Tunes of Yore: New Popularization of the Guqin in 21st Century China

by

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Chapter One

Resurgence of the Guqin: Context and Background

The guqin,\(^1\) an ancient indigenous Chinese zither, has a history more than 3,000 years old (UNESCO, “Guqin and its Music”). Before the twentieth century, consumption of guqin music was considered a privilege only accessible to the elite.\(^2\) Since the mid-twentieth century, the guqin has been through numerous major changes. This revolution that the guqin has been through revived guqin music and brought it back into the general public’s attention from a scholar’s studio.

This thesis uses two contemporary sample guqin associations – Shenzhen Spring Breeze Guqin Association founded by a freelance guqin player Ms. Yao Liang, and Beijing Jun Tian Fang founded by a professional guqin maker Mr. Wang Peng – to address topics such as the tradition of guqin music aesthetics, the transmission of guqin music, changes of traditional guqin music practices, and contemporary guqin pedagogy. From an outsider’s perspective, one might ask questions as follows: what are the reasons and driving forces behind the revival of the guqin music? Has the guqin and its music changed? If so, what aspects of the guqin music have changed from its tradition? Do people still appreciate guqin music in the same way as our predecessors did? In this project, I try to offer reflections on the questions raised above and to illustrate the new popularization of the guqin in 21\textsuperscript{st} century China.

Just like any other parents in China, my parents have always had high expectations for me. They wanted me to be well rounded and music was one aspect of

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\(^1\) Pronounced as gǔ qín or gu-ch’în.
\(^2\) In most of the papers concerning the study of the guqin, a colloquial usage of the word that refers to “the elite” is “literati” and they will be used interchangeably in my thesis.
education that they insisted in me engaging. When I was five years old, my parents bought me a piano, found me a private lesson teacher, informed me about their decisions and off I went to my weekly piano lessons which proved not to be so pleasing. Having been immersed in a non-musical family and involuntarily studying the piano for almost six years, at the age of eleven, I finally had the courage to quit my miserable piano lessons. I had never been so sure that I was not a musical person and I was heavily opposed against any genres of classical music. However, almost at the same time I set myself free from the piano, I had an irresistible impulse to study the guqin, a not so well known ancient Chinese instrument. I could vaguely remember where I first heard about the guqin. In early 2000, the guqin has already become a popular element that was constantly being featured in martial arts television shows and movies. I told my parents how much I was enchanted by the guqin and how much I wanted to learn. They did not take my wish seriously at first, and were even a bit angry as I gave up the piano after six years of learning, not to mention the time and the money that they had invested in. I started to lecture my parents day and night about the rich history of the guqin, the elegant structure of the guqin, the importance and the beauty of guqin music that I learned by myself from the Internet. “I feel connected to it,” I said to my parents one day and finally they nodded and were willing to give it a try.

In 2003, the same year I started to look for a guqin teacher in Shenzhen, the city I was born and lived in for eighteen years before I came to the United States, the guqin was proclaimed to be the World Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). It
was big news in the field of the guqin but it did not make my journey of finding a guqin teacher any easier. By 2003, according to UNESCO, there were only less than one thousand guqin players and around fifty surviving guqin masters in China. Most of the active guqin players, professionals, and scholars were centered around Beijing or Shanghai, but definitely not Shenzhen, a young city that was only known for its modernity and infinite investment opportunities. In 2004, completely by chance and luck, my mother stumbled across a guqin album at a local bookstore and was told by the bookstore clerk that the guqin artist on the cover, Yao Liang, actually resided in Shenzhen. After several rounds of calls and interviews, I started my guqin-studying journey as a pupil of Yao’s at the age of twelve.

In addition to the recognition by the UNESCO in 2003, another remarkable event for the guqin was its appearance at the 2008 Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony. With an intention to showcase the essence of traditional Chinese cultures to the rest of the world, Zhang Yimou, the director of the ceremony, incorporated many symbolic Chinese art forms, such as traditional Chinese paintings, calligraphy, Chinese operas, martial arts, literature, and so on. The guqin was also displayed on the stage as a representative of traditional Chinese art forms. Chen Leiji, a contemporary guqin master now at the age of forty-eight played for the ceremony on a guqin crafted by Wang Peng. Not to draw any definitive causal relationships between the abovementioned two events and the later development of the guqin, but after being given the title “world intangible heritage” by the UNESCO and being intensely exposed to global audience, the guqin gradually regained some of the public

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3 Wang is one of the most prestigious contemporary guqin makers whose guqin manufacturing is considered the best by most of guqin professionals.
attention and the social status that it used to have. People were intrigued by this flat long-board instrument because of its unique sound, structure, and history. In conservatories, guqin students who used to find themselves not so welcome in the job market now have plenty of lucrative job opportunities through giving private guqin lessons and teaching at guqin associations. The need for qualified guqin teachers has been soaring since then (Personal Interview with Du, Summer 2014).

As a pillar consumer group in the guqin industry, accomplished businessmen, businesswomen, white-collar workers, and members of the middle-class who have been through radical social and economic changes and fighting for their materialistic needs for the past 30 years realized that it might finally be the right time to pull back from their work and invest some of their time in fulfilling their spiritual needs. Luckily, the guqin reentered the general public and regained its popularity at such a critical time when the middle-class was urgently searching for a channel through which they can release their emotion, anger, and tiredness. Meanwhile, functioning as a mental shelter to guqin community members, guqin music also serves to entertain the general public. People are willing to pay a large amount of money\(^4\) for a forty-minute class with a guqin professor from the conservatory.

Just like the beginners of any other musical instruments, most of guqin beginners do not play the guqin professionally. They usually do not spend too much time in practicing and playing, but they somehow want to own the best instruments, the most stylish tables made of the best wood,\(^5\) the best strings and the best of any other supplementary products. Such a high demand for high-quality guqin and its

\(^4\) The tuition varies but it is around 400 to 600 Chinese Yuan per class (around US$60 to 100).

\(^5\) The guqin is usually placed on a wooden table and there are special requirements regarding the height, width, length and the materials of the table so that the guqin can resonate well.
relevant products helps with the boom of the guqin making business. A concert-use guqin handcrafted by Wang Peng himself now costs around US$100,000, but for most of the guqin enthusiasts, money is not their primary concern and to have a guqin that is made by a famous craftsman is somehow a must (Personal Interview with Wang, Summer 2014). Some of them treat the guqin as a luxurious collection, or even a piece of valuable furniture that could make their living rooms glitter. As a matter of fact, the guqin has become a beloved object in the market of luxury auction, always sold at the price of rare art. In 2010, a guqin named “Song Shi Jian Yi” (Wonders between the Pine Trees and the Mountains) from the Northern Song Dynasty\(^6\) was auctioned with a record price of around US$220,70,254 at the China Guardian. In 2014, two modern guqins crafted by Wang were auctioned at the China Guardian with a combined price of US$951,900 (Wang, “Instrument of the sages”). From only one hundred guqin players in the 1950s to today’s inflated number of guqin aficionados, the guqin is indeed on its way of getting rid of its reputation of simply being an art object displayed in the museum.

The increasing popularity of guqin music also boosts the need of guqin teachers. Guqin associations where most of the guqin teachers are gathered and teach have been prospering ever since 2008. Among the countless guqin associations, two of them can be seen as representatives: Shenzhen Spring Breeze Guqin Association and Beijing Jun Tian Fang.

Jun Tian Fang is located in a suburb of Beijing and is originally Wang Peng’s guqin-making studio. The venue later became a multifunctional and sales-oriented cultural company that incorporates guqin manufacturing, guqin teaching, guqin

\(^6\) AD 960 to 1127.
performing, and guqin music promotion. Shenzhen Spring Breeze Guqin Association, on the other hand, was founded in 2009 by Yao Liang, a freelance guqin player, and is also the first guqin association in Shenzhen. It is a non-profit guqin association that is dedicated to gather guqin music fans and to promote guqin music. Although they both endeavor to promote guqin music, these two guqin associations have chosen completely different routes in practicing guqin music, which makes them perfect case study samples for my thesis as they can be seen as representatives of the types of guqin associations that exist in today’s China.

Almost all of the literature and academic essays written in Chinese regarding the guqin have concentrated on the following topics: the history of the guqin, the repertoires of the guqin, the development of the guqin’s tuning and notational system, and the evolvement of different schools of guqin playing. However, rarely has there been any research dedicated to the most recent social development of the guqin from an ethnomusicological perspective. In this thesis, I will use the above two guqin associations as my samples to conduct comparative studies in order to unfold the current social development of the guqin and to illustrate some of the intriguing characteristics in the new popularization trend of guqin music from the late 1980s to present time.

In this chapter, I will first briefly introduce the guqin and its history in a chronological order, and then move to an overview of the cultural and social background in China from the 1980s to 1990s. Following that, I will offer a discussion on the academic studies of the guqin in Mainland China from the late
1980s to the present. The last section of this chapter concerns the overall structure of my thesis.

**A Brief History of the Guqin**

The guqin, or qin,\(^7\) is an ancient Chinese seven-string plucked instrument with a history of around 3,000 years. By legend, it was believed that Shennong, Fuxi, and Shun\(^8\) invented the guqin. In ancient times, the guqin was mostly played and favored by scholars, literati, and emperors. It was tightly associated with the ancient Chinese philosophies, ideologies, and was used to serve as the doctrine of the society. Frequent mentions of the guqin can be found in various classic Chinese literature, such as *Book of Rites (Li Ji)*,\(^9\) where it says, “a gentleman never parts with his qin without good reasons,” and *Classic of Poetry (Shi Jing)*,\(^10\) where it says “I will play the qin to greet my confidant.”

The guqin is an intimate and quiet instrument. It has two sound boxes and is made by attaching two wooden boards, either paulouwnia or catalpa, together, thus creating a hollow resonating body. In early times, the guqin strings were made of silk. It was not until the 1970s that the silk strings were replaced with nylon to make the sound of the guqin more echoing and audible in a modern concert hall. The length of guqin varies but the standard length is three *chi* (around 33 cm) plus six *cun* (around 3.33 cm) plus five *fen* (around 10 cm) in traditional Chinese measurement.

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\(^7\) Both the “guqin” and the “qin” are commonly used in the study of this instrument. I will use them interchangeably in the latter part of my thesis.

\(^8\) Shennong, Fuxi, and Shun are three legendary rulers and sovereigns in ancient China around 5,000 years ago.

\(^9\) Published in 200 BC.

\(^10\) Published in 8\(^{th}\) to 7\(^{th}\) century BC.
approximately 125 cm in total, representing the 365 days in a year. On the surface of the guqin, thirteen dots indicating harmonics positions are carved and filled with pearls or Hawksbill sea turtle shells, representing the twelve months in a year plus a leap month (See Figure 1). The guqin has a range of four octaves, from C2 to D6 and is capable of three timbres: open strings, stopped strings, and harmonics. The open strings’ sounds stand for the sound from the ground; stopped strings, more often referred to as the sliding tones, stand for the sound of human beings; harmonics stand for the sound from heaven.

Figure 1: A guqin. 2014. Jun Tian Fang, Beijing. Weibo.com/Juntianfang Web. 28 January. 2015.

11 We can quibble about whether a guqin’s length was really intended to represent the 365 days in a year because in fact, according to the traditional Chinese lunar calendar, a year does not always have 365 days.
The guqin has become an important instrument for the Han people since the Zhou Dynasty. In the Spring and Autumn period and the Qin Dynasty, evidences of professional guqin players were discovered and legendary guqin masters such as Shikuang and Boya were from this period. The time of the Han Dynasty was probably the most crucial period for the development of the guqin because it was then that the guqin officially became the instrument of the state. The Emperors during the Han Dynasty recognized Confucianism as the essential guidelines in policy making and reigned the country by following the ideologies of Confucianism, among which was the music of the guqin. It was believed that Confucius who lived in the Spring and Autumn period was an excellent guqin player himself (Wu 1980).

Moving along to the Southern and Northern Dynasties, according to Wu and many other Chinese guqin scholars, the guqin was favored and played by people who had lower social status than the elite as an instrument to assuage their anger and dissatisfaction towards society. The guqin flourished in the Tang Dynasty. Cultural exchanges through the Silk Road had greatly influenced the guqin with music from the outside world, mostly Central Asia, in terms of guqin’s playing techniques whose improvements had given the guqin much more expressiveness. A large group of guqin musicians, professional players, and theorists emerged during the Tang Dynasty. The earliest guqin manuscript noted in Chinese characters, *Solitary Orchid* (*Youlan*) which was said to be composed by Confucius, also dated back to Tang

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12 The largest ethnic group in China.  
13 1046 BC - 256 BCE.  
14 771 BC to 476 BC.  
15 221 BC to 206 BC.  
16 206 BC to AD 220.  
17 AD 420 to 589.  
18 AD 618 to 907.
Dynasty and is now kept in Japan. *Jianzipu*, a guqin notation system using the abbreviated Chinese characters, was also developed during the Tang Dynasty (Wu 1980).

The study of the guqin was advanced noticeably in Song\(^{19}\) and Yuan\(^{20}\) Dynasties with the emergence of the masterpiece *Qinshi*, a history of the Qin published in 1084. *Qindao* (the “Way” of the qin), an ideology of the guqin music advocated by the guqin scholars based on Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism first appeared in the Ming Dynasty\(^{21}\) (Wu 1980).

The Qing Dynasty was the last era in the ancient Chinese history when the guqin flourished. Many famous guqin players appeared in the Qing Dynasty during which around sixty-five guqin handbooks were published. Starting from the late 19\(^{th}\) Century, the guqin gradually stepped back from the literati tradition and lost its popularity and social importance. There is no clear evidence showing why such a decline occurred in the late 19\(^{th}\) Century. In a survey conducted in 1950, it showed that there were only approximately one hundred people who could play the guqin. Beginning in the 1960s, conservatories in China started to offer degrees in guqin performance. It was not until the 60s that guqin music and related research slowly began to resume. In 2003, the guqin was proclaimed to be the World Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by the UNESCO (Wu 1980).

\(^{19}\) AD 960 to 1279.  
\(^{20}\) AD 1271–1368.  
\(^{21}\) AD 1368–1644.
China in the 1980s:
A Utopian Dream of the Coexistence of Modernization and Enlightenment

In order to answer questions such as how this new popularization of the guqin music emerges, what exactly this new wave of guqin music looks like, why there is a new popularization of the guqin music, how it is influencing people’s cultural life and what it does to our society, a basic understanding of the cultural and social background in China from the 1980s to 1990s is necessary.

Since the late 1970s, Mainland China has been through various radical social and economic changes due to Deng Xiaoping, the leader of China from 1978 to 1992, and his open door policy (Kau and Marsh 1993). China opened its market and started to intensely interact with the global market. The entire society and its people were inevitably overwhelmed.

Numerous cultural fevers went prevalent among Chinese intellectuals during the post-revolutionary period after the Cultural Revolution which lasted from 1966 to 1976. Intellectuals, writers, poets, artists, and musicians were actively and desperately searching for the roots of Chinese tradition that have survived for centuries but were severely compromised during the Cultural Revolution. They wanted to protect and revive the local and ethnic minority cultures and traditions (Wu 2005). In addition to the root-searching movement, fevers about modernization, enlightenment, knowledge, and methodologies were ubiquitous in Mainland China. The term “Cultural Discussion” (Wen Hua Tao Lun) was thus coined for such debates over what route China should take as it came to a new epoch. People had high hopes for a more prosperous future and intellectuals considered themselves as the “think tank of the
new era” (Wang 1996). They planned ahead and focused mostly on the future instead of the present, which characterized the discourse of Chinese modernity of the 1980s as profoundly “utopian” (Wang 1996). Cooperation between the intellectuals and the government had been ongoing throughout the entire 1980s; the relationship between them, however, was somewhat antagonistic.

The Cultural Discussion started in 1981 with numerous conferences and seminars held in academic and research institutes. Most of the themes of the conferences were centered around the comparative study of Chinese and Western cultures, the study of the conflicts between tradition and modernity, the relationship between Modernization and traditional Chinese Culture, the continuity of traditional Chinese culture, the relationship between Confucianism and modernization, the link between economic reform and cultural reform and so on. In 1985, a conference about outlining research plans for cultural studies for each participating city was held in Shenzhen, one of China’s special economic zones. The research agenda and topics were assigned according to geography and cultural specialties. For example, scholars from Xi’an would be focusing on the Han-Tang culture research. Scholars from Beijing and Shanghai would be focusing on theoretical and methodological topics (i.e. comparative studies of Chinese and Western cultures). In May 1986, another similar conference was held in Hang Zhou and the questions being raised and discussed this time were somehow more inward as the vocabularies used such as typology, structure, and function were more abstract and concerned mostly macro-issues. A new debate

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22 The capital of the Shanxi Province, Northwestern China. Xi’an was an ancient capital of China in the Han and Tang Dynasties.
23 Beijing and Shanghai serve as the political and economic centers of China, respectively.
24 The capital of Zhejiang Province, Eastern China.
surfaced during this period was an “embarrassing” one according to Wang (1996), and that is the debate over the comparison between the Cultural Discussion and the May Fourth Movement in 1919.

Several themes of the 1980s’ Cultural Discussion overlapped with the ones of the May Fourth Movement: a shortsighted search for modernity and anti-traditionalism. Some people argued that although similar themes were touched upon, the contemporary Cultural Discussion analyzed the theoretical problems from a higher level. Other people believed that there was a significant difference between the two discussions as the contemporary one originated from a self-examination of the cultural conflicts between the past and the present whereas the one that had happened seventy years ago was caused by wars and national crises.

Such self-criticism was reckoned to develop from the initial mania but was unfortunately terminated due to political intervention. In the late 1986, the government announced a slogan “Learning from Lei Feng the Revolutionary Model” for propaganda purposes and put lots of works including newspapers, essays, and film productions under strict censorship. The culture fever was not reignited until the summer of 1988, symbolized by the controversial TV documentary Heshang (Yellow River Elegy). The film questioned and criticized traditional Chinese culture and delivered a negative portrait of it. It also expressed China’s strong desire for Western culture. For the first time, Chinese intellectuals found themselves and their utopian discourses finally in line with the government’s blueprint of modernization. Nevertheless, “Heshang was doomed to defeat its own purpose…” and “the discourse that the cultural elite constructed laboriously between 1985 and 1986 lost much of its

25 Here the tradition mainly stands for the Han tradition.
critical edge and fell into the hands of interested parties as an ideological instrument for power struggle” (Wang 1996). The TV documentary was later harshly condemned by the Party.

The 1980s gave rise to a ten-year paradoxical cultural discussion. The discussion was inevitable as the society at the time was going through radical socioeconomic changes but it gradually became a metaphysical discourse that was after all, “a modernity on paper, not in reality” (Wang 1996).

**China in the 1990s: The Dawn of Prosperity Concealed with Inner Turbulence**

According to Xudong Zhang, a professor of East Asian studies and comparative literatures at New York University, and author of the book *Postsocialism and Cultural Politics* (2008) in which he dissects China in the last decade of the twentieth century, the social and cultural development of China in its 1990s spanned twelve years, from 1989 to 2001.

Most of the manifestations of both the mass culture\(^{26}\) and the high culture\(^{27}\) in the 1990s were derived from the 1980s. Themes from the 1980s such as modernization, enlightenment, and the “Open Door policy,” still permeated the 90s with an even more dramatic disclosure.

The Tiananmen Square crackdown on June 4th, 1989 initiated a new phase in the contemporary Chinese history, which was a tragic and painful start. In 1992, Deng Xiaoping’s southern tour to Shenzhen strengthened and deepened the socioeconomic reforms that he first proposed in 1978. In 1993, Beijing lost its bid to host the 2000

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\(^{26}\) Here the mass culture refers to the popular culture favored by the general public.

\(^{27}\) An intellectual culture favored by scholars.
Summer Olympic games and the incident undoubtedly left the entire nation with deep disappointment. In 1996, five coauthors who were freelance writers published the famous yet controversial book *China Can Say No* as a naïve response to the “American Imperialism,” an abreaction derived from losing the bid to host the 2000 Olympics and prematurely expecting too much enthusiastic welcome and embrace from the outside world. The publication of the book was deemed to be an indication of the nationalism in the 1990s (Zhang 2008).

In 1997, Hong Kong returned to the Mainland after being colonized by the British for ninety-nine years. Then it was followed by the return of Macao, a Portuguese colony, in 1999, which ended modern China’s colonial history. Mainland China got through the 1997 Asian financial crisis smoothly and in December 2001, China finally joined the World Trade Organization, which was a grand finale of China’s twentieth century.

Meanwhile, Chinese economy was still interacting and integrating actively with the global market. In main cities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen, western culture influences were ubiquitous. Mass culture, or consumer culture, became the prevailing culture (Zhang 2008).

In the 1990s, in addition to the problematic relationship between the mass and the high culture, the relationship between the mass culture and the official propaganda was also not an easy one (Barme 1999). After the June 4th tragedy, the central government restarted their promotion of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, which forced the field of culture and art to undergo an arduous period of time.
The propaganda was marked with strict ideological control and the standards announced were considered to be “hard lines” (Barme 1999). Nonetheless, the Party was at the same time paradoxically encouraging the prosperity and diversity of culture. Such a phenomena was described as a cultural dysfunction and labeled as “grey” by Barme (1999). The coexistence of the abovementioned mass culture and the official promotional movement was proved to be an uneasy and contradictory one. The government and the population sometimes even have unexpectedly different interpretations regarding the same films, TV shows or songs. The dialogue and the freedom among different forms of culture was thus seriously disturbed due to the government’s manipulation (Barme 1999).

As China gradually transformed from an economy that was under complete central government’s control, to an open economy, inevitable changes and reconfigurations were happening every minute in every facet of China. Uneven development and social polarization emerged as a huge price paid for the fast economic growth. Admitting China’s accomplishment, one cannot neglect the fact that social contradictions were continuously being intensified and society’s imbalance and polarization had put China in an awkward position globally.

As China entered a new phase and became a crucial actor in the international arena, traditional Chinese art forms did not go out of favor and were insulated against the strong impact of mass culture, which was greatly influenced by the culture from the West, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. It is true that traditional Chinese art forms were not the mainstream of popular culture, but they were still favored and used by film directors, musicians, and painters who managed to intertwine traditional Chinese art
elements and new technology in an organic way. The guqin, an instrument that used to be only favored and played by the elite and scholars, has gradually entered the general public’s daily life through mass media since the 1980s. In the 1980s and 90s, many popular martial arts movies and television shows, such as Demi-Gods and Semi-Devils (Tian Long Ba Bu), The Legend of the Condor Heroes (She Diao Ying Xiong Zhuan), and Kong Fu Hustle (Gong Fu), all depicted the guqin as a mysterious instrument and a symbolism of the elite Chinese culture. As the guqin was making its return to the public’s attention with the help of mass media, new technology, and popular culture, academic study on the subject of the guqin was gradually resuming as well.

**Research on the Guqin in Mainland China since the Late 1980s**

Using the *People’s Music* as the main source of my literature review, I conducted a general search with the keyword “guqin” and 102 articles showed up dating from 1980s to 2014. Most of the research covered similar topics such as the history of the guqin, the problems and challenges that the guqin faces, musical analysis of specific guqin pieces, and the development of different schools of guqin playing. For example, In Zhang Hongwei’s article (1995), the author proposes that in order to further develop the guqin in a healthy way, guqin professionals should compose more modern pieces for the guqin while continue to discover more ancient repertoires. Zhang also suggests that professionals should also value the importance of the improvement of the physical structure of the guqin, and should work on

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28 A Chinese music academic journal run by the Chinese Musicians Association. Its first issue was published in 1950.
increasing the volume of the sound of the guqin so that the instrument can adapt to contemporary audiences. In Feng Guangyu’s article (1995), the author summarizes the work that guqin scholars have accomplished since the 1950s into four categories: the discovery of more ancient guqin repertoires, the establishment of guqin major in conservatories, new guqin compositions, and regular academic conferences.

Gong Yi, a guqin master now in his seventies, discusses the importance of setting an appropriate social position for guqin music. That is, guqin music should reflect people’s life and emotions. Gong insists that guqin music should not be trapped in scholars’ study rooms; instead, it should adapt to mass culture so that it can have more room to survive and develop (Gong 2001). In another paper, Gong also argued for the importance of having guqin competitions, a controversial topic that is still under debate today. Gong advocates that guqin competitions along with guqin performance certificate examinations should be seen and utilized as a way to promote guqin music (Gong 2005). In Wu Zhao’s article (2005), the author harshly criticizes some of the modern guqin practice promoted by guqin professionals from the conservatories. Wu argues that since the guqin is a heritage, the priority for any guqin players and scholars is to keep the guqin’s tradition, music, structure, and its function in the society as original and untouched as possible. He thinks that although it is musicians’ freedom to compose modern pieces for the guqin, it would be a huge mistake if guqin professionals see it as a right direction in which the guqin music should develop. Wu believes that Western music ideology is influencing and gradually replacing the essence of guqin music and traditional guqin music aesthetics (Wu 2005).
Some more micro-based and detailed studies concerning the development of specific schools of guqin playing have also appeared in *People’s Music* when it comes to the 21st century. For instance, authors Zhu Wei (2011), Wang Xiaolong & Wen Yifei (2014) all address the importance of modernizing guqin music by composing new pieces for the guqin, experimenting with different performing styles, and promoting guqin music by holding summer camps, founding guqin associations, cooperating with local governments, and incubating young guqin players. More specifically, through their case study on the school of Yushan, the authors discuss how the guqin has influenced the development of the city of Changshu, the hometown of the guqin where the school of Yushan was originated, and helped with the revitalization of Changshu’s tourism industry and economy.

Zhu, and Wang and Wen’s perspectives take into account the inter-influence of the current social development and the development of the guqin. Their analyses incorporated concrete cases, based on original fieldwork, addressed up-to-date phenomenon, and paid attention to the current development of guqin music from the society’s perspective.

**Thesis structure**

My thesis is structured as follows: the present chapter provides an overview of the guqin’s history, the cultural and social background in China from the 1980s to the 1990s, and the research in the field of the guqin conducted from the 1980s. Chapter two offers a comparative study with two case study samples, Jun Tian Fang and

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29 The school of Yushan is a school (style) of guqin playing which can be traced back to Ming Dynasty.
Shenzhen Spring Breeze Guqin Association. A comparison will be made between these two associations from aspects such as the life experience of the founders, histories of the associations, business structures, business philosophies and their current development. Chapter three explains the essence of guqin music. I will illustrate the art of the guqin by talking about its aesthetics, notational system, transmission of guqin music, and finally the changes in guqin music’s traditions. Chapter four concerns the similarities and the differences between two sample guqin associations from the perspectives of their repertoire choices in commercial recordings and teaching. I will analyze changes in the taste of guqin music and how Western music has influenced contemporary guqin compositions through detailed reviews of the albums released by these two sample guqin associations. Chapter five, the concluding chapter, offers reflections on the questions I raised in chapter one.
Chapter Two

**Two Sides of the Same Coin: A Comparison between Two Sample Guqin Associations**

As discussed in the previous chapter, beginning in the late 1980s, the guqin gradually returns to the general public with the help of mass media and popular culture. Guqin professionals, who have been striving to revive and promote guqin music since the time it began to decline, now finally see the possibility of their dream coming true, and it really is: a new popularization of the guqin is happening in today’s China.

Although the Chinese government and the United Nations are trying their best to protect the guqin by listing guqin music as a protected human intangible heritage, guqin professionals realize that without actual practice of the instrument, guqin music will not go further but only be displayed in museums as a rare and endangered art. Therefore, with a clear intention to put guqin music into practice, guqin professionals, including guqin players, scholars, and guqin makers, began to establish guqin associations in the early 21st century, which have been thriving since then. It is worth emphasizing that among today’s countless guqin associations, a significant number of them are not founded by guqin professionals. Some of the owners of guqin associations have only studied the guqin for months, but still publicize themselves as guqin masters, or claim that they study the guqin with a guqin master. The reasons behind this growth in guqin business are not difficult to unfold, as there is the high demand for guqin music and guqin teachers. Profits from the guqin industry compared to other forms of cultural business are high.
In this chapter, I will introduce two professional guqin associations, Shenzhen Spring Breeze Guqin Association, and Beijing Jun Tian Fang, as they are different in terms of business goals yet still represent most guqin associations that exist in China nowadays. While bearing the same mission to promote and practice guqin music, the ultimate goal of each business polarizes these two guqin associations: Shenzhen Spring Breeze Guqin Association is a non-profit organization that is dedicated to gathering guqin music lovers and promoting guqin music. Beijing Jun Tian Fang is a profits-oriented cultural company whose business mainly concerns guqin making. I will conduct a comparison between these two associations from aspects such as the history of their founders and the associations, their business structures, philosophies, current development, and finally their marketing strategies.

Yao Liang and Shenzhen Spring Breeze Guqin Association

Yao Liang: a Practical Idealist and a Guqin Music Practitioner

Figure 2: The founder of Shenzhen Spring Breeze Guqin Association – Yao Liang. 2009. Shenzhen. szchunfeng.cn. Web. 9 Apr. 2015.
Yao Liang was born into a musical family in Su Zhou, a historical city located in Eastern China. Yao’s parents are both traditional Chinese music and opera aficionados and her father plays several Chinese instruments such as the Pipa, the Erhu and the Yangqin\(^1\) as hobbies. Immersing in various traditional Chinese art forms from childhood, Yao has been developing her interests and sensibility in music since early childhood and has a solid Chinese music background.

Yao studied the Pipa, a four-string pear-shaped traditional Chinese plucked instrument imported from Persia during the Tang dynasty when she was at the age of twelve. At the age of eighteen, Yao sprained the little finger of her right hand. This injury eventually forced her to stop playing the Pipa. In the same year, Yao’s father ran into an acquaintance of his who later told him that Gong Yi, a well-known guqin master from Shanghai was looking for a guqin student in Su Zhou.\(^2\) As a traditional Chinese music lover himself, Yao’s father wanted his daughter to seize this rare chance to study the guqin with one of the most respected guqin players in China, and the fact that the guqin playing does not require the use of the little finger realized the possibility of studying the guqin even further. Through this mutual friend and after auditions, Yao started to take private guqin lessons with Gong Yi at the age of eighteen.

In an interview that I had with her in the summer of 2014, Yao narrated her experience of studying the guqin with Gong Yi, which according to her, is a lifelong journey. In the guqin community, it is always a privilege to become a pupil of Gong’s,

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1. The Yangqin is a Chinese hammered dulcimer originated from Persia.
2. Su Zhou is adjacent to the city of Shanghai.
and it can make guqin students jealous that Yao, who did not go to a conservatory, began her guqin study with Gong as a private student. Yao cherished this opportunity and devoted most of her time to study and play the guqin. She would take a one-way bus from Su Zhou to Shanghai twice a month, which would usually take around four hours on the road, and stay in Shanghai for eight to ten days to take private guqin lessons with Gong.

In the late 80s, Shenzhen as a young city that was under quick development attracted Yao because she imagined the people there would be more open-minded and energetic, an atmosphere that she was looking for but was unfortunately missing in Su Zhou. Yao coincidently heard about a cultural company that involved foreign investment that was looking for a professional guqin player, an employment that could finally allow Yao to make a living with her beloved guqin music. Without any hesitation, Yao Liang left Su Zhou where she worked as an assembly-line worker in a local watch factory and went to Shenzhen, hoping that one day she could shine on a bigger stage and gain a wider group of audience for her music (Personal Interview with Yao, summer 2014).

The Once “Cultural Desert City”

Shenzhen, a major city in the Guangdong Province in Southern China, is situated right next to Hong Kong and has a population of approximately 15 million. The city has a history of only thirty-five years and is one of China’s special economic zones. Before 1979, Shenzhen was only a small village, and the mainstay of its economy was the fishery industry. In 1979, the former leader of China Deng
Xiaoping enacted the open door policy in order to allow for more frequent and intimate communications between China and the outside world. Shenzhen was the city where the reform began. Due to the Open Door Policy, various foreign investments and popular Western cultures flooded into Mainland China, which greatly influenced Shenzhen (Shenzhen Government Online, “Overview”).

At the beginning of the economic and political reform in the 1980s, Shenzhen was known as a small city with no history but unlimited amount of investment opportunities. Shenzhen’s economic development sprinted at an unimaginable speed, which was later referred to as the “Shenzhen speed.” People came to Shenzhen with dreams of making a fortune, and the average age of Shenzhen citizens at that time was only a little over twenty. People did not have many options in leisure activities at that time, and according to Zhang Tiejun, the general secretary of the Shenzhen Spring Breeze Guqin Association who also came to Shenzhen in the 1980s, “the only place where you could have some fun after work was the Culture Plaza where some karaoke events were occasionally held” (Personal Interview with Zhang, Summer 2014).

With the help of the central government’s full support in the city’s economic development and the “Shenzhen Speed,” in 2013, the gross domestic product (GDP) of Shenzhen was ranked fourth among the other 659 cities in China with a total economic output of 237 million U.S. dollars, only after Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou (Shenzhen Government Online, “Overview”). Aside from its economic success, Shenzhen, however, has long been and still is considered a “cultural desert
city” because it has no history and culture\(^3\) compared to other cities in China (Wang 2005, 67). It is a city for entrepreneurs, politicians, financing professionals, businessmen, and the young who dream to be change makers, but not so much an ideal city for poets, artists or musicians. As Shenzhen gradually reaches a stable social and economic status, those once young and ambitious pioneers who helped build the city from scratch are now looking for ways to fulfill their spiritual needs. The local government sensed the change and began to work on its cultural development. City libraries, district libraries, museums, art galleries, and city concert halls burgeoned. Countless non-profit cultural promotion events started to appear in Shenzhen and most of them were supported and sponsored by the Shenzhen government.

**The Birth of Shenzhen Spring Breeze Guqin Association**

Working as a musician who helped the company to promote the firm’s cultural product did not satisfy Yao, and was not helping her in realizing her dream to promote guqin music. Yao decided to try to offer guqin private lessons in Shenzhen. But she was being too optimistic and her journey of promoting guqin music proved to be an arduous one. Yao could barely find any students at first and very few performance opportunities were available because most people simply had never heard about the guqin. The situation did not take a favorable turn until 1996 when Yao was invited by the *Shenzhen Special Zone Daily* to hold a lecture on the guqin and guqin music. The lecture was surprisingly phenomenal according to Yao. “A lot

\(^3\) The culture here mainly refers to the intellectual culture (i.e. high culture).
of audience members who were at my lecture came to me and asked to study the guqin with me immediately after the lecture. Some of them have been studying the guqin with me since then” (Personal Interview with Yao, Summer 2014). In 2000, Shenzhen Arts School started to offer degrees in guqin performance and Yao taught there as a guest guqin teacher. Yao gradually gathered more and more students and many loyal fans of her music. As an established musician and a prizewinner guqin professional, Yao has built a reputation for being the guqin ambassador in the city of Shenzhen and a respected guqin teacher with her marvelous music talent and strict teaching methods.

In 2005, two years after guqin being officially recognized by the UNESCO, Yao and a handful of her close students had the idea of founding the very first guqin association in Shenzhen. When asked about her motivation to found a guqin association, Yao told me that although guqin music was officially recognized and protected by the Chinese government and the UN, she was worried that the guqin would still eventually become a rare art only displayed in museums if no one promotes it truly as an instrument whose main function is to produce touching music. “I hope that I could gather guqin music lovers and starting from there, we could save and promote guqin music and even some other endangered traditional Chinese art forms. I would love to pass down what I have learned from my teacher to the younger generation,” she said in an interview I conducted with her in late August 2014.

In terms of any concerns that Yao had at the time that she started to execute her plan on founding a guqin association, she said that there were honestly not that
many because of her 20 years\textsuperscript{4} experience in teaching, playing, and promoting guqin music. Yao said that she “felt matured and experienced enough to do this.” One minor concern did occur to her during the initial preparation period, and that is whether the association could “make [its] members feel at home and help them learn something valuable,” which to Yao, were the purpose and main philosophy of the association. “Now it looks like we’ve succeeded in doing that!” Yao said in a phone conversation I had with her in early January 2015.

The social and cultural environment in Shenzhen in recent years have changed radically and become the perfect soil for Yao Liang to plant her dream and to let it grow vibrantly. As mentioned before, Shenzhen government has been endeavoring to get rid of the name of being a “cultural desert city” by encouraging and supporting non-profit organizations whose main focus is to promote traditional Chinese cultures. The guqin, an instrument that not only carries traditional Chinese music, but also Chinese history, philosophy, and literature, seems to be a perfect project for a city like Shenzhen to promote and build as part of the city’s brand.

Expecting that the government would support the foundation of a guqin association, Yao Liang initiated her first attempt in 2005. However, the procedure was exceptionally strenuous and the result turned out to be unsatisfying. Insufficient financial sources to support the association’s daily managerial costs and venue rent, lack of government endorsement, and tedious administrative procedures obstructed the foundation of the association. No one would sponsor the $5,000 registration fee, and Yao had to pay for the amount herself from her very small savings. According to

\textsuperscript{4} Although Yao’s guqin teaching in Shenzhen did not take place until 1996, she already started teaching when she was in Su Zhou.
the local law, any non-profit organization has to have one supervising unit (*Zhu Guan Dan Wei*) as the organization’s supervisor otherwise the organization would not be officially recognized by the government. Contrary to her wish, the Bureau of Arts declined Yao’s request and decided not to support the project of founding a guqin association. “Even now, I’m still very angry and confused by their decisions,” the general secretary Mr. Zhang told me in an interview I had with him in the summer of 2014. After four years of nonstop applying, in 2009, Shenzhen Literature and Arts Association (*Wen Lian*) finally accepted Yao’s materials and agreed to serve as the guqin association’s supervising unit.

The biggest problem standing ahead of Yao now was, however, to find an affordable venue (Personal Interview with Yao, Summer 2014). Without government’s financial support, it was almost impossible to rent a place without costing too much in Shenzhen where the price of residential buildings belongs to the “first tier,” only a little after Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou⁵ (*Bloomberg Business*, “China Home Prices Fall in Fewer Cities”). After knowing about the situation, a student of Yao’s, Mr. Chen who is a successful businessman and a guqin music enthusiast decided to give Yao his own two-storey tea house as a venue for the guqin association. Until now, the Shenzhen government still refuses to provide any financial support to the association. During the interview I had with Yao in January 2015, she told me the following anecdote:

In Fujian Province [Southeastern China], their local government constructed a business zone specifically for the development of the guqin and let the most representative guqin players and their own guqin associations start business there for free. In Nanjing [the capital of Jiangsu Province in Eastern China], the local government has an

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⁵ The capital of Guangdong Province, Southern China.
annual fund of around 300,000 Yuan [around US$50,000] to support the local development of guqin music. Same for Hangzhou [the capital of Zhejiang Province in Eastern China], they give one million Yuan [around US$160,000]! I think the government of Shenzhen is wealthier than those governments but they don’t value the art of guqin enough…I am very sad and disappointed…But I will keep trying [to persuade the local government to give the association financial support and to help them understand the importance of the guqin] (Personal Interview with Yao, January 2015).

In September 2009, Shenzhen Spring Breeze Guqin Association\(^6\) was officially registered and founded with the support from Yao’s friends and business partners, and the Shenzhen Literature and Arts Association.

A Dissection of Shenzhen Spring Breeze Guqin Association

By December 2014, SSGA has forty members and all of them are Yao’s students. Association members’ ages vary from five to sixty years old. Yao herself has around 500 pupils in total with an age ranges from five to sixty years old as well.

Yao has always wanted the SSGA to be a non-profit organization while most of the other guqin associations in China today focus on holding guqin summer camps, offering short-term guqin lessons, and guqin dealing. Yao and her business partners believe that only a non-profit guqin association can achieve the goal of promoting guqin music, gathering guqin music lovers, and creating a pure guqin community where music matters the most as it will contain no extraneousness and profit conflicts.

The honorary president of the SSGA Gong Yi, a guqin master and Yao’s teacher, set three goals which were later treated as guidelines for the management of the association: first, to hold guqin related activities on a regular basis; second, to reach

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\(^6\) Shenzhen Spring Breeze Guqin Association will be abbreviated as SSGA in the latter part of this chapter.
solidarity among members; third, to keep scouting for talents (Personal Interview with Yao, Summer 2014). Yao has always been keeping the above three requirements from her teacher in mind and spared no efforts to put them into practice. On the SSGA’s official website, three guidelines for the current and future members are observably listed: “First, the association’s responsibility is to promote the art of the guqin and guqin music. Second, the association is young but we are professional. We pay extreme attention to music details in order to deliver the most authentic guqin music to audiences. Third, we are a family. Members come to the SSGA not only to learn and study guqin music, but to harvest friendships as well ” (Shenzhen Sping Breeze, “Overview”).

SSGA recently released its 2014 annual report, and expectations and planning for 2015 on its official website. According to the report and multiple interviews I conducted with Yao in person and over the phone, Yao’s main expectation for the SSGA in 2015 is to improve association members’ playing techniques and to work on their musicality. “Music always comes first,” Yao said. When it comes to concrete plans to achieve the association’s resolution, Yao and her team are planning to hold two tiny concerts in March and April, one for her students under the age of fifteen and another one for her adult students. They believe that students can thus learn from each other, discuss and exchange thoughts and ideas that they have about guqin playing. As for the SSGA’s long-term goals, Yao, a devout Buddhist herself, said she prefers to “live in the moment and leave the rest to destiny (Personal Interview with Yao, Summer 2014). But in general, she hopes that she and her students can have more opportunities to perform and promote guqin music both in and outside of
Shenzhen (as a matter of fact, Yao and two of her students are invited to play in Taiwan for a culture exchange program in February 2015) and to have more financial support from the society and the government.

As a non-profit organization, SSGA’s main source of funding comes from sponsors from society and corporations. Very few funds came from the local government. Some of Yao’s students donate large amounts of money and provide activity venues for the SSGA to cover its daily expenses. For example, in late November 2014, SSGA held a concert with several guzheng\(^7\) players from Taiwan in Shenzhen. A local businessman, who is also a member of the SSGA, sponsored the entire concert and covered all the costs, including publicizing, venue rent, traveling expenses and accommodations. In addition, each year, every member of the association is required to pay around US$80 as annual fees to the association. The money will only be used in guqin related activities. All of the annual fees spent are under strict supervision and transaction details are all open to the public.

The SSGA realizes the power of the Internet and has been working intensely on their online exposures. The association has an official website, a Sina Weibo\(^8\) account and an invite-only Wechat group chat.\(^9\) Yao also has a personal Sina Weibo account. By March 30, 2015, Yao has 1,044 followers on Sina Weibo.

\(^{7}\) A 21-string traditional Chinese zither.  
\(^{8}\) A popular Chinese micro-blogging website.  
\(^{9}\) A Chinese text and voice messaging phone application developed by Tencent China.
Wang Peng and Beijing Jun Tian Fang

Wang Peng: from a Guqin Maker to an Entrepreneur

Born in 1963, Wang Peng graduated from Shenyang \(^{10}\) Conservatory of Music in 1990 with a degree in guqin making, a study that was - and probably still is - one of the most unpopular majors. After graduation, Wang was assigned to Beijing Traditional Instrument Manufacturing factory and worked there as a musical instrument craftsman for ten years. With little salary, crude living conditions, and an unpromising future, it was a difficult ten years for Wang and his family. Wang said in a television interview that during the time when he was working for the factory, he did not even touch the guqin because there was simply no market for it. He had to use offcuts from his daily work to make woodcarvings in his spare time and barely made a living. Eleven years later in 2001, Wang reunited with his guqin-making teacher

\(^{10}\) Shenyang is the capital of Liaoniang Province, Northeastern China.
who inspired and encouraged him not to give up such an almost-lost crafting art as guqin making. “I have never thought about giving up on guqin. I’ve been waiting for a chance,” Wang said in an interview he did with China Central Television (Wang, Interview, “Caifu Gushi”). He later decided to pick up his guqin making skills again, and crafted his first handmade guqin with an avant-garde body structure that was different from and improved upon the traditional ones. In the same year, Wang founded his guqin-making studio: Jun Tian Fang.

*Jun Tian*, in traditional Chinese literatures, means the center of the sky or the emperor. *Fang* is a general term that refers to a workshop or a studio. I first heard about Wang and his guqin brand in 2004 when I started my first guqin private lesson with my teacher Yao Liang. I was desperately in need of my own instrument so that I could practice at home, and Yao recommended Wang’s guqin among her guqin collections. I remembered Yao showed me this guqin handcrafted by Wang and I was already amazed by its sole appearance even before my teacher played it for me to demonstrate its timbre. It was made of paulownia wood covered with shiny black lacquer, and the overall body of the instrument had a nice flow, which is a condition one rarely sees on a handmade wooden instrument. The sound of that guqin was also exceptionally satisfying: the harmonics were extremely clear and crisp, the open notes were thick, solid and had a long resonating time, and finally its sliding tones were smooth, echoing, and touching. It was more like a piece of art than just an instrument, and from today’s guqin professionals’ perspectives, Wang’s guqin certainly stands for the highest level in modern guqin making. I immediately fell in love with it and bought it for a price of US$1,600. The price of a guqin handcrafted by Wang himself
today (See Figure 4), by the way, ranges from US$100,000 to US$320,000 (Personal Interview with Wang, Summer 2014).

![Guqin (crafted by Wang Peng) display room, Jun Tian Fang.](image)

Based on and developed from his original studio, Wang founded Jun Tian Fang Co., Ltd. in 2009 as a cultural company with its headquarter in Daxing district, Beijing (See Figure 5). The company specializes in guqin manufacturing, teaching, and promoting guqin music in addition to other traditional Chinese art forms such as calligraphy, tea ceremony and *Tai Chi*. It also manufactures products that are derived from the guqin, such as guqin-music inspired furniture, guqin handbooks, guqin-shaped table décor and accessories, and even traditional Chinese style clothing designed for guqin performing.

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11 Daxing district is in the southern suburbs of the city of Beijing.
12 A type of Chinese martial art.
After thirteen years of development, Jun Tian Fang has become a leading company in guqin business, especially famous for its excellent guqin making technology, which largely improves the guqin’s timbre and makes the guqin sound louder without compromising its musical subtlety. Since its foundation in 2001, Jun Tian Fang has gradually been recognized as the best guqin manufacturing brand in China, and Wang himself is also considered the best guqin maker today. Almost at the same time, when Jun Tian Fang was established, the company was named to be the Beijing Intangible Culture Heritage representative company by the Beijing government. In 2010, Jun Tian Fang was named to be the Demonstration Base of the Culture Industry by the China Ministry of Culture. From only a small guqin making studio in the suburbs of Beijing, Jun Tian Fang has made an impressive leap. With its business focus being on guqin making and relevant technology development and
research, Jun Tian Fang is also actively expanding its business area into guqin education, guqin concert planning, guqin-music handbooks publishing, consulting services for museums, and so on.

A Dissection of Beijing Jun Tian Fang

Jun Tian Fang Co., Ltd. has six departments. The first and foremost is its Products Department, which is the backbone of the company. It is markedly stated on its official website that Jun Tian Fang is a technology-oriented guqin-making research base. In an interview I conducted with the Chief Public Relations Officer of Jun Tian Fang Ms. Du Juan in Beijing in late August 2014, she confirmed the above statement. The essence of Jun Tian Fang is guqin making. It has over one hundred workers on the assembly line and the company refused to release any information regarding the quantity of its annual guqin production. The company invests a decent amount of time and funds in guqin-making related research and experiments, and is committed to elevating the quality and the sound of the modern guqin to a brand-new level from aspects such as guqin-making raw materials (i.e. wood), strings, and the overall structure of resonating sound box of the guqin. The research team in Jun Tian Fang has ten people in total and they are all Wang’s pupils. The Products Department is also in charge of developing guqin essentials such as performance-use wooden tables and chairs.

The second division, Guqin Culture Publicizing Department is mainly responsible for developing and marketing guqin-derived products such as guqin-shaped décor and accessories, furniture, traditional Chinese style clothing, tea
ceremony equipment, incenses appreciating equipment and so on. The third division is the Jun Tian Guqin Association. It was established for guqin educational purposes and is responsible for organizing and holding guqin summer camps. The other three departments are the Performance Department, Marketing Department and finally the New Media Department, which manages Jun Tian Fang’s social media pages and online exposures, including its official webpage, Sina Weibo, and Wechat moments updates.

Jun Tian Fang has a Taobao store and business partnerships with fifteen other guqin associations in eight different cities in China. The business relationships between Jun Tian Fang and its business partners are mainly centered around guqin products sales. In addition to guqin dealership, Jun Tian Fang and its partnered guqin associations are also involved in education programs. As Ms. Du pointed out, those guqin associations have their own independent teaching systems and guqin teachers, and the cooperation on guqin teaching is only based on requests (Personal Interview with Du, Summer 2014). That is, if any of its partner guqin associations need support to train their guqin teachers or need any guidelines in guqin teaching, Jun Tian Fang would send its team to that specific association, most likely in another city, and conduct a short-term training program. “But essentially speaking, our cooperation is about product sales,” Du told me (Personal Interview with Du, Summer 2014).

When I visited Jun Tian Fang in Beijing in late August 2014, I ran into a group of students who had come from all over China to Beijing to attend Jun Tian Fang’s summer camp program. The students were all in their 20s and 30s. I was later told that all students were from Jun Tian Fang’s partner guqin associations. They

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13 A major e-commerce online shopping site operated by Alibaba Group.
came to the headquarters of Jun Tian Fang in Beijing to receive a short-term yet comprehensive training program in guqin playing, teaching, and even other forms of traditional Chinese art such as calligraphy, tea ceremony and Tai Chi. The purpose of this program was to ensure that all of Jun Tian Fang’s partners and dealers could represent the best side of guqin music. All of the expenses for this summer program were covered by Jun Tian Fang (Personal Interview with Du, Summer 2014).

Jun Tian Yun He (See Figure 6), a professional guqin performance troupe affiliated with Jun Tian Fang, is operated by the Performance Department and is mainly composed of Jun Tian Fang’s own guqin artists; Wang is also part of the group. They define Jun Tian Yun He as a “flowing performance group” as they do not perform regularly. They hold concerts in different cities in China whenever the members of the group, Wang and several other guqin artists in-residence, “feel inspired and have new guqin compositions or arrangements to present to the audiences” (Personal Interview with Du, Summer 2014). The group also invites artists and musicians from the outside, and collaborates with them in duets and trios. Collaborative compositions performed by Jun Tian Yun He will be introduced in details in chapter four.

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14 Yun He, originally refers to a mountain where guqin craftsman can find rare wood for guqin making. It is later used as a general term for any music associations.
Although named as the Beijing Intangible Culture Heritage representative company, Jun Tian Fang receives very limited funding from the local government. The main source of funds and revenues still come from the company’s guqin products sales, which are used to cover daily administrative expenses. “We digest costs by ourselves,” Du told me (Personal Interview with Du, Summer 2014).

Wang believes in the importance and the power of interests and the education from society. He thinks that education from society could complement education from the system and fill the gaps that education from the system creates for the younger generation. He designs and plans Jun Tian Fang to be a multi-dimensional artistic space where people can feel the close connections between music and our lives.

Jun Tian Fang sees itself as not only a guqin manufacturer, but also an integrated guqin organization that combines multiple facets of traditional Chinese culture and art forms. Wang expects his team and the company not only to impart guqin music, but also to help people gain a more comprehensive understanding of
traditional Chinese culture in general. “I try to connect history, within which the focus of mine is the guqin, with contemporary culture, and I certainly do not want my students to simply copy the ancients,” Wang said (Personal Interview with Wang, Summer 2014).

Jun Tian Fang has its own Publicizing and Marketing departments to provide all-around services to the company’s online exposures. It has an official webpage, an official verified Sina Weibo account, and also an official Wechat account where updates of the company are posted regularly. By March 30, 2015, Jun Tian Fang’s Sina Weibo account has 19,890 followers.

The Convergence of Two Guqin Associations

Yao Liang, a guqin player and teacher, left her hometown in her early 20s to a “cultural desert city” Shenzhen with a dream of promoting guqin music. Wang Peng, a guqin craftsman and entrepreneur, picked up again his guqin-making craft in his late 30s to realize his dream of revitalizing the flagging guqin-making business. Both beginning in early 2000, Yao and Wang, one in Shenzhen, the south of China, and one in Beijing, the north of China, sensed the emergence of the new popularization of the guqin, and seized the chance to promote guqin music with their own specialties and strengths.

Yao took the route of teaching the guqin and establishing a non-profit guqin association, Shenzhen Spring Breeze Guqin Association, to gather guqin music learners, and to provide them with a pure musical environment where they can share a musical experience with each other. Wang chose to work on his craft, and
successfully developed his original guqin-making studio into a leading cultural company, Jun Tian Fang, which focuses on guqin crafting and the promotion of guqin music. These two guqin associations represent all the types of guqin organizations existed in today’s China. Admittedly, Shenzhen Spring Breeze Guqin Association and Jun Tian Fang are completely different in terms of their business goals – one is non-profit and the other is profit-oriented – they both bear the same mission, and that is to promote and practice guqin music.

From the first five to six students to today’s more than 500 students, Yao has helped the guqin thrive in the once “cultural desert city,” and built a cultural brand for the city of Shenzhen. From a frustrated conservatory student to a leading guqin-crafting artist, Wang has elevated the standards of guqin making, and fascinated people with unlimited musical potentials that a modern guqin is capable of. It goes without saying that in addition to have the same dream of promoting guqin music, Yao and Wang also share the same high professionalism and pure passion in the guqin, which are essential in supporting them to achieve what they have accomplished today.
Chapter Three

An Everlasting Search For a *Zhiyin*:\(^1\)
The “Way” of the Guqin and the Transmission of Guqin Music

The guqin and its music are unique in the history of Chinese music in various ways, the foremost among which is its “long and uninterrupted” history and “unbroken continuity” of its own tradition that only few instruments can claim (Yung 1998, 11). The history of the instrument alone has attracted numerous fans of the guqin and is believed to be the driving force of its return to popularity today.

The guqin’s special characteristics can be grouped into two parts. The first is the aesthetics of guqin music, or more accurately the “Way” of the Qin. It sets specific rules for guqin players regarding the “right” way to play the music and the “right” way to interpret the music. It also provides guidelines to audiences regarding the “right” way to receive the music. The “Way” is prescriptive as it intends to teach guqin musicians how to play a piece and to guide the audience, if any, on appreciating a piece. From ancient times to today, guqin musicians have been following the “Way” of the Qin strictly and very few have ever questioned or challenged it. The “Way” of the Qin can be further decomposed into two categories: the first concerns the performance practice of the guqin and the second concerns its musical characteristics. During the guqin’s three thousands years of history, its music was never ever intended for an audience other than the performer himself. A guqin player would only perform for his own enjoyment and cultivation. The listeners, if

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\(^1\) Between *zhiyin*, “there is a sound of unsayable and unmentionable music. You understand the music of my heart without words...we share this wordless understanding...everything was left unsayable and yet understandable” (Schwarz, Speech, April 2013).
any, were only limited to a handful of the player’s confidants (zhiyin). Guqin players do not make a living off of their music. They do not look for acceptance or approval for their music. Another critical aspect of the guqin that shaped its aesthetic framework is its musical characteristics. Neither the players nor the listeners would pay undue attention to guqin music itself (that is, the melody, harmony, rhythm, structure, technique and etc.) but instead, they would focus on the literary content of a specific piece or the mood evoked by the music. The second special characteristic of the guqin is its special notational system,\(^2\) which is still widely and commonly used in today’s guqin music transmission process\(^3\) and performance practices.

The essence of guqin music is closely related to and greatly influenced by Chinese history, philosophy, politics and religion. It represents the elite culture\(^4\) and reflects three main Chinese philosophies: Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. What attracts people to guqin music is not even the music itself, but its “Way” and its special notational system, which together make the guqin mysterious, difficult to access and unique. As discussed in the last chapter, Shenzhen Spring Breeze Guqin Association and Beijing Jun Tian Fang are different in many ways such as their main goals of business, business structure, operations and philosophies. However, one should not forget that both organizations, along with many other contemporary guqin associations in China, share the same ultimate mission, which is to promote the art of the guqin whose essence serves as the foundation on which both of the associations are based.

\(^2\) The notational system of the guqin will be discussed in detail in this chapter.
\(^3\) A music transmission process refers to a way in which a particular kind of music is being transmitted and passed down from generation to generation, people to people.
\(^4\) Here the elite culture, as opposed to mass or popular culture, refers to the culture that is enjoyed by scholars rather than the general public.
In this chapter, I illustrate the cornerstone of the two sample guqin associations by outlining and decomposing the abovementioned two special characteristics of guqin music. I will first visit the “Way” of the guqin to explain the goal of its performance practice and the musical characteristics of the instrument. I will then analyze the contemporary transmission process of guqin music by examining its notational system and the \emph{dапу} \textsuperscript{5} process. I will discuss the changes in guqin tradition in the last section of this chapter.

\textbf{Qindao: the “Way” of the Qin}

With its long, intertwined history and deep connections with ancient China’s politics, society, arts and philosophy, guqin music has a massive musical archive with approximately 3,000 pieces dating from the 15\textsuperscript{th} to 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries. The number of extant compositions comes from national systematic research conducted in the 1950s by looking over more than 150 guqin handbooks. Whereas that number may seem impressive, among those 3000 pieces, a large portion of them either share the same titles or are actually the same pieces with minor variations and different titles. For example, the famous piece “Three Variations at the Yang Pass” \textit{(Yang Guan San Die)} has thirty-three different versions spanning from 1491 to 1922 which were later grouped into seven schools of playing according to their noticeable yet minor differences in terms of notes, phrasing, rhythms and playing styles. If one does not count those repeated or similar compositions, the number of guqin pieces comes down to around 300; among them, only less then one hundred pieces are still actively

\textsuperscript{5} A process that deciphers the original tablature notation into a playable form.
played on stage in today’s performances. Selected Pieces for the Guqin Performing Examinations published by People’s Music Publishing House (Renmin yinyue) in 2009 contains eighty-two guqin pieces in which simple etudes arranged from traditional folk tunes that are usually not performed on stage are also included. Audiences will only hear roughly thirty guqin pieces, less than half of the eighty-two pieces published, performed either on stage or in commercial recordings after eliminating etudes.

Despite the limited number of traditional guqin pieces that have been performed over and over again for more than thirty years since the late 1980s does not seem to bore the modern audience in China. Instrumentalists will commonly play the most classic compositions in concerts, as those pieces conform to the market’s demands and the taste of the public, but it is unusual for an instrument to have only a handful of pieces to offer to an audience, as is the case with the guqin. The audience seldom asks for new guqin pieces and most professional players are also satisfied with the current guqin repertoires. If one looks through all of the guqin commercial recordings produced within the last thirty years, only the most popular pieces (no more than ten) will be found and one would be unlikely to discover a new piece of guqin music being recorded. Here, the “new” does not only refer to contemporary guqin compositions but also includes any newly discovered ancient pieces or pieces that are less often heard. In an interview I conducted with Du Dapeng in late August 2014, Jun Tian Fang’s in-house guqin artist who graduated from the Shenyang Conservatory of Music, he told me that a guqin major student would spend his or her entire four years at a conservatory working on only eight large-scale pieces, or one
Zhao Wenyi, a guqin major student now pursuing her Master’s degree in guqin performance at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music and Zhuo Ran, a guqin student who graduated from the Central Conservatory of Music, both confirmed the above (Personal Interview with Zhuo, March 2015). Even as graduate students, Zhao and her classmates were never encouraged or asked to discover “new” guqin pieces (Personal Interview with Zhao, Summer 2014).

Most contemporary guqin music aficionados still religiously follow the traditional guqin music aesthetics and see the guqin as an epitome of Chinese culture, philosophy and history, not simply as an instrument. What they are looking for in a guqin piece is its spiritual meanings and its mysterious power to connect audiences with the cosmos. They love the guqin music because of its unique sound, human singing-like sliding tones, crystal harmonics, and most importantly, its ability to evoke different emotions. In other words, the music itself does not matter as long as the desired atmosphere is created.

In modern Mainland China, especially after the large influx of foreign culture in the early 1980s, popular music from Hong Kong, Taiwan and the United States dominated the market, and the only “old” music that still had a spot in the market was Western classical music. Traditional Chinese music, no matter folk tunes or the once literati music, had almost completely lost its attraction to any Chinese audience; only a handful of loyal old-fashioned audiences and scholars still favored the traditional Chinese music. The fear of the extinction of such traditional art forms was becoming real and challenged the scholars, beginning in the early 1980s. According to Henochowicz (2009), a situation in which traditions are challenged by popular culture

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6 The pieces assigned vary from student to student.
also occurred in pre-imperial China\textsuperscript{7} when \textit{yayue} (ceremonial music) was not as popular as entertainment music (i.e. folk tunes), which was seen as the “improper” kind. Scholars and social elites thus began to try to protect and revive “proper” music with the help of \textit{Qindao} – the “Way” of the Qin.

\textit{Huyue}, a kind of music that was thought to be barbarian had gradually permeated traditional “proper” court music since the Han dynasty from Northwestern China and central Asia. During the Tang dynasty, economic prosperity, frequent international communications and trade activities through the Silk Road brought in various foreign cultures, including music from central Asia. Non-Chinese instruments such as the Erhu and the Pipa made their debut in China in the Tang dynasty and quickly became popular among the general public. Not only was popular folk music affected by “imported” foreign cultures, but also proper court music incorporated many central Asian tunes. Conservative scholars feared that this wide spread of “improper” music would overpower the long-established guqin music aesthetics and “falsely” lead musicians to “release uncontrolled and excessive emotion while playing” (Henochowicz 2009, 377). They used the “Way” of the Qin with the “mythologized Chineseness” of the guqin to diminish foreign music’s influence and advocate for the philosophy of Confucius, which urged musicians to play with free rhythms and simple melodies instead of central Asian “improper” tunes that contained complex rhythmic patterns, chromatic scales and various ornamentations (Henochowicz 2009).

According to the “Way” of the Qin, a guqin player should never intend to play for an audience; he plays for his own self-cultivation, and to communicate with

\textsuperscript{7} A period that is before the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC).
ancient sages and cosmos, to realize his own emotion, and to share music with his close friends. Regarding the desired musical characteristics, the music itself is never the focus in a guqin musician’s playing. He has full freedom in interpreting a piece in whatever way he feels; he can choose his own rhythm, tempo and even change notes, as long as the intended mood is created.

The guqin has been idealized and utilized as a means to civilize people by the Han scholars since its birth. Henochowicz said, “Listening to the qin requires the same artistry as does playing it” (378). It was believed that if both the player and the listener can deliver and receive music correctly, a requirement as ambiguous as it could be, they can communicate with the cosmos and their ancient sages. From the Han to the Sui dynasty, this was one of the main purposes of the guqin music. The “Way” of the Qin purposely excludes the audience and asks guqin players to repress their feelings and emotion outflow, and realize emotion inwardly instead. Relatedly, most of the titles and themes of guqin music are about natural scenes, personal emotion and reflections. In other words, the fact that guqin musicians deliberately distanced themselves from the audience and music itself leads to a sole intention of their playing: to pursue their own spiritual needs through music.

The “Way” of the Qin also instructs guqin players to shun excessive musical ornamentations which were thought to trap the music (Henochowicz 2009). Literati value guqin music on a metaphysical level more than the melody itself. Tao Yuanming, a famous poet and guqin musician from the Six Dynasties Period played a guqin that had no strings at all. As an old proverb states: “the ultimate sound is the

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8 Han people, the largest ethnic group in China. 
9 206 BC to AD 619. 
10 AD 220 – AD 589.
one that has no sound;” the musical expression is thus reduced to the mere idea of music. In order to achieve that ultimate goal, many guqin players, especially those from the Song dynasty, set strict rules and standards concerning a proper setting, both physical and mental, for guqin playing. The pursuit of such minimalist styles caused guqin players often look down upon folk musicians or popular musicians who chose to entertain an audience and pay more attention to music itself. To guqin musicians, the music itself is always secondary to their spiritual pursuit. Musicians who focused on the performance were harshly criticized and disfavored by intellectual audiences.

One of the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove Ruan Ji from the Wei dynasty used to comment on the differences between music and melodies:

> Birds and beasts know sound but do not know melodic lines, and the commoner know melodic lines but do not know music. It is only gentleman who is able to know music.

He and the other literati looked down upon popular music and folk tunes, which in their minds were considered shallow and excessive in emotions; guqin music was on the other hand “subtle and restrained.” A dominant idea back in the ancient time was that music would fail to serve its purpose if it moves people because it would thus become merely entertaining (Henochowicz 2009).

The “Way” of the Qin gives special care to the overall emotion of a piece, or “mood” of a piece. It is the priority of a guqin player to faithfully deliver the mood desired by the composer (Gulik 1969). Each guqin piece has a literary preface attached to it, and the preface functions as a programmatic note that provides the player with guidance regarding the interpretation of a specific composition. As
mentioned before, music itself is secondary to the “mood” of a piece and melody only works as a medium through which the emotion of the composer and the player is transmitted. The programmatic meaning of a piece does not change but the interpretation of it does. Musicians have a large amount of freedom in interpreting a piece in any way they feel is most appropriate and are most comfortable with. The guqin musicians have always been open to different versions of a single piece so long as the version evokes the desired mood (Yung 1987). The primary importance of evoking the “mood” of a piece and the focus on the literary content rather than the music itself are closely related to the guqin’s notation system, which deliberately does not focus on rhythms, meters and phrasings.\footnote{One can even argue that there is simply no need for rhythms for guqin music which is extremely meditative and personal. However the lack of rhythm poses a difficult question for contemporary guqin musicians and scholars who try to revive guqin music because those ancient guqin pieces that have been reconstructed by contemporary guqin scholars might sound completely different from what they actually sound in the first place.} This will be discussed later in this chapter.

Although literati such as Ji Kang and Ruan Ji believed that music should “[have] neither joy nor sorrow,” they still agreed that the music could evoke emotion and serve as a channel through which the emotion is carefully released. The only concern, however, was centered around the “hyper-sensibility and a theatrical exhibition of such sentiments” (Kouwenhoven 2001, 41). They criticized the practices of “shallow” artistic playing and self-centered emotional expression. It is true that the guqin and its music function as a symbol of “intellectual sophistication, mental restraint and emotional balance,” and elites such as Ji Kang thought highly of themselves and believed that music transcended the mundane human psychology. They also believed that both the players and the listeners should learn to control their
emotion in order to gain the “true” essence of music. As spiritual and mysterious as it could be, guqin music captures many secular topics such as sceneries, love, tragedies, wars, loneliness and so on, and music serves as a bridge to connect the secular with the spiritual world. The principle of the “Way” of the Qin still holds, and that is to evoke the spiritual enlightenment and self-improvement of both the player and the player’s close friends who understand his music. As a “sympathetic resonator” and a musical tool, the guqin serves to help a guqin musician communicate with cosmic powers and explore the philosophies of the world. A special favor of musical silence is a good example of the abovementioned purport. Musical silence is common in guqin music and it refers to the intention for the lingering but almost inaudible sliding tones, or tones only audible under an extremely intimate environment and to the player himself only. Players often make arbitrary and personal choices in deciding the time value of a sliding tone or the length of silent moments between two phrases (Kouwenhoven 2001).

The guqin players’ intention for the “mood” of a musical piece is also manifested in many traditional Chinese literatures, poetries and especially paintings. Guqin players are usually portrayed to be playing music on mountaintops covered with brume, or in a grove of bamboos and pines, sitting cross-legged with the guqin on his lap. However, in reality, it is almost impossible to play the guqin in such a poetic and idealized position depicted in most of the traditional Chinese visual arts. There is also no solid evidence showing that ancient guqin players would actually play outdoors as portrayed. On the contrary, handbooks and guqin manuals published in the Tang dynasty have explicit instructions recommending that guqin players
should neither expose their instrument to severe outdoor environments nor play on a rainy or thunderous day. Acoustically, the guqin is best played indoors because of its quiet tones, especially at a time when the strings were still made of silk and no amplifying equipment yet existed. Depiction of the guqin in a natural setting is more likely to be symbolic of the philosophy of guqin music. Nevertheless, the guqin and nature have had a long history, and they are deeply connected. The relationship between them goes “far beyond assuming a romantic posture in a bamboo grove” (Kouwenhoven 2001, 45). Many aspects of the guqin, including its size, structure, shape, hand movements, finger postures, are all related to and inspired by nature. For instance, many guqin pieces incorporate special playing techniques to imitate sounds from nature such as flowing water, birds’ singing and flapping, women’s tearing, etc. Some guqin scholars even dedicated an entire book to draw desired hand and finger postures that imitate the shape of plants or animals such as “the leopard catching its prey,” “a crane calling in the shade,” “a lonely duck looking for the flock,” and “the fish beating its tail” (Kouwenhoven 2001, 46).

**Jian Zi Pu: the Guqin’s Special Notational System**

The “Way” of the Qin, especially its heavy emphasis on the “mood” of a piece is explicitly shown in guqin’s notational system, *jianzi*: a Chinese character-based tablature notation that literally means the “reduced” notation. Scholars see the Tang dynasty as a “renaissance period” for guqin music. With the influx of foreign music and the threat of the guqin being replaced, musicians were forced to reexamine the guqin, further develop its playing techniques, extend its preexistent repertoires and
most significantly to accelerate the efficiency of the transmission of guqin music (Henochowicz 2009). The guqin tablature notational system, jianzipu, was believed to be invented in the Southern Song dynasty\textsuperscript{12} and became widely used beginning in the Tang dynasty.

The guqin music’s unique notation system, which heavily depends on the use of Chinese characters, always seems to be intimidating, complex and confusing at first glance, especially to beginners who cannot read Chinese characters. The earliest guqin notation system (i.e. the notational system before the jianzipu) was called wenzipu, which dated back to the Warring States Period\textsuperscript{13} around 2235 years ago. The wenzipu literally means the “written notation.” The composer would use plain texts to describe fingerings, playing techniques, hand positions and dynamics. One could imagine how tedious and inefficient the wenzipu could be as it would take a whole sentence and even several paragraphs to denote only one note. Unfortunately, only one guqin piece written in wenzipu survived and it is the Solitary Orchid (You Lan), which was believed to be composed by Confucius. Its original manuscript is now preserved in the Tokyo National Museum. The piece is roughly ten minutes long depending on the performer, and the scores of the piece were first denoted in the Tang dynasty and its size is as thick as a book, 224 lines and 4954 characters in total. The passing down of guqin music before the existence of the wenzipu was unknown but most likely, a student would learn a piece by playing along with his teacher face-to-face and phrase-by-phrase. The invention of the jianzipu largely improved the efficiency of the transmission process of guqin music. The jianzipu is still made of

\textsuperscript{12} 1127-1279
\textsuperscript{13} Before 221 BC.
characters but only takes strokes from different characters and combines them together into one new character that cannot be pronounced. This reduced character contains all the information needed for fingerings, playing techniques and hand positions, but it does not contain any information regarding rhythms and dynamics. The jianzipu is still widely used in today’s guqin playing but accompanied by either the number notation or the staff notation as an indication for rhythms. For example, a piece of guqin music will be first notated in either number or staff notation and a reduced character will be denoted under each note.

Although after the Tang dynasty, with the common use of jianzipu, the guqin music was recorded in a much more advanced and efficient way, the tablature notation still only marks hand positions, fingerings and playing techniques and rarely indicates rhythms or phrasings of a piece. There are some pros and cons regarding this notation system, and one of the most important advantages of this system is the fact that it gives a guqin player an enormous amount of rhythmical freedom in playing. This rhythmical freedom, which leads some guqin scholars and musicologists to categorize guqin music into a rhapsodic style, is actually a major and conscious feature in guqin tradition. Guqin musicians from the ancient time would play the same melody in different ways depending on their own interpretation of a piece or even the mood they were in when playing; the same piece would not sound exactly the same when it was repeated. It is worth reiterating that the tablature notation only serves as a guide to performers in order to help them achieve the ultimate goal, which is to evoke the “mood” of a guqin composition. The notation’s “non-specificity is crucial to this particular aspect of the ideology and the
performance practice of the guqin” (Yung 1987, 85). However it is important not to be misread as they have the complete freedom in reinventing the tradition without any restrictions and boundaries. As a matter of fact, guqin players’ different renditions would still follow some certain established rules and frameworks although they are allowed to reorganize and even reshape the piece based on their own understandings (Kouwenhoven 2001).

**The Process of Dapu**

Most of guqin repertoires are preserved in 150 handbooks with the earliest one dating back to the 15th century. Due to the nature of how guqin music was taught, that is the “oral and aural learning,” and the way it was notated, guqin musicians in the 20th century cannot simply sight-read “scores” from handbooks and play. The process of transforming tablature notations (i.e. the jianzipu) to modern playable scores is called *dapu* and it is an essential step that to be taken in order to bring guqin music to the present. *Dapu* is a new process of transmitting and preserving guqin music conducted by guqin scholars in the 20th century. It is deeply influenced by Western music theories because the process intentionally sets the tempo and dynamics to a guqin piece based on scholars’ own understanding of music. In addition, the process of *dapu* organizes a guqin piece into different phrases and sentences. *Dapu* is also a process of reinterpreting a guqin piece. As a result, it is possible that a reconstructed piece might sound completely different from its original version. The process of *dapu* is also extremely time-consuming and involves extensive preliminary research and
continuous revisions. Just as the old saying states: “Three months for a small piece and three years for a large piece.”

The preliminary step to tablature reading is to conduct research on the literary content of a piece in order to understand the desired “mood” of a piece which is usually indicated in the program notes that can be found in the preface of a piece. What follows are basically deciphering the tablature notations (that is, to figure out what notes are being described), correcting any notation mistakes, deciding phrasing and finally adding the player’s own interpretation and creation to this specific composition. The freedom to reinterpret the music and include the player’s own emotion and thoughts is guided by programmatic notes which summarize the literary content of a piece. The final work reflects the performer and his time’s musical style, aesthetics, and taste. Different performers with different social, cultural and geographical backgrounds would have completely different interpretations of the same piece of music, and might thus produce different versions of the same piece varying in aspects such as rhythm, phrasing, meter, length and dynamics. The differences could be considerable. This musical reconstruction strengthens the formation of different schools of guqin playing, which is in large caused by geographical differences and underdeveloped transportation system back in ancient times. Performers from different areas were heavily influenced by their local music styles and local dialects, which would in turn be manifested in the guqin pieces that they deciphered.

However, guqin players sometimes took the freedom allowed to them in reinterpretation far and would modify the parts that are already specified in the
original manuscripts such as certain fingerings, playing techniques, phrasings and etc. Cases like deleting and adding notes or sections, prolonging and shortening sentences, changing dynamics, and so on are ubiquitous in the process of *dapu*. Scholars from different schools of playing have been quibbling about the quality of such alterations. In my opinion, it is a matter of taste, as subjective as music. Yung (1987) uses the piece “The Melody of Guangling” (*Guang Ling San*) one of the most famous and technically challenging pieces in the guqin repertoire, to illustrate this issue.

Guangling is a small town in the Jiangsu Province\(^{14}\) and the piece is named after Guangling because of the melody’s popularity around the area. The piece is similar to the program music and tells a story that happened in the Warring States Period:\(^{15}\) Nie Zheng, a famous assassin from the Warring States Period, camouflaged himself as a guqin player and played in court for the King of Han with the intention to assassinate him to avenge his father. Nie eventually failed and committed a suicide afterwards. The piece is deemed to be the only violent piece in the entire guqin repertoire. Music-wise, this piece includes many uncommon playing techniques and a special tuning – both the first and the second string are tuned to C2 in order to deliver a strong sound effect – which is extremely descriptive of the changes in the emotions of Nie Zheng. The special tuning explicitly and straightforwardly conveys the intense and violent atmosphere, a way of expression that is contrary to the common guqin performance practice. The piece became extremely popular because of Ji Kang,\(^{16}\) a literati and one of the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove from the Wei dynasty who

\(^{14}\) Eastern China.
\(^{15}\) 475 - 221 BC.
\(^{16}\) AD 223 – AD 263.
played the *Melody of Guangling* on the execution spot before he was sentenced to death (Chinese Culture, “Guang Ling San”).

“The Melody of Guangling” has thirteen different versions with the first official publication dating back to 1425 and the latest one to 1931. Guan Pinghu (1897 - 1967), a long revered guqin master and a guqin scholar, conducted the *dapu* process of this grand piece based on the version published in 1425 (around 20 to 30 minutes long depending on the tempo). He did not delete any repeated sections and kept the overall structure of the piece untouched, but he changed many fingerings and “corrected” all the “weird” notes that are outside of the pentatonic scale and replaced them with notes that he thought would fit better (Yung 1987). Guan’s version became the most performed one although many modern guqin scholars have shown disagreements regarding his reinterpretations of the piece. Guan specified many ambiguous finger positions and changed multiple foreign notes (foreign to his ears) based on his own understanding and expectations of the piece. Nevertheless, some scholars have criticized Guan’s reinterpretation, especially his decision to omit non-pentatonic notes for being too arbitrary. Admittedly, as some scholars who try to justify Guan’s version said, the inclusion of chromatic notes may sound too exotic and even wrong to the audience who is used to more traditional and common guqin tunes. Yung (1987) claims that guqin players, scholars and audiences have low tolerance to the style that does not conform to their expectations and dominant aesthetics; thus guqin musicians such as Guan Pinghu make changes and reconstruct the musical contents of a piece to make it fit. Most of the activities of the *dapu* were conducted during the 1950s, early 60s and 80s (Yung 1987).
The rhythmic flexibility and flow feature of guqin music prompt a discussion of the interdependency of guqin music. That is, according to Yung (1987), the study of how different generations of guqin musicians, and how the past and the present can influence each other. It is natural for one to think that older generations or old traditions will inevitably influence the present ones, but can the present practice affect traditions? How can the present influence the past? Before answering the question, Yung (1987) proposes that one should first understand the difference between the actual past and the perceived past. The actual past is the history and part of it would remain unknown forever; the perceived past, however, could somehow be reinterpreted. A musical composition, especially guqin music’s notational form contains both: the jianzipu is the actual past as it preserves the music from the past; the process of dapu is an example of the present changing the past. When a contemporary guqin scholar deciphers the character-based tablature notation of a piece and brings the music back to a playable form (that is, the process of dapu), he or she infuses his or her own feelings into the music which reflects the present. In other words, playing the music from the past inevitably involves the process of reinterpretation, and thus influences the perceived past.

Due to the nature of its notation system and the way it is passed down, guqin music has always been reinterpreted, reconstructed and instilled with new and personal reflections. That is to say, the past is somehow constantly being changed and modified, and the present does not necessarily authentically represent the past. Practices of reinterpreting and reshaping guqin music follow the long tradition of the “Way” of guqin music. It loosens musical rules such as rhythms and dynamics that
are necessary and basic to most of Western classical music, but permits the freedom of reinterpreting music as long as the intended “mood” is achieved. I propose that the lack of the rhythm notation in the guqin music is not caused by the incompetence or ignorance of our predecessors, but more likely by the fact that there was simply no need for such a component which originated from Western music and does not belong to the tradition of guqin music at all.

**Changes of Traditional Guqin Music Practices**

Since the 20th Century, China has undergone radical economic, social and political changes which forced many traditional arts to change in order to adapt to the new environment. As a representative of one of the traditional art forms, the guqin music also went through various revolutions that raised many conflicts between traditional and contemporary aesthetics (Yung 1998).

The changes in traditional art forms were initiated in 1942 by Mao Zedong’s *Talks at the Yanan Forum on Literature and Art*, which set the “ideological framework within which Chinese music, and specifically Qin music has operated in recent decades” (Yung 1998, 16). The talk explicitly states that literature and art should serve the masses, that is, “workers, peasants, soldiers and the urban petty bourgeoisie” (Mao [1942] 1967, 12). Mao (1967) also suggests that the way to serve the masses is to find a unity and a balance between “the Spring Snow” (*Yangchun Baixue*)17 and the “Song of the Rustic Poor” (*Xiali Baren*). The guqin, probably the

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17 Here the “Spring Snow” is a metaphoric Chinese expression that stands for anything that is intellectual and difficult to access.
most distant and “Spring Snow” instrument had no choice but to change in order to survive.

Until the first half of the 20th Century, guqin players followed most of the rules regularized by the “Way” of the Qin. Beginning in the latter half of the 20th century, however, changes in the execution of the guqin music emerged. Musicians were bolder in terms of experimenting with new ways of playing guqin music. Ancient pieces were reinterpreted in a contemporary way that was not bound by certain ideological frameworks and were less restrained, aiming to please the public audience.

Changes in the traditional guqin practice are manifested in the following five aspects. First, guqin musicians replaced the traditional silk strings with metal strings in order increase the overall volume of the sound of the guqin. Nylon-covered metal strings can produce a louder sound and they also lengthen the resonating time when a string is plucked. The use of metal strings has made it possible for guqin players to perform on a larger stage and attract more attention from the audiences. Second, the social status of the guqin has completely changed. Major orchestras started to have guqin soloists in residence. The guqin has also been officially recognized as a major in conservatories that would hire prestigious guqin musicians as guqin professors or guqin music researchers. Third, some of the guqin music repertories were modified to satisfy the taste of the contemporary audience. For instance, “the Melody of Guangling” was shortened from twenty minutes to around seven minutes by deleting repeated and some of the development sections. Fourth, as discussed earlier, guqin players usually do not pay undue attention to playing techniques and the music itself
as long as the player’s intended emotion and the literary content of the piece are expressed. However for contemporary audiences, the literary content seems to be less interesting and instead, they are more attracted to the melodies and showy techniques. As a result, contemporary guqin musicians play the music with extra, sometimes even excessive care to techniques as a way to gain the audience’s attention. A more uniform music style is also being gradually formed. Finally, the aesthetics of guqin music, that is, the “Way” of the Qin has also changed in terms of guqin players’ performing styles. Guqin players nowadays feel “a need to externalize the emotional content in order to help the communication” so they exaggerate their facial expressions, hand and body movements so that they become noticeable to the mass audience (Yung 1998, 23). Such performance practices are considered particularly necessary when performing in a large concert hall (Yung 1998). The influence of Western music also can be easily found in the contemporary guqin recordings where one can hear guqin musicians playing the music in a more emotionally externalizing way by gradually accenting certain notes or changing tempos suddenly to reach a dramatic effect. Some older scholars disagreed with such an unconstrained way of performing, as it is drastically different from the traditional way of playing which asked the player to stay in a steady tempo throughout the entire piece. But they did not deny the fact that such changes have given the guqin more breadth and possibilities and have somehow revived the music of guqin and kept it from staying a “museum art.”

The cost of entering a larger stage and playing for the masses, however, is to compromise the guqin’s traditional intimacy and privacy. Much timbre richness and
musical nuances have been lost and the guqin has gradually become a means of entertainment instead of a tool with which the literati utilized to explore self-fulfillment and self-cultivation. The attempts to make such changes, according to Kouwenhoven (2001), were mostly due to the urgency of saving, promoting and popularizing the guqin.

Yung has explicitly expressed his concerns about the changes of the aesthetics of the guqin:

Qin music has stepped out of the privacy and intimacy of the scholar-gentleman’s study and climbed onto the stage of the public concert hall. In so doing, qin music has become like other kinds of music: its main function is to please a large, public audience... On the stage of a concert hall, he is judged by an audience – the workers, peasants, soldiers – who are, for historical reasons, relatively uninitiated in the music and its literary content (Yung 1998, 20).

As a guqin player myself, I have pure enjoyment when playing, and the purpose of performing to an audience, is to deliver the music, both the actual music itself and the “mood” of the piece, to the audience as accurately and personally as possible. For me, the whole process of performing and playing the guqin music outside the context of a scholar’s room, which seemingly sacrifices the privacy and intimacy, is to share and inspire. Music changes along with the changes in the society, history, philosophy, arts and so on; it changes unpredictably and quietly. To the contemporary guqin musicians whose main goal of playing has developed from self-cultivation to entertaining mass audiences, the idea of treating the guqin as a meditation tool instead of an instrument is probably not meaningful anymore (Kouwenhoven 2001). On the audience side, they are enchanted by the music of the guqin primarily because of its deep open strings, melancholy sliding tones, crystal
harmonics, rich repertoires, elegant construction and of course the long history it carries. It is difficult to ask all contemporary audiences to understand and appreciate the literary content of a guqin composition, as they are less knowledgeable than their earlier generations (Yung 1998). Literati from the ancient times projected not only images and literary stories, but also projected personal emotions, philosophies and certain ideology onto the guqin music. Such aesthetic practice is a matter of intellectual activity (Yung 1998). At the end of the day, the guqin is still a sounding instrument and it is still the music itself that should be the primary concern of modern guqin musicians and scholars.
Beginning in the late 20th century, Yao Liang, the founder of Shenzhen Spring Breeze Guqin Association, and Wang Peng, the founder of Beijing Jun Tian Fang, have been striving to revolutionize the guqin by composing new pieces for the guqin, discovering more ancient guqin compositions, experimenting with other instruments, improving guqin’s physical structure, exploring new guqin-making technology, and so on. In addition to these changes in traditional guqin practices, contemporary guqin’s performance styles, performance goals, and even the music itself have also changed in order to adjust to today’s social and cultural environment in China. Despite these changes of the traditional “Way” of the guqin, Yao and Wang, along with many other contemporary guqin players, still believe in and follow certain aesthetic rules set by the “Way,” such as to perform only for self-cultivation, and to strive to deliver the mood of a piece. The Chinese-character based tablature notational system is still widely used by every guqin player, regardless of the notational system’s limitation and incompetence in adapting to today’s performance needs, which require musicians to be able to quickly read a piece of music and play. Spring Breeze Guqin Association and Jun Tian Fang both treat the “Way” of the guqin as a foundation on which they are based.
Apart from the similarities and the differences in their business goals and structures,\(^1\) Spring Breeze Guqin Association and Jun Tian Fang are also different in many other facets of guqin music. In this chapter, I will explore the other similarities and differences in these two sample guqin associations in order to deliver a panoramic and comprehensive view of the guqin, and its contemporary development. Areas such as guqin commercial recordings and guqin pedagogy will be visited. For commercial recordings, I will discuss two associations’ similar and different repertoire choices in recording guqin music. As for guqin pedagogy, I will conduct a comparison between these two sample guqin associations in the following three domains: musical emphasis and styles in teaching, repertoire choices, schools of playing, and finally opinions on contemporary guqin pedagogy.

**A Review of Guqin Commercial Recordings: Repertoire Choices**

**Yao Liang and “Spring Breeze”**

As mentioned in chapter two, Yao Liang, the founder of Shenzhen Spring Breeze Guqin Association, has been studying the guqin with Gong Yi, a guqin master and a retired professor at Shanghai Conservatory of Music, for more than thirty years. She studied most of her repertoire with Mr. Gong and inherited his playing, a hybrid style that incorporates twelve different schools of playing. As exploratory as her teacher is, Yao has never been satisfied with the small number of available\(^2\) guqin

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\(^1\) Please refer to chapter two for a detailed discussion on this topic.

\(^2\) As discussed in chapter three, the number of guqin pieces that have already been transcribed from their original tablature notation to today’s playable staff notation is small compared to other instruments. So here “available” stands for the guqin pieces that have already been deciphered and can be played.
pieces, and she has been actively participating in the process of discovering and composing new guqin pieces.

Yao has released three guqin albums and recorded twenty-nine pieces to date. The pieces recorded have a wide time range, from the oldest one “Flowing Water” (*Liu Shui*) dating back to the Spring and Autumn Period, to Yao’s own composition in 2008, “Chant” (*Xiang Yin*). Repertoire wise, in addition to traditional guqin pieces that audiences favor the most, Yao is also known for her interpretation of contemporary guqin pieces such as “Spring Breeze” (*Chun Feng*). Although most of the recordings she has released are traditional pieces, Yao still breaks traditional boundaries, and constantly experiments with other instruments or new forms of performing such as playing duets, trios, and cooperating with small ensembles and orchestras. Such practice is common to most Western and Chinese solo instruments, but is considered new and even avant-garde in the guqin community.


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3 771 to 476 BC.
The first piece of the album, “Incantation of the Temple Pu” is one of Yao’s signature pieces. The piece was composed in Ming dynasty and has a close relationship with Buddhism. The piece has five sections. It starts with a dyad with two notes an octave apart, and a hollow sound created by gently tapping the surface of the guqin with the player’s left thumb, which imitates the sound of a Muyu, a Chinese temple block. Sliding tones and open notes are frequently used in this composition to mimic the sound of tolling bells and praying. The piece intends to create a solemn atmosphere of an old temple. According to the original program notes, the composer intends to use this piece to bring peace and good luck to the world.

Yao’s rendition of “Incantation of the Temple Pu” has always been recognized and praised by some of the harshest music critics in China because of her special focus on clarity of sound, and specific attention to precision of pitches. In addition, as a devoted Buddhist herself, Yao instills personal emotions and reflections into the piece, which makes her interpretation of the piece more touching and convincing.

The second piece of the album, “The Melody of Guangling,” is famous for its special tuning and history. But music-wise, elder guqin professionals and audiences do not favor this piece for its violence and explicit expression of anger that the music evokes. The outward expression of one’s emotion sharply contrasts to the traditional aesthetics of guqin music that advocates for a more inward, controlled and subtle expression of emotions. Considering technique, “the Melody of Guangling” is

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4 Please refer to chapter three for a detailed introduction to this piece.
challenging as it requires the player to be able to move hands swiftly while maintaining a great deal of strength and precision in pitches.

Many audiences and guqin professionals were surprised that Yao, who specializes in interpreting lyrical and sentimental pieces, would choose this composition to record. People had doubts that Yao could conquer this grand and fierce guqin composition, and thoroughly carry out the intended violent emotion (Personal Interview with Yao, Summer 2014). Some guqin players tend to play it in a rough way in order to deliver the desired tension, but have thus to compromise its musical delicacy and nuances. Yao, however, still manages to maintain a high quality of clarity while giving extra strength to the music as intended by the literary content of the piece. Nevertheless, as Yao once said to me, she thinks that as a woman, her version is softer than the other male guqin musicians due to physical constraints.

The last piece, “Spring Breeze,” is the highlight of this album, and Yao’s recording of this piece is still considered the best by guqin music critics. Upon its release in 1982, this contemporary guqin composition was deemed to be a groundbreaking and remarkable one in the guqin's 3,000-year history. The piece is written in a brilliant style and contains a lot of virtuosic passages. It also incorporates new arrangements of music forms and various modulations in tonality. The tempo of the piece is fast and the overall atmosphere is vibrant, refreshing and joyful. As the very first guqin player to ever record this piece, Yao overcame all the technical difficulties, playing it with ease and exquisite details. Even her teacher Gong Yi, one of the composers of this piece, said that he had to relearn this piece from her

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5 I think what she was trying to refer to here is her teacher Gong Yi’s version.
(Personal Interview with Yao, summer 2014). Some guqin players even gave Yao a pseudonym “Spring Breeze Yao” after the release of this recording.


The third album, *Bi Jian Liu Quan* (Brook Traversing Valleys), contains nine traditional guqin pieces accompanied by the xiao. It is a common practice to have the guqin and the xiao playing together. The xiao has a soft, lyrical, and dim timbre, which is a perfect accompaniment to the guqin because it would not overpower the sound of the guqin. However, the traditional approach to a duet between the xiao and the guqin is to have them playing in unison. That is, the guqin and the xiao will have exactly same melody throughout a piece. However, it is not the case on Yao’s album. A famous Chinese composer Zhou Chenglong rewrote some of the guqin’s parts and composed new passages for the xiao. Collaborations between the guqin and the xiao have truly become conversations between the two ancient instruments instead of a placid unison playing style (*Yao, Bi Jian Liu Quan*, 2008). The album turned out to be a huge success.

**Wang Peng and Jun Tian Yun He**

Jun Tian Fang as a profit-oriented company, however, it does not have as many commercial recordings as Yao does. In fact, only one album has been released

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6 A Chinese vertical bamboo flute.
by Jun Tian Yun He – Jun Tian Fang’s own guqin performance troupe, which is mainly composed of freelance musicians. Neither Wang Peng nor Du Dapeng, Jun Tian Fang’s guqin artist in-residence and chief art supervisor, has released any personal guqin albums.


Four of them, the first, fifth, sixth, and the eighth track, are traditional guqin pieces. Wang Peng opens the album with “Wild Geese Landing on the Sand,” one of the most classic guqin repertories. The piece has thirty-three different versions which are mostly different in rhythms and phrasings. Wang follows the version of the school of Guangling. The music intends to deliver a sense of calmness by vividly depicting geese’s flying, flapping, landing, and honking. A generous use of sliding tones is an important characteristic of this piece. Perfect controls of intonation and precision in pitches have thus become essential in order to deliver a successful performance of this piece. Unfortunately, Wang’s playing is not as satisfying as his guqin crafting. Careless sliding notes and poor realization of pitches are ubiquitous and easy to discover throughout this nine-minute recording, although the desired mood of the piece is achieved. The fifth, sixth and the eighth track, “the Song of a Woodman,” “Flying Dragons,” and “Ao Ai” are all traditional guqin repertoires and are all played

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7 The name of this album comes from the name of the troupe.
in the style of Guangling. In addition to the precision in pitches, which is still a significant problem in these three tracks, the sound of the guqin is particularly dry in the recording.

The rest five tracks are all contemporary guqin compositions, and arrangements of traditional guqin pieces with new instrumentations.

The second piece, “Buddhist chanting” (Xin Jing), is a trio of the guqin, the xiao, and vocals. Du Dapeng plays the guqin, Hou Changqing, who is an established Chinese xiao artist graduated from the Central Conservatory of Music, plays the xiao, and Shan Yuanyin, a vocal soloist in-residence at the Guangzhou Opera and Dance Drama Theater, sings the vocal part. According to the program notes, the main melody of this piece originates from India (Wang, “Yun Tian Yun He”). The piece starts with a phrase borrowed from “the Incantation of the Temple Pu,” which is then immediately followed by a brief passage of digital music. The female voice accompanied by the guqin and the xiao, carefully and quietly joins in as the digital music passage gradually fades out. Both the guqin and the xiao are played in unison in line with the vocal melodies.

The third piece the “Earth” played by Du Dapeng is a guqin solo piece composed by a guqin master and composer Cheng Gongliang in 1996. It is one of Cheng’s famous “Pao Xiu Luo Lan” suites. The piece is neither widely performed nor recorded despite being considered one of the most successful contemporary guqin compositions. “Earth” is the first piece in the suite, which, according to the composer, conveys deep mysterious connotations. The fourth track “Song of the Yue Boatman” was said to be a southern Chinese folk tune sung in an unknown dialect dating back to
528 BC (Zhengzhang 1991). This tune was later arranged and set into the movie “The Banquet” by Tan Dun. The track contained in this album is a version especially arranged for the guqin, male voice and the shakuhachi.\footnote{A traditional Japanese flute.} Jin Peng, Jun Tian Fang’s vocalist in-residence, sings the song. His voice is accompanied by the guqin played by Du throughout the entire piece. Digital music is also used in this track to create a mysterious atmosphere. The seventh piece is another Buddhist chanting composed for the human voice and the guqin. The album ends with an new arrangement of a famous ancient guqin repertoire “Three Variations on the Yang Pass” (Yang Guan San Die). The Yang Pass is one of the two most important mountain passes located in Dunhuang, far northwestern China as the last stop before travellers leave China. The music is a melancholy farewell song, lyrics written by a famous Tang Dynasty poet Wang Wei. The theme melody is played three times with minor variations (Wang 2003). It is here set for the guqin, human voice, the Chinese bamboo flute, and the guitar. The main melody is delivered by the male voice; the guqin and the flute play in unison. Du plays the guitar, which adds occasional ornamentations to the ongoing melodic phrases.

A Hybrid: Sandwich-like Contemporary Guqin Recordings

Most contemporary guqin players tend to teach, perform and record classic guqin repertoires, because audiences and traditional Chinese music market still mostly demand for ancient tunes. Such phenomenon indicates the general public’s taste and is also manifested in commercial recordings released by Yao and Jun Tian Fang.
First, as discussed above, most of the pieces contained in Yao’s three albums and Jun Tian Fang’s recording are traditional guqin pieces despite the fact that they both experimented with new musical materials and different means of guqin performance. As an ancient instrument, modern guqin music still stands on and needs its solid traditional repertoires. Second, new guqin pieces are emerging. Yet here the “new” has two layers. First, the least “new” pieces are contemporary arrangements of traditional pieces. Composers modify a traditional guqin piece usually by changing its original melodies, and adding new instruments. New instrumentation such as the use of the zheng, the Chinese bamboo flute, human voice, the cello, the guitar, and digital music is a common approach to renew a traditional guqin piece. Arrangements of famous tunes to a guqin version are also considered new guqin pieces. The second layer of “new” guqin pieces is original compositions. New guqin compositions of this type are rare in contemporary guqin repertoire. Beginning in the late 1980s, there are only five new large-scale guqin pieces officially published: “Spring Breeze” (Chun Feng), “the Melody of Loulan” (Lou Lan San), the “Pao Xiu Luo Lan” suites, “A Song of the Three Gorges Dam” (San Xia Chuan Ge), and “A Tune of Plum Blossom” (Mei Yuan Yin). These original guqin compositions are favored by most audiences, but are less performed and recorded by guqin players due to these pieces’ novel and virtuosic playing technique requirements.

Jun Tian Fang’s album contains one new composition: the “Earth” from the “Pao Xiu Luo Lan” suites. Yao recorded one new guqin composition – the “Spring Breeze” – in her first guqin solo album.
Yao Liang and Jun Tian Fang’s Approaches to Guqin Teaching

As professional guqin musicians, Yao Liang, and Wang Peng and the other Jun Tian Fang’s guqin teachers hold guqin lessons and provide professional guidance to entry-level guqin students. Yao is a private guqin teacher and has been teaching the guqin for almost twenty years. Wang, initially a professional guqin maker, began teaching after the foundation of his cultural company, Jun Tian Fang. They use similar guqin repertoires in teaching, and share the same musical emphasis on how to approach guqin music. What distinguish Yao and Jun Tian Fang are their divergent teaching styles and different schools of playing (Liu Pai). In this section, I will analyze Yao and Jun Tian Fang’s various approaches to guqin teaching by first visiting their musical approaches and teaching styles, then repertoire choices in teaching, and finally the different schools of playing that they choose to pass down to students.

Similar Musical Approaches and Divergent Teaching Styles

For Jun Tian Fang, a corporation whose essential line of business is guqin making and sale, guqin teaching is not a priority. It holds short-term summer guqin camps and admits students from different social and cultural backgrounds to learn the guqin under the instruction of Jun Tian Fang’s guqin players in-residence. Shenzhen Spring Breeze Guqin Association, as it is a non-profit guqin organization, does not hold guqin lessons at all. Its goal is to promote guqin music and to provide a platform for guqin music lovers, and to help them connect. However, almost all of Spring
Breeze’s members used to study, or are still studying the guqin with Yao; such study is usually based on a long-term commitment and is more like a lifelong journey.

Guqin classes provided at Jun Tian Fang follow the one-to-multiple format whereas Yao’s lessons are one-on-one private lessons. Because of the fundamental differences between these two guqin associations, their styles of teaching are radically different.

Jun Tian Fang has classrooms specially designed for teaching, and the classrooms can accommodate around twenty to thirty students (See Figure 7). Guqin summer camps at Jun Tian Fang usually last for ten days and the tuition is around 2,440 U.S. dollars. During these ten days, students will live on site and will be intensely exposed to the guqin in addition to other traditional Chinese art forms such as calligraphy, tea ceremony, and Tai Chi (Personal Interview with Du, Summer 2014).

At the summer camp, four steps are taken in sequence to fulfill the purpose of Jun Tian Fang’s guqin teaching: the first step concerns basic theories. Jun Tian Fang offers a variety of lecture series to prepare students with basic guqin knowledge, including the guqin’s history, the evolution of guqin music, guqin notational system reading, the aesthetics of the guqin, and so on. The second step revolves around techniques. Course materials include guqin fingerings, basic playing techniques, guqin music sight singing, and basic Western music theories such as staff or number notations reading and rhythms. The third step is to let students actually play small-size traditional guqin pieces that usually last for two to three minutes, and to instruct students to further polish those small pieces by instilling personal emotion into the music, and bringing out the composer’s intended emotion as much as possible. The last step is titled as “arts appreciation,” which teaches students how to appreciate a guqin, guqin music, and other forms of traditional Chinese arts such as tea ceremony, flower arrangement, calligraphy, and Tai Chi martial art (Jun Tian Fang, “Course”).

Yao’s guqin private lessons use similar steps of teaching. But various materials such as guqin fingerings, notational system reading, guqin music aesthetics, guqin literatures, will be integrated into one lesson depending on each student’s progress. Yao only offers one-on-one private session, and she always starts with basic music theories. She spends a generous amount of time on fingerling exercises because she believes that “theories and basic skills are the pillars of any types of performing arts” (Personal Interview with Yao, Summer 2014). She prolongs each of the abovementioned four steps, and at the same time she manages to sew them together so that students have a deeper understanding of a piece by standing from a more
comprehensive point of view, simultaneously overlooking multiple aspects. Yao will also invite other guqin professionals and hold occasional big lectures regarding certain repertoires or music theories for Spring Breeze Guqin Association’s members (See Figure 8).

![Image](image.jpg)

**Figure 8:** *Guqin lecture series for association members.* 2015. Spring Breeze Guqin Association, Shenzhen. szchunfeng.cn. Web. 9 Apr. 2015

While adopting the same steps of teaching and musical emphasis, Yao and Jun Tian Fang have divergent teaching formats and styles. Jun Tian Fang’s course is well structured, material-wise condensed, and highly industrialized. Nonetheless, it is unrealistic to expect a student to gain a solid and deep understanding of the guqin from Jun Tian Fang’s summer camp because the materials are specifically designed to give students a quick, intensive, and comprehensive overview of guqin music; the depth of the courses is therefore compromised. Yao’s teaching, on the other hand, is a lifelong journey. Pupils of Yao’s are not constrained in time, and they study guqin music at a more moderate pace compared to Jun Tian Fang’s accelerated guqin course package.
Repertoire Choices in Contemporary Guqin Teaching

Traditional guqin repertoires are still the most often used materials for guqin teaching by many contemporary guqin teachers; contemporary guqin compositions, despite the fact that there are not that many, are seldom taught. The following four reasons will suffice to explain such repertoire choices in teaching.

First, many contemporary guqin players believe that only ancient repertoires can deliver the essence of guqin music, and truly reflect the “Way” of the guqin. The “Way” states that a guqin player’s expression of emotion should be inward, personal, and controlled. Any excessive emotion outflow is forbidden according to the “Way” of the guqin. Contemporary guqin compositions, which are highly influenced by Western music composition techniques, often incorporate novel and demanding playing techniques, and have explicit emotion expression such as merriment, sorrow, sentiment, longing, and so on. Virtuosic passages in modern guqin pieces sometimes require players to exaggerate their hand or body movements in order to deliver the intended strong emotion. Therefore, today’s guqin teachers do not favor modern guqin compositions because the performance practice of those pieces is contrary to traditional “Way” of the guqin.

Second, as mentioned in previous chapters, beginning in the late 1990s, the guqin made its return to the general public’s attention through mass media. Most of the audience first encountered the guqin in novels, fictions, literatures, ancient paintings, martial-arts television shows, and movies. Audiences are enchanted by the guqin’s mysteriousness, rich history, and literary content that guqin music carries. As a result, it is understandable that today’s guqin music fans would want to learn.

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9 Please refer to chapter three for a detailed discussion on the “Way” of the guqin.
traditional guqin repertoires first, which in their minds, are the only appropriate music for the guqin.

Third, the number of extant traditional guqin pieces, which is around 300, is much larger than that of contemporary pieces. Traditional repertoires suffice the needs of daily guqin teaching.

Fourth, contemporary guqin compositions are difficult to learn in terms of techniques and notes reading.¹⁰ Yao and Jun Tian Fang both adopt newly composed guqin etudes in their teaching for finger exercise purposes. Notwithstanding their inclusion of etudes in teaching, Yao and Jun Tian Fang still follow the traditional guqin music imparting method, which still prevails today. According to tradition, a student learns a piece by sitting in front of his or her teacher, and imitating that teacher’s playing, notes by notes, sentence by sentence and phrase by phrase. In other words, a guqin student does not need to understand either the inner structure of a piece or the notation of a piece. A lack of understanding in Western music theories and incompetence in fluently reading staff notation together prevent most of guqin students from learning modern guqin compositions. As a result, guqin teachers do not teach their students any contemporary guqin compositions at all, or only teach non-traditional pieces to advanced students by request. Of course, guqin students and professionals at conservatories are an exception. The study of both traditional and modern guqin compositions is required for guqin students at conservatories.

Both Jun Tian Fang’s guqin teachers and Yao said to me that the focus of their teaching is to pass down traditional guqin repertoires despite their use of etudes

¹⁰ Almost all contemporary guqin compositions are written in staff notation, which is foreign and hard to read to most of guqin students who do not have a musical background.
(Personal Interview with Yao and Du, Summer 2014). I have been studying the guqin with Yao for eleven years, and I did not begin studying contemporary guqin repertoires until the last three or four years. Admittedly, the first seven years of learning traditional repertoires truly consolidate my understanding and ability to properly interpret a guqin piece. Traditional repertoires serve as a solid and soft ground for any entry-level guqin players to help them land safely, to develop their understanding of the essence of guqin music, to nurture them with the history of guqin music, to improve their ability to properly interpret a piece, and finally, to prepare them with an ability to use the guqin to freely express their feelings.

Liu Pai: Different Schools of Playing

Ancient times’ underdeveloped transportation and geographical limitations caused the emergence of different schools (Liu Pai) of guqin playing. The impossibility of long-distance communication made predecessor guqin players, who resided in the same region gradually formed their own playing styles. However, with today’s technology, convenient transportation, and the frequent use of the Internet, scholars, musicians, and artists communicate and mingle with each other on a constant basis. Physical, linguistic, economic, cultural, and social boundaries have all been shattered. Frequent exchanges of ideas, knowledge, arts, forms of culture, and different genres of music are happening every minute with an extremely low cost.

The process of passing down different schools of guqin playing has been incredibly active since the 1940s. Mr. Gong Yi, a guqin master and a retired professor from the Shanghai Conservatory of Music now in his 70s, studied under twelve guqin
teachers and learned five different schools of playing. He later incorporated all those five schools of playing into an integrated style – the school of Gong (Gong Pai). Boundaries of different schools have gradually become blurry, and the practice of sticking to only one school of playing is considered old-school and stagnant in terms of a player’s own musical development and the development of contemporary guqin music. However, it is crucial not to misread it as an assertion to simplify various styles of guqin playing. Most contemporary guqin scholars and players advocate for an ongoing practice to continue traditional different schools of playing by breaking the preexisting boundaries. Contemporary guqin players accept and learn different styles of playing, and even incorporate external styles into the school of playing that they were originally taught in. For instance, guqin players from ancient time would only play pieces passed down from one school,\textsuperscript{11} and perform in a style of that specific school. Today’s guqin players, on the other hand, play a piece in a hybrid style or are capable of playing various styles.

Du Dapeng, Jun Tian Fang’s guqin player in-residence, thinks that there should be no segregation of schools. This is an extreme opinion because even conservatories, where the most the most revolutionary thoughts took place, teach a guqin piece in different schools of playing depending on professors. Du argues that different schools of guqin playing should be fused into an integrated one, called the school of traditional Chinese culture (Zhong Guo Chuan Tong Wen Hua Pai) (Personal Interview with Du, February 2015).

\textsuperscript{11} A school does not only have a certain style of playing such as special fingerings, but also has a different way of interpreting the same piece by changing notes and phrases. As a result, the same piece may be notated differently and thus sound different depending on the school.
If one carefully listens to Du’s playing, one cannot trace Du’s playing back to a certain school or style. Although playing in an integrated style, most of Jun Tian Fang’s guqin players’ choices of repertory versions belong to the school of Guangling. One could argue that the choice of repertory versions is a matter of personal taste and has nothing to do with the passing down of one school of playing.

Besides Gong Yi, Yao Liang has also studied the guqin with Wu Zhaoji. Wu was born in 1908 and passed away in 1997. He was a highly respected guqin master and a leading figure in the school of Wu12 playing, especially famous for his “detached, intellectual, smooth yet vigorous playing style” (Wiki, “Wu Zhaoji”). Although Yao only studied with Wu for a short period of time, she still inherited some of Wu’s literati playing style, which is especially noticeable when she plays some of Wu’s signature repertories such as “Recalling an Old Friend” (Yi Gu Ren). Yao Liang is still more often considered to be a representative of the school Gong (Gong Pai).

Selected Opinions on Contemporary Guqin Pedagogy

Both Jun Tian Fang and Yao equally value the importance of properly delivering the mood of a piece, and of honing one’s playing technique. They also both choose traditional guqin repertoire as their teaching materials. As discussed before, Yao and Jun Tian Fang are different in terms of their teaching styles: Yao teaches private one-on-one lessons, and Jun Tian Fang only holds short-term guqin summer camps. They are also different in the their schools of playing. Yao represents the

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12 A school of guqin playing prevalent in the Jing Su area, Eastern China.
school of Gong while Jun Tian Fang’s guqin teachers advocate for a hybrid style of playing, or simply no distinction of schools.

In addition to aspects such as musical emphasis, teaching styles, repertoire choices, and schools of playing, Yao and Jun Tian Fang’s guqin teachers share the same opinions on contemporary guqin pedagogy. They both agree that the study of the guqin requires of course playing techniques (Ji Fa), but more importantly, it requires a successful realization of the emotion of a piece (Xin Fa).

As previously discussed, different schools of guqin playing are gradually integrated into a singular one due to the dissolution of physical and geographical boundaries. But meanwhile, two distinct new schools of interpreting and understanding guqin music is now emerging from professional guqin musicians and freelance guqin lovers: the school of pure music (Yin Yue Pai) and the school of intellectuals (Wen Ren Pai). Guqin teachers, scholars and students from conservatories represent the school of pure music. They tend to see the guqin purely as an instrument, and spend most of their time and energy in solving technical difficulties. The school of intellectuals, on the other hand, gives more weight to the delivery of the mood of a guqin piece (Personal Interview with Du, Summer 2014). Some of the extremists even try to mythologize guqin music, and even assert that one does not need to practice at all as long as he or she has a pure mind, and meditates regularly. Neither Yao nor Jun Tian Fang’s guqin teachers agrees these above two new approaches. Du said, “They are both too extreme. A combination of these two schools should be practiced instead” (Personal Interview with Du, Summer 2014).
In an interview I conducted with Du in late August 2014, he harshly criticized the current guqin education programs provided at some of the best conservatories in China. In an anecdote he told me during the interview, a guqin major student once called Du and asked for help with repairing a guqin. The student had a hard time describing the name of the part that needs to be repaired. “I was stunned and disappointed by the fact that a guqin major student does not even know the basic structure of the instrument that he studies” (Personal Interview with Du, Summer 2014).

I met Zhao Wenyi, a guqin graduate student now pursuing her Master’s degree at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music in the 42nd International Council for Traditional Music World Conference held at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music in July 2013. She told me that guqin students at Shanghai Conservatory of Music do not study the process *dapu*, and most of them cannot sight-read scores. The same situation applies to other conservatories in China, and was confirmed by Du who frequently interacts with fresh-out-of-college guqin students. He told me that a guqin undergraduate studies one piece per semester, and by the time of graduation, he or she will finish the study of eight pieces. During those four years at a conservatory, guqin students do not study the history or literature of the guqin. They only focus on working on their playing crafts and preparing for various competitions (Personal Interview with Du, Summer 2014). Du strongly expressed his disappointment in contemporary guqin pedagogy at conservatories.

Yes, [guqin major students] play pieces perfectly in terms of techniques, but they know nothing about guqin music. They play the

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*Dapu* is a process of transcribing guqin’s original tablature notation to today’s playable staff notation. Please refer to chapter three for a detailed discussion on this topic.
music like machines, and they certainly do not represent guqin music! I think the best way to protect and further develop the guqin is to remove it from conservatories and provide it as an extra-curricular subject at universities where students from different majors can choose to part-time study the guqin if they are truly interested (Personal Interview with Du, Summer 2014).

In my opinion, one should not study music solely by looking at the melodies and playing techniques. A practice that isolates music from all other outside references, emotions, history, and literary content is inappropriate because music is not science. However, one should not approach music arbitrarily and unscientifically. On the contrary, guqin players, especially guqin professionals from conservatories should dig into guqin music by disenchanting its myths, and substituting reasonable explanations to guqin music’s inner structures for its long-lasting metaphysical, abstract, and mythological concepts.
Chapter Five

Contemporary Practices of Guqin Music: A Concluding Remark

古聲淡無味 不稱今人情
玉徽光彩滅 朱弦塵土生
不辭為君彈 縱彈人不聽
何物使之然 羌笛與秦箏

Placid ancient tunes elude the masses
Luster of jade dims as dust gathers on the strings

I long for someone whose ear is tuned to my heart
else play on in vain
I sigh as the hoi polloi
Want only the noise of today

– Bai Juyi “Lament on the Qin” 《廢琴》Tang Dynasty

In this thesis, I try to illustrate and offer reflections on the new popularization of the guqin in 21st century China by first reviewing the guqin’s history, the cultural and social background in China since the 1980s, and traditional aesthetics of guqin music. As previously discussed, in the guqin’s 3,000 years of history, the instrument has always been considered a symbol of elite and intellectual culture as opposed to popular culture, which in a guqin musician’s mind is gaudy and vulgar. For years and years, all guqin players had purposely kept the guqin in their study room, and spent their entire life looking for a zhiyin, a person who understood the soul of his music. Guqin players would never bow down to the taste of the masses. They would only play the music for their own self-cultivation; neither did they look for acceptance or approvals from an audience. Due to the nature of the guqin’s physical structure and
its traditional aesthetics, its music, which is personal, acoustically soft, and philosophical, does not suit modern concert halls and stages unless changes are made.

Beginning in the late 19th century, popularity of the guqin gradually declined and the instrument also lost its erstwhile lust. The study of the guqin did not resume until the early 1950s. In the 1980s, Deng Xiaoping’s revolutionary Open Door policy radically changed China’s political, economic, and cultural environment. First appearing in martial-arts television shows and movies as a mysterious ancient Chinese instrument, the guqin made its gradual return to the general public’s attention with the help of the prevalence of mass media and popular culture.

The late 1990s to 2003 is a crucial time period for the guqin’s contemporary development. China was creating an economic miracle at an unimaginable speed, and its people started looking for spiritual needs after urban middle-class members’ material satisfaction was met. In 2003, the UNESCO officially recognized the guqin as a world intangible heritage. Such an event drew attention from the Chinese middle-class who was urgently searching for a medium through which they could release their emotions, and satisfy their spiritual needs. The guqin enchanted the Chinese middle-class with its unique timbre, rich history, mysteriousness, and accessibility. A new popularization of the guqin quietly began.

I present this resurgence of the guqin through the lens of two sample guqin associations, and cover topics such as changes of traditional guqin music practices, contemporary commercial recordings of the guqin, and contemporary guqin teaching styles. One can find various new appearances of the guqin beginning in the late 1990s to early 21st century. The guqin is no longer “trapped” in a scholar’s study room;
instead, it climbs up to modern concert stages and even appears at the Beijing 2008 Summer Olympic Opening Ceremony. Major fine arts auction houses displayed the ancient guqin as an invaluable antique; conservatories started offering degrees in guqin performance; guqin performance competitions are held frequently. More apparently, people can easily find a guqin association or guqin dealing store in every major city in today’s China.

The tradition of guqin practice has also been through several major changes. The traditional one-to-one teaching style is now gradually being replaced by the one-to-multiple style, which may work more effectively when a guqin teacher is dealing with a larger group of students. More guqin associations are also quickly emerging. They provide platforms and stages for guqin music fans to perform the guqin, to connect, and to share their musical experiences. Some of the associations also function as guqin dealers and sell the guqin manufactured by major guqin makers.

In order to extend the guqin’s current repertoire, guqin professionals teamed up with composers and invented new playing techniques to accommodate contemporary guqin compositions. Additionally, with a new playing environment, that is, concert halls, guqin makers have to modify the sound box of the guqin, and to replace the guqin’s original silk strings with nylon strings so that the instrument can sound louder. With that said, the goal of guqin playing is also radically different from what it was before. Admittedly, a purpose of self-cultivation and self-enjoyment still matters the most to a guqin player, but to please audiences and to attract more audiences have gradually become more important for many guqin players who are actively playing and promoting the guqin on today’s concert stage.
Modern Manifestations of Guqin Music

On March 14th 2015, one month after Chinese lunar new year, Shenzhen Spring Breeze Guqin Association held its first small concert of the year: “Spring Sprouts” Kids Guqin Concert (See Figure 9 & 10). Yao Liang’s six young students, with the youngest being eight years old and the eldest being thirteen years old, performed eleven traditional guqin pieces on stage at the association. Yao thinks that in addition to practice guqin music, to impart the music to the next generation is more urgent because “children are the hope of guqin music” (Spring Breeze, “Spring Sprouts”).

Figure 9 & 10: Spring Sprouts kids Concert. 2015. Spring Breeze Guqin Association, Shenzhen. szchunfeng.cn. Web. 9 Apr. 2015.
With the coming of Qingming Festival,\(^1\) a traditional Chinese holiday for people to celebrate the spring and to recall people’s passed friends and relatives, Spring Breeze Guqin Association is planning its second concert of the year on April 18\(^{th}\). Yao Liang, the founder of the association, hopes that her students and the members of the association can use this concert as a chance to recall ancestors, old friends, and to gain actual performance experience. Members of the association have been discussing in a Wechat group chat the pieces that they plan to perform, and offering opinions on their interpretations of certain pieces. A final program of the event is yet to be published. The concert is free of charge and is open to public.

In addition to the guqin summer camps discussed earlier, Beijing Jun Tian Fang recently began to offer short-term guqin lessons during non-summer time, with the most recent one ending on March 28\(^{th}\) 2015. Jun Tian Fang’s affiliated performance troupe, Jun Tian Yun He, is now publicizing its upcoming concert in Shanghai on June 7\(^{th}\). The troupe names the concert “Yun Zi” as a poetic way to celebrate the spring. The name of the concert comes from *The Classic of Poetry* (*Shi Jing*) and refers to farming in traditional Chinese literatures. The concert is partnered with one of Jun Tian Fang’s guqin dealers, Shanghai Jiuyi\(^2\) Guqin Association. It is a ticketed concert, and the prices range from US$15 to US$100.

The programs at the Spring Breeze Guqin Association’s kids’ concert and Jun Tian Yun He’s “Yun Zi” spring concert are still largely based on traditional guqin repertories. At the kids’ concert, eight out of eleven pieces are traditional ones; the

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\(^1\)Qingming literally means “Pure Brightness,” and the festival, usually on the 4\(^{th}\), 5\(^{th}\), or 6\(^{th}\) of April depending on the time of the Spring Equinox, is a public holiday in China ([http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/Festivals/78319.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/Festivals/78319.htm), accessed April 5, 2015).

\(^2\) Jiuyi is the name of a mountain range located in Hunan province, Southern China. In the study of the guqin, Jiuyi usually stands for the school of Jiuyi.
remaining three non-traditional pieces are an etude on harmonics, an etude arranged from a Chinese folk tune, and Yao’s composition “the Chant.” Jun Tian Fang’s spring concert will present six classic guqin pieces and three contemporary pieces. The three new compositions are “Tai Chi,” a contemporary composition for the guqin and the piano by Chinese composer Guan Naizhong, “Songs of the Yue Boatman” arranged for the guqin and the vocalist, and “Ban Ruo,” a duet between the guqin and the cello.

**Recalling an Old Friend: My Guqin Senior Recital**

I have been studying and playing the guqin for over ten years, but it always seems to be an unachievable dream of mine to hold a personal guqin recital. I made my first debut in 2009 as a student guqin soloist along with seven other guqin masters at the Spring Breeze Guqin Association Foundation Ceremony at Shenzhen Concert Hall.

Like other music major students, I was extremely fortunate to have the full support from the Music Department at Wesleyan University who allowed me to hold a guqin senior recital on the night of March 28th at Center for the Arts Hall as a concluding event of this project. It was indeed a remarkable and unforgettable night. I think of it as a rare occasion, probably the one and only chance for me to share this foreign and ancient music with my friends, professors, schoolmates, and Middletown residents. I named my recital “Recalling an Old Friend: Lost in Reverie” after a classic guqin repertory “Recalling an Old Friend” (*Yi Gu Ren*). The concert was a reflection of what I have learned, experienced, and gained from my four years of study at Wesleyan University.
The concert lasted for around ninety minutes and was designed in a chronological fashion. A musical time journey is intended to bring audiences from the starting point of the Han Chinese history, through four essential Chinese dynasties Tang (618 - 907), Song (960 - 1279), Ming (1368–1644), Qing (1644–1912), and finally landing on contemporary China. The purpose of my concert was to deliver a grand tour of the guqin’s repertoire to my audience from compositions dating back to ancient times to selected contemporary guqin pieces. The program contained eleven pieces in total, among which there are six traditional guqin solo works, one contemporary composition for guqin solo, three duets arranged for the guqin and the western flute, the erhu, and the pipa, respectively, and finally a trio for the guqin, the pipa, and the African drum sets (Zhu, “Recalling an Old Friend”).

Only a few members of my audience had listened to guqin music before my recital, and the feedback I received from them was interesting in terms of their opinions on my repertoire choices. The last piece of my program, a trio for the guqin, the pipa, and the African drums, titled “Spring Breeze,” was originally a contemporary guqin solo, is the only repertory that satisfied all the audiences. A prestigious Chinese composer Zhou Chenglong composed the pipa part and arranged “Spring Breeze” to a duet for my guqin teacher Yao Liang; a local percussionist from Middletown Tim Gaylord who voluntarily played at my recital as one of my guest musicians played the percussion section in an improvising style. The piece is a technically demanding modern composition that incorporates various virtuosic playing techniques. The melodies are highly influenced by Uyghur folk tunes. This
Turkish twist makes the music extremely exotic, melodic, vibrant, and easy to listen to.

Another important contemporary guqin solo composition that I played at my recital, “The Melody of Loulan,” was much less favored by the audience, although it has always been a favorite of mine since I learned it when I was sixteen. Loulan was an ancient Kingdom located along the Silk Road in the 2nd century BCE on the northeastern edge of the Lop Desert. Around 4th century, Loulan Kingdom mysteriously disappeared and its ruins were not found until 1900. The composer Jin Xiang incorporated many Loulan folk tunes and organized the piece in an improvisational style. Upon its release in the 1990s, this contemporary guqin composition was deemed to be a groundbreaking and remarkable piece in guqin's 3,000 years of history (Zhu, “Recalling an Old Friend”). Unfortunately, many of the audience members found this piece strange and even noisy to their ears. I speculate that the frequent use of minor seconds and major thirds in this piece is one of the main reasons for the discomfort that the audience experienced. In addition, “The Melody of Loulan” does not have a tonic center and is not based on any particular scales, which makes the music sound airy, unstable, and even a bit eerie. There was only one friend of mine who later told me that he found this piece particularly fascinating.

The rest of the repertoire, including three duets arranged by me, was all classic guqin pieces. Ancient tunes were a major part of my recital, and are also the ones with which I felt the most emotionally connected. However, many of the audience members, especially younger members who are around my age, found these
traditional pieces dull. It is true that guqin music is not as easy to listen to as other forms of traditional Chinese music, mainly because it lacks a clear melodic line. Based on my personal experience and conversations, many young listeners would describe a traditional guqin piece as placid and plain because it does not seem to have a theme and is extremely free in terms of rhythms; their perception of guqin music is actually quite accurate. As discussed in this paper, instead of pleasing an audience, intellectuals only used the guqin as a way to realize their own cultivation and to communicate with ancient sages and cosmos. Such a once common practice of the guqin therefore does not require a guqin player to set a piece within a specific form or give it a predetermined rhythmic structure, which would otherwise compromise a piece’s flexibility and flow.

Being a guqin player myself, I have always seen a live performance as a way for me to share and to inspire. However, never have I dreamt about writing a research paper on the guqin, an instrument for which I have extreme passion. The liberal arts education I received at Wesleyan University encouraged, and gave me a chance to step back, and reexamine the guqin from a scholar’s eyes. From the very initial stage of finding a special perspective of my study of the guqin, through preliminary research, interviews, follow-up interviews, and to finally beginning to write, this entire process has indeed been a rewarding ordeal.

In this project, I conducted fieldwork in Shenzhen and Beijing, and collected a variety of primary sources by interviewing key personnel at sample guqin associations, participating in sample guqin associations’ activities, and observing members of the associations. I try to illustrate and analyze the new popularization of
the guqin under the context of 21st century China from the late 1980s to 2015. This paper, along with my recital serves as a conclusion of my ten years’ study of the guqin. I foresee my practice of the guqin to be a lifelong one, and I wish this ancient instrument could find its zhiyin out of the noise of today.
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Recalling an Old Friend: Lost in Reverie
Ming Zhu’s Guqin Senior Recital

CFA HALL, WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY, CT || Saturday, March 28, 2015 || 7 P.M. EST

To my guqin teacher Yao Liang, my parents, and my dear friend and lifelong mentor, Chen Hui

The guqin is an ancient Chinese seven-string plucked instrument with a history of around 3,000 years. It is deemed to be the origin of the Han Chinese music and is closely related to ancient Chinese history, politics, aesthetics and philosophies. In 2003, guqin music was proclaimed to be the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

As a Music and Economics double major at Wesleyan University, Ming Zhu has been studying and performing the guqin for more than ten years. He achieved high honors by the China Nationalities Orchestra Society in the Guqin Performing Examination 2012 and has performed with some of the most respected guqin artists in China, including his guqin teacher Yao Liang and Gong Yi, a guqin master and a professor of the guqin at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. In 2011, Ming appeared as the first student guqin soloist in the Shenzhen City Concert Hall for the 2011 Summer Universiade.

Showcasing a wide range of guqin repertoires, Ming will play pieces from guqin repertories from 2324 BC to the 20th century. A musical time journey is intended to bring audience to travel from the starting point of the Han Chinese history, through four essential Chinese dynasties Tang (618 - 907), Song (960 - 1279), Ming (1368–1644), Qing (1644–1912), and finally landing on contemporary China. In addition to guqin solo pieces, several duet and trio pieces arranged for the guqin and the erhu, the guqin and the Western flute, the guqin and the pipa, the guqin and the percussion will also be performed.
Guqin Solo

Rhapsody on a Celestial (Shen Ren Chang) 神人暢
Composed during 2324 – 2206 BC, Published in 1525

Mythologizing report says the piece was composed by Emperor Yao, a legendary Chinese ruler born in 2324 BC. Yao composed this piece to commemorate the appearance of a celestial. This piece only uses the first five strings of the instrument and is the only piece in the entire guqin repertoire that incorporates all the harmonics available on the guqin.

Flowing Water (Liu Shui) 流水
Composed during 771 – 476 BC, Published in 1425

This most famous guqin piece was said to be composed by Yu Boya, a famous guqin player from the Spring and Autumn Period (771 – 476 BC). The music vividly depicts water flowing from small brooks to a sea, and was traditionally only played for a confidant (zhiyin) of the player. In 1977, this piece was included in the Voyager Golden Record and sent into the outer space by NASA as a representative of the traditional Chinese music.

Evening Ballad of the Drunken Fisherman (Zui Yu Chang Wan) 醉漁唱晚
Composed in Tang Dynasty, Published in 1549

Two Tang dynasty poets Pi Rixiu and Lu Guimeng composed this piece together after hearing a drunk fisherman singing in the evening while they were floating in a boat on the river. The music is known for its witty melodies and is free in rhythms.

Brume Over the Xiao and Xiang Rivers (Xiao Xiang Shui Yu) 瀟湘水雲
Composed in Song Dynasty, Published in 1425

One of the most praised guqin pieces composed by Guo Chuwang, it depicts a scene where the Xiao and Xiang rivers were covered by the brume. It expresses the composer’s frustration toward the Song government.

Flying Dragons (Long Xiang Cao) 龍翔操
Composed & Published in Ming Dynasty 1425

A representative composition of the school of Guangling, this philosophical piece intends to convey a feeling of solemnness and dignity.

Brook Traversing Valleys (Bi Jian Liu Quan) 碧澗流泉
Composed & Published in Qing Dynasty 1686

A guqin composition especially popular in Southern China (Ling Nan), this piece is famous for its clean melodies and delicate overall structure. The structure of the piece is often compared to an A-B-A ternary form, which is common in the Western classical music but rare in the guqin repertoire.

Melody of Loulan (Loulan San) 樓蘭散
Composed by Jin Xiang, Published in the 1980s

Loulan was an ancient Kingdom located along the Silk Road in the 2nd century BCE on the northeastern edge of the Lop Desert. Around 4th century, Loulan Kingdom mysteriously disappeared and its ruins were not found until 1900. The composer incorporated many Loulan folk tunes and organized the piece in an improvisational style. Upon its release in the 1990s, this contemporary guqin composition was deemed to be a groundbreaking and remarkable piece in guqin’s 3,000 years of history.
Collaborations

Three Variations on the Plum Blossom (Mei Hua San Nong) 梅花三弄
Guqin: Ming Zhu  Composed during 265 – 420, Published in 1425
Western Flute: Charlene (Zheyan) Ni  Arranged by Ming Zhu, January 2015

One of the most popular and demanded guqin pieces, this composition is especially known for its delicate structure and its repeated theme on different pitches on harmonics.

Three Variations on the Yang Pass (Yang Guan San Die) 陽關三疊
Guqin: Ming Zhu  Composed in Tang Dynasty, Published in 1876
Erhu: Joy Lu Arranged by Ming Zhu & Joy Lu, February 2015

The Yang Pass is one of the two most important mountain passes located in Dunhuang, far northwestern China as the last stop before Chinese travellers to leave China. The music is a melancholy farewell song with its lyrics written by a famous Tang Dynasty poet Wang Wei. The theme melody is played three times with minor variations.

Recalling an Old Friend (Yi Gu Ren) 憶故人
Guqin: Ming Zhu  Composed Year Unknown, Published in 1937
Pipa: Yihan Chen  Notated & Arranged by Ming Zhu, February 2015

Spring Breeze (Chun Feng) 春風
Guqin: Ming Zhu  Composed & Published in 1982
Pipa: Yihan Chen  Composed by Xu Guohua, Gong Yi
Percussion: Tim Gaylord Arranged by Zhou Chenglong

Upon its release in 1982, this contemporary guqin composition is regarded as a groundbreaking and remarkable piece in the guqin’s 3,000-year history. The piece requires many novel and virtuosic techniques, while incorporating new arrangements of music form and various modulations in tonality.
**Guest Musicians**

**Yihan Chen  *Pipa* Soloist**

A mesmerizing master of the Pipa (an ancient four-string Chinese lute), Yihan Chen was a prizewinner at the 1995 Freedom International Chinese Instrument Competition and the 1989 Art Cup. She has performed at many major international festivals in China, USA, France, Portugal, Canada, Japan and Italy, such as Spoleto Festival USA 2012, Lincoln Center Festival, Skaneateles Festival, De Création Musicale de Radio France, Le Festival Avignon, Le Festival Musique en Scène, Encontros Acarte 98 Portugal, La Cité de la Musique, Lotus Festival, and Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra’s New Music Festival. She has appeared at Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, the Library of Congress and other leading venues. Ms. Chen has collaborated with internationally renowned composers such as Chen Yi, Zhou Long, Chen Qigang and Bright Sheng. She was the soloist of the Hua Xia Chamber Ensemble (Beijing) and has been performing with Music From China (New York City) since 1999. After graduating from the China Conservatory of Music with a bachelor's degree in 1995, Yihan was a faculty member there teaching the Pipa at its affiliated middle school.

**Joy Lu  *Erhu* Soloist & Conductor of the Wesleyan Chinese Music Ensemble**

Joy Lu is a PhD candidate in ethnomusicology at Wesleyan. She received a B.F.A. in *erhu* performance and music education from National Taiwan Normal University, and an M.A. in ethnomusicology from the University of Sheffield, U.K. Joy has studied *erhu* since her childhood and was awarded several prizes in *erhu* performances in Taiwan. After graduating from the University, Joy began to direct and conduct Chinese music orchestras and ensembles. Her research includes Chinese and Taiwanese music and her dissertation analyzes the music, gender and national politics of *koa-á-hi* (Taiwanese Opera).

**Tim Gaylord  Percussionist**

Tim Gaylord is a Percussionist who lives in Middletown, CT. Before coming to Connecticut in 2007, Tim spent most of his life in Toledo, OH and Detroit, MI. Tim enjoys playing and teaching music in settings ranging from Chamber Music to Rock Bands. Tim also plays with and serves as section leader for various ensembles at Wesleyan University. In the Summer Tim plays with the ArtFarm Electro Acoustic Orchestral Unit (AEIOU) and the Middletown Children's Circus Band.
Photographs


Figure 2: The founder of Shenzhen Spring Breeze Guqin Association – Yao Liang. 2009. Shenzhen. szchunfeng.cn. Web. 9 Apr. 2015.

Figure 4: Zhu, Ming. “Guqin (crafted by Wang Peng) display room, Jun Tian Fang.” Personal photograph by author. 2014.
Figure 5: Zhu, Ming. “Front Entrance, Beijing Jun Tian Fang Co., Ltd.” Personal photograph by author. 2014.


Figure 8: Guqin lecture series for association members I. 2015. Spring Breeze Guqin Association, Shenzhen. szchunfeng.cn. Web. 9 Apr. 2015.
Figure 9: *Spring Sprouts kids Concert I*. 2015. Spring Breeze Guqin Association, Shenzhen. szchunfeng.cn. Web. 9 Apr. 2015.

Figure 10: *Audiences, Spring Sprouts kids Concert II*. 2015. Spring Breeze Guqin Association, Shenzhen. szchunfeng.cn. Web. 9 Apr. 2015.
Figure 11: Zhu, Ming. “Performance stage, Jun Tian Fang.” Personal photograph by author. 2014.

Figure 12: Zhu, Ming. “Summer camp students having lunch at dining hall, Jun Tian Fang.” Personal photograph by author. 2014.
Figure 13: Zhu, Ming. “Chief Public Relations Officer Du Juan playing the guqin, Jun Tian Fang.” Personal photograph by author. 2014.

Figure 14: Zhu, Ming. “Author conducting personal interview with Yao Liang.” Personal photograph by author. 2014.
Figure 15: Zhu, Ming. “Association members’ social hour at Spring Breeze Guqin Association.” Personal photograph by author. 2014.

Figure 16: Guqin lecture series for association members II. 2015. Spring Breeze Guqin Association, Shenzhen. szchunfeng.cn. Web. 9 Apr. 2015.