: Erliu, slow board, padded board, second inverted board, waiting board, and rolling board; caiqiang, commonly known as "er yin," is often used in scenes with dramatic ups and downs and intense emotions. The sustained notes in Qin Opera must be categorized under the "an" rhyme, a unique feature that makes the musical phrases full and expressive. Based on the pentatonic scale, Qin Opera has developed two completely opposite musical styles: "huan yin" and "ku (crying) yin." Taking "Yun Shang Su" as an example, this guzheng piece composed by Mr.Zhou Yugu, its structure echoes the rhythmic patterns of Qin Operas singing style, adopting a structure of introduction (scattered)—slow board—fast board—embellishment—slow board return—ending, which follows the logical pattern of scattered—slow—medium—fast—scattered in Qin Opera. In terms of rhythmic characteristics, "Yun Shang Su" also uses the Erliu beat of Qin Opera, such as the last line of the introduction starting on a weak beat and ending on a strong beat. Additionally, the piece consistently employs the "Qin Opera" tone, using the ku yin scale, extensively employing micro-sharp fa and micro-flat si, vividly conveying a mournful and poignant musical emotion, It shows the melancholy and beautiful music color, fully reflects the rich color tone and strong emotional expression of Qin opera music, so that this modern zither piece.

Discussion

This study focuses on the formation and characteristics of the Shaanxi Zither School, demonstrating distinct differences from other research in various aspects, effectively addressing some issues that have not been thoroughly explored in related fields. The systematic and comprehensive nature of its historical development: while other studies have touched upon the history of the Qin zither, this study traces its history from pre-Qin times to the present, detailing the development process of the Shaanxi Zither School, clearly delineating the stages of inception, consolidation, and expansion. For example, although "A History of the Qin Zither" provides a systematic overview of the Qin zithers history, this study builds upon it by analyzing key figures, events, and internal and external factors at each stage, providing a more comprehensive presentation of how the Shaanxi Zither School evolved from near extinction to revival and growth.

In-depth and Unique Perspectives on the Study of Lineage Transmission: In this study, we not only trace the lineage but also delve into the unique model of the Shaanxi Zither School, which combines master-apprentice relationships with family inheritance through its institutional system. We examine how this school evolved from being confined to local institutions to developing an open, nationwide transmission model. Compared to other studies on the inheritance of ancient zither schools, this research focuses on the characteristics of the Shaanxi Zither School under special conditions for revival, exploring how the inheritance system supports its development. This provides a new perspective for understanding the inheritance of musical schools.

Knowledge from Research

This study systematically examines the historical evolution, transmission mechanisms, and cultural influences of the Shaanxi Guzheng School, constructing a multi-dimensional knowledge framework (as illustrated in Figure 2). Centered on three core dimensions and presented through a conceptual map, this framework elucidates intrinsic logical relationships:

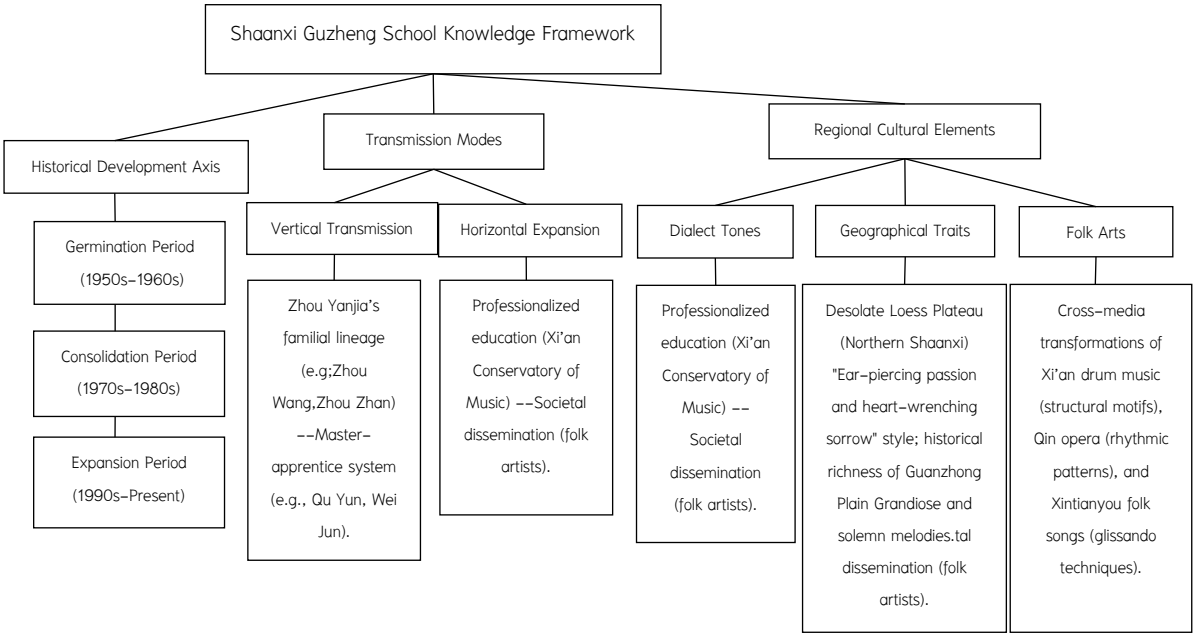


Figure 2 Shaanxi Guzheng School Knowledge Framework (source: Created by researchers, 2025)

Conclusion

The article delves into the Shaanxi Zither School, tracing its development trajectory and discovering that it originated in the Qin region. After experiencing twists and turns, it was revived after the founding of the Peoples Republic of China. The school has gone through three phases: the budding stage, the consolidation stage, and the expansion stage, each with distinct characteristics influenced by historical factors. In terms of lineage, it evolved from early apprenticeship and family inheritance to an open, broad–based model, fostering a diverse group of practitioners who have significantly propelled the school growth. The local language, regional culture, folk instruments, folk songs, and folk operas of Shaanxi, as objective conditions, have profoundly influenced the formation of the Shaanxi Zither School. This school is characterized by its unique artistic style, which includes features such as "second transformation sounds," "joyful tones," and "sorrowful tones." Its melodic progression and technique of "using rhythm to complement sound" are distinctive. In performance, techniques like thumb pressing and vibrato are unique, collectively contributing to its distinctive artistic appeal. The research findings of this article provide a perspective for a deeper understanding of the Shaanxi Zither School and offer valuable insights for the inheritance and development of traditional Chinese music culture.

Suggestions

1.Deepening Existing Research: Although the article has conducted multifaceted studies on the Shaanxi Zither School, there is still room for further exploration. In the study of its development trajectory, historical materials can be further mined to explore the interactions and exchanges between the Shaanxi Zither School and other regional schools during different historical periods, clarifying their dynamic changes in the national guzheng art landscape. For example, researching the potential impact of musical cultural exchanges with surrounding areas on the style evolution of the Shaanxi Zither School during the Ming and Qing dynasties can fill gaps in related historical stages and refine the development timeline.

2.Application Expansion Research Recommendations: Explore innovative integration paths between the Shaanxi Zither School and modern music elements. Study how to combine electronic music, jazz, and other contemporary musical styles with traditional techniques and characteristics of the Shaanxi Zither School, developing new works that meet the aesthetic demands of modern audiences. For example, attempt to create a concerto for the Shaanxi Zither School incorporating electronic sound effects, researching innovations and breakthroughs in performance techniques, form structure, and musical expressiveness, thus opening up new spaces for the Shaanxi Zither School in the contemporary music market.

3.The revival and development of the Shaanxi Zither School provide valuable experiences and exemplars for the protection of international folk music. Its success hinges on policy support and institutional promotion, the excavation and innovation of local culture, the openness and diversity of its inheritance system, and international exchanges and dissemination. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, national cultural protection policies and the academic support of the Xi'an Conservatory of Music laid the foundation for the revival of the Shaanxi Zither School; the deep exploration of local musical elements such as Mi Hu and Wan Wan Qiang formed its unique artistic style; the multi-channel inheritance through master-apprentice relationships, university education, and social activities ensured the continuity of its vitality; meanwhile, through domestic and international music cultural exchanges, it absorbed the essence of other schools and disseminated its artistic charm to the global stage. The experience of the Shaanxi Zither School demonstrates that the protection and inheritance of folk music require multi-faceted collaboration in policy, academia, cultural excavation, and international exchanges, offering actionable paths and models for the protection of other endangered folk music traditions, thereby promoting the diversity and prosperity of global music culture.

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