

Silent Strings: The Cultural Identity of the Guqin in the Shape of National Policies

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Abstract

The guqin from an exclusive cultural instrument of the literati class to a protected intangible cultural heritage—its shifting status reflects the condensed history of Chinese culture. The guqin was inscribed by UNESCO in 2003 as a "Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity," marking a turning point. Since then, it has no longer been merely an elegant pastime for scholars but has entered the realm of national cultural strategy, becoming an important symbol of China's cultural soft power. The policy's "designation" of the guqin constitute a cultural practice of power. On one hand, it redefines what constitutes the "orthodox" guqin tradition—what deserves protection, promotion, and transmission. On the other hand, it has also been subject to bottom-up interpretations by different decoders, revealing diverse understandings and expressions of the guqin. Utilizing ethnographic methods, this article explores the guqin's modern cultural identity emerges through ongoing negotiations between national preservation policies and local interpretations of the tradition.

Keywords: Guqin, Cultural Identity, Traditional Cultural, Cultural Policy

Introduction

The *guqin* (or *qin*) is one of the oldest plucked instruments in China, with a history spanning over 3,000 years (Leman et al., 2009; Jirajarupat & Zhang, 2023). The music of the *guqin* is unique in style, profound in meaning, and rich in repertoire and theory (Yan, 2007). Over the course of more than three thousand years, the art of *guqin* has acquired a special cultural significance (Jirajarupat & Zhang, 2023). This significance has shifted with each new social regime, reflecting the constant dialogue and negotiation between *qin* players and the dominant discourse, thus constructing different cultural identities for the *guqin* (Sun, 2016; Hu, 2009).

Today, *qin* practitioners interpret the cultural identity of *guqin* art variously and from diverse cultural perspectives (Nathanson, 2012). Contemporary *guqin* performers are creating new forms of performance that represent a new cultural identity for the *guqin* in the context of globalization and under the influence of new national cultural policies (Wang, 2021; Chen, 2019). Many *guqin* enthusiasts are transforming the cultural functions of the *guqin* according to their own cultural consumption needs. *Guqin* culture has become a kind

of cultural capital and displays its symbols and meanings in different ways (Song, 2012). *Qin* players no longer represent a single cultural identity of the *guqin*; their interpretation of the cultural identity of the *guqin* now shows a trend toward pluralism (Yan, 2007). The main purpose of this study is to investigate and understand how *qin* players form contemporary *guqin* cultural identity, with a particular focus on the influences of cultural policies, globalization, and commercialization.

After two years of fieldwork, through contact with the two official organization of Shijiazhuang Guqin, taking part in their activities, and participating in the courses of local Guqin training institutes, and in events such as the Yaji (theme meeting), the author found that there are two driving forces behind the contemporary development of the guqin in China. One is that the art of the guqin was nominated by UNESCO as a World Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2003 (CICHN,2018) , which bringing a dying art form back to the public eye and gave the guqin a spike in popularity(Hu, 2009), and the second is that since 2014, President Xi Jinping has repeatedly mentioned the need to “enhance cultural self-consciousness and cultural self-confidence” on important occasions, such as his speech at the forum on cultural and literary arts, the policy after emphasizing that the excellent traditional Chinese culture is the spiritual lifeblood of the Chinese nation and an important source of nourishing socialist core values (People's Forum, 2018.7.12). In 2017, the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) included “cultural self-confidence” in the Party's constitution and report, making it one of the core elements of Xi Jinping's socialist ideology with Chinese characteristics for a new era (China Daily, 2017,10,28). Therefore, cultural self-confidence is a call to all people at the national level in China today, which emphasizes the Chinese nation's full affirmation of its own cultural values and its active practice of them.

The guqin, with its uninterrupted development for more than 3,000 years and its long connection with the literati, has been called “a representative of the excellent traditional Chinese culture”, and also possesses the aura of the world's intangible cultural heritage, making it one of the national musical instruments that the state and the people have been focusing on. Against this social background, the two guqin associations in Shijiazhuang, Hebei Qin Society and Hebei guqin association ,under the jurisdiction of the government have naturally captured the new opportunities given to the guqin by the state and the times, moving forward with the trend of the era. This paper will discuss the role of official discourse in shaping the cultural identity of guqin in Shijiazhuang city, Hebei Province, China.

Literature review of the Study

Guqin music stands out as an intriguing representation of China's rich history and artistic expression (Zou, Tsai, & Wang, 2022). This long-standing musical tradition, which has been practiced for thousands of years, has a strong sense of cultural identity. However, as a result of great changes in contemporary society, the tradition has encountered a number of challenges. (Chen, 2017). *Guqin* music, which symbolizes the meeting point of ancient and contemporary cultures, not only provides an insight into Chinese culture but additionally reveals the difficulties and complexities involved in its preservation and adaptation (Chen, 2019). In the following sections, I will provide a literature review of the changing cultural identity of the guqin, focusing on four important turning points in history. These are the period of modern China (1919-1949), the founding of New China (1949), the reform and

opening up (the late 1970s-early 21st century), and the recognition of *guqin* art as an Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) by UNESCO.

Class Identity

The esteemed status of the *guqin* in traditional Chinese culture was not innate. Guo (1982) notes that "characters such as *qin* and *se* (瑟) have no influence in Bu Ci (卜辞) and Jin Wen (金文), and in the Shi jing (诗经) it is still an instrument used as a medium for love, and the music for the gods in the clan temples is not used for *qin* and *se*" (p. 143). Guo's observation demonstrates that the cultural identity of the *qin* was initially not fundamentally different from that of folk instruments such as the *pipa* and the *guzheng*. It was only after the development from the Zhou dynasty to the Han dynasty when *qin* music shifted from being folk music to class-exclusive music, did the *qin* gradually stand out from other instruments (Miao, 2006).

When the *guqin* became the exclusive instrument of the literati after the Han dynasty, it also became an instrument associated with the class. Yung (2017) says that the *guqin* was central to the scholar's identity as a cultural elite, a symbol of intellectual and moral perfection. In addition, the literati's identification with the *guqin* reflected their unique sense of social responsibility (Zhang, 2011). Influenced by Confucianism, the literati developed the *guqin* from the perspective of defending the Li Yue (ritual music). Playing the *guqin* became an important means for the literati to express their philosophical and political views; ideologies and identities; and to lament their changing fates. For example, *Youlan* (幽兰), the oldest *guqin* score in existence, is said to have been composed by Confucius. It expressed his depression and sadness after a setback in his official career, and Confucius likened himself to an orchid growing among wild grasses. Another example is *Guang Ling San* (广陵散), a very well-known *guqin* piece in Chinese music history. It is widely believed to have been written during the Qin and Han dynasties and depicts the tragic story of Nie Zheng, the son of a sword maker, who stabbed the King of Han to avenge his father's death before committing suicide. The melody is impassioned and mournful, and the atmosphere of fighting and killing is expressed throughout the piece, embodying the spirit of the oppressed rebelling against the tyrant. Finally, the repertoire of *Jiu Kuang* (酒狂) tells the story of Ruan Ji, a literati who lived in the Wei and Jin dynasties. Ruan Ji was deeply at odds with the politics of his time, so he lived in seclusion in the mountains, playing the *guqin* and chanting poems to forget his worries.

Modern China Period (1919-1949)

After the Opium War (1840-1842), with the introduction of Western industrial culture, China's social and economic system underwent significant changes, and traditional culture was strongly impacted, causing profound reflection among the new intellectuals. The decline of national fortunes in the early 20th century led educated people to question Confucianism and traditional Chinese culture (Hu, 2009). By the end of the Qing dynasty, with the abolition of the imperial examinations and the rise of a new educational system, a different type of intellectual emerged. Miao (2006) argues that in contrast to the traditional literati, the new intellectuals were free and independent, and they no longer needed to follow Confucius's way of cultivating the self, regulating the family, governing the state, then leading the world to peace (修身, 齐家, 治国, 平天下), nor did they need to seek spiritual support from the *guqin*.⁴ Thus, along with the disappearance of the literati class,

the art of *guqin* also went into decline. The class identity of the *guqin* was also about to change. You (2020) noted that Chinese scholars tried to find an alternative ideology to guide China and ensure its prosperity, one that was not based on Confucianism or Westernization.

The May Fourth Movement (4 May to 28 June 1919), which preached democracy and science, dealt a fatal blow to traditional culture. The spread of Western Enlightenment ideals and the eager expectation of a new type of state throughout the intellectual world accelerated the dramatic decline of *guqin* art. As a result of social unrest and the outbreak of war, traditional culture struggled to survive making the art of *guqin* almost extinct (Yung, 2017). However, the cultural identity of the *qin* players remained relatively unchanged because the ideology of the ruling class did not change fundamentally. Hu (2009) described the situation of Shanghai *qin* players under the historical conditions of the time as follows:

From the beginning of the twentieth century until the founding of the People's Republic of China, the development of *guqin* culture in Shanghai was mainly carried out in a relatively closed and self-disciplined manner. During the time of major social change, the *guqin* players in Shanghai expressed their cultural identity with their historical memory and the preservation of traditional *guqin* cultural norms of behavior (p. 45).

In the early 20th century, Shanghai was an important city for the spread of *guqin* art, and we see from Hu's statement that the survival of the *guqin* in Shanghai at that time was largely spontaneous and unguaranteed. Wang (2011) also says that *guqin* art remained traditional and, to a certain extent, self-perpetuating during the first half of the 20th century.

New China (The Founding of New China in 1949)

After the founding of New China, a new ideology swept the country. Art had to serve the people, and the ancient and backward elite imagery represented by the *guqin* was a key obstacle to the integration of *qin* music into the new era (Huang, 1998). Under the strong integration of socialist ideology, different types of cultural resources began to be distributed by the state. Wang (2011) says that Mao Zedong's policy of "Bai Hua Qi Fang" (encouraging the development of artistic works in all forms and styles), which was explicitly proposed in the 1953 literary and artistic rectification movement, further promoted the Communist Party's policy of "coming from the masses and going to the masses" (从群众中来,到群众中去). Hu (2009) also writes that all arguments attached to the arts at that time bore obvious political markers. The works performed and composed by the *qin* players also no longer reflected the class ideology of the traditional literati, but strove to express the political life of all citizens of the country. The "Dong Fang Hong" (东方红), "Sheng Li Cao" (胜利操), "Gong She Zhi Chun" (公社之春), and other works with a clear political identity came into being (Huang, 1998). Under the normative constraints of the socialist political system, the cultural identity of the *guqin* was integrated and regulated by socialist ideology, allowing it to evolve from a class identity that once honored Confucianism to a mass cultural identity that embodied the life of the public.

In addition to the implementation of a new ideology, the new government also made a number of efforts to save the art of *guqin*, a representative of the old culture which had fallen into hard times and had become almost extinct at the end of the previous century. Qiao

(2000) says that it was not until after 1949 when the cultural environment changed due to the transformation of the social system, that the study of *guqin* began to enter the modern period. The 1950s and 1960s were an important era of cultural development and recovery after the founding of New China (Huang, 1998). The new government paid more attention to culture and art, and a series of strong cultural protection policies were introduced, creating a boom in everything from literary performances to academic research. The art of *guqin* also began to emerge from a decline that had lasted for nearly a century—In the 1950s, fewer than 100 people in the country could play the *guqin*—and were given a chance to be saved (Li, 2014). Zang (2015) argues that at the junction of the *guqin* revival, the landmark "signpost" was the establishment of the Institute of Ethnic Music of the Central Conservatory of Music (now the Institute of Music of the China Academy of Art) and the Beijing *Guqin* Research Association in 1954. Echoing Zang, Qiao (2000) says that with extraordinary foresight, scholars such as Yang Yinliu, Li Yuanqing, Cha Fuxi, and Guan Pinghu began a series of important endeavors: acquiring *guqin* instruments and scores, holding performances and gatherings, investigating the locations of *qin* masters, recording *guqin* music, compiling *guqin* literature, organizing *guqin* playing conferences, and holding exhibitions.

As mentioned above, the efforts made by the older generation of *qin* masters in the early years of the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) to preserve and develop the art of the *guqin* brought it back to its former vitality. Huang (1998) describes this period as the "Golden Period" of the development of the *guqin* in mainland China (p.164). However, during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), traditional culture and arts suffered a devastating blow. A large number of cultural and historical materials and precious old instruments were destroyed. Many performing artists and intellectuals versed in ancient and modern culture were persecuted. The decade of the Cultural Revolution was not only a decade of stagnation for China's culture and arts—it also weakened the cultural foundation of the whole society. Wang (2017) says that the cataclysmic Cultural Revolution brought social production to a complete standstill and devastated traditional culture and art, with the *guqin*, bearing the brunt of the devastation. Huang (1998) discusses how the development of the *guqin* suffered serious damage during this period of political and social chaos:

The significant historical research and systematic archiving of *qin* literature, notations, and handbooks, as well as the nationwide field recordings conducted during the past two decades were abolished. The newly established system of transmission in the academic environment, together with the programs for training professional *qin* musicians, were abrogated since all schools were closed. Consequently, the emerging professionalization of *qin* music as well as *qin* musicians came to an abrupt end (p. 169).

Not only was the development of the *guqin* at a standstill but *qin* players were also forced to cease their *guqin*-related artistic activities. Qiao (2010) writes about an interview with Li Xiangting, a *guqin* master who lived through the Revolution:

Li said that during the Cultural Revolution, the art of *guqin* was completely rejected, and he didn't play it for six years. In 1973, The government realized that the *guqin* was necessary for the long history of ancient Chinese culture, so he could start playing it again. During the six years, he didn't play the *guqin* but played the *Duxian qin*.⁵ During the Cultural Revolution, he played some revolutionary songs on the *Duxian qin*, which were very popular (P.21)

The two quotations above reflect the fact that both the art of the *guqin* and the *qin* players suffered tremendously during the Cultural Revolution. The *guqin*, which had just regained its vitality after the founding of the new state, was once again in a situation of despair. The far-reaching impact of the decade-long social upheaval on traditional culture made it impossible for traditional art, which should have returned to its normal course of development after the end of the Revolution, to recover its rightful place (Zang, 2015).

Late 1970s—Early 21st Century and Globalization

The reform and opening-up policy of the late 1970s changed China's economic system and began a process of modernization (Yuan & Gao, 2020). Economic and cultural policies shifted more freely. Establishing a national culture is particularly important in the context of globalization, and Wang (2011) argues that as international cultural competition intensified, traditional arts including the art of *guqin* were gradually taken up by China, and subsequently, *guqin* was included in the spectrum of "outstanding national cultures" at the initiative of the state.

According to Zhang (2023), with increasing globalization, non-Western countries often face a cultural identity crisis in the process of opening up due to the influence of strong Western culture. Wang (2011) says that globalization is not only a process of economic integration but also involves worldwide political, cultural integration and competition. Wang (1998) states that "cultural movements in response to colonialism and forced change from the outside often use the original cultural symbol system of the local area to construct an ethnic integration and symbolic power, excluding cultural elements from the outside" (p. 366). Thus, the successful shaping of national culture, according to Wang, plays an important role in national identity.

After the *guqin* was established as an "outstanding national culture," China tried to establish a moderate image of a cultural power by turning the "national cultural heritage" into a "world cultural heritage." On 7 November 2003, the art of *guqin* was listed by UNESCO as the second masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (ICH). The international recognition of *guqin* art as an ICH made it a symbol of cultural identity, connecting Chinese people around the world and enhancing the Chinese people's sense of national belonging. At the same time, being recognized as an ICH by UNESCO has greatly enhanced the popularity of the *guqin*, which has undoubtedly accelerated the dissemination of the *guqin* into modern mass culture. Hu (2009) says that before 2000, there was only one training institution in Shanghai, and from 2003 until 2007, there were about 20 amateur training institutions (p. 69). Today, however, *guqin* training institutions are located all over the country, and more and more people are becoming involved in the study of the *guqin*.

The Development of Contemporary Guqin

Contemporary China is the largest developing country in the world. Its economy has been growing rapidly, its comprehensive national power has been increasing, and it has become a national global influence since its reform and opening up in 1978. The strong support for the revival of traditional culture and the ICH brand effect has made the *guqin* more familiar among the public. The pursuit of leisure activities brought about by the improvement of material living standards has led to an increasing number of participants in *guqin* art. Li (2014) says that the *guqin* has passed the most dangerous rescue period, and the next step

is to consider how to properly disseminate the art of *guqin*. Throughout the history of the development of the *guqin*, the musical works of the *guqin*, the identity of the *guqin* community, and the practice and social attributes of the *guqin* have entered a new context again and again. Currently, I believe that national discourse is a very important factor that influences the construction of the contemporary cultural identity of the *guqin*. The national cultural authorities have shaped the cultural identity of the contemporary art of the *guqin* through the theme of safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage (ICH), and China's cultural self-confidence policy.

Research Problem

The current political, cultural, and economic changes have led to diversity in the cultural identity of the *guqin*. On the one hand, the *guqin's* identity as an intangible cultural heritage – made stronger by state discourse – has meant that it has stayed in a conventional role bound by traditional cultural norms. In this role, the *guqin* seems to be justified only by a deliberate return to traditional norms to achieve a marriage of ideology and artistry. On the other hand, due to the commodification of culture, *guqin* art is bound to become a commodity and enter the context of mass cultural consumption. Therefore, the current producers and consumers of *guqin* art are often engaged in cultural practices under the premise of advocating cultural consumption or pursuing economic benefits. The development of profit-oriented cultural products, with consumer demand as the main priority, makes it difficult to take into account the integrity of the traditional culture carried by the *guqin*.

Hu (2009) says that the cultural identity of the *guqin* under shifting discourses may have to undergo different transformations, which in turn creates confusion about the roles of the *qin* players themselves—and this is what triggers the *guqin* cultural identity crisis. I disagree with this view and argue that in the process of forming a new cultural identity, different cultural subjects understand, adapt and negotiate with the cultural policies, economic patterns and other factors, thus promoting the formation of a new cultural identity, which then becomes a driving force for the development of the *guqin* art. This article attempts to examine the construction and development of the cultural identity of the *guqin* by its players in a contemporary context. I argue that the process of constructing new cultural identities is an opportunity for *qin* practitioners to take the art of *guqin* in a different direction.

Research Gap

The rapid changes brought about by national cultural policy, globalization, and commercialization have also presented challenges and complexities to the contemporary cultural identity of the *guqin* in Shijiazhuang. These factors have influenced the perceptions, practices, and artistic expressions associated with *guqin*; they have also impacted the instruments' traditional essence and cultural significance. However, the specific issues and dynamics surrounding the evolving cultural identity of *guqin* in this context remain relatively unexplored. Therefore, there is a need for an ethnographic study to delve into the implications of cultural policy on the contemporary cultural identity of *guqin* in Shijiazhuang. By conducting such research, a deeper understanding of the challenges, tensions, and potential opportunities arising from these influences can be gained, ultimately providing insights for the development of strategies that can ensure the preservation and sustainable development of the *guqin's* cultural identity in the face of contemporary forces. In the

following, I will explore the role played by the local official guqin association in Shijiazhuang in the development of the guqin's contemporary cultural identity.

Hebei has two official provincial organizations for the *guqin*. One is the Hebei Qin Society, an academic group led by the Hebei Musicians Association. As one of the only two official guqin organizations in Hebei Province, the development direction of the Hebei Qin Society continues the aesthetic standards of traditional guqin players, focusing on The Context of literati Qin Playing under the Consciousness of Confucian Ritual and Music Thought and Taoist Nature View. Hebei Qin Society was established on December 10, 2016. The purpose of the opening of the Hebei Qin Society is to unite the *guqin* culture and art community in Hebei Province, to strengthen academic exchanges between professional and non-professional *guqin* culture groups within and outside the province, to promote the popularization, improvement, and development of *guqin* culture and art in Hebei Province, and to contribute to the prosperity of Hebei Province's music and cultural undertakings (Hebei Qin Society Public, 2016). The president, Li Tianhuan, is a descendant of the Jiuyi School and has deep family roots. In May of 2023, I had an opportunity to communicate with the president, through the conversation can feel that he is in the traditional Chinese culture under the cultivation of the old generation of qin players, he believes that playing the guqin and deep literary skills are inseparable from the current generation of people who have not been educated in traditional culture, no deep traditional cultural heritage, can not be a good explanation of the culture of the spirit of the guqin, but also unable to understand the cultural connotations of guqin music. Although he was neutral about many contemporary approaches to *guqin* transmission, He is clearly a defender of the traditional literati qin (personal interview).

During Mr. Li's presidency, he carried out the first calligraphy and painting exhibition in Hebei Province (figure1), the first guqin theme gathering (figure2), and he edited and published the introductory qin score of the jiuyi school and the classic qin score of the Jiuyi school --*Xiaozhai qinpu*. The *Xiaozhai Qinpu* is an essential reference work for the study of the Jiuyi school of *qin* studies (Figure 3).



Figure 1: The First Hebei *Guqin* Society Calligraphy and Painting Exhibition.

Photo source: Hebei *Guqin* Society WeChat public number.



Figure 2: Mr Li Tianhuan, the first president of the Hebei Qin Society, playing "Narcissus".

Photo source: Hebei *Guqin* Society Public Number.

On the day of my visit to Mr. Li, which happened to be his birthday, his students came to wish him well, I discussed with them why traditional *qin* players preferred painting and calligraphy, and one of his students, Mr. Sun, spoke of the interconnectedness of the *guqin*, *painting*, and *calligraphy*, stating that the discourse of the *Liji* establishes that “music is the harmony of heaven and earth” The cosmological view of the *qin* elevates it to the realm of “correcting the heart” and makes it a cornerstone of moral cultivation. The ideology of *painting* and *calligraphy* are of the same origin, revealing the common aesthetic standard of vividness of rhythm between visual arts and musical tones. Therefore, traditional literati were as persistent in their pursuit of painting and calligraphy as they were in their pursuit of the *guqin*. As a painting and calligraphy enthusiast, he studied with Mr. Li Tianhuan, learning not only the *guqin* but also painting and calligraphy techniques (personal interview).



Figure 3: Xiaozhai Qinpu(脩齋琴譜).

After the end of the epidemic in 2023, the Society was re-elected for a new term, the current president is Mr. Li's student Gao Shitao, Mr. Gao continued the spirit of the traditional literati qin, the organization of the Society to carry out the activities pay great attention to the promotion of traditional culture, the theme of the collection of Buddhism, calligraphy, and then to the museum of cultural relics. All of them emphasize a contemporary literati's understanding and expectation of the guqin. So far the collection has accumulated to more than 20 (Hebei qin society public number 2025.6),

Hebei Guqin Association ----- Fusion of Tradition and Contemporaneity

In August 2024, in a guqin studio in Shijiazhuang, Hebei province, a young qin player is playing guqin music on the livestream, his fingertips wandering among the seven strings, with Chinese furnishings, antique decorate, and orchids looming in the background. This is a guqin training institution located in the center of Shijiazhuang city, which is in the heart of the CBD of high-rise buildings, occupying a corner of a bustling shopping mall, becoming a clear stream among the waves of commerce (Figure 4). This is a guqin training institution established by Sun Jian, president of the Hebei Province Guqin Association, reflecting another more modern and commercialized approach to the development of guqin in Shijiazhuang.



Figure 4 :Guanyin Piano Shop in Beiguo Shopping Center, Shijiazhuang, Hebei, China.(photoed by author)

Mr.Sun is an 80s traditional culture and traditional music enthusiast as well as a businessman, which gives him both the basic aesthetics of music and a high sensitivity to the contemporary transformation of traditional culture under the business model, so he personally set up a cultural company mainly focusing on the education market such as cooperating with universities to provide guqin courses. Public welfare courses for education, such as guqin training for primary and secondary school teachers in Shijiazhuang, guqin craft training for young people in youth night schools (Hebei News Network, May 2015); adult market development, such as the white-collar urban culture enthusiasts to launch the guqin experience class, combined with the tea ceremony, incense ceremony and other traditional

cultural elements. The company also cooperates with guqin factories or guqin makers to create high-end customised instruments, emphasising the contemporary realisation of the scarcity of handmade craftsmanship (personal interview) .

Since Sun Jian took office as president of the Hebei Guqin Association, the Guqin Association of Hebei Province has focused more on promoting guqin culture to a wider public, attracting a larger audience including non-professional enthusiasts, and expanding the influence of guqin education and culture. For example, the guqin concert - the 2016 Hebei Guqin Famous Artists and Songs Concert - was the first time that Hebei province brought together many famous guqin artists, with a line-up that is considered to be first-rate in the country (Beautiful Hebei 2022,4,13).

the Hebei *Guqin* Association carried out a seminar on Fuxi and *guqin* culture in 2022 at the Hebei Academy of Fine Arts, and in May 2023, the Hebei *Guqin* Association took part in the traditional cultural inheritance and development activities of Hebei University. by comparison, the activities of the Hebei *Qin* Society are more inclined to the inheritance of the traditional *guqin* techniques of the Jiuyi School and the cultivation of professional *qin* talents, and the contents of the activities are more niche and limited to the population, such as private teaching of masters and disciples and seminars for the improvement of *qin* skills. The activities of the Hebei Guqin Association also have an element of traditional cultural export, but it is not the main purpose of its development. In addition to public service classes, the Association encourages its members to conduct national guqin examinations and institutional training in guqin for the general public, all of which are for-profit activities, and the commercial nature of the vast majority of the activities is clear. The Hebei Guqin Association needs to think about how to make a profit as well as how to promote the development of the guqin in contemporary cities, especially in the face of the phenomenon that the government does not subsidise the expenses of various activities, which need to be self-financed by the association. The result derived from this is that in the face of commercialization, the authenticity of traditional art will inevitably be damaged.

Government Support

In the process of the development of the two associations, the Government has played the role of leading the development based on national policies, and the Government's policies on registration and qualification audit have given legal status to the associations and enhanced their credibility and social recognition. The association is eager to get the endorsement of the government and the support of national policies. In the process of the development of guqin in Shijiazhuang, the government has given importance and rationality to the organisation of activities, but in terms of financial support is very limited, both the Hebei qin society and the Hebei guqin association, in the process of organising theme meeting, editing and publishing books mainly rely on their own form of fund-raising, and according to my fieldwork, the establishment of theme meeting and the calligraphy and painting exhibitions of the Hebei qin society relied on support and sponsorship from guqin organisations across Hebei Province. The Hebei Guqin Association has its own cultural company, and most of the profits from the sale of musical instruments and guqin training are invested in the expenses of guqin activities. relying on self-development and government policy support, both *guqin* organizations have made very important contributions to the popularization of the *guqin* in Shijiazhuang, the

cultivation of talents, the promotion of *guqin* culture, and the development and dissemination of the *guqin*.

Summary

At the national level, Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party, "building a strong cultural nation" has become the central expression of China's national cultural strategy, forming an integrated overview of past experience in cultural reform and development, as well as future development goals. The Fifth Plenary Session of the 19th CPC Central Committee put forward new requirements for the prosperous development of cultural undertakings and industries, and the enhancement of the country's cultural soft power", and for the first time put forward a timetable for the fulfillment of the goal of becoming a cultural powerhouse at the national planning level.

In the 14th Five-Year Plan and the next decade, China's traditional cultural industry will usher in a window of opportunity for structural reform, and we should grasp the window of opportunity of digital information technology to promote the modernization of the cultural governance system and governance capacity, continuously consolidate the common ideological foundation for the unity of all the people, and better construct the Chinese spirit, Chinese values, and Chinese power (Yang, 2020).

"Building a strong cultural nation" is the general outline of cultural coding, the main theoretical basis put forward by the State for the development of cultural undertakings (including traditional art forms represented by the *guqin*), and it will also be the outcome of the State's policy after it has called on cultural and artistic groups to dig deeper into traditional culture and develop it. The aura of selective "certification" of specific cultural symbols by the State through the UNESCO platform is in fact a practice of reconstructing national identity and challenging cultural discourse in the context of globalization. Led by the national policy of cultural self-confidence, the *guqin* has been transformed from a dying art form into a popular Chinese outstanding traditional culture and a symbol of China's soft power.

national discourse has an important guiding and facilitating role in the construction of contemporary *guqin* cultural identity, but it is constrained by a variety of factors, and the specific limits of its influence vary from region to region. From a bottom-up perspective, these two *guqin* organisations are highly identified with and dependent on the official guidance of the state in the process of promoting local *guqin* cultural activities. In the process of relying on government support to carry out various activities, the official organization take the ideology of promoting excellent traditional culture as a frame of reference, and keep in line with the dominant force, using the ideology of the dominant force to develop political support for their own development. In practice, however, when faced with the complexity of their own situation, official organizations may see their decoding of mainstream politics partially modified or challenged due to their own circumstances.

For example, during the interviews, it was clear that the activities of the Hebei *Qin* Society are focused on the heritage of the Jiuyi School rather than on serving national political slogans. As mentioned earlier, both the writing of books and the development of the spread of the Jiuyi School in Hebei Province are motivated by the continuation of family roots, and

the activities are small-scale gatherings of traditional literati in poetry, calligraphy, chess, and painting. It is just that the activities of the association appear to be more legitimate and convincing in a national environment that strongly advocates the development of traditional culture. However ensuring the transmission of the spirit of the Jiuyi School has always been a central consideration in the process of shaping the contemporary *guqin*'s cultural identity and transmission for the Hebei *Qin* Society, and it has never changed. In other words, if the state did not support or intervene in the contemporary development of the *guqin*, the Jiuyi School of *Qin* would have done the same with the strength of the local associations, except that without the aura of intangible cultural heritage and the support of state policy, the *guqin* might have returned to its traditional mode of transmission, which could have been facing extinction, or it might have been sustained in a niche way with a feeble vitality.

Under the conditions of a market economy, the influence of commercial interests and popular culture will, to a certain extent, weaken the influence of national discourse on the ideological construction of traditional *guqin* cultural identity. The activities of another official association, the Hebei *Guqin* Association, reflect these problems. The Hebei *Guqin* Association also follows the call of the state and takes the national cultural policy as the basic foundation for the development and inheritance of the *guqin*, but in the actual process of inheritance, it treats the *guqin* as a cultural commodity to be packaged and operated. The cultural identity of the *guqin* is mixed with strong economic attributes of the commodity. For example, when I interviewed teachers from the Hebei *Guqin* Association about their daily teaching, basically the vast majority of *guqin* teachers said that if they only taught traditional *guqin* pieces in their regular teaching, students would lose interest in learning. As a training organization, the amount of profit is directly related to the survival and development of the organization. Therefore, many teachers said that they would adjust their teaching repertoire according to the student's age, aesthetic taste, and interests to meet the market demand. Some teachers, in the teaching process for beginners, especially use *guqin* pieces adapted from popular songs as teaching repertoire instead of traditional *guqin* pieces. Although this is not conducive to the inheritance of the traditional *guqin* cultural identity, it can better cater to the public's tastes and allow more people to choose to learn the *guqin*, thus expanding the enrollment scale of the training institution and obtaining greater benefits.

Although the construction of *guqin* cultural identity by local institutions depends on the guidance of national discourse, it ultimately depends on self-understanding and the concrete implementation of cultural policies. Therefore, the influence of national discourse on contemporary *guqin* cultural policy is not unilateral and linear but rather depends on the forms of decoding by different cultural communicators to present a pluralistic pattern.

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