

# **THE CURRENT STATUS OF GUZHENG TEACHING IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS AND THE GUZHENG EXERCISE BOOK**

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## **Abstract**

The Current Status of Guzheng Teaching in Junior High Schools and the Guzheng Exercise Book, China examines the role of guzheng education in junior high schools within the context of China's rich cultural heritage, beliefs, and traditional values. With the revival of interest in traditional Chinese music, the demand for guzheng education is rising, reflecting a deeper cultural aspiration to preserve and honor national identity. However, guzheng instruction in public schools faces challenges such as inadequate resources, reliance on oral teaching methods, and a lack of multimedia support, which limit students' engagement and appreciation for the instrument. This article argues that a well-developed curriculum and structured exercise books can bridge this gap, providing systematic guidance that nurtures students' skills and cultivates a connection to traditional Chinese aesthetics and cultural values. Guzheng education also supports a sense of continuity in religious and philosophical beliefs, such as respect for harmony, discipline, and self-cultivation, reinforcing students' identity and pride in their cultural heritage. Through targeted teaching resources, educators can inspire a deeper appreciation for traditional Chinese music, helping students develop a sense of responsibility to preserve and cherish their cultural legacy. This article presented (1) the current status of guzheng teaching in junior high schools, (2) guzheng exercise book.

**Keywords:** Guzheng; Teaching; Junior High School; Exercise Book

## Introduction

The guzheng is known as the "King of Music" and the "Oriental Piano" because of its wide range, beautiful sound and rich playing skills. It is often used for solo performance, repertoire, instrumental ensemble and accompaniment of songs, dances, operas, and musicals. The performance of guzheng can fully show the emotion and meaning of music, giving people the enjoyment of beauty and shock of the soul. As early as in the Warring States period from the 5th century BC to the 3rd century BC, the guzheng was widely circulated in the area of Qin (now Shaanxi), so it was named Qin Zheng, with a history of more than 2,500 years. The origin of the guzheng is still inconclusive (Zhang, 2022). Guzheng has a long history, having been popular in many places in the north as early as the Warring States period, and has a history of more than 2,000 years. During its evolution, it has gone through changes from the five-stringed zhuzhi to the twelve-stringed, thirteen-stringed, and even more-stringed ones. In different periods of history, the shape, number of strings and playing techniques of the guzheng have all developed. The structure of the guzheng consists of a panel, a goose pillar (zheng pillar), strings, a front yakuzan, string pegs, a tuning box, a foot, a back yakuzan, a side plate, a sound outlet, a bottom plate, a string piercing hole and other parts. Its shape is a rectangular wooden sound box, the string holder "zheng column" can be moved freely, one string, one tone, arranged according to the pentatonic scale. The decorative process of guzheng is also very elaborate, from the Tang Dynasty and Qing Dynasty, it has been decorated with lacquer carving, color painting and other techniques. The modern guzheng is even more "blossomed" in decoration to meet people's aesthetic demand (Yin, 2023).

The performance method of guzheng is mainly divided into right hand technique and left-hand technique. The right hand plays the strings with the big, forefinger, middle and ring fingers, controlling the rhythm and the change of sound strength; the left hand presses the strings with the forefinger and middle finger, controlling the change of the pitch and the sound of the strings, showing different rhythms. The performance method of guzheng is mainly divided into right hand technique and left-hand technique. The right hand plays the strings with the big, forefinger, middle and ring fingers to control the rhythm and the change of the sound; the left hand presses the strings with the forefinger and

middle finger to control the change of the pitch and the sound of the strings to show different rhythms of the sound (Zhou Junqi, 2018).

As far back as the Warring States period, the zheng was popularized in the territory of the Qin State (Shaanxi Province) and was called the "Qin Zheng" at that time. Since then, it has been spread to Henan, Shandong, Guangdong, Zhejiang, Inner Mongolia and other places. Due to the changes in history and the influence of the region, there are differences in local styles and playing techniques, which have led to the formation of different genres of guzheng today, making the development of guzheng more and more prosperous. Before Han and Jin, the zheng had twelve strings; during the Sui and Tang dynasties, the zheng was increased from twelve strings to thirteen strings; after the Ming and Qing dynasties, the number of strings was gradually increased to fifteen; from the end of the Qing Dynasty to the beginning of the Republic of China, there appeared a new sixteen-stringed zheng, which is the traditional zheng that has been popular in the past hundred years in China; after 1949, the zheng, which is the ancient folk musical instrument, has successfully developed S-type twenty-one-stringed koto, on the basis of reforming the shape and the string quality, through the research and study by the players and the experts. They successfully developed the S-type twenty-one-string nylon steel wire-wrapped koto. This kind of koto has enlarged the resonance body and increased the number of strings, which obviously enriches the acoustic effect and the thickness of pronunciation. The S type 21-string nylon wire-wound zither is a popular zither in China and all over the world.

In the early days, traditional zheng music was divided into two Genres, the north and the south, which were represented by the five Genress of "Zhejiang, Shandong, Henan, Hakka, and Teochew", but in modern times, the difference between the genres is very small, and almost every genre has the strengths of each Genre. Since the Qin and Han dynasties, the guzheng has been gradually spreading from northwest China to all parts of the country, and has been blended with local operas, raps and folk music to form various genres with strong local styles. Traditional zheng music was divided into two genres, the north and the south, and is now generally divided into nine genres, each of which has its own distinctive zheng tunes and playing methods (Tian, 2024).

Shaanxi is the birthplace of the Chinese zheng, but now the zheng music of the "true sound of Qin" is almost extinct, and there are colorful operas and folk music here, in which traditional instruments are not rare, but only the zheng is not available or rarely used; only in Yulin does the guzheng appear as an accompaniment, along with the qin, pipa, and sanxian, in the accompaniment of Yulin's small songs. At the end of the 1950s, Mr. Zhou Yanjia, the president of Shaanxi Qin Zither Society and performer, put forward the slogan of "Qin Zither Returns to Qin", and later excellent Shaanxi-style zheng tunes such as "Qin Sang Qu", " Jiang Nu's Tears", " Xiangshan Shooting Drums", "Sanqin Joyful Songs", " Xiujin Bian" and so on appeared (Guo, 2021).

From the recorded words in the "Historical Records" and the "Book of Han", zheng has been quite commonly developed in the Qin and Han Dynasties. In the Eastern Han Dynasty, Emperor Guangwu built the capital of Luoyang, and the Northern Song Dynasty built the capital of Bianliang (i.e. Kaifeng today), both in Henan Province, and in this area has long been popular with the folk music of "Zhengwei Voice", the Qin zheng flowed into Henan Province along with the relocation of the capital and the local folk music of "Zhengwei Voice" was fused and developed into the famous Zhongzhou ancient tunes of later times. The Qin zheng came to Henan with the relocation of the capital, and fused with the local folk music "Zheng Wei Voice" to become the famous Zhongzhou ancient tune. One of the characteristics of Henan zheng is that the right hand starts from the place close to the zither code, and then plays to the place close to the Yue Shan, and at the same time, the left hand makes a large-scale vibration, which makes the music performance very dramatic and effective. The tunes of Henan zheng are very singable, and there are a lot of big jumps in the fourth, fifth and sixth degrees in the melody, which is fresh and smooth, and see the staccato and majestic; the frequent use of the big second and small third degrees of the upward and downward tones are especially suitable for the resonant and subdued tones of the Zhongzhou, so that the zheng tunes have a simple and pure flavor.

The Teochew zheng, which has been passed down in the area of Teochew, Guangdong Province, has a special musical structure and a unique approach. The most important thing that makes the zheng different from other musical instruments is the change of the left-handed slide, that is, the so-called

rhyme to complement the sound, therefore, it is difficult to talk about the zheng's genres and development. In the Chaozheng, the use of this technique can be said to have reached a very wonderful point. In fact, it is played through the change of the left hand's pressing tone, in order to achieve the combination of several scales and modes, and the meter is also different from the twelve equal temperament and other local folk music. The Teochew zheng is unique for its smooth and gorgeous right hand and the unique and flowery playing method of the left hand by pressing the sliding tone, with delicate and subtle changes (Wang, 2022).

According to the "Strategies of the Warring States" recorded: "Linzi is very rich, they have no people there do not like to blow yu, drums, zheng," so many people call the Shandong zheng for the Qi zheng. Its circulation is mainly in the Heze area, including Yuncheng and Jancheng, and the Liaocheng area in western Shandong, especially the Heze area of folk music is very popular, known as the "township of zhengqin", out of a lot of folk rap, opera and folk instrumental music performance talents. The teaching system of guzheng in these two areas is different, and the repertoire is not the same, but most of the traditional guzheng pieces are title pieces with the structure of "eight panels" with the length of 68 phrases, and there is no great difference in the playing techniques. In Liaocheng area, the number of guzheng players and guzheng tunes is relatively small, and its traditional zheng tunes are mainly handed down by Mr. Jin Zhuo Nan and Mr. Jin Yi Ocarina of Jin Hao Zhuang in Linqing County of Liaocheng area. Since the traditional zheng music of Liaocheng area has not been circulated in Shandong and the whole country, its history and genealogy have yet to be further organized and explored, so the concept of "Shandong zheng" only refers to the guzheng of Heze area.

In the past, Shandong zheng used 15 strings, seven old strings for the outer bass part and eight strings for the inner part, commonly known as "seven old strings and eight young strings". When playing, the big finger is used frequently and is strong and robust. Even if it is a "flower finger", it is mostly the lower flower finger played with the big finger and the "tor". The left hand's gong, kneading, pressing and sliding are both rigid and soft, resonant and deep, and their playing style is pure and simple (Hu Yuxin, 2019).

## **The Current Status of Guzheng Teaching in Junior High Schools**

With the revival of traditional Chinese music and culture, the demand for teaching the guzheng, a traditional musical instrument with a long history and deep cultural heritage, is growing. More and more people begin to pay attention to traditional music and culture and show great interest in learning guzheng. The guzheng training market has gradually emerged and developed rapidly, with numerous training institutions and teachers emerging in the market. However, the teaching of the guzheng instrument is less emphasized in public genres, and there is a lack of teaching experience.

School music education is an important way of spreading Chinese traditional music culture, and folk music clubs are an important carrier for the inheritance of China's national music culture, therefore, it is necessary to reform school music education as the main position for the development of music subjects and the promotion of traditional music. With the development of the times and the advent of the information age, popular music is overused in secondary school music classrooms, which can mislead students and is not conducive to cultivating students' aesthetics of traditional culture. Therefore, it is especially urgent to strengthen the learning of traditional national music culture. Children in middle school are in adolescence, which is a critical period for the development of IQ and EQ. We can seize this opportunity to educate students about traditional culture and establish the awareness of protecting and passing on the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation. Let students start from Chinese traditional musical instruments, learn and experience the charm of our traditional music, improve their aesthetic sense of Chinese traditional music culture, and thus love traditional music more. Aesthetic consciousness, so as to love traditional music more, so that students can stimulate their interest in learning guzheng in listening, appreciating and practicing. This can not only cultivate students' understanding of and respect for traditional music and culture and improve their traditional cultural literacy, but also enhance their national self-confidence in a subtle way while appreciating and learning guzheng music.

In terms of teaching forms, there are many teachers who do not know how to use multimedia teaching, and there are only guzhengs and music stands in the guzheng classrooms. Most of them are still teaching orally, with the

teacher explaining and demonstrating, the students imitating, and then assigning post-lesson homework, and a lesson is finished in this way. In terms of evaluation methods, the teacher only evaluates the performance of the whole piece at the end, ignoring the students' progress in the learning process and not encouraging the students in time. Teachers design more teaching focuses for the performance of the piece in the classroom, because the time of a lesson is limited, and students feel that the background knowledge is boring and boring, and they just make some markings for the music in the sheet music, and the teachers neglect the explanation of the cultural background of guzheng works, and the students just learn the knowledge and skills (Lang, 2024).

At present, the planning of music teaching hardware facilities in public schools is not comprehensive enough. Most of the schools have only two music classrooms, one for chorus and the other for dance, and there are no specialized rehearsal halls or recital halls for instrumental music. The existing hardware facilities can only satisfy the basic curriculum teaching. There are few guzhengs in schools for teaching, few teachers and many students, so the number of guzheng instruments can't meet the needs of each student to fully experience learning, and for this status quo the module lessons can only be taken in batches and time slots, and sometimes can only be combined with the multimedia teaching for centralized listening and appreciation, and this teaching status quo greatly reduces the learning efficiency (Wang, 2022).

Most middle school students are still interested in guzheng lessons. Some of the students who participate in the Guzheng module lessons do so out of their own love, on the one hand, it may also be due to the requirements of their parents, who want students to master a musical instrument playing skills, and on the other hand, it is the cultivation requirements of the school, which makes it necessary for all students to master a specialty hobby and improve their comprehensive qualities outside of the cultural lessons. Students who expressly dislike the guzheng module class, their reasons include that the musical style of the guzheng is not in line with their own favorite music style, and that they prefer pop music to traditional music such as the guzheng. They preferred pop music to traditional music such as guzheng. They also felt that the school had too few guzheng instruments and they were unable to practice their guzheng skills adequately. There are also students who are not satisfied with their

guzheng teachers and think that the teachers are not fixed and change frequently, and their teaching level is different, so the students can't adapt well to the teaching style and way of different teachers (Shen, 2023).

## **Guzheng Exercise Book**

Guzheng practice books usually arrange the repertoire and exercises in an order from easy to difficult, from basic to advanced, providing a clear and systematic learning path for learners. This helps learners to gradually master the fundamentals and techniques of guzheng playing and steadily improve their playing level. For each practice piece, the exercise book also provides background introduction and pattern analysis to help learners understand the meaning of the piece and the requirements of playing it more deeply (Qiao & Zhu, 2023).

The guzheng practice book contains a rich and varied repertoire of both traditional classics and modern compositions. This helps learners to broaden their musical horizons and enrich their playing experience. In addition to basic repertoire exercises, the practice books may also contain rhythmic exercises, scale exercises, arpeggio exercises and other forms of practice materials. These exercises help learners to improve their performance skills in all aspects. The repertoire and exercises in an exercise book are often interesting and challenging, and can stimulate the learner's interest and motivation. When the learner succeeds in mastering a piece of music or solving a difficult problem, he or she will get a great sense of achievement and satisfaction.

Guzheng exercise books usually arrange the repertoire and exercises in the order from easy to difficult and from basic to advanced, providing teachers with a clear and systematic teaching program. This helps teachers to scientifically and rationally arrange the teaching content and progress according to the actual situation of the students. The exercise books contain detailed explanations of various techniques and difficulties, providing teachers with professional guidance. Teachers can make use of these explanations to conduct targeted teaching in the classroom and help students better understand and master guzheng playing skills.



Guzheng practice books contain a rich variety of repertoire, both traditional classical repertoire and modern creative repertoire. This provides teachers with rich teaching resources, which can be flexibly selected according to students' interests and needs, and stimulate students' interest and motivation in learning. In addition to basic repertoire exercises, exercise books may also contain rhythmic exercises, scale exercises, arpeggio exercises and other forms of practice materials. These forms of exercises help teachers to train students' performance skills comprehensively and improve their overall performance ability. The repertoire and exercises in the exercise books usually have clear teaching objectives, which help teachers to clarify the direction and focus of teaching and improve teaching efficiency. Teachers can directly utilize the contents of the exercise books for teaching without spending a lot of time on arranging their own repertoire and exercises, which saves time for lesson preparation and allows them to better devote themselves to classroom teaching.

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Guzheng exercise books usually contain repertoire and exercises for several levels, each with a corresponding level of difficulty and skill requirements. These repertoire and exercises provide clear assessment criteria for teaching evaluation. Teachers can assess students' mastery of guzheng playing skills, musical understanding, sense of rhythm and other aspects based

on their completion, thus gaining a comprehensive understanding of students' learning status. Through the students' progress in completing the various chapters and repertoire in the exercise book, teachers can have a clear understanding of the students' learning progress and speed. This helps teachers make timely adjustments to the teaching program to ensure that students are able to follow the intended learning path. Once students have completed the repertoire and exercises in the workbook, teachers can assess their learning outcomes by listening to them play, reviewing their practice notes, and so on. This helps the teacher to identify the student's strengths and weaknesses and provide targeted guidance for subsequent instruction.

**Concept of exercise book:** Guzheng practice books should contain a series of repertoire arranged according to a gradient of difficulty, technique exercises, rhythmic training, scales arpeggios and other basic exercises, as well as possible additional background introduction to the repertoire, playing hints, and analysis of techniques. These exercises are designed to help learners systematically improve their guzheng playing skills and deepen their understanding and feeling of guzheng music.

The design of guzheng practice books often follows the scientific law of guzheng teaching and students' learning characteristics, focusing on the combination of basic and advanced, and the unity of theory and practice. Through repeated practice of the repertoire and techniques in the exercise books, learners can gradually master the basic skills of guzheng playing, and improve finger dexterity, coordination and musical expression. In addition, guzheng practice books are flexible and optional. Teachers can choose suitable practice repertoire and difficulty according to students' actual situation and learning needs, and make personalized teaching plans. Students can also choose their own practice contents and practice in a targeted way according to their own interests and progress (Mei, 2023).

The arrangement of the exercise book should follow the principle of from easy to difficult, from shallow to deep, to ensure that students can gradually master the basic and advanced skills of guzheng playing. Each practice session should be closely connected to form a complete system, so that students can gradually improve their playing level in continuous practice. It

should be based on scientific music education theory to ensure the accuracy and effectiveness of the practice contents. At the same time, students' physiological and psychological development should be taken into account, and the time and intensity of practice should be rationally arranged. Sheet music and fingering symbols should be written in strict accordance with industry norms to avoid causing confusion and misunderstanding among students.

**Process of exercise book:** Interviews are an important form of communication, and a wealth of information and insights can be gained through in-depth interaction with the person being interviewed. The following are detailed steps and tips on how to conduct an interview: 1. Define the purpose and topic of the interview: Determine the purpose of the interview and the problem areas you want to understand. Design an outline of the interview, listing the key issues and topics to be discussed. 2. Understand the interviewee: Gather as much information as possible about the interviewee, including his or her background, experience, and area of specialization. Analyzing the interviewee's interests and possible concerns in order to better guide the topic during the interview. 3. Choose the appropriate time and place for the interview: Consult with the interviewee to determine the specific time and place of the interview to ensure that both parties can participate conveniently. Considering the privacy and quietness of the interview, choose an appropriate environment for the interview.

Organize and analyze interview transcripts: Organize and analyze interview transcripts to extract key information and insights. Categorize, summarize and conclude interviews as needed. Write a detailed interview report based on the interview transcripts and analysis. The report should include the purpose of the interview, process, findings and recommendations.

Gathering materials: collect resources such as all kinds of guzheng teaching materials, music scores and practice pieces, filter and organize them. Developing framework: according to the goal and orientation of the exercise book, develop a detailed framework and catalog. Prepare contents: Prepare specific exercise contents and instructions according to the requirements of the framework and catalog. Pay attention to maintain the coherence and logic of the content. Proofreading and review: After completing the first draft, carefully

proofread and review the work to ensure the accuracy and standardization of the exercise book. Publishing and Distribution: After review and approval, the exercise book can be published and distributed for the use of all guzheng learners.

## New Knowledges



**Figure 1:** Diagram Show the Current Status of Guzheng Teaching in Junior High Schools and the Guzheng Exercise Book.

## Conclusions

The rising demand for guzheng instruction amid a renewed interest in traditional Chinese music. Although the guzheng training market is expanding, its integration into public school curriculums remains limited, often lacking sufficient teaching experience and resources. Effective guzheng education in schools is essential for preserving traditional music, but current instruction heavily relies on oral teaching methods and is hampered by limited facilities, multimedia tools, and guzheng instruments. The article emphasizes the need for reform in school music education to prioritize traditional music over the prevalent focus on pop music, which often fails to foster cultural appreciation. Students show varied interest in learning the guzheng, influenced by personal

preference, parental encouragement, or school requirements. Additionally, well-structured guzheng exercise books provide systematic learning resources, supporting skill progression from basic to advanced levels, which helps teachers guide students effectively while deepening students' understanding and appreciation of traditional music.

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